



*Edited by*

Dirk van Dierendonck · Kathleen Patterson

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# Practicing Servant Leadership

## Developments in Implementation

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# 1

## Introduction

Dirk van Dierendonck and Kathleen Patterson

Servant leadership is a field that is now coming full circle. With the publication of Robert Greenleaf's seminal booklet 'The Servant as Leader', in the 1970s, we saw companies like TDIndustries that started organization developmental trajectories to rebuild their organizational culture into a servant leadership culture. Though there was not more to work from other than Greenleaf's booklet, they embarked on this journey. These trajectories often involved development at all levels of the organization, with leadership development of their management as an integral part. Given the lack of theoretical models, they were primarily practically driven, servant driven, taking on the challenge of rebuilding their culture into combinations that worked toward a synergy between the needs and goals of their people while steadily making a healthy profit.

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It took about 25 years, until end of the last century, that a start was made with more academic interest into servant leadership. More than a decade later, when we brought out our first edited volume (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2010), there was a clear need to bring more conceptual clarity into the field. The aim of that volume was to bring together the main conceptual frameworks at that moment. Frameworks were building on Greenleaf's original work, and this helped bring more clarity and a deeper understanding of servant leadership as the academic world tried to conceptualize, and ultimately measure, the idea of serving. Since 2010, we have seen servant leadership gain its rightful place within the academic literature. Several well-validated measures now exist and empirical articles are being published in a wide range of journals, including the top-tier journals in the fields of business and leadership studies. Empirical evidence for its effectiveness is appearing in peer-reviewed articles, studying underlying processes of servant leadership and its impact on key performance outcomes. Leadership research, in general, is also now more focused on the soft aspects of leadership such as humility, authenticity, and ethics. A recent meta-analysis by Hoch et al. (2016) even showed that it is servant leadership that can explain 12% additional variance on key employee outcomes beyond that of the more organizational focus of transformational leadership. Research continues to confirm that servant leadership is not only effective but it is needed – for the leader, the follower, and the organization.

Currently, attention is returning to servant leadership development within the broader context of organizational development. The conceptual models that have been formulated the last decade or so, are providing building blocks for a research-based organizational practice grounded in the original thinking of Greenleaf. As with leadership development in general, it is useful to realize that servant leadership development takes place at different levels, from the invisible – strongly linked to adult development process, via the less visible – leader identity and self-regulation, to the visible – leader competences (Day and Sin 2011). Given the central place of the motivation to become a leader within servant leadership ('It begins with the desire to serve...'; Greenleaf 1970), it will be no surprise that attention for the person and for a leader's character take a central stage. Additionally, it is clear from this literature that



encouraging the development of one's identity as a servant leader is more important than specific skills. Persons who perceive themselves as servant leaders will let this reflect in their goals and aspirations. Servant leader development is explicitly a dynamic process that evolves through challenges and time. It certainly is not a one-time process but rather a long-haul model that is worth the investment. Yes, individual training for leaders can be instrumental in their development, yet can never be truly effective unless the leader is truly changed internally with the bent toward servant, based on Greenleaf's admonition of the servant leader being a servant first. It is also essential to take the organizational context into account.

Leadership development in general has seen a strong surge the last decades (McGonagill 2010). New approaches are under development, driven by developments within a society that are becoming more complex and globally interconnected. Recent developments within psychology have given a deeper understanding of adult development and the field is gaining from new insights derived from leadership studies. In an overview study of best practices, McGonagill (2010) described nine general principles that the best programs seem to have in common: Reinforcing a supportive organizational culture, sponsorship from top management, context-tailored goals, attention for the specific audience, and integrative approach with strong linkages between the different elements, using a variety of learning methods over an extended period, a central role of self-development and commitment to continuous improvement. This study emphasized the importance of using different tools that address development at intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels. Tools mentioned ranged from personal mastery and mindfulness to facilitation skills and developing a shared vision to storytelling and social networking. Within servant leadership development programs, we also see a similar broad focus and range of techniques used.

A challenge of servant leadership development is that it may go together with turning the organizational culture upside down. Underlying implicit ideas that most people have about what constitutes a good leader is reflected in words like being assertive, strong, charismatic, and visionary. A nurturer is not the first thought that comes to mind, and in fact some would not appreciate this thought. These implicit ideas focus on being

decisive, a person that leads the troops to victory. Servant leadership, on the other hand places empowerment, stewardship and a virtuous attitude in terms of humility, gratitude, forgiveness, altruism, and even compassionate love into central stage (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015). Of course, a servant leader is still responsible for providing direction, but the way it is done differs when taking the ideas behind servant leadership as starting point. Servant leadership provides a challenge for leaders aiming to combine humility with courage; with providing a vision and encouraging autonomy, indeed this requires a different mind-set, a mind-set that embraces the philosophy of servant first. It certainly asks for a certain level of maturity and self-control, both among leaders and among the rest of the people within an organization. As such, choosing to work from the principles behind servant leadership may not be a sign of weakness, but one of strength. And the road toward it certainly is not always easy—in fact, you can count on it not being easy—this is why servant leadership is for the bravest of souls.

