# THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP, LEARNING ORGANIZATION PRACTICE, AND WORK-FAMILY ENRICHMENT AND CONFLICT — A CHINESE SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to China's economy, many of them are facing serious human resource issues. One of the biggest issues for SME employees is the unbalanced work-life relationship. This study aimed to examine the relationships between supervisor's servant leadership (SL), work-family enrichment (WFE) and work-family conflict (WFC) in the context of Chinese SMEs. The mediation effect of learning organization practice (LOP) was the other focus of the study. A non-experimental, quantitative cross-sectional survey research approach was applied to collect the data. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data. The results indicated that SL was positively and significantly correlated with WFE but negatively correlated with WFC. Additionally, the relationships between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC were fully mediated by LOP.

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# NOMENCLATURE

| | |
|---|---|
| SL | Servant Leadership |
| LOP | Learning Organization Practice |
| WFC | Work-Family Conflict |
| WFE | Work-Family Enrichment |
| SME | Small and Medium Sized Enterprise |
| SEM | Structural Equation Modelling |

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Small and medium sized-enterprises (SMEs) are vital to the development and the success of any economy. The significance of SMEs is even more paramount to China's economic development. In the last 30 years, millions of Chinese SMEs have burgeoned. According to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (2016), about 99 % of Chinese firms are SMEs and they contribute about 60% of the country's total gross industrial output. More than 73 million SMEs existed at the end of 2017 (The Government of People's Republic of China Government, 2017) and most SMEs are in the service industry (76.49%).

Despite SMEs' remarkable contributions to China's economic growth, the demanding working schedule, stressful workload, and lack of family-supportive human resource (HR) policies and practices are well documented in the literature related to Chinese workforce (Xiao & Cooke, 2012). Xiao and Cooke (2012) found that SMEs employers do not have an understanding about the importance of work-family balance on performance in the Chinese society. In particular, professionals have suffered stressful and demanding lifestyles. Chinese professionals tend to work long hours that has become a new norm in Chinese companies that it is now generally called as "996": working from nine in the morning to nine in the evening, six days a week. Gradually, work-family conflict has become a routine. Those who cannot handle pressures well, quit their jobs. This situation causes an increasing rate of turnover, which leads to worsened business performance (Huselid, 1995).

In the field of work-family relations, most scholars and practitioners focus on the negative side of the interface between work and family (work-family conflict) (Greenhaus &

Powell, 2006). The bi-directional work-family relationship can be positive to both family and work domains (work-family enrichment). Extant literature found that marriage and the moderate pressure of children are positively correlated with three indicators of professional success – income, advancement, and satisfaction – but primarily for men (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Carlson, Hunter, Ferguson, and Whitten (2014) found that work-family enrichment is positively connected with family satisfaction from a study with 310 workers. Lam et al., (2012) connected work-family enrichment with job satisfaction in Chinese companies and found a significant and positive relationship. Therefore, taken together, work experiences can enrich family life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Nevertheless, the antecedents of a more positive work-family relationship (more work-family enrichment; less work-family conflict) needs empirical evidence. This research was aimed at finding variables that lead to a better work-family relationship.

According to transition theory, the workplace can create a family-supportive environment for an effective interface between family and the workplace (i.e., more work-family enrichment and less work-family conflict). There are four elements for an effective transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Because "self" (individual characteristics) was not the main focus of this study, the researcher controlled some individual level factors including gender, age, parental status, marital status, job tenure. The other three elements, namely situation, support, and strategies can be achieved from the organizational and leadership level in an organization. For the situation and strategies, at the organizational level, learning organization practice may help employees make transitions between family and the workplace. For support, at the leadership level, servant leadership, which puts others interests in the first place, may be reciprocated from employees with higher commitment and job satisfaction.

**Work-Family Conflict and Work-Family Enrichment**

Perceived family supportive organizational culture would lead to less work-related stress and higher job satisfaction and life satisfaction in general (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Scholars have recognized that these two interdependent domains share a permeable boundary (Ashforth, 2000; Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Kanter, 1977). It is impossible to find a perfect balance between the two most dominant domains: family and work (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007). According to Boundary Theory (Nippert-Eng, 1996), the permeable boundary between these two domains has made the work-family interface possible. For example, in regions where values such as family and fidelity are highly cherished, the boundary between the workplace and family is more permeable for females (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Furthermore, because these two domains (family and workplace) cannot be fully integrated, they may reinforce or negate each other. Work-family conflict generates negative effects, and hence deteriorates employee satisfaction and increases workplace stress (Allen, Herst, Burke, & Sutton, 2000). Researchers have found that the negative effect from WFC has caused huge costs for organizations (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). On the other hand, another dimension — work-family enrichment, enhances affective commitment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Work-family enrichment refers to experience or participation in one role that positively influences the quality or performance in the other role (Sprung & Jex, 2017). Therefore, the study was focused on the elements that may cause the interface between the workplace and family (i.e., Work-Family Enrichment and Conflict).

## Learning Organization Practice

To facilitate a better transition between family and the workplace, building a learning organization (LO) is one effective strategy for Chinese SMEs. An LO is a place where a learning culture is permeated, and employees support each other to learn and develop (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). It also builds a strong organizational structure for conversations and reflections to happen, knowledge to keep, and business to advance. This organizational structure and the learning culture, which are created by an LO, may offer a successful transition between family and work with suitable strategies and situations.

The LO concept was developed from the West and it has been studied extensively and globally in the last three decades (Song, 2008; Zhang, Zhang, & Yang, 2004). After almost 30 years of development, the LO concept has become prescriptive by providing guidelines to companies regarding the transformation of an organization (Tsang, 1997). Watkins and Marsick (1993) described an LO as an entity that is adept at individual learning, team-based learning, organizational level learning, and the exchange between the organization and its environment. Further, they defined an LO as, "one that learns constantly and transforms itself" (p. 8). The LO concept has been used in many fields of studies. For example, in education, Bui and Baruch (2010) found that servant leadership was significantly correlated with learning performance in a higher education institution.

The LO concept is multi-dimensional. Learning organization practice (LOP) at the individual level is fundamental for an organization, but the knowledge management between different organizational levels (team and organization level) is tantamount to the continuous transformation of an LO (Marquardt, 1996; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Besides learning initiatives at different levels in an organization, learning between systems and strategic leadership are also important for an LO.

According to Watkins and Marsick (1993), LOP consists of 7 dimensions:

1. *Continuous learning*. Employees learn on the job; opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth.

2. *Dialogue and inquiry.* Employees gain reasoning skills. The organizational culture is changed to support questioning, feedback, and experimentation.

3. *Team learning and collaboration.* Groups are expected to learn together and work together.

4. *Embedded systems.* Knowledge management systems to capture, share, maintain learning results.

5. *Empowerment.* Employees are motivated to learn toward what they are held accountable to do.

6. *Systems connections.* The organization is linked to its communities.

7. *Strategic leaderships*. Leaders model, champion, and support learning.

Adopting LOP may not only help employees make transitions between family and work, but also help Chinese SMEs transform. There is evidence supporting that LO practices facilitate continuous enhancement of an organization's capacity to develop, advance, and thrive in the face of rapid change (Fiksel, 2006; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

Learning organization practice should increase employees' performance by cultivating a learning culture that favors learning, by constructing a structure that supports learning, and by creating a system that captures learning. After all, the learning structure and system needs a leader to champion, HR professionals to strengthen, and every employee to support.

## Servant Leadership

Given the complexity of the Chinese market, at the leadership level, a possible variable for both work-family enrichment and conflict is servant leadership (SL). Servant leaders prioritize followers' needs; they care if their assistance helps employees to reach their learning and developmental potential (Greenleaf, 1977). As role models, servant leaders are likely to elicit servant behaviors from their followers (Zhang, Kwan, Everett, & Jian, 2012). If SMEs owners behave as a servant rather than a manager, according to social exchange theory, employees may reciprocate with altruistic behaviors (Blau, 1964). When employees are outside the work domain, the impact of SL on them is critical (Lord & Brown, 2004; van Dierendonck, 2011; Zhang et al., 2012). Influenced by their servant leaders, employees who behave like servants themselves would create a more pleasant family environment. In the unique socio-cultural context of China, where *guanxi* (personal relationship) is dominant, SME employees may acquire more resources (e.g., spouse's connections, family resources) to invest in the *guanxi* with the employer and co-workers. Ergo, servant leadership, which is an employee focused leadership, may positively affect work-family relationship and offer great insights in managing Chinese SMEs.

Servant leadership can be applied in the Chinese setting. Sun and Wang (2010) found SL is an applicable concept in China. They identified five characteristics of SL in the Chinese context: persuasive mapping, wisdom, emotional healing, altruistic calling, and organizational stewardship. Nevertheless, scholars understand and depict servant leaders differently. The SL characteristics run the gamut for different writers. For example, Spears' (2010) crystalized servant leadership's 10 characteristics from Greenleaf's work. As he noted, a servant leader has superior listening skills to capture what has been said and what has not been said, which is the most critical skill for a servant leader (Spears, 2010). Other characteristics include awareness, building community empathy, commitment to the growth of people healing, conceptualization, foresight, persuasion, and stewardship. However, other scholars hold inconsistent opinions related to SL's characteristics. Some doubt the applicability of SL in China because Chinese culture exhibits high power distance (centralized leadership and hierarchical organizational structure), whereas SL is more likely to be observed in contexts where power is distributed and people are more equal (van Dierendonck, 2011). In this research, SL was measured with Ehrhart's (2004) 14-item servant leadership scale. A detailed introduction of the Servant Leadership Scale is provided in the methodology section.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The aim of this research was to determine if there are connections among servant leadership, learning organization practice, work-family enrichment, and work-family conflict by drawing on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), Boundary Theory (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004), and Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al, 1995).

Servant leadership is closely tied to Social Exchange Theory (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Servant leadership fosters the relationship between leaders and followers and cares about the relationship between leaders and followers in the workplace. According to Social Exchange Theory, if the participants receive valued rewards from an exchange partner, they tend to return the favor with similar or even more value. Liden, Bauer, and Erdogan (2004) believed that when subordinates perceive the service from the leader, who is the "face" of the organization, they are motivated to return more favor by showing stronger engagement, and higher commitment. Moreover, when employees are exposed to their leader's servant leadership behavior, they may behave more altruistically (Greenleaf, 1977). Thus, at home, when employees behave like a servant leader, more positive resources may be generated (e.g., positive emotions, constructive conversations). Taken together, servant leaders generate positive resource in both domains.

Boundary Theory can be applied in the research in explaining how people switch roles in life. It can be drawn from current literature that work and family are not absolutely “separate spheres” (Kanter, 1977). Boundary Theory suggests that roles or the concept of role identities can be recognized as a continuum of low integration to high integration of roles; roles in work and family influence each other (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). This indicates that when individuals transition from one role to another, they will carry both positive and negative spillovers with them (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 486); the more permeable boundaries are, the easier transition among roles can be (p. 476). Thus, when servant leaders generate abundant positive resources, and because of the permeable boundaries between these two life domains, more positive resources are expected to be transitioned across boundaries. Hence, servant leadership may alleviate the conflict and promote enrichment in work-family relationship.

Finally, Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined the transition as, “any event or non-event that results in changed relationship, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). According to the Transition Theory, four major sets of factors influence the effectiveness of a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. In Chinese SMEs, servant leadership is critical in role transition because servant leaders are exceptional at offering support to employees who are in need. Servant leaders not only create abundant positive resources, but also because they put serving others as their priority, a supportive social environment is likely to be produced that encourages the transition. Besides, a supportive environment created by servant leaders, learning organization practice should also facilitate the transition between the workplace and family as a strategy. That is to say, learning organization practice challenges employees to make improvement continuously by leveraging resources even from the family domain (i.e., spouse's social resources). Therefore, it is possible that servant leadership and learning organization practice enlarge the positive effect of role transition between work and family (WFE) and suppress the negative effect (WFC).

Combining Social Exchange Theory, Boundary Theory and Transition Theory, employees who perceive their supervisor's servant leadership traits may return the favor by demonstrating higher commitment and better performance, and also the implementation of LOP would create an environment in the workplace that facilitate the role transition between workplace and family.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The relationship between employees' perception of servant leadership traits and WFE, WFC, and the mediation effect of LOP on that relationship in Chinese SMEs were explored in this study. Two research questions were developed.

RQ1: Is there a direct relationship between Chinese SMEs' employees' perception of their supervisors' servant leadership traits and employees' work-family enrichment and conflict?

RQ2: Is there a mediation effect of learning organization practice on the relationship between employees' perception of their supervisors' servant leadership traits and work-family enrichment and conflict in Chinese SMEs?

In order to address the research questions and analyze the relationships between servant leadership, work-family enrichment and conflict, and learning organization practice, a hypothesized model was proposed in Figure 1. In the model, WFE stands for Work-Family Enrichment, WFC means Work-Family Conflict; SL equals Servant Leadership, and LOP is the acronym of Learning Organization Practice. The conceptual model is presented to show that servant leadership is anticipated to have an impact on work-family enrichment and work-family conflict, and both relationships are mediated by learning organization practice.

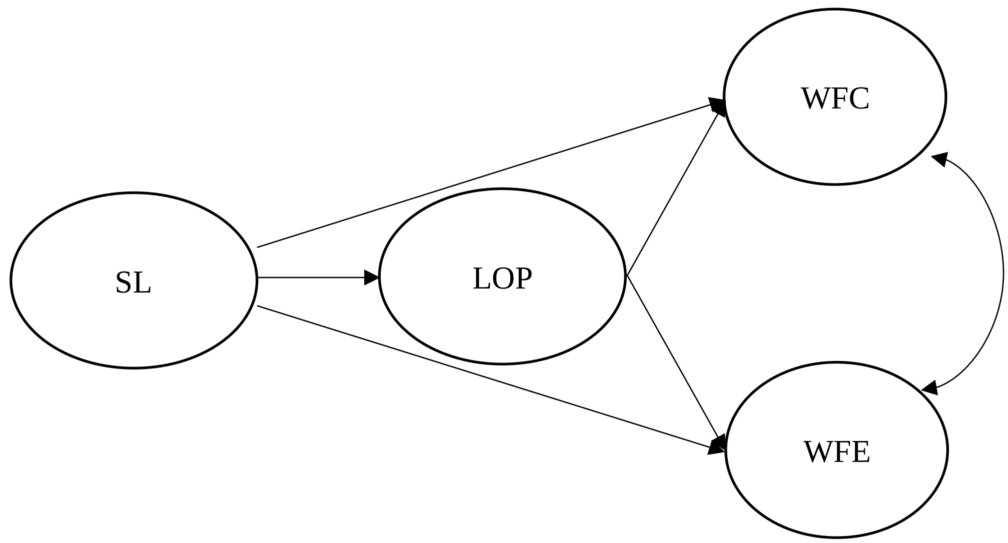


**Figure 1 Conceptual Model of the Study**

*Note*. SL stands for servant leadership; WFC means work-family conflict; WFE is short for work-family enrichment; LOP is the acronym of learning organization practice.

