Servant Leadership as A Leadership Model

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ABSTRACT

Research and popular writing on the subject of leadership continues at a rapid pace. The leadership section at local bookstores and libraries gives evidence to the growing number of volumes written from numerous perspectives and from a wide range of experience. There appears to be no quarrel with the idea that leadership is in short supply, yet it is vitally important to every type of organization. Within this mass of literature are those who explore various theories, approaches, and styles, as well as those who offer their own brand of leadership principles that are sure to solve the leadership problems of most any organization. Though no longer an unknown model, servant leadership is seeing increased research through scholarly articles, dissertations, and books on this relatively new approach to leadership. Servant leadership is not based on a complicated set of guidelines; however, some basic tenets have been researched, studied and compiled by a host of scholars and popular speakers. It is interesting that, in spite of the extent of available literature, many people are unable to clearly define servant leadership. This presentation will contribute to defining servant leadership, explain its genesis and concepts, and offer the model as an option for effective leadership in organizations.

Keywords: Servant leadership, Leadership approaches; Organizational models, Servant leadership paradox; Servant leadership conceptualizations; Servant leadership characteristics; Servant leadership definitions

The title of the first chapter of George Barna's book (1997), Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice, and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People, is a concise statement of the significance of leadership. The title is, "Nothing is More Important than Leadership" (p. 17). Barna used the title of the chapter to stress the idea that the church of today is in decline due to a lack of leadership. Other organizational models are also facing a similar deterioration. Redmond

proposed that "needs of people would be met easier and more efficiently and with less 'management' if there were more leaders seeking to serve others" (Redmond, 1995, p. 30).

This paper will examine servant leadership from a variety of viewpoints. The volume of research into servant leadership as a viable model of leadership is increasing each year. Servant leadership is a relatively popular topic for many dissertations in a variety of fields. It is also interesting to consider servant leadership in comparison with other, more established, leadership models. Numerous research studies have focused on such relationships between theories.

Servant leadership is often associated with Christian leadership and Christian leaders; however, the model is not limited to the Christian realm. Such well-known organizations as 7-Eleven, TD Industries, Southwest Airlines, Herman Miller, and ServiceMaster embrace the servant leadership model. Herman Miller's website explains the notion of servant leadership:

At Herman Miller, we respect each other as we are and focus on who we will become. Our culture represents the collective attitudes, aspirations, ideas, and experiences of the people who work here (http://www.hermanmiller.com/about-us/things-that-matter-to-us.html).

A review of Herman Miller's values gives further evidence of the company's focus on servant leadership. The identified values are operational excellence; better world report; environmental advocacy; inclusiveness and diversity; health and well-being; and community service.

1. DEFINITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Understanding servant leadership is greatly aided by understanding the terms servant and service. The dictionary definitions of servant have many dimensions:

1.   one who serves, or does services, voluntarily or on compulsion; a person who is employed by another for menial offices, or for other labor, and is subject to his command; a person who labors or exerts himself for the benefit of another, his master or employer; a subordinate helper
2.   a person in the service of another
3.   one who expresses submission, recognizance, or debt to another
4.   a person working in the service of another
5.   in a subordinate position
6.   a person who is hired to work for another

Likewise, the definitions of the word service take several approaches:
1.   An act of assistance or benefit; a favor
2.   an act of helpful activity; help; aid.
3.   work done by one person or group that benefits another
4.   The performance of work or duties for a superior or as a servant
5.   be of service, to be helpful or useful (Dictionary, 2011)

The concept of servant leadership, as developed by Robert Greenleaf, has given attention to the topic of servant leadership. The leader as a servant has historical origins back to biblical days, though this has not been a concept understood or practiced by many. Greenleaf's conception of servant leadership has brought about significant change in the philosophy of leadership and management in numerous arenas of the secular business world. In describing the qualities of a leader, DePree insisted, "Above all, leadership is a position of servanthood" (1997, p. 220).

There is no one better to define servant leadership than Robert Greenleaf himself. In

The Servant as Leader, Greenleaf (1991) described the servant leaders in this manner, "The servant leader is servant first … It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 7). For Greenleaf, "servant leadership means serving others and placing the good of others and the organization above the leader's self-interest" (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004, p. 108).

2 DIMENSIONS, CONCEPTUALIZATIONS, AND PARADOX OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf's servant leadership concept has infiltrated a significant number of management and leadership sectors. A transformation is experienced by many after learning of the servant approach to leadership. There is a sense in which the servant leader is given permission to serve and meet the needs of others. Though often in practice in secular business settings, servant leadership also brings a spiritual dimension to management and leadership (Rieser, 1995). For some, the spiritual side of servant leadership is part of its appeal, especially when examined in the context of more prevailing societal trends. Even in some business environments, spiritual and religious discussions have a level of acceptance and do not necessarily create animosity among coworkers (Lee & Zemke 1993).