This book consists of four parts. In Part I, Don Frick Don Frick begins by addressing how Greenleaf's thinking and writing is related to wisdom, distinguishing between two kinds of wisdom: transmitted and experiential. Transmitted wisdom can be found in history, sacred writings, and unexpected places, like the reflections of common people. Transmitted wisdom, however, has built-in boundaries because wisdom is not acquired in this way. One acquires authentic wisdom through direct experience of and reflection upon one's inner and outer worlds. Experiential wisdom tests and tempers knowledge of the world with inner disciplines and reflections upon personal growth, intuition, creativity, and openness to wonder, mystery and spirit. Frick emphasizes that none of this is mystical but imminently practical, especially in business settings. In Chap. 3, Justin Irving builds on the importance of attention for the good of those led over the self-interest of leaders. The chapter explores the construct of leader purposefulness for a deeper understanding of servant leadership. It emphasizes the role that meaning and purpose play in shaping leaders and their commitments to service and follower-focus. Carolyn Crippen, in Chap. 4, places servant leadership within a historical context. The

chapter presents some stories and analyses of servant leaders from the past. Their stories showcase both their successes in contributing to the good of society and the costs and courage it took to make this happen.

Part II of this volume builds on the insights of the first part to provide some new perspectives on what it takes to become a servant leader. Peter Sun addresses the motivation to serve and how this may transcend oneself to serve the legitimate needs of others. He links it to one's identity as a leader and as a servant; the chapter explores how both self-serving and other-serving can work together. Johan van 't Zet, in Chap. 6, also addresses the importance of personal growth; positioning it is a process of continual investigation, within which the deeper meaning of personal themes can be constantly understood. Two main keys to encourage this process of increasing self-knowledge are the ability to self-reflect and the ability to wonder. Related to this perspective is the role that can be played by mindfulness, as described in Chap. 7 by Armin Pircher Verdorfer and Johannes Arendt. The chapter provides a short review of the current research on mindfulness in relation to leadership in general. Next, it elaborates how mindfulness can help encourage the unique features of servant leadership mechanisms.

In Part III, the step is made toward building an organizational culture, grounded in the principles of servant leadership. Four different frameworks are presented that together will help the reader with tools to start an organizational developmental trajectory. Of interest, the four perspectives are written by authors from different parts of the world: Finland, South-Africa, The Netherlands and Iceland. Chapter 8 by Jari Hakanen and Birgitta Pessi introduces two Finnish projects (CoPassion and Spirals of Inspiration). Together, these projects show how managers can be taught to work with more compassion on how to boost employee well-being and proactive work cultures via servant leadership and job-crafting interventions. The following chapter by Charl Coetzer introduces a framework to make servant leadership practical within organizations. It describes three dimensions of servant leadership, namely, the heart, the head, and hands of a servant leader. It consists of four broad functions or roles of a servant leader, which are clustered into strategic servant

leadership and operational servant leadership. Next, the chapter by Dirk van Dierendonck links HR practices with servant leadership. His model places the individual within the organizational setting and in the societal context. It emphasizes the need to build a leadership culture grounded in servant leadership and a work environment with core HR practices that encourages employees toward flourishing in terms of optimal performance, self-development, and personal growth. The concluding chapter by Robert Jack links servant leadership theory with Laloux's (2014) classification of leadership and management. The author argues that although some of Greenleaf's ideas seem green, his fundamental view of servant leadership is very much in conformity with the three main ideas that Laloux ascribes to teal organizations.

In the fourth and final part of this book, the ideas behind servant leadership are placed in a broader context. The chapter by Jane Waddell and Kathleen Patterson links servant leadership to the needs and expectations of the millennial generation. Millennials have garnered a lot of attention and deservedly so with their perceived entitlement mentality and narcissistic tendencies. This chapter proposes a more positive view by arguing that hope resides with the Millennials and subsequent Gen Z as the servant leaders of tomorrow because of their strong inclination to seek purpose-filled lives and wanting to work for a greater good. Chapter 13 by Miguel Pinto Luz and Milton Sousa aims to show how servant leadership can contribute to the public administration context. It explores how servant leadership can contribute toward greater organizational ambidexterity, allowing public institutions to simultaneously achieve bureaucratic efficiency and increased innovation in response to an unprecedented changing environment. The concluding chapter by Sigrún Gunnarsdóttir, Kasper Edwards and Lotta Dellve provides insight into how servant leadership has the potential to create and support organizational culture and leadership behavior to develop sustainable work environment in health care. These authors emphasize the importance of leaders being involved as full partners in a context of mutual respect and collaboration with focus on people and relationships, trust, empowering environment, and balancing values and priority. Servant leaders at the clinical level can support the empowerment of health care staff and foster their well-being at work.