According to Boundary Theory, resources may be exchanged when people switch roles in life. Boundary Theory suggests that with permeable boundaries between roles, individuals may not only make role transitions, but also use resources belongs to a domain and apply them in another one (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Once there are interactions between domains, both positive and negative resources would be exchanged (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 476). For example, when employees perceive their supervisor's SL behaviors, they would like to return the favor by using family resources in the workplace (e.g. using family's connections) and demonstrate SL behaviors themselves at home (i.e. carry positive spillovers from the workplace to home). Therefore, my hypothesis 1 is that SL may alleviate WFC and promote WFE.

**Hypothesis 1**: Servant Leadership and Work-Family Enrichment are positively and significantly correlated.

**Hypothesis 2**: Servant Leadership and Work-Family Conflict are negatively and significantly correlated.

According to Transition Theory, organizational factors — situation, self, support, and strategies — may affect the transition of employees between workplace and family. Thus, drawing upon Boundary Theory (permeable boundaries between workplace and family) and Transition Theory, one can transition roles between the workplace and family and the transition is influenced by factors such as SL (support/strategies) and LOP (strategies/situation). However, few scholars have empirically tested the relationships between servant leadership, learning organization, and work-family relationship (Di Schiena Letens, Van Aken, & Farris, 2013; Gentle & Clifton, 2017; Senge, 1996). In today's innovation-driven society, learning and knowledge sharing are key processes in helping organizations update themselves to keep up with the competition (Caldwell, 2012; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). More research is needed for adding evidence regarding the relationship between leadership, learning organization, and work-family relationship. In a recent literature review, Xie (2019) noted that as shown from extant literature, researchers tend to focus on transformational and transactional leadership's impact on learning in the organization. Following Xie's (2019) suggestion, this dissertation was aimed to explore the impact of servant leadership on learning organization. Namely, the mediating role of learning organization practice on the relationship between servant leadership and work-family enrichment, and servant leadership and work-family conflict. The underline mechanism is that when employees are challenged to learn constantly and offer feedback instantly to their co-workers, they tend to leverage external resources to solve their in-work problems (Watkins &

Marsick, 1993). Especially when multiple level of learning organization practice is established, employees would be more likely to be motivated to utilize resource from outside of the organization.

**Hypothesis 3**: Servant Leadership and Learning Organization Practice are positively and significantly correlated.

**Hypothesis 4**: Learning Organization Practice fully mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Work-Family Enrichment.

**Hypothesis 5**: Learning Organization Practice fully mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Work-Family Conflict.

## Significance

The contribution of the study was twofold. First, based on the tenets of transition theory, the four constructs, namely servant leadership, learning organization practice, work-family enrichment, and work-family conflict are associated together in the context of Chinese SMEs. Second, to my knowledge, the findings may provide practical implications to SMEs owners or HRD professionals in emerging economies about how to improve work-family relationship using transition theory. The implications may mitigate the three major challenges that Chinese SMEs are facing, namely, sustainability, ethical leadership, and work-family balance.

The relationship between servant leadership and work-family enrichment and conflict in the context of Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was the main focus of the study. The purpose of the study was to determine if learning organization practice mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work-family enrichment and conflict.

## Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The background of the study and the significance of the study are presented in Chapter I. In addition, research questions are also listed in the first chapter. A literature review of the four main constructs, servant leadership, learning organization, and work-family enrichment and conflict are provided in the next chapter. The methodology of the research is introduced in Chapter III. The data analysis and findings are introduced in Chapter IV. And finally, the findings are discussed, and the implications for both scholars and practitioners are provided in Chapter V.

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature on learning organization, servant leadership, work-family enrichment, and work-family conflict, is reviewed. The information is organized into the following categories: learning organization, learning organization model comparison and model critique, servant leadership, servant leadership measurement instrument development in the past 20 years, extant literature regarding work-family enrichment and conflict, and theories review with regard to social exchange theory and transition theory.

Argyris's (2003) innovative thinking has contributed much to learning practices in organizations, such as single-loop learning, double-loop learning, and organizational learning. These learning practices have largely influenced the development of the learning organization field in its early stages (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000). Senge's (1990) seminal book *The Fifth Discipline* explored the practices of the LO and propagated the concept. In his book, he described an LO as a concept with five dimensions: personal mastery, mental models, systems thinking, building shared vision, and team learning (Senge, 1990). Most other scholars describe LO practices at multiple dimensions (individual, team or group, and organization). This type of taxonomy has depicted a more holistic picture of the role of all levels of learning in building LOs (Berson, Nemanich, Waldman, Galvin, & Keller, 2006).

## Learning Organization

The concept of learning organization (LO) has been discussed extensively in the past 30 years. Learning increases organizations' capability of making successful changes in the fast-evolving business environment (West, 1994). Many Chinese companies have attempted to implement LO practices (Hong, Snell, & Lin, 2013; Zhang et al., 2004). Despite the significance of learning organization practice in modern organizations, there is limited empirical research of LO in the Chinese SME context (Wang, Yang, & McLean, 2007; Zhang et al., 2004).

Six main learning organization theories/models are introduced chronologically in the next section. The models are conceptually constructive for the development of the LO concept (most cited models in the past 30 years). Three of them have been further developed into measurement instruments which have far-reaching practical implications (e.g., DLOQ).

### *Pedler, Boydell, and Burgoyne (1991): Learning Company*

Pedler, Boydell, and Burgoyne (1991) believed that an ideal company integrates individual and organizational level learning practices effectively. They named this ideal form a learning company. Pedler and his colleagues (1991) defined a learning company as "an organization which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals" (p. 92). In their writings, they noted that the concept of learning company was developed from Peters and Waterman (1982): "the excellent companies are learning organisations" (p. 110).

Starting with a discussion about learning's role in companies at the micro-level, they further focused on the transformation process from a regular company to an LO. Pedler and his colleagues (1991) argued that the successful transformation into an LO relied on employees' self-development. However, they did not elaborate how to develop those training programs or offer guidance to employees about self-development. They then offered 10 guidelines for designing a learning company. Those 10 guidelines are categorized into six sections: (a) employees in the organization, (b) external environment, (c) the connection between internal and external environment, (d) organizational policy and strategy with consciously structured for learning, (e) shared culture of a learning organization, and (f) the distribution of power within the whole organization.

In summary, Pedler and his colleagues (1991) assumed that employees in a learning company come with full potential, and a learning company can provide means to unlock, release, and develop that potential. They also believed workers with sufficient self-development trainings can become the cornerstone of a learning company.

### *Senge (1990): Learning Organization*

Senge's (1990) book: *The Fifth Discipline* popularized the concept of LO globally. He noted, "it is vital that the five disciplines develop as an ensemble. This is challenging because it is much harder to integrate new tools than apply them separately. But the payoffs are immense" (p. 12). His model is widely used as the framework to cultivate organizations into LOs. The five dimensions comprise (a) personal mastery (discipline of aspiration), (b) mental models (discipline of reflection and enquiry), (c) shared vision (collective discipline), (d) team learning (discipline of group interrelation), and (e) systems thinking (complexity and interdependency discipline). He also argued the quality of leadership in LOs is of paramount importance. The leader is the person who unleashes people's imagination and therefore enhances their ability to form vision shared throughout the whole organization (Senge, 1996).

### *Garvin (1993): Learning Organization*

Garvin's (1993) LO theory was built on the process of learning transformation. He analyzed other LO definitions and incorporated those into his understanding of learning organization. His focus was on the product of learning: knowledge. He defined a learning organization as, "… an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights" (para. 11). He recommended five activities which tend to help organizations become LOs. They are (a) solving problems systematically, (b) experimenting with new approaches to work, (c) learning from past experience, (d) learning from other companies and from customers, and (e) transferring knowledge throughout the organization.

An LO is not built overnight. Garvin (1993) proposed a three-step implementation plan. The first step is to foster an environment conducive to learning. Reflection and having dialogue are key to the process of environment building. The management should create flexible work schedules to increase learning potential. Frequent trainings in brainstorming, problem solving, evaluating experiments and other learning skills are also essential in LO development. The second step is to concentrate on learning processes and practices. To focus on learning process is to ensure that effective learning occurs by design rather than by chance. The third step is the leadership building. Garvin (1993) emphasized that leadership, one of the building blocks of LO's, enhances learning by modeling behaviors such as inquiry and showing empathy (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008).

### *Watkins and Marsick (1993): Seven Dimensions of A Learning Organization*

Watkins and Marsick (1993) designed their seven-dimension LO model in the early 1990s. They developed this concept from informal and incidental learning and incorporated previous organizational learning works from Argyris and Schon (1974,1978). The seven dimensions are interconnected with each other. Watkins and Marsick (1993) described an LO as an entity that is adept at individual learning, team-based learning, organizational level learning, and the exchange between the organization and its environment. They defined an LO as, "one that learns constantly and transforms itself" (p. 8), which is similar to Garvin's LO definition.

Watkins and Marsick (1993) prescribed major elements of an LO. Those seven elements are: (a) creating continuous learning opportunities, (b) promoting inquiry and dialogue, (c) encouraging collaboration and team learning, (d) establishing systems to capture and share learning, (e) empowering people toward a collective vision, (f) connecting the organization to its environment, and (g) providing strategic leadership for learning.

This model highlighted not only the key role of learning at the individual level, but also the importance of connections amongst different levels. Solely relying on LOP at the individual level, a culture of learning is less likely to be formed, which severely affects an LO's ability to continuously transform (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). However, if work is redesigned for collaboration, it allows for a transfer of knowledge from the team level to the organizational level (Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

Marsick and Watkins (2003) further advanced their LO concept and developed a questionnaire named Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ). It became a widely used measurement tool to evaluate if an organization has the dimensions of an LO. For an instrument to be generalizable, it needs to be tested and validated in various culture settings. So far, DLOQ has been validated in the contexts of China, Taiwan, Korea, Lebanon, Colombia, and many other countries and regions (Watkins & Kim, 2018).

### *Marquardt (1996): How to Build A Learning Organization*

Coming from the background of action learning, Marquardt (1996) designed an LO model he named "the systems-linked learning organization model." He defined an LO as, "…an organization which learns powerfully and collectively and is continually transforming itself to better collect, manage, and use knowledge for corporate success. It empowers people within and outside the company to learn as they work. Technology is utilized to optimize both learning and productivity” (p. 19). He put learning at the center of his model as he believed “learning is a new labor”. The other four dimensions in his model are (a) technology, (b) organization, (c) people, and (d) knowledge.

One way that Marquardt’s (1996) model differed from others is that it recognizes technology as one important component of an LO. He argued that sufficient technology programs support and integrate networks that allow access to and exchange of information and knowledge. For his LO model, a system of technology plays a supportive role in enabling knowledge management and learning enhancement (Marquardt, 1996, p. 178). Marquardt and Waddill (2004) believed knowledge is a result of learning that can be shared and transferred through team learning and organizational learning. Thus, a culture of learning can be formed because of the interactions among different levels.

### *Örtenblad (2004): An Integrated Learning Organization Model*

As one of the most recent learning organization models, Örtenblad’s (2004) model synthesized previous works and focused on four aspects. These aspects are organizational learning, learning at work, learning climate, and learning structure. He also zeroed in on the integration process of those four aspects which made the model more concrete. His goal for this process was to create a climate that favors learning and encourages individuals to experiment during the on-the-job learning process. This in turn, increases the possibility of generating more innovative knowledge. The culture provides the essential support to help employees reflect on their daily activities (Kolb, Rubin, & Mclntyre, 1984).

Örtenblad’s (2004) model acknowledged an important idea of “partial learning organizations.” He maintained that becoming an LO is an answer to a rapidly changing world, but also conceded that fully accomplishing an LO is an unrealistic task. Örtenblad (2004) suggested that for those LOs which have incorporated parts of the integrated learning organization model, should be followed by an abbreviation of the aspect/s in LOP in brackets. He later provided an example. In this case, the organization X became an LO of the "learning at work" aspect. He stated, "For instance, 'organization X is a partial learning organization (LaW=learning at work)'" (p. 141). That is to say, if one organization fails to become an LO, but a partial LO, according to the model, employees must continue experimenting, and enjoying learning. An effective learning culture encourages employees to feel safe to take risks and even celebrate failures. Örtenblad (2004) stated, "Indeed, when experiments do not lead to favorable outcomes, they should still be labelled as successes" (p. 136).

Örtenblad (2004) proposed his integrated learning organization model in which he used fewer vague ideas and made it easier to test empirically. He believed that a model with vague ideas is generally "impossible to implement but excellent to show" (p. 130). However, he also maintained that vagueness in the theory building process is crucial; ambiguity presents more possibilities.

### *Learning Organization Definition Comparison*

All of the learning organization theorists assume that (a) every employee in the organization is an asset for LOP, (b) a learning culture is equally important to a flexible organizational structure, (c) leadership towards learning is irreplaceable, and (d) to become a learning organization involves great organizational change (transformation).

**Table 1 Learning Organization Definition Comparison**

| Year | Author(s) | Definition | Measurement |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | Pedler, Boydell, and Burgoyne. | An organization which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals | Structure of the Eleven Characteristics Questionnaire (1991) |
| 1990 | Senge | Learning organizations are places where people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together | N/A |
| 1993 | Watkins and Marsick | One that learns continuously and transforms itself | Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (1997) |
| 1993 | Garvin | A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights | The Learning Organization Survey (2008) |

Table 1 Continued.

| Year | Author(s) | Definition | Measurement |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | Marquardt | A learning organization is an organization which learns powerfully and collectively and is continually transforming itself to better collect, manage, and use knowledge for corporate success. It empowers people within and outside the company to learn as they work. Technology is utilized to optimize both learning and productivity. | Learning Organization Profile (1996) |
| 2004 | Örtenblad | A learning organization is one in which the four aspects [organizational learning; learning at work; learning climate; learning structure] are present but likely to be emphasized differently. | N/A |

It is suggested from the models listed above in the table that an LO is an open system that facilitates learning practices, regulates learning processes, and disseminates the results of learning. Senge (1990) stressed the significance of a culture that encourages systems thinking and learning. Pedler and his colleagues (1991) described a supportive culture that tolerates mistakes and encourages constructive feedback. Watkins and Marsick (1993) emphasized a culture that empowers people. From the learning results' perspective, Garvin (1993) pointed out that a culture of reflection needs to be cultivated and the end result of learning-knowledge-should be transferred freely. Similar to Garvin's (1993) LO concept, Marquardt (1996) also reference knowledge management and described it as vital in a successful LO. On top of this, he argued that a culture of learning supports the acquisition of information and the distribution of learning.