Most leadership models can be observed in the workplace and then explained in behavioral terms. Servant leadership differs from other models in that servant leadership comes from within the leader, surfacing out of the leader's principles, values, and beliefs. The servant leader's motivation and behavior come exclusively from the personal principles, values, and beliefs of the leader. It is through service to others that the servant leader seeks to achieve organizational goals (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999).

The conceptualizations of servant leadership are extremely varied. People who have been exposed to the idea of servant leadership might describe the model in any number of ways. Research on servant leadership includes several attempts to conceptualize the term. The concept of servant leadership finds its roots as far back in history as 600 B.C. At about this time, a Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu expressed his idea about servant leadership by writing that the greatest leader forgets himself and attends to the development of others (Lichtenwalner, 2011). Biblical concepts of servant leadership are described in many passages of Scripture, though none of these passages are noted with the term "servant leadership."

Robert Greenleaf gave much attention to the conceptualization of servant leadership in his writings. Larry Spears (2004), former president of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, offered many explanations of ten of Greenleaf's most prominent characteristics that enhance an understanding of the concept of servant leadership. Spears' list of characteristics included listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Laub (1999) identified six scales of servant leadership that can provide a comprehensive model within which to identify specific characterizations. Many of the elements of Laub's scales are consistent with those identified by Greenleaf and those writings based on Greenleaf's model. The categories suggested by Laub are values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership (Laub, p. 83).

Servant leadership is not an oxymoron; however, it is a paradox. The entire principle of Servant leadership was developed in the framework of Greenleaf's notion that the sole reason for the leader's existence is to serve the followers. As Lee explained, "It does stand the traditional

view of the leader—the CEO at the peak of the pyramid, the captain at the helm of the ship—on its head" (Lee & Zemke, 1993, p. 28). Servant leadership is dependent upon the blending of being a leader and being a servant. Servant leadership is not a concept of either/or; instead, the concept is both/and. "In the end, being a servant leader is not something you do but rather something you are" (DeGraaf, et al, 2001, p. 27).

3 SERVANT LEADERS: BORN OR MADE?

Gardner made a dogmatic statement about the prospect of leaders being born or made. When the question of servant leaders being born or made was rephrased to ask if servant leadership can be taught, Gardner (1990) gave another dogmatic answer—yes! He found that it is reasonable to believe that servant leadership can be taught because leadership itself can be taught. Servant leadership includes many of the same elements found in leadership.

Other researchers are not as quick to agree to an answer to this prevalent question. Rost (1991) suggested that a number of leadership concepts make the assumption that leaders are made, not born, but he pointed out that this could be too narrow a view. Maintaining such a stance does not consider the growth process of the leader. Ndoria (2004) stressed that there is much to be learned by studying the application of the various theories and approaches to leadership. She offered an example regarding transformational leadership.

Servant leadership recognizes awareness as a key mechanism for leadership development. Considering the development of servant leaders, Greenleaf (1970) suggested that "awareness . . . strengthens one's effectiveness as a leader." The sign of an effective servant leader is whether or not the community the leader serves becomes "healthier, wiser, [and] freer." Greenleaf also noted that leaders must learn how to view the act of leading as an act of serving followers (Greenleaf, p. 27).

4 MODEL COMPARISON

Comparison of varied models of servant leadership contributes to a more complete understanding of a conceptualization of servant leadership adaptable for the higher education environment. It should be noted that the conceptualizations of servant leadership are closely akin to traits, characteristics, and behaviors. In particular, a comparison of varied conceptualizations may serve as a fundamental basis for the development of a research instrument for use in the higher education setting.

Laub's six scales—values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership—can be viewed as they relate to the characteristics forming the conceptualizations of servant leadership in the models described by Greenleaf, Spears, Farling, Stone, Winston, and Ingram.

The conceptualizations of servant leadership examined are not specific to higher education; however, one could argue for adoption of such characteristics among educators and administrations in the higher education setting.

Table 1 displays the comparison of five servant leadership models.

Table 1. Servant Leadership Model Comparison

Greenleaf	Laub	Spears	Farling, Stone, and Winston	Ingram
Healing	Values people	Healing	Trust	Acceptance
Service	Develops	Growth of	Service	Relationship

	people	people		
Ability to lead	Provides leadership	Empathy	Credibility	Credibility
Influence	Shares leadership	Awareness	Influence	Influence
Language and communication	Builds community	Building community	Vision	Vision
Foresight	Displays authenticity	Foresight		Encouragement
Listening		Listening		
Persuasion		Persuasion		
Priorities		Stewardship		
Conceptualizing		Conceptualizing		
Acceptance				
Values				
Vision				
Authority				
Power				
Trust				

5 CONCLUSION

Understanding servant leadership is only the first step toward the practice of servant leadership. Today's service economy is consistent with servant leadership, but the concept takes service to a higher level. Students today are increasingly seeing themselves as consumers and customers—people who seek a service that higher education offers. Educators have the opportunity to meet the needs of students by teaching the disciplines in which they are experts and model for students a viable leadership example that can further prepare them for their vocational choices.

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