In conclusion, this volume brings together an active group of servant leadership researchers and practitioners from different parts of the world; this diversity in cultural context provides a unique perspective and yet a harmonious one. Working from the original writings of Greenleaf from more than 40 years ago, the combined chapters show a quick progression in linking theoretical development and academic research to practical frameworks to better deal with a changing world. It addresses the clear need to bridge Greenleaf's original ideas and writings to current-day challenges within businesses and organizations, incorporating insights from recent academic research, and to note the fundamentals of Greenleaf's writings are still solid and are still uniquely accurate for this day and age as if they were written for the here and now. Each of the chapters provides some new insight into the servant leadership theory, broadens its underlying conceptual framework, and shows how to apply them in modern organizations. Our hope is to encourage the servant, the servant leader, the servant follower in their journey and to invite all of us to continue to serve others.

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# Part I

## Positioning Servant Leadership

# 2

## Wisdom as a Pillar for Servant Leadership

Don M. Frick

Throughout his writings, Robert K. Greenleaf shared thoughts about the nature and acquisition of wisdom. Much of what he had to say was not “common wisdom” about the topic but rich with insights that went beyond clichés. His accumulated enlightenment from multiple disciplines and scores of extraordinary people prepared him to publish the first servant essay *The Servant as Leader* in 1970 at age sixty-four. In the next two decades, Greenleaf refined and expanded the servant theme to address servant leadership in boards of trustees, business, universities, religious organizations, and individuals.

Greenleaf’s writings and life are the starting point to define wisdom; they flesh out the four stages of finding and claiming wisdom for servant-leaders and show how Greenleaf applied a lifetime of accumulated wisdom to define key capacities of servant-leaders.

---

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## Defining Wisdom

Years ago I reported for my first day of work at a radio station. Right away, an old hand took me aside and said, “Listen, kid. I have years of experience and will share my wisdom with you about how to go along and get along at this place!” He then gave me a rundown of people I should not trust, told war stories of predecessors who had been fired (including Rod Serling), and warned me to look over my shoulder *all the time*. Even if my self-appointed mentor’s “wisdom” had been more positive, Greenleaf would have warned me not to take his advice.

In a pamphlet written for up-and-coming managers at AT&T, he said as much when he described a situation eerily parallel to mine.

If I, as the young understudy, happen to look up to the fellow I happen to be working for and have a great deal of respect for, and if he undertakes to pass on his wisdom to me, I might just be so gullible as to try to incorporate it in my way of working. And the chances are, if I do, I have taken on a limitation. Wisdom is not acquired in this way. (Frick 2004, 155)

Another person’s “wisdom” may be merely opinion, as it was with the crusty old engineer at my radio station, or it could be the real deal: authentic, hard-won, deep-rooted illumination learned through living and learning. Does Greenleaf mean we should discard deep insights shared by others? No, but we should consider that what another person calls *wisdom* is not fully transferable, and may limit us in our own journey. So let us take a deep dive into what Greenleaf means by *wisdom* because he described himself as “a pursuer of wisdom” (Greenleaf 2002, 16).

In its definitions of *wise* and *wisdom*, the Merriam-Webster dictionary includes: accumulated philosophical or scientific knowledge, the teachings of ancient wise men, deep understanding, discernment, prudence, intuition, possession of inside knowledge, good judgment, and even crafty or shrewd attitudes (Merriam-Webster n.d.; Wise n.d.; Wisdom n.d.). That is a wide range of choices, but Greenleaf narrowed them down to the essentials as he practiced them, including deep understanding through reflection, discernment, and intuition.



Wisdom is often associated with age. Perhaps that is why teeth that emerge later in life are called wisdom teeth. But age is no guarantee of wisdom. So deeply did Greenleaf believe that young people could cultivate wisdom he wrote *The Servant as Leader* with college students as the intended audience (Frick 2004).

Although Greenleaf never wrote down an exact sequence for finding wisdom, a close study of his life and writings reveals four steps central to his process: (1) personal *experience*, (2) *reflection*, (3) *insight*, and (4) *action*. By following these four movements, in roughly chronological order, he gained enough accumulated wisdom to begin writing his servant series of essays.

## Experience

*Experience* includes those stimuli that come through the senses: achingly beautiful sunsets, touches and tastes, concerts and conversations, astonishing people we meet personally and those we meet through the written word. Gradually, all this bounty of living, enriched by adventures in nature and reading, tempered by the light and, yes, the darkness of this world, create a reservoir for future wisdom.

One word describes Greenleaf's approach to experience: *seeker*, but not one who seeks a predetermined goal.

All of this suggests two kinds of seekers: those who seek to find and those who seek to seek. The first see the search as a path toward finding something they want. When they find it, they hope to settle down and enjoy it. The search will be over. The others are interested in the search. They don't want anything but opening vistas for the search.

The search gives them joy. They do not expect ever to settle down. Instead, they hope to grow. (Frick 2004, 81)

Greenleaf was the second kind of seeker, largely because he knew growth could lead to wisdom. The idea of seeking for the sake of seeking sounds wasteful and unfocused to the modern ear, but Greenleaf was describing his own life. Around the age of forty, he decided that

he wanted to be useful in his older years, but he *did not define precisely what that meant*. Instead, he and his wife Esther attended every possible concert and lecture, befriended every available artist and thought leader from Eleanor Roosevelt to Robert Frost, Peter Drucker, and “Bill W.,” the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. He also met and learned from dozens of authors who wrote books on wide-ranging topics: Zen Buddhism, general semantics, philosophy, Jewish prophets, business and management history, and organic gardening. By the time he retired, Greenleaf had gathered enough wisdom to write about servant leadership.