A flexible organization is always in a status of flux with permeable organizational boundaries. Therefore, an LO requires a higher degree of flexibility than the conventional business model, and expects its employees to maintain this standard. Meeting this expectation generates challenges for small organizations because oftentimes they consist of less educated employees. To make up for this, HR professionals in small businesses need to unleash employees' potential and influence employees with more strategic interventions.

The third factor they all agreed upon is the critical role of leadership in LOs. Leadership in an LO should aim to pursue performance with long-term aspirations of learning and continuous improvement. Leaders need to be advocates for learning and transformation (Marquardt, 1996; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Namely, leaders should provide opportunities for employees to learn and reflect, support and encourage staff to overcome the fear of change, and reward efforts in innovative thinking and experimentation (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Garvin (1993) emphasized the leaders' role as a facilitator. He suggested leaders should offer more free time and flexible schedules to employees for them to experiment and learn. There is a contrast between Örtenblad (2004) and Pedler's (1989) view on the focus of leaders in learning organizations. Pedler et al., (1991) believed an LO leader ought to act like a coach in guiding employees' growth. Örtenblad (2004) maintained that a leader should behave as a system thinker, linking LO's components seamlessly.

Last but not least, they all defined learning organization as an entity that is organic and transforms itself constantly through LOP. Therefore, LOs are not only good at managing effective learning practices, but they are also specialized in making rapid and continuous organizational changes.

After comparing all previous LO models, an issue has emerged for SMEs, which typically lack talents because of their non-competitive salaries and limited resources. Less talented employees may generate potential costs to a company. Those costs include: lower productivity, loss of clients, training costs, advertising costs, recruitment fees, and redundancy packages (Smith & Graves, 2005). Therefore, small businesses are much less likely to become LOs according to existing LO definitions.

The most ideal model for my current research is Watkins and Marsick's (1993) LO model. Compared to other abstract models, the Watkins and Marsick's LO model is one of the most comprehensive conceptual LO models. Firstly, it describes seven interconnected dimensions in individual, team, and organizational levels. These dimensions have already been tested and validated across cultures and organizations (e.g. Dirani, 2009; Song, Joo, & Chermack, 2009). Second, among these models, only two of the listed models emphasized the significance of the connection between external and internal environment (i.e., Pedler et al., 1991; Watkisn & Marsick, 1993). Therefore, it is beneficial to choose the Watkins and Marsick's LO model as this research aimed to study the influence of organizational factors on work-family enrichment and conflict.

### *Critiques of the LO Concept*

In this part, I critique current LO concepts and attempt to offer future direction for LO research. First, Senge's work is critiqued from its lack of consideration of power and social justice. Second, leadership in learning SMEs is discussed. Third, the missing component of

SMEs in LO research is noticed. Power issues and external factors' influence on LO are the last two areas that I critique.

**Senge's Work**

In Senge's (1990) *The Fifth Discipline*, leadership is defined as a critical process in the development of any LO. Caldwell (2012) deemed that leadership in an LO is a type of distributed/decentralized leadership. Employees are leaders too in LOs. Traditional leader-follower relationships are to be changed to "employee to employee" continuous dialogues at all learning dimensions in an LO (Senge, 1996). However, according to organizational change theory, change agents need to foresee obstacles before execute new change initiatives. Agents also need to encourage employees and other stakeholders to adopt new practices (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009). The ability to implement change hinges on positional power and social influence (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). Therefore, in Senge's LO model, employees can be change agents and lead organizational changes without positional power and social influence, which contradicts with other organizational change researchers' findings. Furthermore, Senge (1990) did not expound the relationship between those five disciplines. These disciplines may fail to function as a system when the fast-evolving environment (internal and external) interacts with an LO (Marquardt, 1996).

**Leadership in SME LOs**

The optimal leadership traits for LOs' development are still undetermined. Organizations' size determines leadership type (Vaccaro, Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2012). SME's members are more likely to look to a leader for cues (Ling, Simsek, Lubatkin, & Veiga, 2008). Current literature indicates that SMEs benefit more from transformational leadership in cultivating management innovation (Matzler, Schwarz, Deutinger, & Harms, 2012), increasing firm performance (Ling et al., 2008). However, leadership has not been extensively connected with the LO concept in the context of SMEs.

Servant leadership, one of the most ethical forms of leadership (Spears, 2010), may offer insights into the LO research in developing countries (Montes, Moreno, & Morales, 2005). For example, some scholars suggest that servant leadership is a potential solution for corruption, which is a prevalent issue in developing countries (Manala, 2014). When businesses aim to become LOs in the developing world, they must fight corruption in order to grow sustainably. Even though servant leadership is a leadership concept that was originated from the West, it has been found that servant leadership has its universal application (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). Scholars even found its philosophical root in the East. In China, for example, servant leadership is quite influential in places where traditional Confucius values are still heavily cherished (Sun & Wang, 2010). Therefore, servant leadership's influence on the formation of an LO deserves more attention.

**Lack of SMEs' Perspectives**

The ultimate goal of any LO is to change behavior while preserving the unity of an LO (Beyerlein, Dirani, & Xie, 2017). Analyzing current literature, most researchers construct the LO concept deductively, extracting success factors from high performance large organizations such as, IBM, Whirlpool, and HP to envision what an LO should look like. Therefore, if an SME transitions into an LO, there may be less values for SME's owners to borrow directly from previous introduced LO models. A tailored LO model for their transformations may be needed. For example, a critical issue for SMEs is insufficient technology support. In Marquardt's (1996) LO model, he put technology as one subsystem of an LO, but small businesses are often incapable of maintaining complex knowledge management systems due to limited finance and human capital resources.

Financial and other resources are scarce for SMEs. They lack talents to build and maintain an LO. The smaller the business, the higher the probability it is not an LO (Birdthistle, 2008). It is possible that when a business grows in size, it may become a “partial learning organizations” according to Örtenblad’s (2004) LO concept. The SME’s owners should select LO interventions more strategically. According to Birdthistle (2008), SMEs may consider building the LO structure first, changing the LO culture gradually, and creating a budget system for the provision of learning and training (p. 433). When learning opportunities are presented to SME employees, they need to learn both formally from traditional learning interventions in the workplace and informally through self-directed learning (Kim & Marsick, 2013). In conclusion, the design of LO models for SMEs is one future research direction.

**Power Issues**

LO scholars often overlook the influence of the political domain (Coopey, 1995). As many organization researchers have mentioned, it is impractical for organizations to achieve the state of LO because of its political nature (Kanter, 1977; Coopey, 1995). Since LOs are advanced flat or decentralized systems, where rules are expected to be reduced, more interactions among employees with different management levels is likely to cause more friction among people (Kanter, 1977). Vince (2018) suggested that scholars should study the LO concept in a more politically realistic context, “Any desire to create ongoing learning opportunities, to encourage collaboration and team learning, will be intimately connected to resistance to learning in an organisation, to conscious and unconscious efforts to avoid and undermine it” (p. 2).

**External Environment**

LOs are flexible systems (Örtenblad, 2004; Santa & Nurcan, 2016). It means that there are frequent interactions between the internal and external environment in an LO. In Pedler (1991) and Watkins and Marsick's (1993) models they encourage managers to use the systems thinking idea (Senge, 1990) to coalesce the external environment into daily operations as well. For example, the interface between the R&D and customers provides feedback for product updates. Watkins and Marsick (1993) envisioned an LO as an organization that should have healthy relationships with its physical, social, and cultural environments (Watkins & Marsick, p. 217). In the LO building processes, it is necessary to invite external stakeholders into the LO system for its continuous transformation. However, there are limited insights about how to execute this strategy (Coopey, 1995). Because of LOs' openness, employees are more sensitive towards changes in the outside environment (Senge, 1990; Wick & Leon, 1995). The effect of external environment on LO itself can be compounded because of more frequent interactions between their competitors.

*Learning Organization and HRD*

There are many entry steps for building an LO. HRD as an integration of training and development (T&D), career development (CD) and organization development (OD) offers a foundation for an LO (Marsick & Watkins, 1994). HRD typically promotes continuous learning opportunities for individuals because of its main functions including T&D and OD. HRD must be committed to employees' long-term development, creating opportunities for employees to continue growing and learning. HRD must also position itself to act strategically throughout the LO. Stewart (2005) has argued that the LO idea is the ultimate articulation of the goals and values of OD.

Many organizations are ambitious to implement the idea of LO, but execution is taxing work; it needs HRD's assistance. LO theorists have pointed out that a leader's role in an LO is paramount. A leader is an architect (Watkins & Marisick, 1993), a teacher, and a steward (Marquardt, 1996). A leader communicates the mission, vision and values (Senge, 1990), specify strategies (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Garvin, 1993), structures and politics. A leader must work with HRD, creating efficient learning processes and help subordinates continually develop their shared mental model and systems thinking (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Most importantly, teams in LOs need HRD's contribution. The quality of communication between teams is central to the idea of the LO. It is HRD's job to fulfil the task of creating learning teams by improving dialogue among employees with a common goal. Therefore, leadership, structure, and a well-functioning HRD are irreplaceable components for a successful LO.

Continuous learning at the individual level is critical for the success of an LO, however, it cannot guarantee improved performance. It is well accepted that learning must occur at multiple levels of an organization, and the organizational structure and design need to assist employee learning initiatives at multiple learning levels. Egan, Yang, and Bartlett (2004) also suggest that "continued efforts exploring the dynamics associated with interactions between organizational learning culture and employee satisfaction, learning, and performance are essential for the ongoing development of research and practice unique to HRD" (p. 298). In a nutshell, HRD is critical in setting an LO's structure, facilitating leaders' initiatives, and coaching individuals towards better performance through a long-term learning strategy.

## Servant Leadership

The father of servant leadership, Robert K. Greenleaf (1977), coined the term servant leadership after a long and successful career at AT&T. Nevertheless, his professional work was tangential in creating the concept of servant leadership. His personal reading of Herman Hesse's (1956) story about a servant as a leader, *The Journey to the East*, acted as the source from which servant leadership arose. Greenleaf saw the paradoxical combination of servanthood and leadership in the main character of the book — Leo (Spears, 2010). Leo was a servant leader who constantly encouraged and served a group of pilgrims to achieve a collective mission. Spears (2010) offered a detailed introduction on the development of Greenleaf's servant leadership. Greenleaf initially described that, "the servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (Spears, 1998, p. 1). Servant leadership is gradually attracting more and more researchers in the past four decades (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendock, & Liden, 2018).

### *Main Characteristics of Servant Leadership*

The concept of servant leadership continues to grow in its influence and impact in recent years. Servant leadership is distinctively different from other mainstream leadership styles such as transformational or authentic leadership (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018). First, compared to other leadership styles, servant leadership cares more about employee's long-term development (Greenleaf, 1977). This person-centered, follower-focused attitude paves the path for unbreakable bonds among employees in an organization (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Reinke, 2004). Even though servant leaders are entitled with positional power, they would never abuse the power (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Spears, 2010). Servant leaders would try to persuade and convince their staff with the power of service. They are servants first, leaders second. Servant leaders treat their employees as friends or even family members (Sendjaya, 2015). Given the close bonds among employees and the servant leaders, servant leaders are greatly loved and supported by their employees (Greenleaf, 1998). Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004) pointed out that followers of servant leaders are granted extraordinary freedom to excel. Notwithstanding, this freedom requires a culture that tolerates mistakes and accepts timely feedback (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

### *Servant Leadership Outcomes*

Given that the nature of leadership is elusive and ubiquitous, it is difficult to pin down all outcomes of servant leadership. It can be drawn from current empirical studies that servant leadership is an important leadership concept in today's society. The outcomes of servant leadership run the gamut from enhanced creativity (Yoshida, Sendjaya, Hirst, & Cooper, 2014) to organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010). A critical examination of the relationship between servant leadership and other leadership approaches would be helpful to build a better understanding of what servant leadership is and how, where, and when to apply it to reach its maximum potential.

#### **Creativity and Innovation**

Despite the fact that the original intent of servant leadership is not to foster creativity, it builds a culture that encourages creative endeavors and liberates the development of an individual. Yoshida and his colleagues (2014) found that servant leaders stimulate individual creativity and team innovation. Immersed in a supportive environment that created by servant leaders, they tend to be more intrinsically motivated to perform creativity (Sendjaya, 2015). Yoshida's (2014) findings suggest that a supportive environment created by servant leaders stimulates creativity and innovation; servant leadership galvanizes constituents' interpersonal connections, which in turn, fosters psychological safety and empower them to learn and experiment. A strong bond is built by frequent genuine leader-follower exchange.

**Trust**

It is not difficult to imagine the trust among employees and servant leaders because the nature of a servant leader is to care about employees. From recent research, it can be found that employees who perceive a higher level of servant leadership have a stronger sense of trust in their leaders (Hoch et al., 2018; Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). In addition, compared to transformational leadership, servant leadership is a better predictor of leader-member-exchange (LMX) quality (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Therefore, promoting servant leadership behaviors should be encouraged in organizations for trust building purposes.

**Employee Engagement**

Researchers have found that several key influencers to employee engagement are positively connected with servant leadership behaviors in Australian firms. Employees perceive a strong sense of support while servant leaders operate in an organization. Liden et al., (2008) noted that the crucial bond between servant leaders and their employees is fundamental for employee engagement in general. In a recent case study of a restaurant chain in the Dallas area, as shown in its findings, servant leadership has a strong influence on employee engagement (Carter & Baghurst, 2014).

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**

Scholars recently connected servant leadership with OCB (Walumbwa et al., 2010). OCB is defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4). According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), servant leaders initiate a positive relationship with employees and influence them high moral behavior and as a return to maintain the relationship with their servant leaders, employees serve their community and behave as servant leaders. Servant leadership positively affects employees' attitude and behavior. Ehrhart (2004) found a positive significant relationship between servant leadership and employee OCB. Because of these servant leadership characteristics, it is common to find servant leaders serving outside the organization.

**Learning Organization/Organizational Learning**

Choudhary, Akhtar, and Zaheer (2013) found that servant leadership is significantly positively correlated with organizational learning in the service sector of Pakistan. Limited research has focused on the relationship between these two constructs. Therefore, it is also one main purpose of the study – to examine the relationship between servant leadership and learning organization practice.