## Knowledge Versus Wisdom

In an effort to seek grand principles, satisfy curiosity, and learn what we need to know to make a living, many people focus on amassing knowledge. That path can be richly rewarded in Western cultures and traditional educational systems. Knowledge, however, is not wisdom, although it can be the beginning of wisdom. In an address to college students who were entering their sophomore year, Greenleaf offered this thought about knowledge and wisdom.

You can easily be deceived that you are wise because you are academically proficient, articulate, can reason well, and understand another’s wisdom. Wisdom is not the antithesis of intellect. But intellectual growth can interfere with wisdom if not kept in perspective. (Greenleaf 1998, 102)

The *Tao Tè Ching* elaborates on the distinction between knowledge and wisdom:

Knowledge of anything is not the same as the thing of which we have that knowledge. When we have knowledge of a thing but do not have experience of it, in trying to describe that thing, all we can describe is our knowledge, not the thing itself. Equally, even when we have experience of a thing, all we can convey is knowledge of that experience, not the experience itself. (Rosenthal n.d., 14)

Stan Rosenthal, who wrote an interpretation of the *Tao Te Ching*, commented, “We may seek to understand a thing, rather than to experience it, because, in a world beset with man-made dangers, it is frequently safer to understand than to experience” (Rosenthal n.d., 13).

Greenleaf was fond of quoting Quaker founder, George Fox, on the link between knowledge and experience. “Thus when God doth work, who shall hinder it? And this I knew experimentally” (Fox n.d., 35). By *experimentally*, Fox meant what today we would call “experientially” (Amoss 2008). In the earlier Greenleaf quote where he claimed that wisdom was not acquired from someone passing along knowledge, the missing link was an *experiential encounter* that led to integration of mind, body, and even spirit. The integration phase can take time and be cumulative, or it may happen in a flash. When you encounter someone who has not yet done the necessary work of integration, you will sense it.

I vividly recall meeting a woman I will call Sue. I still consider her one of the most knowledgeable people I have ever met, and she had the degrees to prove it. I was fascinated to hear her talk—and she talked at length—yet was vaguely disturbed because she talked about ideas and emotions as if they were things *out there*. Then I realized that I saw in Sue shadow parts of myself; *I lived in my head far too often, I had used ideas to armor against messy reality, I often talked too much and listened too little*. Sue—and I—often found it safer to understand than to experience.

Sue offered me a precious gift: the opportunity to understand areas where I needed to evolve. If I had reflexively judged her, I would have decided that she was the only one who had a problem.

When you are lucky enough to encounter someone who has managed the alchemy of finding gold in the base material of experience, you will know them as people who are at least on the path to wisdom. Many servant-leaders fit that category.

I had a conversation with my friend and mentor Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper several years before she died, during a period between chemotherapy treatments. Ann seemed to shimmer with a lightness of being I had never seen in her, as if she had simultaneous contact with two worlds. She was continuing to work by coaching top executives on servant leadership, but at a reduced pace. With a slight smile, she said that

her cancer had actually improved her clients' willingness to engage in deep, authentic inner work. She told them that because her time was limited, she chose only to work with people who were ready for honesty and change. "Their intense engagement was a window to their accelerated learning and my own growth into my life mission," she said.

I was reminded of another conversation we'd had years earlier when I asked Ann her thoughts about why are we all here, on this earth, at this time. Without hesitation she replied, "We are here to learn, to love, and to serve."

She did not need to flesh out that answer with her vast knowledge *about* learning, loving, and serving. I had already known her for decades, had seen her commitment to these ideals and behaviors, knew many life challenges that had given rise to this wisdom, and had, in fact, been the recipient of Ann's learning, loving, and serving. After reflecting on this exchange for some months, Ann's transmitted wisdom became my own because I'd had personal experience with it, in both of our lives.

## Reflection

Mental reflection is more than thinking in a quiet place. Some dictionaries suggest it involves a form of meditation, a process of clearing the mind. Greenleaf found that trains were fine places to practice reflection on long trips. He worked in an era with grand national train service, but even after airlines offered safe and regular schedules, he preferred to take trains. They gave him time to write notes, to plan, or simply do nothing but look out the window. "I found trains a good place for meditation," he later recalled. "I like my solitude" (Frick 2004, 123).

Like many noted psychiatrists going back to Freud, Greenleaf saw a parallel between human consciousness and an iceberg. The tip of an iceberg, the part we see above water, only averages 13% of its mass; the other 87% is underwater. Greenleaf believed we needed to allow our "below the waterline" resources and intuition to rise "above the waterline" into conscious awareness. Reflection paved the way for that movement (Frick 2004).

Put another way, experience is but the raw data of wisdom. *Reflection* on experience is the process by which one sees patterns in data, accesses intuition, and glimpses an infinity of nonconscious inner wisdom that includes lessons from the head, the heart, and the gut.

Reflection takes time. Greenleaf lived before our era of smartphones and text messages, but as one of the top officials at AT&T, the world's largest corporation at the time, he had plenty of demands and distractions. He simply decided to take charge of his own schedule. Reflection and meditation are possible even in the digital age. It starts as a discipline and then becomes a habit.

Greenleaf famously wrote, "The very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, derives from more than usual openness to inspiration" (Greenleaf 2002, 28). Inspiration and her cousin Intuition are soulful and shy. One cannot manufacture them on demand, but only create conditions that invite them to come up above the waterline and play.

## Insight

Isabel Lopez is one of the top servant leadership speakers and trainers; she has a reputation for being a *wise* person (Lopez 2012, 5). Isabel observes that most leadership experts advise us to *start* with the gifts of mind and intellect, refining analytical processes like best practices and focused action. In other words, we are trained in *how* to operate with planning strategies, marketing practices, and management techniques to make organizations more efficient. Greenleaf's "gently demanding" writing, however, requires us to start with the *why* of an organization and address questions of purpose, values, vision, and relationships (Lopez 2012, 9).

The same is true for individuals. While we wonder and worry about *how* we will succeed in our jobs, marriages, education, and parenting, we often neglect to ask the *why* questions: Why am I working in my current job? Which values do I want to communicate through the way I live and lead? What do I believe, and is my behavior congruent with those stated beliefs? What will be my legacy?

Noted educator and author Parker Palmer suggests the reason the *why* questions are so difficult:

The problem is that people rise to leadership in our society by a tendency toward extroversion, which too often means ignoring what is going on inside themselves...I have met too many leaders whose confidence in the external world is so high that they regard the inner life as illusory, a waste of time, a magical fantasy trip into a region that does not even exist. (Palmer 1998, 200–201)

Palmer is especially concerned that leaders—including teachers, clergy, parents, and anyone who influences others—acknowledge their shadows. In Jungian psychology, shadows are parts of the self that a person denies and relegates to the unconscious, where they exert hidden control. As one writer put it, “The shadow is the ‘long bag we drag behind us,’ heavy with parts of ourselves our parents or community didn’t approve of” (Bly 1988, 2). According to Palmer, unacknowledged shadows are a real problem for leaders and their followers because, “A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project onto other people his or her shadow, his or her light” (Palmer 1998, 200).

Greenleaf was aware of his own shadows because he worked with trusted friends and Jungian therapists to identify them and discuss how they affected his behavior. Perhaps that is one reason why Greenleaf, in various writings, wrote that everything begins with the individual. “The servant,” he wrote, “views any problem in the world as *in here*, inside oneself, not *out there*. And if a flaw in the world is to be remedied, the process of change starts *in here*, in the servant, not *out there*. This is a difficult concept for that busy-body modern person” (Greenleaf 2002, 57).

Given this, it follows that servant-leaders need to lead themselves first. How can a leader “go out ahead and show the way” unless she knows something of the territory ahead? Without reflection, the leader’s own shadows can darken the path ahead. All ethical leaders need insight into their own psyches, but that need is heightened with servant-leaders, whose effectiveness relies on trust. “Trust is first,” wrote Greenleaf. “Nothing will move until trust is firm” (Greenleaf 1991, 37).

Simply put, there is no wisdom without insight and no insight or intuition without withdrawal, reflection, and fearless self-examination.

## Action

Many leadership approaches start with *action*. People with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to make an organization more efficient are in high demand, and are critically important. No argument there—and most are proficient in these areas by the time they reach a position of leadership. According to Isabel Lopez, however, servant-leaders start with the *meaning* of their actions, “the frames of reference, the confirmation of *lived* experience, the validation of communicated ideas... This dimension of meaning and meaning transformation is a *critical factor of effectiveness*.” In other words, starting below the waterline “leads to the creation of visions that inspire, principles that guide, and results that matter” (Lopez 2012, 10).

Greenleaf incorporated all this and more into his “Best Test” for a servant-leader:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And* what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived? (Greenleaf 2002, 27)

With the Best Test, Greenleaf has offered a way to choose Right Action. The ultimate criterion is the impact on people. It is not an unrealistic ideal but a pragmatic way of measuring outcomes, and it works. The CEO of a fairly large company practicing servant leadership told a mutual friend that “Most companies use their people to build up their company. We use our company to build up people, and the traditional measurements of profit, innovation, and growth have never been better.” As counter-cultural as this may sound, focusing on people first tends to produce higher profits, lower turnover, and more satisfied customers and employees (Sipe and Frick 2011, 2–3).

## The Heroine's Journey

Experience, reflection, insight and action all played a part in the evolved wisdom my amazing friend Virginia (Ginny) Gilmore experienced on her Heroine's Journey. I first met Ginny in 1997 at a servant leadership workshop when she was in a cycle of massive changes. She was approaching her 50th birthday; her marriage was crumbling, her youngest daughter was leaving for college, and her family's business was about to be sold, leaving her without a job. On the bright side, the sale of the business would give a measure of financial security, but she did not know what to do next: Travel the world? Relax on a beach? Just wait and see what developed? Those options were not good enough for what Ginny called her "heart wisdom."