*Servant Leadership Conceptualizations*

I introduce the eight most cited conceptualizations in servant leadership research: (a) Spears' (1998) Ten servant leadership characteristics, (b) Laub's (1999) servant leadership model, (c) Patterson's (2003) servant leadership model, (d) Ehrhart's servant leadership model (2004), (e) Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora's (2008) servant leadership model, (f) Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson's (2008) servant leadership model, (g) van Dierendonck's (2011) servant leadership model, and (h) Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) servant leadership model. Further, the selected model/measurement for data collection is provided.

**Spears' (1998) Ten Characteristics of Servant Leadership.**

As Greenleaf's protégé, Spears identified 10 characteristics of servant leadership from Greenleaf's work. These 10 characteristics are: (a) listening (servant leaders respectfully listen to what is said by employees, which allows leaders to identify the will of the group and help clarify the will), (b) empathy (servant leaders are good at understanding different perspectives and striving to accept and understand others), (c) awareness (servant leaders view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position), (d) persuasion (servant leaders have superior communication skills), (e) conceptualization (servant leaders balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach), (f) foresight (servant leaders have long-term vision), (g) stewardship (servant leaders emphasize the use of openness and persuasion rather than control), (h) commitment to the growth of people (servant leaders develop employees as humans), (i) building community (servant leaders identify means for building communities, which give the healing love essential for health), and (j) healing (servant leaders heal emotional hurts to “help make whole”).

**Laub’s Servant Leadership Model**

Laub (1999) conducted a systematic literature review regarding the topic of servant leadership. He concluded six characteristics of a servant leader and developed his own measurement instrument. Laub (1999) created a six-dimensional servant leadership construct. In his work, a servant leader respects employee, support employee, focus on employees’ interpersonal connections, displays authenticity, offer guidance and leadership, and most importantly, shares leadership. As the first empirical study of servant leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011), Laub’s (1999) measurement instrument was a breakthrough for the servant leadership field.

**Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Model.**

Patterson’s servant leadership model is composed of seven attributes: (a) Agapao love (moral treatment of others), (b) humility (serving others), (c) altruism (concerns for the welfare of others), (d) vision (seek to find what the followers want in the organization), (e) trust, (f) empowerment, and (g) service. Patterson (2003) focused on the leader-to-follower interactions.

**Ehrhart's (2004) Servant Leadership Model**

Ehrhart (2004) developed his own scale of measuring servant leadership after a thorough literature review. Ehrhart (1998) concluded servant leadership behaviors into seven major categories: (a) forming relationships with subordinates, (b) empowering subordinates, (c) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (d) behaving ethically, (e) having conceptual skills, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) creating value for those outside of the organization. He developed a 14-item servant-leadership measurement instrument that each dimension contains two items. This scale has been validated in the context of Chinese public sectors by Miao et al. (2010). I used this instrument to measure servant leadership for this research in Chinese SMEs because it also measures servant leaders' influence on things outside of the organization.

**Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) Servant Leadership Model**

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) defined servant leadership as a construct which comprises 11 related characteristics. They extracted five factors and generated a new servant leadership model by conducting an exploratory factor analysis: (a) altruistic calling, (b) emotional healing, (c) persuasive mapping, (d) wisdom, and (e) organizational stewardship. This five-dimensional servant leadership model has been tested and validated in different cultural contexts including China (Sun & Wang, 2010).

*Altruistic Calling*

It can be drawn from this dimension that a servant leader's fundamental desire is to make a positive difference in others' lives. This means a servant leader is genuinely concerned about one's development as a human. Instead of working towards the ultimate goal of an organization as a profitable business, leaders who serve others first always put employees' development in first place.

*Emotional Healing*

It can be seen from this dimension that servant leaders have exceptional skills of fostering recovery from hardship or trauma. By doing this, the leader facilitates employees' transitioning roles (i.e. family roles and professional roles). Employees may ricochet the care they perceived from their leaders back to the organization. China may be an extreme case because *hui bao* (reciprocity) and *guanxi* (personal relationship) are still dominant concepts in organizations.

*Wisdom*

A servant leader needs to be aware of surroundings and anticipate consequences. Wisdom is more than being decisive and making good decisions. It is also about using appropriate techniques in different occasions. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) thought wisdom is "the ideal of perfect and practical, combing the height of knowledge and utility" (p. 319).

*Persuasive Mapping*

Servant leaders are experts in persuasion because they frequently communicate with employees and persuade them to move towards the shared direction. Servant leaders are good at using persuasion to influence others without relying on formal authority (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

*Organizational Stewardship*

A leader needs to be a role model, who goes beyond self-interest and acts in a manner that stimulates others to form a sense of obligation for the common good of the group (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; van Dierendonck, 2011). Organizational stewardship involves developing a sense of community and serves, to a broader sense, people who live in the community. Because of servant leaders' natural inclination to serve, it is not difficult to imagine a servant leader serving in their community.

**Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora's (2008) Servant Leadership Model**

Scholars have claimed that servant leadership is nested in spiritual leadership, but Sendjaya and his colleagues (2008) found two important dimensions missing in spiritual leadership research: self-sacrificial servanthood and moral values. They further reviewed literature and found 20 themes pertinent to servant leadership. Furthermore, they employed exploratory factor analysis and categorized those 20 themes into six dimensions: (a) voluntary subordination (voluntarily abandoning oneself to serve others), (b) authentic self (humility, integrity, accountability, security, and vulnerability), (c) covenantal relationship (intense personal bond with shared values, mutual trust and concerns for the welfare of the other party), (d) responsible morality (being ethical), (e) transcendental spirituality (being aware of the connection between oneself to the external world), and (f) transforming influence (transforming others to servant leaders). A total of 73 items were retained to measure the six-dimensional servant leadership construct.

**Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson's (2008) Servant Leadership Model**

Liden and colleagues (2008) understood servant leadership differently from previous researchers and developed it into a nine-dimensional construct: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, (g) behaving ethically, (h) relationships, and (i) servanthood. Similar with Patterson's (2003) contribution, they contended that the core of servant leadership is the relationship between followers and leaders. It is suggested that whether employees can fulfill their potential and become self-motivated is determined by the leader-follower relationship (Manz & Sims, 1987). Liden et al. (2015) validated a short form of the original 28-item servant leadership questionnaire. They further developed a 7-item scale.

**van Dierendonck's (2011) Servant Leadership Model**

As one of the most used servant-leadership measurement instruments, van Dierendonck and Nuijten followed Hinkin's (1995) approach and generated 30 items inductively from data from two countries, four studies, eight samples, 1571 participants. After a systematic literature review and interviews with experts in the field of leadership, he synthesized eight main characteristics that describe servant leadership: (a) empowerment (encouraging and enabling with a sense of personal power), (b) accountability (ensuring people know what is expected of them), (c) standing back (giving priority to the interest of others), (d) humility (knowing self-limitations and seeking contributions from others), (e) authenticity (being true to oneself), (f) courage (daring to take risks), (g) interpersonal acceptance (showing empathy and creating a trusting atmosphere), (h) stewardship (providing service instead of control and self-interest). van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) named this scale The Servant Leadership Survey (SLS), which has been recognized as the most promising measure for continued servant leadership research (Dinh et al., 2014).

*Servant Leadership Conceptualizations Comparison*

Given that scholars have different interpretations of Greenleaf's original writing of servant leadership, they use part or all of Greenleaf's definition as the foundation for servant leadership discussion. As shown above, researchers have conceptualized servant leadership differently and created instruments with various subscales to measure servant leadership or characteristics of a servant leader (Parris & Peachey, 2013). As shown in Table 2, it is a straightforward display of all eight models introduced in the literature section.

**Table 2 The Most Cited Servant Leadership Conceptualizations Comparison**

| Author/s | Dimensions | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Personal Characteristics | Employees Focus | Organizational Focus | External Environment Connections |
| Spears (1998) | Listening; Empathy; Healing; Awareness; Persuasion; Conceptualization | Helping people grow; Stewardship | Foresight | Community building |
| Laub (1999) | Displaying authenticity | Valuing people; Developing people; Sharing leadership | Providing leadership | Building community |
| Patterson (2003) | Agapao love; Humility | Altruism; Trust; Empowerment; Service | Vision | |
| Ehrhart (2004) | Having conceptual skills; Behaving ethically; | Putting subordinates first; Forming relationship with employees; Empowering subordinates; Helping employees grow and succeed | | Creating values for those outside the organization |
| Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) | Emotional healing; Wisdom | Altruistic calling | Persuasive mapping; | Organizational stewardship |
| Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) | Emotional healing; Conceptual skills; Behaving ethically; Servanthood | Putting subordinates first; Helping subordinates grow and succeed; Relationships | | Creating values for the community |

Table 2 Continued.

| Author/s | Dimensions | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Personal Characteristics | Employees Focus | Organizational Focus | External Environment Connections |
| Sendjaya, Sarros and Santora (2008) | Authentic self; Responsible morality | Voluntary subordination; Transforming influence; Covenantal relationship | | Transcendent al spirituality |
| van Dierendonck (2011) | Humility; Authenticity; Interpersonal acceptance; Courage | Standing back; Stewardship; Accountability; Empowerment; | | |

Every conceptualization of servant leadership that are listed above have been developed and validated into measurement instruments. The most widely used instrument is Laub's (1999) Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) instrument (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

**Comparison between Servant Leadership and Traditional Leadership**

Servant leadership instills a culture of serving and caring within one organization by listening to, valuing, enabling, encouraging, and empowering employees (Kim, Kim, & Choi, 2014). Compared to servant leaders, traditional leaders put achieving corporate goals as the top priority, which is always good for the short-term development of a company (Kim, Kim, & Choi, 2014). However, for achieving the long-term sustainable strategies, such as continuous high performance, servant leadership is more suitable for today's organization (Yukl, 2006). After all, knowledge-based organizations need servant leaders to advocate a culture that support risk taking and continuous learning (Politis, 2001). The comparison between traditional leaderships and servant leadership is shown in Table 3 from seven different categories.

**Table 3 Difference between Traditional Leaderships and Servant Leadership**

| | Traditional leaderships | Servant leadership |
|---|---|---|
| Aware of resources | Organization member is one of the resources and an object of producing outcomes as instructed by a leader. | Organization member is the most important resource in achieving corporate goals and leader helps organization members grow and foster their abilities. |
| Production of an organization | Task-oriented rather than human-oriented. Time, expense, and production are visible and evaluated from quantitative contribution. | Human-centered. The outcome of task and the degree of voluntary behaviors of organization members are evaluated |
| Trust and empowerment among organization members | Leader's experience and knowledge is superior to organization members' ones. Organization member's criticism or contrary opinion is neglected. | A leader trusts in the ability of organization members and respects their judgment in performing tasks.<br>A leader supports necessary resources so that organization members can promote their business with delegated authority. |

Table 3 Continued.

| | Traditional leaderships | Servant leadership |
|---|---|---|
| Investment and communication method | Top-down unilateral communication. | Two-way communication. Communication is activated and information is shared. |
| Learning orientation | Learning and development interventions are for performance enhancement. | Learning and development practices help employee personal grow in the long term. |
| External environment | Leaders view organizations as closed entities without much interaction between its communities. | A leader values the community; organization is prepared to contribute to the society positively. |

Source: adopted from Kim, Kim, and Choi, 2014

**Critiques of Servant Leadership**

Empirical research in the servant leadership realm is still in its early stages (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Similar with other constructs in social science, servant leadership theory lacks a unified definition among scholars. This situation can be easily identified from current literature. Scholars tend to define the concept with a different interpretation of Greenleaf’s work. Servant leadership is no doubt rooted in Greenleaf’s original work, however, because of Greenleaf’s evasive and ambiguous writing style, servant leadership was left without a clear conceptualization. Therefore, no consensus of servant leadership’s definition exists, and various instruments are used to measure the construct (see the model comparison in Table 2).

In terms of theory building, some methodologies are missing from current research literature. For example, there are a few articles using grounded theory to study servant leadership. Grounded theory is a combination of ethnographic and phenomenological research; it uses both inductive and deductive reasoning to build theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), developing a more defendable theoretical explanation of the data (Locke, 2002). Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that the researcher should discuss a theory after the content analysis is finished when they are certain the theory is fully supported by the collected data. Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005) used grounded theory to study servant leadership. They identified a servant leader's six characteristics: (a) valuing people, (b) networking, (c) enabling, (d) acting with integrity, (e) being accessible, and (f) being decisive.

Some researchers have challenged the findings related to servant leadership's outcomes. McCrimmon (2010) lambasted the concept of servant leadership. He argued that servant leadership creates hindrances for employee engagement, which contradicted other researchers' findings (see Carter & Baghurst, 2014; Liden et al., 2014). Servant leadership theorists believe that employees are motivated by the servant-like leaders. However, in reality, McCrimmon (2010) noted "if employees feel so treated, they will surely be even more demotivated and disengaged than they are already" (para. 12). Further, McCrimmon (2010) argued it is impossible for servant leaders to reach the ultimate goal of a company, which is to make a profit. In addition, McCrimmon (2010) pointed out a servant leadership theorists' erroneous assumption about employees. The employees need to serve the owner of the company and the customers who purchase their products.

It can be revealed from current servant leadership literature that the construct has been studied in a broad range of cultural contexts. Researchers have shown tremendous interest in servant leadership in the U.S. and the Asia Pacific region. However, there is a paucity of studies being conducted in other parts of the world. For example, some researchers have suggested that servant leadership is a solution for corruption in certain African countries, which is a serious issue in the current management world (Manala, 2014).

## Work-Family Enrichment and Work-Family Conflict

In the early 1900's, Frederick Taylor's scientific management theory dominated the management world. In the 1920s, the Hawthorne Experiment was conducted, discovering that workers react positively to personal care and attention. The worker began to feel they were seen as a real person rather than a cog in an organizational machine to be used to achieve management financial goals. Since then, it is well received that human capital is the most valuable resource in an organization. Consequently, organizational researchers aim to design interventions to increase the organization's sustainability and long-term development. One stream of research concerns the interface (enrichment and conflict) between domains in employees' lives. The vast majority of work-family research has focused on its negative aspects – work-family conflict (Grzywacz & Butlers, 2008). For example, most supervisors fail to see positive spillovers from the family domain to the workplace, and are solely concern about the negative spillovers from the family domain (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). However, work-family enrichment tends to lead to higher job satisfaction and affective commitment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The interface between two domains -workplace and family - is inevitable and positive spillovers from one role can be transitioned to another.