Ginny had always been interested in leadership so she went back to school to finish a degree started thirty years earlier, but this time with a twist: she wanted to help design her own learning. So she met with Dr. Gary Boelhower, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Marian University in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. He well remembers that first visit.

She arrived at my office one late summer day with a request. At least that's what she called it; in reality, it was a proposal delivered with passion and conviction. She wanted to complete her bachelor's degree by studying servant leadership and spirituality. And she wanted her first course to be a self-directed, two-month-long sabbatical experience in the woods during which she would read, journal, and reflect on her calling. I remember saying to myself, this lady is clearly determined and this is a much more constructive response to a mid-life crisis than buying a red convertible. (Boelhower [2013](#), 155)

Ginny's proposal was approved and she headed off to the North Woods in upper Wisconsin armed with books, pictures, blank journals, and plenty of pens. "I was ready for a new journey of silence and solitude," she later wrote. "I could no longer find excuses to wait. I had come face to face with my own heart. It was time to meet my soul." (Boelhower, 156). Years later, she told me, "I was simply seeking wisdom. I wanted to heal my wounds from losses and become a wounded healer." (Gilmore [2017](#)).



Ginny learned that finding your way in the forest can be lonely, with days of feeling doubt, abandonment, and confusion, but she was able to live with the paradox of not knowing what was ahead by engaging in daily periods of reflection, listening to her inner voice, writing, walking, thinking, feeling, and writing more. Curiously, the name Sophia began popping up in her notebook. Sophia is the Greek word for “wisdom.”

Ever so slowly, a vision emerged from this withdrawal to the woods; perhaps she could start an organization that focused on the needs of women and children and could introduce servant leadership to her community. At the suggestion of her advisor, Dr. Michael Ketterhagen, Ginny titled her remarkable final paper for Dr. Boelhower *The Heroine's Journey*. In it, she included a quote from the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn: “When you touch deep understanding and love, you are healed” (Duncan 1997, 28).

After finishing her degree, Ginny spent several years traveling to meet and learn from world-class thinkers and doers, creating learning communities, sharing her vision with others, and seeking discernment about how best to proceed. In 2001, she incorporated the nonprofit Sophia Foundation in her hometown of Fond du Lac. Besides healing women and children, the Foundation initiated programming that nurtured wisdom within individuals and organizations and promoted the inherent wisdom in communities. Servant leadership was at the heart of it all.

Ginny did the hard and high work of withdrawal and reflection, allowing intuitive insights to bubble to the surface and lead to Right Action.

## Wisdom Expressed

One can see uncommon wisdom in Greenleaf's writing about the core skills and capacities of servant-leaders as he redefines the meaning of common tools of leadership. Here are just three examples:

## Listening: The Premier Skill for a Servant Leader

Servant leader listening goes beyond the “active listening” techniques you can google on the Internet. A servant leader understands that listening can change both the speaker *and* the listener, and is open to change while listening. Greenleaf also wrote about the role of awareness and *presence* in listening (Frick [2011](#)).

## Foresight: The Central Ethic of Servant Leadership

Before Greenleaf, few noticed that foresight was an *ethical* choice. *Foresight* goes beyond *forecasting* because it relies upon informed intuition, which Greenleaf defined as a feel for patterns. To practice foresight, “One is at once, in every moment of time, a historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet—not three separate roles. This is what the practicing leader is, every day of his or her life” (Greenleaf [2002](#), 38–39).

## Persuasion: The Ethical Use of Power

Aristotle said that persuasion relied on three factors: *logos* (logical argument), *pathos* (appeal to emotions), and *ethos* (the personal character of the persuader). Of the three, he argued that *ethos* was the most important. Greenleaf would not disagree about the power of *ethos*, but he defined persuasion differently. It involves “arriving at a feeling of rightness about a feeling or action through one’s own intuitive sense... The act of persuasion, thus defined, would help order the logic and favor the intuitive step. But the person persuaded must take that intuitive step alone, untrammelled by coercive or manipulative stratagems of any kind” (Greenleaf [1996](#), 129). Too many leaders confuse persuasion with manipulation and coercion.

These three examples demonstrate how Greenleaf marshaled a lifetime of wisdom-building to bring fresh understanding to skills that most people thought they already understood.

## What Will You Do?

Servant leadership is rooted in the universal human impulse to serve. That makes it a *trans*-philosophy: translingual, transcultural, transdoctrinal, transnational, because the capacity for serving exists in all cultures and at all times. Those who translate that possibility into action change themselves first, and then the world.

People who wish to embrace what Greenleaf called their “legitimate greatness” will step up and risk appearing wise fools by modeling deep listening, collaboration, persuasion, community-building, and concern for the common good rather than advocating actions that manipulate, coerce, cower, diminish, and control as first options. They will be accountable realists who recognize the dis-ease in people and institutions because they are bravely confronting their own shadows. They will use power ethically, yet admit that they are imperfect and sometimes act wrongly (Frick 2013).

All of this requires uncommon wisdom. The most important question is this: How will aspiring servant-leaders gain and express wisdom in their own lives and work?