### *Work-Family Conflict (WFC)*

The concept of WFC has been discussed extensively by researchers and practitioners since the 1960s. A large body of studies has focused on the negative relationship between WFC and other organizational constructs (Moen & Sweet, 2002; Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined WFC as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (p. 77). WFC especially worsens the relationship between married couples when they are raising young children (Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988).

Several systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses have provided a holistic view of WFC’s effects in the workplace. In Byron’s (2005) meta-analysis, he combined the results of more than 60 studies. He concluded that WFC was associated with stress and hours of work/non-work from the work domain and number of children, time spent at home from the family domain. Eby and her colleagues (2005) reviewed the literature that related to work-family research from 1980 to 2002. They found: (a) high involvement in work was positively and significantly correlated with WFC, (b) supportive organizational culture and supervisor could reduce WFC, (c) higher self-monitors report less WFC, (d) WFC was highly correlated with mental health outcomes, (e) the more frequent WFC happens, the lower job satisfaction, greater turnover intentions, and lower perceived career success for employees, (f) higher WFC suggests high work involvement and affective organizational commitment, and (g) workers who have higher work expectations, greater work conflict, and higher involvement in family domains have higher WFC. Allen et al. (2000) categorized the outcomes of WFC into three camps: work-related, non-work-related, and stress-related outcomes. Many other researchers also confirmed the negative impact of WFC on business operation (e.g., Adams & Jex, 1999; Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002).

Work-family conflict reflects the goodness of fit between work and family life. There is a reciprocal relationship between work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). When conflicts in the workplace rise, the conflicts in one's family are more likely to correlate positively. When one's responsibilities from a role interfere with the quality of another role, the second role's satisfaction will suffer. However, different directions of conflict may relate to different outcomes. Some work-related outcomes are strongly linked with work-to-family conflict compared to family-to-work conflict such as job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Work-to-family conflict may be connected with turnover intentions and family-to-work conflict may be correlated with absenteeism (Frone et al., 1992). In this study, I did not differentiate the two directions, and instead, I focused on the effect of servant leadership and learning organization practice on the positive relationship between work and family (WFE) and the negative relationship between work and family (WFC).

### *Work-Family Enrichment (WFE)*

Traditionally, the interface between work and family domains was dominantly about work-family conflict. However, scholars have called for a research transition to study the positive spillovers from those two domains (Bakker & Demerouti, 2005). Indeed, work and family can be allies (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Many researchers assert that positive experience from one role can be transferred to another (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Voydanoff (2001) noted that participation in different roles can produce positive outcomes for later activities because of the accumulation of skills from different roles that one has. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) summarized former studies of WFE and commented, "work-to-family enrichment occurs when work experiences improve the quality of family life, and family-to-work enrichment occurs when family experiences improve the quality of work life" (p. 73). Some evidence about the possible positive relationship between work and family can be found from this line of research. For instance, Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, and King (2002) reported how a manager's family life enhanced her own professional life. Crouter (1984) gave an example of a factory worker using what he had learned in job trainings to teach his 16-year-old son valuable lessons. From entrepreneur's perspectives, Powell and Eddleston (2013) compared the influence of family-to-work enrichment on different genders; women benefit more from the connection between family-to-work enrichment and business success than men.

**Outcomes of WFE**

As the two most important domains in one's life, the quality of the interface between the work and the family acts as a critical predictor of organizational commitment (e.g., Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013). According to Social Exchange Theory, when an employee perceives greater work-family enrichment and less work-family conflict, they show greater commitment to the company (Blau, 1964). Work-family enrichment is positively related to job satisfaction and family satisfaction. To clarify, work-to-family enrichment has a positive relationship with family satisfaction, and family to work enrichment has a positive relationship with job satisfaction (McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010). Mihelic and Tekavcic (2014) confirm McNall et al.'s (2010) findings and also found work-to-family enrichment was significantly and positively related to job satisfaction, but family-to-work enrichment was not. Moreover, scholars have found the connection between work-to-family positive spillover and job performance, and WFE's mediation effect on the linkage between work-to-family positive spillover and job and life satisfaction (Carlson et al., 2014). Consistent with previous findings regarding WFE, one 2012 study in which the researchers used hospital employees as the sample, found WFE full mediated the relationship between family supportive supervisor behaviors and various organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and job performance (Odle-Dusseau, Britt, & Greene-Shortridge, 2012).

## Social Exchange Theory

Blau (1964) defined social exchange as “voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (p. 91). Social exchange theory emphasizes that interconnected exchanges between individuals may lead to high-quality relationships, even though it seems to only happen in certain contexts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Based on the tenets of social exchange theory, reciprocity is one critical rule in maintaining a healthy exchange relationship. Reciprocity is not bargaining. Two interdependent parties are involved in the exchange process. Moreover, two parties trust each other, even though the return is not the exact same thing. The exchange process is also a recursive process as when one party initiated the action, the other party would follow because of the obligations that generated by the favor one owes to the other. However, individuals differ; not everyone values reciprocity equally; some carefully track obligations (score keeping), which causes stress in the process of exchange (Murstein, Cerreto, & MacDonald, 1977). In general, scholars and practitioners alike agree that reciprocity represents quid pro quo propensities, positive or negative. That is to say, when one receives negative treatment, he or she would return negative treatment as well. Similarly, when one receives positive treatment, he or she would return positive treatment.

Despite the focus of social exchange theory on the interpersonal relationship between individuals, it helps explain associations between organizational variables. For example, social exchange theory is found in connecting leader-member exchange and organizational support (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996), servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2010), and ethical leadership and employees’ voice behavior (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

In this study, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) was used to explain the possible association between servant leadership and work-family relationship (enrichment and conflict). Servant leaders influence individual attitudes and organizational culture in a positive way. Positive resources tend to accumulate in the workplace because of servant leadership. High quality interpersonal relationships between servant leaders and employees make positive spillover possible from the workplace to one's family. It is also because servant leaders genuinely care about their followers, thereby creating a social context in which employees reciprocate by using extra resources from their family domain to solve organizational issues (Walumbwa et al., 2010).

## Transition Theory

Adults make transitions all the time. However, not all transitions involve role change (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Role change also alters the behavior patterns of an individual. Positive transitions in roles includes getting married, becoming a parent, and getting a promotion. After spending time at home with the family, entering the workplace brings a certain level of stress with the transition. Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined transition as "any event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). They categorized three different types of transitions: anticipated, those that are not anticipated, and nonevents. The daily routine transition from a spouse role to a worker role is often anticipated and prepared. However, the dissonance between these two life domains (family and workplace) is often caused by unsuccessful transitions. As Schlossberg and coauthors (1989) indicated when "moving in" to a new role, an individual conducts personal analysis of resources available for managing change. These positive resources could help the transition. Schlossberg and coauthors (1995) proposed that adults evaluate the situation when "moving in" to a new environment, and they also apply different strategies to cope with change. Personal characteristics and the support they receive from the new environment may facilitate the transition. In a nutshell, Schlossberg and colleagues believe that there are four critical factors influencing one's transition: the situation, the self, the support, and the strategy.

### *The Situation*

Changes in role trigger learning. New situation instigates learning that a new role may need. Schlossberg (1995) suggested that the duration of the transition also affects the difficultness of managing the transition (i.e., the extent to which one perceives the change brought about by the transition as permanent or temporary). In this study, a daily transition from work to family and family to work is a short-term and temporary transition, which based on transition theory is a short duration transition and should not cause excessive stress or negative effect.

### *The Self*

Personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources influence the effectiveness of how individuals cope with change. Different individuals bring different assets and liabilities to a transition. By and large, those factors include socioeconomic status, gender, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, ego development, optimism and self-efficacy, and commitment and values.

### *The Support*

Schlossberg et al. (1995) classified the types of support by their sources. For example, the social support in the workplace "help the individual mobilize…psychological resources and master…emotional burdens; they share…tasks…they provide…extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skills, and cognitive guidance to improve…handling of …situations" (Caplan, 1976, p. 5-6).

### *The Strategy*

Last but not least, the strategy is an integral element for a transition. Individuals master strategies to analyze the problem, manage their emotions, and finally change the situation. In the workplace, organizational culture (e.g., learning organization culture) trains employees in new strategies to manage their transitions from work life to family life and vice versa.

## Summary of the Chapter

In Chapter II, major concepts were reviewed for this study - learning organization, servant leadership, work-family enrichment and work-family conflict. In addition, two theories were introduced. First, the history of the construct's development was discussed. Second, different conceptualizations of learning organization and servant leadership were introduced separately. Thirdly, those conceptualizations were compared and critiqued. For work-family relationship, I mainly focused on work-family conflict and work-family enrichment. Research regarding work-family conflict and work-family enrichment was synthesized and the outcomes that associated with those two concepts were analyzed as well. Finally, two important theories — social exchange theory and transition theory were presented as the theoretical underpinnings for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I introduced the major components of the research method. The seven sections that this chapter encompasses are: (a) study design, (b) sample, (c) instrumentation/measures, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) ethical considerations and (g) chapter summary.

## Study Design

The relationship between Servant Leadership and Work-family Enrichment and Conflict in the context of Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was the main focus of the study. The study was aimed to examine if Learning Organization Practice fully mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work-family enrichment and conflict. The methodology for this study was quantitative in nature. A non-experimental, quantitative cross-sectional survey research approach was applied to collect the data to explore the two research questions. Cross-sectional surveys can be considered a “snapshot that gives a picture of what the research wants to study” (Connelly, 2016, p. 369). Therefore, for social science research, cross-sectional surveys are used frequently to collect data on the knowledge of respondents (Polit & Beck, 2014). A survey is a tool that helps researchers study the natural behaviors in the natural context (Kazdin, 2003); it is used to gather information from a sample of entities in a systematic way to conduct statistics for a population in which the entities are nested. A web-based instrument was used to assess the knowledge of employees’ perceptions of their leaders’ servant leadership traits, learning organization practice, and work-family enrichment and conflict.

Participants were eligible employees (18 years of age or older) from Chinese SMEs in 34 provinces.

According to transition theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995), servant leadership (SL) in Chinese SMEs leads to higher work-family enrichment (WFE), lower work-family conflict (WFC), and learning organization practice (LOP) mediates the relationship between SL and WFE and SL and WFC. Namely, SL has an impact on WFE and WFC, because the nature of SL is to encourage employees' overall development as humans (Greenleaf, 1977). Therefore, servant leaders are most likely to demonstrate empathetic qualities and truly care for the development of their employees. According to Social Exchange Theory, the employees would become servant leaders themselves and create a supportive environment at home as well. Servant leaders extend their care to employees' families and thus make it possible to let positive workplace spillovers exert an impact on family affairs. In addition, the existence of LOP may mediate the relationship between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC, because LOP may educate employees in better leveraging positive spillover from the workplace.

The study was quantitative research. All four constructs were combined with demographic questions into one online questionnaire. An electronic version of the instrument was distributed to participants of this study via the most popular survey distribution website in China (*WJX.com*). Employees from the sample organizations responded to questionnaires of SL, LOP, WFE, and WFC and seven demographic questions (one optional). Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants received a thank you note and they automatically entered a drawing for a learning course discount, which was provided by the survey website. Winners received discounts if they chose to register for those learning courses.  Data regarding all four constructs was collected after the IRB at Texas A&M University had approved the study.

## Sample

The targeted population for this study was employees from Chinese SMEs in the country. According to the Chinese SME directory, more than 73 million SMEs existed at the end of the year 2017 (The Government of People's Republic of China Government, 2017). Most SMEs are in the service industry (76.49%). Given the criteria for SMEs vary depending on industries in China, organizations with less than 500 employees were chosen as the standard for choosing SMEs for this research following Zheng, O'Neil, and Morrison's (2009) suggestion. The sample was full-time employees from Chinese SMEs, 18 years of age and older. Participants must have had more than six months of working experience at the current company. Employees who had less than six months of working experience might fail to provide accurate information about their supervisors and the organization. Such a large population would require random sampling from all 34 provinces of China. However, this sampling technique is not practical in survey research (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Instead, convenience sampling (non-probability sample) is more appropriate. Creswell (2002) noted that when availability and convenience were issues, the researcher could use volunteers as the samples of the research. Snowball sampling was employed once the initial convenience samples were selected. Participating SMEs owners were asked to recommend their friends (SMEs owners) to participate in this study as well.

A total of 586 employees participated in this research, however, only 313 surveys were usable for data analysis. A total of 273 received questionnaires were deleted based on five data cleaning criteria: (a) less than 30% of the questionnaire was answered, (b) straight-line answers where a big portion of the questionnaire was assigned with a same score, (c) respondents were younger than 18 years old, (d) respondents were not located in China mainland, or (e) answers depicted contradictory realities (e.g., both high on work-family enrichment and work-family conflict). The sample consisted of 31.9% males (n= 100) and 68.1% females (n= 213). The majority of the participants were married (n=227, 72.5%) and most of the respondents had no offspring (n= 258, 82.4%). On average, the job tenure was 8 years with a range from 1 to 40 years. For business locations, 55.3% businesses were located in developed regions (n=173) and 44.7% businesses were from less developed regions (n= 140). I coded 31 provinces (excluding Macau, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) into two regions (developed coastal regions and less developed inland regions). The developed coastal regions include Liaoning, Chongqing, Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong, covered 10.9 % China's land area. However, together they contained 40.6% of China's population in 2012, and they accounted for 61.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 68.6% of the Gross Industrial Output (NBSC, 2013). The less developed inland regions are Anhui, Gansu, Guangxi, Guizhou, Hainan, Hei Longjiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Inner Mongolia, Jiangxi, Jilin, Ningxia, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Sichuan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Yunnan provinces.

## Instrumentation/Measures

The research instrument was comprised of 48 questions, which was distributed as a web questionnaire through *WJX.com*, the most popular survey distribution website in China. A recruitment letter with the web-based link was distributed by business owners to their business's *WeChat* (the most popular social media platform) group. Employees who received this link responded to the survey voluntarily. The questionnaire was in Chinese and all four instruments were translated and validated in the Chinese context by previous researchers (Miao et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2004).

### *Exogenous and Endogenous Variables*

Servant leadership traits were measured with the 14-item servant leadership scale developed by Ehrhart (2004). The original scale is comprised of seven dimensions, which are Forming Relationships with Subordinates (FR), Putting Subordinates First (PS), Empowering Subordinates (ES), Having Conceptual Skills (CS), Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed (GS), Creating Value for Those Outside the Organization (CV), and Behaving Ethically (BE). However, this instrument has been used and validated in the Chinese context as a single construct by Miao et al. (2014). Following Miao et al. (2014), I treated SL as a single construct as well. Each participant was asked to rate his or her supervisor's servant leadership traits on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree to avoid ambiguous responses. The Cronbach's alpha of the SL scale was 0.83, which conforms to the requirement of psychometrics.

Learning organization practice in Chinese SMEs was measured with the Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ). Participants answered 21 questions related to seven dimensions of a learning organization. Those seven dimensions are: (a) Continuous Learning (CL), (b) Dialog and Inquiry (DI), (c) Team Learning and Collaboration (TC), (d) Embedded Systems (ES), (e) Empowerment (EP), (e) Systems Connections (SC), (f) Strategic Leadership (LD). The DLOQ has been translated and used in different cultural contexts. DLOQ is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Following Joo's (2010) research, I treated LOP as a single-factor construct. The Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates for LOP tend to be acceptable (Cronbach's alpha = .85).

Work–family conflict and enrichment were assessed using the Work–family Spillover Scale developed by Grzywacz and Marks (2000). This scale consists of four dimensions: positive spillover from work to family (Work-family Enrichment), positive spillover from family to work

(Family-work Enrichment), negative spillover from work to family (Work-family Conflict), and negative spillover from family to work (Family-work Conflict). One example item from work-family enrichment is “The things I do at work help me deal with personal and practical issues at home”; one example from family-work enrichment is “Home life helps me relax and feel ready for the next day’s work”; one example item of work-family conflict is “Job reduces the effort I can give to activities at home”; and one example item from family-work conflict is “Responsibilities at home reduce the effort I can devote to my job”.

Given the purpose of the research was to examine factors that influence the relationship between work and family (without considering the direction), the four dimensions were combined into two (negative spillovers between work and family, Work-Family Conflict, and positive spillovers between work and family, Work-Family Enrichment) to measure employees’ work-family relationship. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used to measure work-family conflict (WFC) and work-family enrichment (WFE). The Chinese version from this research has an internal reliability for Work-Family Enrichment of 0.70, and 0.68 for Work-Family Conflict.

### *Demographics*

Gender, employee’s age, parental status, number of children, highest level of education earned, job tenure, overall working experiences, business location, and affiliation (optional) were also included in the electronic questionnaire (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Lau, McLean, Hsu, & Lien, 2017). However, they were not added to estimate a “purified” relationship between variables, but to estimate a “controlled” relationship between two variables that accounts for the effects of other meaningful variables (Carlson & Wu, 2012). That is to say, I not only studied the relationships among SL, LOP, WFE, and WFC above and beyond the effect of all those control variables, I but also interpreted the connections between demographic variables and endogenous variables (i.e., LOP, WFE, and WFC).

## Data Collection

Convenience and snowball sampling methods provided the sample. I used my personal connections in China and reached out to those who owned SMEs in different provinces and asked them to help me find more SMEs that were willing to participate in this research. I explained my research purposes to them and obtained their consents. Data were collected by using established questionnaires. One online survey link was created on *WJX.com* (an equivalent online service of Qualtrics) and shared to the employees of Chinese SMEs via *WeChat* (the most popular social media platform in China). To be specific, I asked SMEs owners to distribute the online survey link through their *WeChat* group. This online data collection method is commonly used in organizational research (Brettel & Rottenberger 2013). A brief introduction of the research was provided at the beginning of the survey. The definitions of SL, LOP, WFC, and WFE were also provided. The employees responded to 48 questions voluntarily. Anonymity and the voluntary nature were stressed in the introduction. I also showed the IRB approval of this research to SMEs owners. The whole survey was in simplified Chinese. Upon completion of the survey, participants received a thank you note and were automatically registered for a drawing of a learning course discount, which was provided by *WJX.com*. The participation in the research was not compensated in any monetary means.

## Data Analysis

I used SPSS for Mac (version 22) and Mplus for Mac (version 7) for the statistical analysis of all data resulting from this study. Because I used convenience sampling and snowball sampling, I could not identify all participants' affiliations. Therefore, multilevel data analysis techniques such as hierarchical linear modelling and multi-level structural equation modelling could not be used.

Mplus 7.0 software was used to analyze the data via structural equation modelling (Bollen, 1989). Structural equation modelling (SEM) has the advantages of greater flexibility for the "interplay between theory and data" (Chin, 1998, p. vii). As a statistical tool, SEM is superior to regression analysis in "correcting for unreliability of measures and also gives information on the unique paths between constructs after potentially confounding variables are controlled for" (Montes et al., 2005, p. 1166).

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Data of four constructs, SL, LOP, WFE, and WFC was analyzed by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) first to test the validity of the factor structure and factor loadings by examining the fit between the measurement model and the data (Yang, 2005).

Firstly, CFA was conducted to test the factor structure of SL, LOP, and WFC and WFE using Mplus 7 software. CFA provides various "fit" statistics to assess how well a model fits the data using two indices: absolute fit and comparative fit. I used absolute fit indices to test how well the hypothesized model fits the collected data; it is a measure of fit between the structural model and the observed covariance matrix. The root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI), the standardized root mean-squared residual (SRMR), and goodness-of-fit index (GFI) are often considered measures of absolute fit (Chin, 1998). For comparative fit, it is a comparative measure of fit when comparing two different models. Bentler and Bonett (1980) proposed a normed fit index (NFI), which ranges from 0 to 1. In addition, the comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis index (TLI) are also measures of comparative fit. However, because Mplus 7.0 only reports Chi-square, RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and SRMR, I selected all five fit indices to test measurement model fit. Chi-square ($\chi 2$) goodness of fit tests were conducted to measure the model fit as well. The purpose of comparing competing models is to generate a better fit model to the data. According to Chin (1998), if the value for the RMSEA is less than .05, SRMR value less than .08, CFI value larger than .90, TLI value larger than .90, those indices indicate an acceptable model fit.

### *Path Analysis*

According to Social Exchange Theory, when employees perceive SL from their employer, they would reciprocate with higher involvement, such as being more dedicated to learning activities and also, affect WFE and WFC. Learning organization practice creates a culture that fosters reflection and continual learning to occur. When employees learned things at work, they would use such skills at home. In addition, because of the nature of LOP requires employees to learn and improve continuously, they may leverage resources from external their family domains to solve problems in the workplace, which increases the interface between family and workplace. Therefore, LOP is critical in the transition between work and family. Learning organization practice may fully mediate the relationship between SL and WFC, and SL and WFE.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Any form of human subjects' research involves risk because it may expose participants to risky situations. In the next section, procedures to reduce the risk for participants are explained. Conducting research that involves human participants requires cautiously plan and execution to protect their rights. After I received the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University, I collected the data in the Fall of 2018.

First of all, the research application was submitted to the IRB at Texas A&M University. The data collection process did not begin before I received the approval from the IRB. I also strictly abided by any ethical guidelines from the IRB. Second, the agreement from business owners to allow access to employees in the selected organizations was obtained prior to the data collection process (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The purpose of the study and the communication emails or letters with employees and the business owners were approved by IRB at Texas A&M University. Third, other requested forms from participants was shared with them, while emphasizing the very importance of anonymity and the non-coercive nature of the data collection process. Fourth, participation in the study would be voluntary. Prospective participants received an introduction of the study from the business owner with participation invitation. The participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Fifth, data were collected anonymously through surveys linked to a secure website. Study participants' information was kept securely. Sixth, data are used for research purposes only and will not be shared with others not involved in the study. And last but not least, the data are stored on the survey website for one year once the data is collected and analyzed; after the study is completed, the data will be deleted.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the details of the research methodology were introduced which was utilized in the study. The study design, target population and sample, data collection procedures, instruments/measures, data analysis, and ethical consideration in the study were described. Data were anonymously collected from 586 working employees of Chinese SMEs from 34 provinces via web surveys. SEM was used to analyze the data collected on employees' perception of leaders' servant leadership traits, learning organization practice, and work-family enrichment and conflict. Finally, all actions that the researcher took to protect the participants by following steps to meet ethical research standards were outlined.

# CHAPTER IV

# RESULTS

In the results section, descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables and the reliabilities (Cronbach's $\alpha$) of four variables (i.e., Servant Leadership, Work-Family Conflict, Work-Family Enrichment, and Learning Organization Practice) are reported. Next, the structural equation modelling results are provided and the hypotheses are tested. The model fit indexes and path coefficients are also reported in this section. All five hypotheses were supported.

The descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations), reliabilities (Cronbach's $\alpha$), and the zero-order correlations between these constructs and variables are presented in Table 1. Most of the relationships are significantly connected to each other (at the 0.05 level). Three measurements (SL, LOP, and WFE) demonstrated adequate levels of reliability (0.70-0.85). It is worth noting that the Cronbach's $\alpha$ of WFC is 0.68, which indicates a questionable reliability according to Nunnally and Bernsterin (1994). This may be caused by poor inter-relatedness between items or heterogeneous constructs.

Some control variables show associations with learning organization practice (LOP), work-family conflict (WFC), work-family enrichment (WFE), and servant leadership (SL). Marriage status is found to have a significant relationship with LOP ($r$= -.169 $p$<0.01), WFE ($r$= -.139, $p$<0.05), WFC ($r$= .203 $p$<0.01), and SL ($r$= -.132, $p$<0.05). Further, Job tenure has a significant relationship with LOP ($r$= .138, $p$<0.05), WFE ($r$= .243, $p$<0.01), and SL ($r$= .155, $p$<0.01). Lastly, location is connected with LOP ($r$= -.325, $p$<0.01), WFE ($r$= -.289, $p$<0.01), WFC ($r$= .132, $p$<0.05), and SL ($r$= -.256, $p$<0.01) significantly.

**Table 4 Correlation Matrix and Cronbach's α Values**

| | LOP | WFE | WFC | SL | Gender | Age | Children | Marriage | Job Tenure | Location | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LOP | (0.85) | | | | | | | | | | 3.59 | 0.53 |
| WFE | .665** | (0.70) | | | | | | | | | 3.60 | 0.68 |
| WFC | -.496** | -.424** | (0.68) | | | | | | | | 2.52 | 0.62 |
| SL | .782** | .567** | -.438** | (0.83) | | | | | | | 3.56 | 0.60 |
| Gender | .056 | .056 | .023 | .024 | 1 | | | | | | — | — |
| Age | .051 | .057 | .002 | .070 | -.234** | 1 | | | | | 34.07 | 7.95 |
| Children | .040 | .106 | -.102 | .068 | .082 | -.437** | 1 | | | | — | — |
| Marriage | -.169** | -.139* | .203** | -.132* | .008 | .120* | -.543** | 1 | | | — | — |
| Job Tenure | .138* | .243** | -.020 | .155** | -.150** | .518** | -.275** | .126* | 1 | | 8.05 | 5.77 |
| Location | -.325** | -.289** | .132* | -.256** | -.327** | .201** | -.074 | .137* | .064 | 1 | — | — |

Note. N= 313; **= Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); *= Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). LOP = learning organization practice. WFE = work-family enrichment. WFC = work-family conflict. SL = servant leadership. Cronbach's $\alpha$ in parenthesis.

All hypotheses were tested using Mplus 7.0 software. I employed structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques. To be specific, I used the maximum likelihood parameter estimation technique and employed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step modeling approach to examine the hypothesized model (shown in Fig. 1). First, I analyzed the measurement model. Second, I added directional paths between latent variables and tested their structural relationships. According to Meyers, Gamst, and Guarino (2006), this two-step process ensured that the measurement model of the latent constructs was sufficiently tested before investigated the structural relationships among those latent variables.

Recommended by Hoyle and Panter (1995), the following fit indexes were used to assess the fit of the hypothesized model: chi-square, root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI), and the standardized root mean-squared residual (SRMR) (Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonnett, 1980; Bollen, 1989; Chin, 1998). The use of multiple fit indexes is generally recommended in order to provide convergent evidence of model fit. For this study, with values of RMSEA and SRMR less than 0.08, CFI and TLI less than 0.90, indicating a poor model fit (Kline, 1998; Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008).

## Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first adopted to confirm the measurement model of the four constructs: (a) learning organization practice (LOP), (b) servant leadership (SL), (c) work-family enrichment (WFE), and (d) work-family conflict (WFC) (see Table 3). Path analysis was then used to examine associations among SL, WFE, and WFC, and the mediating effect of LOP. In both CFA and SEM, Mplus 7 was employed to analyze the data. In the data, I did not find any issues with multicollinearity using Mplus 7. The tolerance values range from 0.502 to

0.738, and the variance inflation factors (VIF) is from 1.35 to 1.99 (less than 10). As the survey was self-reported from the Chinese SME context at the same time, it was checked for common methods bias (CMB) to test if any significant relations between the four constructs can be explained by a single factor. One traditional way to check CMB is Harman's one-factor test (Harman, 1960). It was found that the majority of the variances were not explained by one general factor using Harman's one-factor test (22.417%).

### *Discriminant Validity and Convergent Validity*

First, the measurement model was checked. The goodness of fit indexes provided in Mpus include $\chi^2$ (df), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). As shown in Table 5, the measurement four-factor model fits the data according to RMSEA and SRMR values ($\chi^2$ /*df* =1470.835/1121, RMSEA = 0.032, CFI = 0.843, TLI =0.835, SRMR = 0.058) (Kline, 1998; Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). The results of the CFA offered further discriminant validity for the model in a Chinese SME setting. In addition, as shown in Table 6, standardized factor loadings of variables SL, LOP, WFC, and WFE were all significantly different from zero. With loading significantly related to its underlying factor, convergent validity was met (García-Morales, Lloréns-Montes, & Verdú-Jover, 2008).

**Table 5 CFA Fit Indexes for the Measurement Model**

| Model | $\chi^2$ (*df*) | RMSEA | CFI | TLI | SRMR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Four-factor model | 1470.835(1121)** | 0.032 | 0.843 | 0.835 | 0.058 |

*Notes*. **. $\chi^2$ is significant at .001 level.