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# 3

## Leader Purposefulness and Servant Leadership

Justin A. Irving

### Introduction

The study of servant leadership continues to gain attention among leadership thinkers today. Based on the foundational influence of Robert K. Greenleaf (1977), leadership practitioners and theorists began to engage the implications of servant leadership commitments and then moved into the important work of theory formation in the 1990s and early 2000s. This foundation has given rise to empirical studies. As the study of servant leadership expands beyond theoretical exploration, empirical researchers continue to validate the many positive effects of servant leadership practice on diverse outcomes at the follower and organizational levels. But what is it about servant leadership that provides these leaders and their servant practices with the capacity to effect positive outcomes?

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This collection, and this chapter, aims to engage the theoretical and empirical work surrounding servant leadership in view of its implications for today's organizations. How are individuals motivated toward productive and meaningful work? How are organization members led in developmental ways that contribute to both their and the organization's growth? How are organizational members engaged in a manner that fosters effective teamwork and collaborative decision making? Such questions illustrate the importance of not only describing servant leadership, but also taking a deeper look at why servant leadership is a powerful force for answering such questions and empowering leaders and followers toward vocational fulfillment and organizational effectiveness.

In this chapter, I suggest that the role of purpose and meaning is part of the answer to why servant leadership is having a positive effect in organizations. This chapter focuses on the role that leader purposefulness plays in the life of the servant leader and the practice of servant leadership. Though not the only dimension of servant leadership, I argue that leader purposefulness is an important part of the story behind why servant leadership works in today's complex world. Special attention is given to why leader purposefulness is a priority for leaders and why it has promise for providing answers to pressing questions that contemporary theorists, researchers, and practitioners are asking as they work together to affect positive organizational outcomes.

## **Follower Focus and the Effectiveness of Servant Leadership**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of servant leadership is follower focus. As Greenleaf (1977) famously noted, "the servant leader is servant first" (p. 27). This servant first orientation is most evidently seen in the leadership shift from leader-centered models to follower-considerate models—a change observable in leadership studies since the mid-part of the twentieth century. Matteson and Irving (2006) identify this shift as indicative of important steps being taken "toward balancing the needs of both leaders and followers as they work toward fulfilling organizational goals" (p. 36).

Many theories—such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership—are representative of these changes. However, it is the emphasis on follower focus that makes servant leadership uniquely representative of this change. Followers become not only a priority for leaders among many other priorities, but rather part of the highest priority considerations for leaders. Expanding his reflection on the concept of the servant leader as servant first, Greenleaf (1977) argued that the servant leader is a person who takes care “to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (p. 27). Serving the needs of others is not just a byproduct of servant leadership; it is the heart of how servant leadership is practiced.

Although organizational objectives are important for leaders, subordinating such objectives to the service of followers is a priority for servant leaders. Making an argument for the centrality of follower focus in the practice of servant leadership, Stone et al. (2004) argue that servant leaders, “focus on the followers and the achievement of organizational objectives is a subordinate outcome” (p. 349). Servant leaders lead out of the conviction that service of people is not merely a means to a greater end, but is inherently valuable in and of itself. As evidenced by a growing number of studies, servant leadership is indeed effective in its contribution toward important organizational outcomes. This effectiveness, however, is a byproduct of higher order convictions on the part of the leader.

Understanding leadership from this perspective necessitates leaders moving beyond mere service of self-interest. The leader’s capacity to transcend self-interest in service of others is vital for servant leadership practice. But how are leaders to move beyond self-interest to service of something greater than themselves? This is where the focus on leader purposefulness comes into the discussion. The argument in this chapter is that purpose provides leaders with the capacity to transcend self-interest. Although self-interest is a natural human instinct, when infused with a sense of greater purpose or meaning, a leader is able to transcend base commitments to self and begin to authentically consider the needs of others.

Such movement beyond self-interest is significantly limited in the absence of purpose and a sense of transcendent meaning. Noting that people all desire and need a motivating force beyond self-interest,

McCloskey (2014) observes that purpose “is a deep and abiding sense of transcendent meaning that connects the individual to a larger story,” and that “purpose ignites our innate ‘telic orientation’... and sets the individual on a course of energetic striving toward noble ends” (p. 90).

For leaders, particularly servant leaders, this transcendent meaning connects with service of followers. Consider the purpose-filled language with which Greenleaf (1977) described servant leaders: “[servant leadership] begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first” (p. 27). Discussing this passage in Greenleaf’s writing, I observed previously (Irving 2005) that it is logical to see how a person’s master-story or metanarrative (Irving and Klenke 2004) may provide the teleological, historical-narrative, and interpretive perspective necessary for contextualizing one’s service in such a way that it is filled with purpose and meaning.

On this point I noted, “Such a purpose-filled and meaning-rich approach to life and leadership may be just the antecedent needed for someone to walk down the servant-first pathway of leadership rather than the leader-first pathway which Greenleaf associated with a drive to power and the need to acquire material possessions” (Irving 2005, p. 72). This is the core argument I seek to expand in this chapter for how follower focus and leader purposefulness relate to one another. Purpose is an antecedent enabling a transcendent focus on followers over a focus on self-interest.