**Table 6 Factor Loadings**

| Constructs | Indicators | Standardized loading | S.E. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Learning organization practice | L1 | 0.52*** | 0.05 |
| | L2 | 0.51*** | 0.05 |
| | L3 | 0.53*** | 0.05 |
| | L4 | 0.42*** | 0.06 |
| | L5 | 0.40*** | 0.07 |
| | L6 | 0.54*** | 0.05 |
| | L7 | 0.51*** | 0.05 |
| | L8 | 0.47*** | 0.05 |
| | L9 | 0.44*** | 0.06 |
| | L10 | 0.49*** | 0.06 |
| | L11 | 0.42*** | 0.06 |
| | L12 | 0.51*** | 0.05 |
| | L13 | 0.47*** | 0.05 |
| | L14 | 0.22*** | 0.07 |
| | L15 | 0.29*** | 0.06 |
| | L16 | 0.58*** | 0.05 |
| | L17 | 0.46*** | 0.05 |
| | L18 | 0.39*** | 0.06 |
| | L19 | 0.52*** | 0.05 |
| | L20 | 0.55*** | 0.05 |
| | L21 | 0.48*** | 0.05 |
| Work-family conflict | C1 | 0.47*** | 0.11 |
| | C2 | 0.45*** | 0.08 |
| | C3 | 0.49*** | 0.09 |
| | C4 | 0.44*** | 0.09 |
| | C5 | 0.41*** | 0.09 |
| | C6 | 0.50*** | 0.11 |
| | C7 | 0.45*** | 0.09 |
| | C8 | 0.47*** | 0.08 |
| Work-family enrichment | E1 | 0.56*** | 0.06 |
| | E2 | 0.49*** | 0.06 |
| | E3 | 0.49*** | 0.06 |
| | E4 | 0.51*** | 0.06 |
| | E5 | 0.56*** | 0.06 |
| | E6 | 0.54*** | 0.05 |
| Servant leadership | S1 | 0.54*** | 0.05 |
| | S2 | 0.53*** | 0.05 |
| | S3 | 0.34*** | 0.06 |
| | S4 | 0.46*** | 0.06 |
| | S5 | 0.49*** | 0.05 |
| | S6 | 0.53*** | 0.05 |
| | S7 | 0.44*** | 0.06 |
| | S8 | 0.48*** | 0.05 |

Table 6 Factor Loadings Continued.

| Constructs | Indicators | Standardized loading | S.E. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | S9 | 0.50*** | 0.05 |
| | S10 | 0.54*** | 0.05 |
| | S11 | 0.44*** | 0.06 |
| | S12 | 0.66*** | 0.04 |
| | S13 | 0.60*** | 0.05 |
| | S14 | 0.52*** | 0.06 |

## Test of Hypotheses

The hypothesized structural model was tested following the recommendation by Baron and Kenny (1986) to examine the possible mediating effect of LOP on the relationship between: SL and WFE; SL and WFC. I followed the procedure and estimated two structural models. The first model was a direct path model that tested the effects of the exogenous latent variables on the endogenous latent variables without the mediator. In the present research, it involved estimating the direct connections between SL and WFC, and SL and WFE with control variables in the model as well. In order to observe the mediation effect of LOP on the two paths, the direct effects between SL on WFC, and SL on WFE must be significant at first.

The second model is the hypothesized mediation model with the mediator and other control variables added to the first direct path model. Based on Baron and Kenny (1986), certain conditions should be met for mediation to exist: (a) the paths coefficients of SL to WFE, and SL to WFC) must decrease significantly or disappear (non-significant) in the hypothesized mediation model; (b) LOP and WFE, and LOP and WFC should be significantly connected, (c) in the mediation model, the relationship between SL and LOP should be significant, and (d) the partial mediation model must explain more variance in WFC and WFE than the direct effect model. As shown in the output from Mplus 7, the effects of SL on WFC and WFE were both significant ($\gamma$ = -0.564, $p$< 0.001; $\gamma$ = 0.649, $p$< 0.001), indicated that when employees perceived higher SL, they also perceived higher WFE (See Figure 2). The mediation effect of LOP on the relationship between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC were next examined. The direct effect of SL on WFE was not statistically significant ($\gamma$ = -0.073, $p$= 0.655). The direct effect of SL on WFC was not statistically significant either ($\gamma$ = -0.013, $p$= 0.946). In addition, there was a positive significant effect of SL on LOP ($\gamma$ = 0.812, $p$<0.001), and the effects of LOP on WFE, and LOP on WFC were also significantly positive (*ß* = 0.891, $p$< 0.001; *ß* = -0.673, $p$= 0.008). It was clearly shown that LOP fully mediated the relationship between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC. Thus, the evidence supported Hypothesis 4 and 5. The overall mediation model is presented in Figure 3.

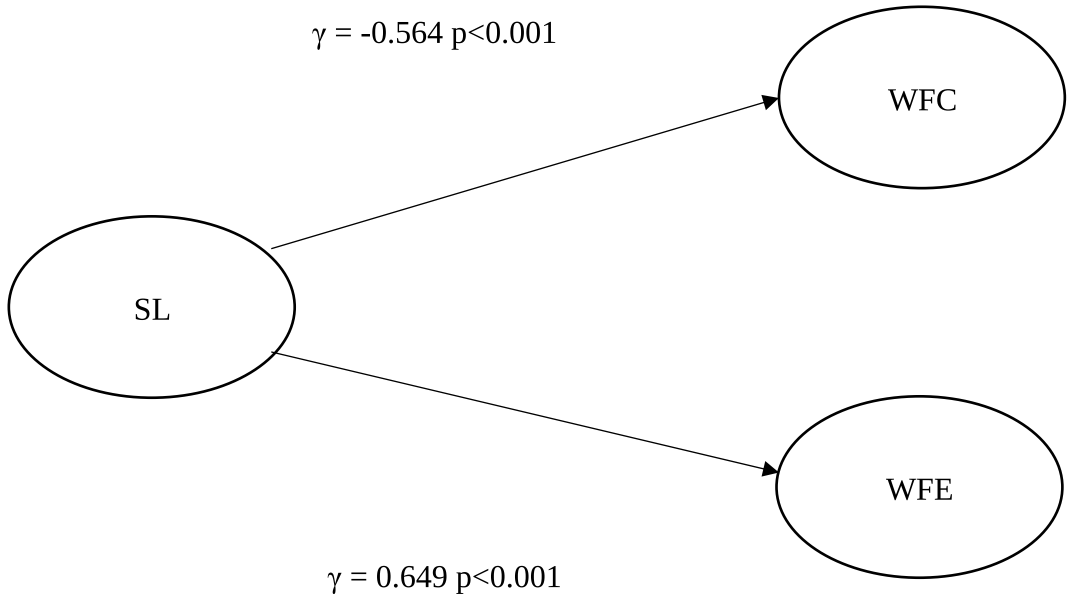


**Figure 2 Results for the Direct Effect Model**

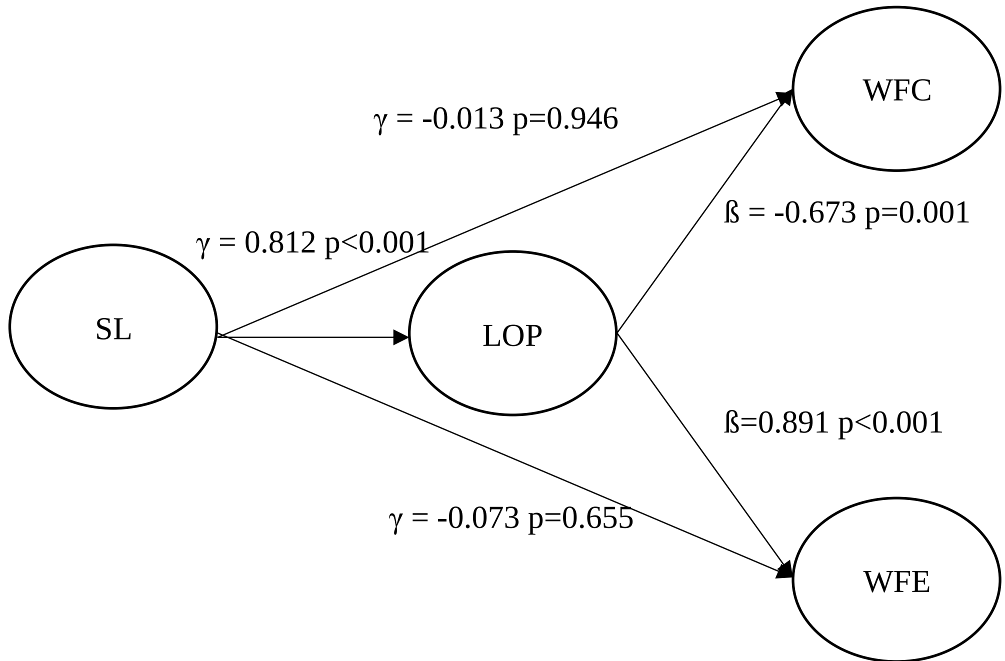


**Figure 3 Results for the Mediation Effect Model**

The indirect effect from SL to WFE was significant ($\beta$= 0.724, $p$< 0.001), which indicated that LOP fully mediated the relationship between SL and WFE, and with LOP held constant, the higher the employee's perception of SL, the more the WFE would happen. Further, the indirect effect from SL to WFC was found significant, but with a negative association ($\beta$= -0.546, p= 0.001). This result indicated that when SL was perceived by employees, the less likely the employees would experience WFC. Thus, the LOP construct fully mediated the relationship between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC.

The coefficients of control variables are presented in Table 8. I found marriage status ($\gamma$=-.089, $p$= 0.032) and business location ($\gamma$= -.125, $p$= 0.026) were negatively related to LOP. In addition, parental status ($\gamma$=.183, $p$= 0.001) and job tenure ($\gamma$=.212, $p$ < 0.001) were positively and significantly related to work-family enrichment. According to Mplus output, the overall mediation model fit was acceptable based on RMSEA and SRMR values ($\chi^2/df$ =1888.05/1391, RMSEA = 0.034, CFI = 0.808, TLI =0.80, SRMR = 0.058).

**Table 7 Control Variables Paths Coefficients**

| | Estimate | SE | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Learning Organization Practice | | | |
| Gender | 0.005 | 0.047 | 0.918 |
| Age | -0.032 | 0.061 | 0.598 |
| Parental Status | -0.081 | 0.048 | 0.094 |
| Marriage Status | -0.089 | 0.042 | 0.032 |
| Job Tenure | 0.030 | 0.043 | 0.483 |
| Business Location | -0.125 | 0.056 | 0.026 |
| Work-Family Enrichment | | | |
| Gender | 0.017 | 0.058 | 0.767 |
| Age | 0.016 | 0.067 | 0.815 |
| Parental Status | 0.183 | 0.056 | 0.001 |
| Marriage Status | 0.056 | 0.055 | 0.304 |
| Business Location | -0.041 | 0.058 | 0.483 |
| Job Tenure | 0.212 | 0.050 | <0.001 |
| Work-Family Conflict | | | |
| Gender | 0.052 | 0.073 | 0.480 |
| Age | 0.002 | 0.073 | 0.975 |
| Parental Status | -0.020 | 0.093 | 0.832 |
| Marriage Status | 0.118 | 0.085 | 0.165 |
| Business Location | -0.097 | 0.12 | 0.416 |
| Job Tenure | 0.071 | 0.081 | 0.381 |

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSIONS

In this section, the study findings are discussed in terms of the research purpose and questions. In the results chapter, the hypotheses were tested and as shown in the results section, I found a significant positive relationship between servant leadership (SL) and work-family enrichment (WFE), and significant negative relationship between servant leadership and work-family conflict (WFC). The learning organization practice (LOP) fully mediated both relationships.

First, it was shown from the results that SL was positively and significantly connected to WFE, but negatively associated with WFC. Servant leadership creates social support in the workplace. To be specific, when leaders support employees, according to social exchange theory, employees tend to reciprocate leader's support and care with positive resources (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Tang, Kwan, Zhang, & Zhu, 2016). Bellavia and Frone, (2005) also discovered that supervisor's or peers' social support is more strongly (negatively) connected with work-to-family conflict, while social support from the family members is more strongly (negatively) related to family-to-work conflict. There is some empirical evidence showing that family positive resources are positively and significantly associated with high work performance (e.g., Demerouti, Bakker, & Voydanoff, 2010; Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Hunter, Perry, Carlson, & Smith, 2010; Weer, Greenhaus, & Linnehan, 2010). Findings of this study substantiate Greenhaus and Powell's work-family interface theory (2006), in which they propose that support from leaders would help to promote the focal employee's job performance which is related to WFE and WFC (i.e., more WFE and less WFC). In summary, the more positive resources (SL generated) from both domains (family and workplace), the higher work-family enrichment and the lower work-family conflict is (Wayne et al., 2013).

Servant leadership was associated with WFC and WFE. As this dissertation was grounded on transition theory, the support from the employer encourages the positive transition between family and work (i.e., servant leadership was positively connected with WFE; servant leadership was negatively connected with WFC). Leaders in top management influence every aspect of daily operations in an organization, especially in SMEs where the hierarchical organizational structure usually would not be a serious issue as in large organizations because fewer layers of management levels produce more direct communication from the top leaders to employees. The relationships between demographic variables with LOP, WFE, WFC, and SL were also examined. As shown from previous research that there are no gender differences in experiencing WFC, but women report interference from work to family more than men (Frone et al., 1992; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). This study adds empirical evidence to the argument that gender does not relate to WFC or WFE.

Second, servant leadership was significantly correlated with learning organization practice. This tends to be especially evident in Chinese SME companies. To date, traditional Taoist values are prevalent in modern China and collectivism as a social culture still dominates Chinese society. Altruism (one major characteristic of a servant leader), as one of five essential components of Taoist values, is still valued in Chinese society in general and organizations particularly (Lee, Lee, & Kwak, 2013). Chinese leaders with altruistic character have a propensity to create more continuous learning opportunities for their employees to develop through dialogue and inquiry. They also tend to empower the subordinates to establish the connections with both internal and external learning ecosystem (García-Holgado & García-Peñalvo, 2019). Further, a shared vision determines the effectiveness of the interconnections among individual, team, and organization learning levels. Leaders who embrace traditional Chinese values tend to demonstrate collectivism traits in groups and are concerned about the results of their behavior on members of the group. They are most likely to create conditions that foster autonomy, feedback and support, and ultimately facilitate employees' learning (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018). Accordingly, it is not surprising that servant leadership was a key factor that promotes learning and therefore was positively associated with LOP in this study.

Third, LOP positively influenced WFE but negatively associated with WFC. SMEs that value and implement LOP provide people with more opportunity to learn and grow, and motivate them to think cooperatively, strategically, and systematically (Senge, 1996). Employees in learning SMEs leverage positive resources from the family to refine their skills, knowledge, and behaviors in the workplace (Carlson et al., 2009). Chinese people interpret learning differently than Westerners. Chinese learn with long-term purposes and goals because they are educated to learn for the nation from a young age (Li, 2003). It is an outstanding virtue to learn for a higher purpose with perseverance. Thus, when Chinese employees are motivated with broader learning purposes such as the strategic goals of the organization instead of their personal objectives, they would devote more to LOP. Immersed in a learning culture, employees are adept to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge, and modify their behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights to connect internal and external organizational systems (Senge, 1990). In China, traditional Chinese values of filial piety and family interdependence are still powerful influencers in employees' family and work life. Employees are expected to respect and obey seniors in the family and value their family's advice with regards to both work and family (Fan, 2000).

Compared to their western counterparts, they are more likely to take advantage of family resources and transfer to work. Thus, when employees are motivated to learn collectively, they would utilize external resources, in this case family resources, to solve issues in the workplace.

Fourth, learning organization practice fully mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work-family relationship. This finding can be explained by transition theory and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Schlossber et al., 1995). Implementing learning organization practices helps the transition of employees from family to the workplace. That is to say, learning organization practice challenges employees to learn and reflect constantly, which requires them to leverage any resources in their lives (i.e., professional resources at work, and personal resources at family) (Marquardt, 1996; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Without the constant challenges at work, employees do not feel the necessity to use external resources to solve tasks at work, and less interface between family and workplace happens.

The findings provide preliminary empirical evidence toward a comprehensive understanding of work-family relationships (work-family enrichment and work-family conflict) in China. Particularly, in my dissertation, I related SL with work-family outcomes. I focused on the influence of SL and LOP on conflict and enrichment that happen within both domains. I further found that learning organization practice mediates the relationship between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC. I substantiate the mediation effect of LOP on the relationship between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC, which supports Xie and Qiu's (in press) findings in Chinese SMEs about LOP's mediation role on the relationship between altruistic leadership behavior (one dimension of SL) and family-to-work enrichment.

Even though control variables were not the focus of this study, some associations between control variables and endogenous variables such as LOP, WFC, and WFE are worth noting. Examining extant literature of work-family relationships, it can be found that employee age is weakly yet significantly correlated with work-to-family conflict (Madsen et al., 2005). However, few researchers have investigated the possible relationships between work-family enrichment and age (Stoddard & Madsen, 2007). Despite age not being found as significantly correlated with LOP, WFE, or WFC, a related variable, job tenure, was found to significantly influencing WFE ($\gamma = 0.212$, $p < 0.001$). In Chinese SMEs, job tenure is significantly and positively related to WFE. McNall et al. (2010) discovered the same result: tenure was positively related to job satisfaction and work-to-family enrichment. Nevertheless, they did not study the impact of tenure on family-to-work enrichment. Other findings have made the research regarding work-family relationship more complicated. Carlson and coauthors (2011) conducted a study using 240 full-time employees from American large organizations and found that tenure and work-family enrichment was not significantly correlated. This is contrary to the findings from this dissertation, and it may be explained by SMEs' unique culture of closeness between individuals. In SMEs, the organizational structure is flat with few management levels. Regular employees can interact with their managers on a daily basis. When one works in an SME for an extended period of time (high job tenure), he or she is likely to be valued as a master or an experienced employee by peers and the owner of the business. In China, those who have more experience earn more respect than regular employees. Hence, this feeling of respect affects one's attitude at work and this positive attitude further impacts one at home.

In the case of Chinese SMEs, where traditional Chinese cultural factors such as *hui bao* (reciprocity) and *guanxi* (personal relationships) play important roles in determining employees' attitudes and behaviors, when employees perceive the caring and support from their employer as what a servant leader demonstrates, they tend to reciprocate with higher job commitment and satisfaction (Rothbard, 2001). Xie and Qiu (in press) studied one main characteristic of a servant leader — altruistic leadership behavior, and found that this behavior has a significant and positive relationship with WFE in Chinese SMEs. That is to say, a prosocial environment that a servant leader created also enhances employees' work-needed skill sets through leveraging positive family resources. Additionally, as employees experience positive emotions at work, they would transfer that positive energy to their family.

Having children was found to be a significant predictor of WFE ($\gamma$ = 0.175, p= 0.002) which corroborated previous studies that reported when employees have stable careers they are more likely to appreciate the time they spend with their families (work-to-family enrichment) (Frone, 2003). Carlson and colleagues (2006) found that spouses report developing greater patience with their life partners and children, which helps them relate better to others in their workplace.

Being married was negatively and significantly correlated with LOP ($\gamma$ = -.087, *p*= 0.037). This finding might be explained by the unique SME setting as well. In most Chinese SMEs, employees are suffering with low salaries and fewer career advancement opportunities compared to those who work in large organizations. When they are single or living by themselves, the pressure on them is not likely to affect their performance or satisfaction towards the job. However, when they are married, they devote more time at home, which may impact their performance at work, which may mean family becomes more salient in the work-family relationship. Besides the time commitment, the aforementioned monetary issue is likely to influence family life overall. Therefore, in this study, being married was negatively and significantly connected with LOP.

Married employees from Chinese SMEs reported lower ratings in regard to LOP. From current literature, the evidence suggests scholars tend to shy away from examining the relationship between marital status and LOP. As shown in one study, there was no significant differences between marital status and LOP (Nazari, Pihie, Akmaliah, Idris, & Basri, 2014). Other researchers in related fields have found marital status has significant relationships with economic participation in organizations, entrepreneurial motivation, and social support (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003; Israel-Cohen, Yael, & Kaplan, 2016; Rey-Marti, Porcar, & Mas-Tur, 2015). In Chinese SMEs, married employees would dedicate more time to their family because of the traditional value of family that Chinese cherish. Because conducting LOP is a challenging task for any organization, the more energy employees consume at home, the less resources they can use at work to tackle those challenges.

Business location has a significant impact on LOP in Chinese SMEs. I coded 34 provinces into two regions (developed region and underdeveloped region; see page 52). Participants from developed regions reported lower ratings of LOP in SMEs ($\gamma$ = -0.125, p= 0.026). The present study is among the first attempts to investigate location's influence on LOP in China. China has been growing rapidly since it adopted the "open door" policy in 1978. The Chinese government strategically developed certain regions first and let those regions function as an exemplar for the rest of the country. Comparing to SMEs in coastal regions (developed regions), SMEs in inland China (less developed) are facing less competition (Pan, 2010). Further, less competition may be one reason that SMEs in inland China could spend more time and energy on LOP comparing to SMEs in coastal areas. SMEs in coastal regions reported facing fierce competition which forces them to become performance-driven organizations instead of long-term-goal-driven companies (Zhou, Arnold, Pereira, & Yu, 2010). In Xie, Dirani, and Beyerlein's (under review) research, an SME in inland China expanded fast with learning and development as the main mission for the business. The company applied LOP to encourage employees to experiment and reflect on what they had learned both formally through regular meetings and informally via personal conversations and after-work meetings. Thus, business locations influence LOP significantly.

## Theoretical Implication

The theoretical implications of this study are threefold. First, this dissertation contributes to the leadership literature, relating SL to LOP and work-family relation (e.g., Joo, 2010). Although some studies have linked leadership with learning organizations in recent years, little research has focused on the concept of SL. The result from this study indicate that SL is a good fit for today's business because of its emphasis on corporate social responsibilities. Servant leadership can be regarded as the catalyst for creating learning organizations with a mission of constant change and transformation, which empowers employees to learn and grow in the long run and encourages the exchange between their internal and external environments.

Second, this research adds to the learning organization literature by analyzing and demonstrating the essential role of SL as an antecedent of LOP. Bass (2000) suggested studying the influence that variables such as SL have on learning organizations. Servant leadership, instead of other popular leadership traits (e.g., transformational leadership), was the focus of the research, and it was considered a facilitator of LOP.

Third, this dissertation substantiates transition theory. According to transition theory, situation, strategy, and support are helpful in one's transition from one role to another. The focus of this dissertation, from the perspective of transition theory, was the effect of SL and LOP on employees' transitions from workplace to family. In the Chinese SME setting, SL and LOP facilitate employees' positive transition between family and work, and thus alleviate the conflict between those two domains.

## Practical Implications

The results of this study provide strong evidence that LOP plays a mediating role in the relationships between SL and WFC, and SL and WFE in the Chinese SME setting. The practical implications for SME employers and HR professionals who aim to assess, design, develop, implement, and evaluate programs that feature mentoring programs that focus on influencing SL traits, LOP building, and work-family policy enacting are suggested below. This empirical study also offers insights for SMEs in emerging markets, which share cultural similarities with China.

Learning organization practice supports employees to learn and reflect within a constantly changing environment. The practice challenges employees to grow through leveraging their personal resources from both internal and external organizational environments (Joo, 2010; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). This study adds evidence to the argument that LOP promotes the exchange of organizational/family resources between both domains. The availability of the LOP in an organization has a high impact on work-family relationship. Thus, LOP building is not only effective in transforming an organization, but also improves work-family relationship.

HR professionals could design mentoring or coaching programs regarding SL traits, especially at the team-mentoring level because of the benefits that SL brings to the inter-organization connection. The more servant leaders in an organization, the better the relationship between employees' family and workplace. HR professionals can organize SL workshops to introduce the concept of SL and mentor/coach managers to behave in that manner. As modern organizations are structured around team-based setting, teams are more organically organized and less hierarchical (Beyerlein, 2000). In previous studies, researchers have found that SL or some other types of distributed leadership are prevalent in teams (Pearce & Conger, 2002; Pearce, 2004). However, those types of leadership need to be formed from mentoring/coaching programs that are carefully designed by HR professionals. Thus, leadership mentoring is a critical tool to change a leader's behavior toward a servant leader with a vison of encouraging learning and reflecting in an organization (Greenleaf, 1977; Senge, 1990), and most importantly, a servant leader that facilitates employees' role transition between the workplace and family enhances employees' performance.

HR professionals could support business owners in implementing business strategies that favor employees' work-family interaction and continuous learning activities in the organization. Increasing an organization's learning abilities requires a system of strategies, incorporating elements of knowledge management and leadership development. Competent HR professionals may assist leaders executing those programs to gain sustainable competitive advantage.

## Limitations

In terms of methods, my dissertation has potential limitations. First, this study is cross-sectional research, which demands an assessment of the influence of common method bias among variables because the exogenous and endogenous variables were measured from the same source. In addition, they were collected at the same time. To test whether common method bias can explain any significant relations between the three constructs, Harman's test was conducted and the results showed that one factor model did not indicate the best fit to the data. As suggested by previous research, longitudinal study with multiple waves would substantiate the conclusions of this dissertation (Liu, Kwan, Lee, & Hui, 2013; Searle & Barbuto, 2011).

Second, this study relied on self-reported questionnaires and the reflection on recollections about LOP, the perception of SL, and the understanding of employees' daily work-family activities (i.e., WFC and WFE). However, participants may exaggerate answers which do not reflect the reality. In the future, researchers may use alternative techniques to collect data and triangulate the findings of the current study.

Third, the sample of the study limits its generalizability. Since the research setting was Chinese SMEs, some fundamental differences between SMEs and large organizations are worth noting. For example, SMEs employees are less educated and have limited training/learning opportunities (Macdonald, Assimakopoulos, & Anderson, 2007). It may be because of the unique research context that explains why LOP mediated the relationship between SL and WFC, and SL and WFE. In large organizations, where employees are good at imbibing new knowledge, when they face challenges at work, they will not feel the need of leveraging resources from external environment such as their families, and only using work resource will suffice. In addition, among those who filled out their affiliations, 186 of them were from just two SMEs. Future studies should consider employing hierarchical linear modeling techniques and use organization as a second level variable.

Finally, despite the contribution of the research to the HRD field using transition theory, I did not study all four factors that impact a transition. That is to say, "the self" was not studied as a focus in this research. However, according to Schlossberg and coauthors (1995), how one copes with a transition is largely impacted by personal characteristics. For example, one's socioeconomic status would influence the effectiveness of the transition between the workplace and family (Sekine, Chandola, Martikainen, Marmot, & Kagaminori, 2006). Thus, future researchers are suggested to test the relationship between personal characteristics and other variables related to work-family outcomes. In particular, individual traits may moderate the relationship between organizational variables and work-family factors.

### Recommendations for Future Research

To solve the limitations above, methodologically, future research needs to consider objective indicators and multiple data sources. Longitudinal studies are highly encouraged in the future due to the lack of causality support among variables from cross-sectional study. Additionally, scholars have noted that more research on the antecedents of work-family relations is needed as there is a paucity of such studies in the work–family literature (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2006; Kofodimos, 1993). Lastly, in order to increase the generalizability, a broader array of contexts should be including in the future studies, especially in different cultural settings and organization types.

First, the relationships between SL and WFE, and SL and WFC need to be investigated in the large organization setting since this dissertation only used SMEs as research samples. In addition, because the research was conducted in China, other countries, or cultural factors may influence the relationship fundamentally. For example, while the U.S. and China share cultural similarities, the differences between these two powerful economies lead to different life styles and behavior in general (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, future research in the west is encouraged.

Other antecedents besides SL and LOP may influence WFC and WFE. Focusing on other antecedents would help researchers to better understand the relationship between SL and WFE or WFC. Additionally, the moderating role of possible multiple levels of factors may impact the relationship as well. For instance, the team level concept, team growth mindset, or leadership prototypicality may impact the work-family relation. Based on the tenets of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees often reciprocate with higher commitment to the organization or higher job performance when they sense a strong supportive leader who helps them integrate work and family roles. Under those circumstances, employees often demonstrate favorable attitudes toward the job and the organization. Researchers have found that transformational leadership leads to perceived organizational support, and thus, further studies may consider transformational leadership another antecedent for work-family relationship. To name another example, because of the cultural differences between rural (less developed regions) and coastal (developed regions), business location may possibly explain the relationship between SL and WFC and WFE (Fan, 2000). That is to say, a possible moderation may exist. One possible explanation would be that when their leaders behave like a servant, employees tend not to interpret that as true "altruism." On the contrary, they would be more skeptical about leaders' intention because employees worry their managers have ulterior motives. In rural areas, where Chinese traditional values such as reciprocity and *guanxi* are still prevalent, employees seem to report more positive perception of their leader's servant leadership behavior. From a recent report (Chinese Business Survival Analysis Report, 2013), organizations in coastal areas fail sooner than those in less developed regions in China. The sense of urgency and high competition make the SME owner concerned with performance enhancement rather than HR functions in developed regions.

## Conclusion

Work-family relationship is tough to manage nowadays; it seems it can never be balanced. It is shown from the present study that positive influence from SL and LOP on the relationship between work and family domain in Chinese SMEs. Given 99 % of the total number of Chinese firms are SMEs, the research setting has a unique and broad impact. The study contributes to the field of leadership and work-family relations from two aspects. First, SL, LOP, WFC, and WFE have been studied together for the first time in the Chinese setting. Second, HR professionals are playing vital roles in helping employees facilitate the transition from family to the workplace through learning initiatives and mentoring SME owners, aiming to help them demonstrate more servant leadership characteristics. This study has identified the correlations between SL and WFC, and SL and WFE. Further, the mediation effect of LOP on those relationships was another important finding.

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