## **Servant Leadership and the Purpose in Leadership Inventory**

Before highlighting this connection between purpose and the servant leader further, I would like to provide a brief overview of why this matters for the organizations we lead. Servant leadership is not just a good or noble idea. Servant leadership also demonstrably works, and the research-based literature points to this reality. Greenleaf’s early work inspired leadership thinkers to engage the task of theory formation (e.g., Farling et al. 1999; Stone et al. 2004) and the development of servant leadership measures (e.g., Laub 1999; Page and Wong 2000; Dennis and



Bocarnea 2005; Barbuto and Wheeler 2006; Sendjaya et al. 2008; Liden et al. 2008; van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011; Irving 2014; Irving and Berndt 2017).

Servant leadership research highlights key work-related outcomes positively associated with servant leadership practice. Examples of this positive association are job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, person-organization fit, team performance, and organizational performance. For detailed overviews of the empirical literature, see Van Dierendonck (2011), Parris and Peachey (2013), and Hoch et al. (2016). The growing body of empirical research illustrates the real-world value of servant leadership for today's organizations.

Building on this work, I developed the Purpose in Leadership Inventory (PLI) (Irving 2014; Irving and Berndt 2017). Conceptually, the PLI provides an overall measure of servant leadership and subscales measuring leader follower-focus, leader goal-orientation, and leader purposefulness. The PLI provides a broader approach to studying servant leadership by bringing these important dimensions of leader focus into a single measure.

While the follower focus dimension of servant leadership is at least implicitly captured in many other servant leadership measures, the PLI makes this implicit dimension explicit by including follower focus as one of the three scales in the instrument. Because follower focus is arguably the core of servant leadership, this explicit dimension provides an important pathway for measuring servant leadership focus on followers. In the study by Irving and Berndt (2017), leader follower-focus had the largest predictive effect on a majority of the dependent variables included in the study (organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and leadership effectiveness).

In addition to follower focus, the PLI also provides measures of goal orientation and leader purposefulness as dimensions of servant leadership. Related to goal orientation, leadership scholars point to the need for balancing social-context and performance-context as both the people of the organization and the outcomes of the organization are considered (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004; Sun 2013). With the PLI's emphasis on both follower focus and goal orientation, I argue that the PLI provides a response to calls for bringing these social and performance considerations

together, and emphasizing both the servant and leader dimensions of servant leadership. Rather than seeing follower focus and goal orientation at odds, I argue that these are a natural outgrowth for leaders who have a sense of transcendent meaning and purpose guiding their leadership.

Finally, the PLI extends the servant leadership literature by providing a measure of leader purposefulness. This dimension of the PLI provides the most unique contribution to the literature, and opens up new pathways for empirical investigation of the role that purpose and meaning play in leadership practice. The following section engages this thread of purpose in more detail, presenting a case for its conceptual importance for servant leaders.

## The Servant Leader and Purpose

So what is leader purposefulness and how is it related to the study of servant leadership? As already indicated above, I see purpose holding promise as an antecedent to leader follower-focus. As such, I do not see servant leadership and leader purposefulness as separate constructs, but rather leader purposefulness as a component of servant leadership—one that is necessary for servant leadership theory and practice. In this section, we will explore the concept of leader purposefulness in greater detail, observing some of its theoretical roots in the servant leadership literature, but also looking beyond the servant leadership literature to understand the nature and value of purpose for leaders.

Although early conceptual work connected servant leadership and purpose, empirical work relating these themes is more a recent addition to the literature (e.g., Irving 2014; Irving and Berndt 2017). One example of early reflection on the two concepts comes from Greenleaf. Fraker shares Greenleaf's words bringing together purpose and laughter as a vital pairing for leaders:

If I had the chance to rub Aladdin's lamp, one rub, one wish, I would wish for a world in which people laugh more. One can cultivate purpose to the point of having a glimpse of the ultimate and still remain connected to people and events, if one has humor, if one can laugh with all people at all stages of their journey. (Fraker 1995, p. 44)

Implied in Greenleaf's reflection is the conviction that purpose can become ethereal if not connected to the people and events of our world. This is the core job of servant leaders after all—connecting the things that matter most to people in their everyday lives, communities, and organizations. Because of this, Greenleaf called for keeping purpose and laughter together: “purpose and laughter are the twins that must not separate. Each is empty without the other. Together they are the impregnable fortress of strength” (Fraker, p. 44).

Expanding beyond the individual level we find that the theme of purpose has been significantly emphasized in the organizational leadership literature for years. One example of this comes from Collins and Porras (1991) who argued that purpose is a natural outgrowth of organizational core values and beliefs that helps to motivate organizational members. Their discussion of purpose largely focuses on purpose at the organizational level. Regarding this level of stating purpose organizationally, Collins and Porras note that quality statements of purpose need to grab the soul of each member of the organization. This is where the distinction between goals and purpose is felt most prominently.

The articulation of purpose possesses potential to communicate to the heart of organizational members, because purpose, even at the organizational level, speaks to the broader, holistic, integrative, and more qualitative nature of life and organization. On this point, Rost writes, “Purposes are broader, more holistic or integrated.... Purposes are often stated in qualitative terms.” This is in contrast to the nature of goals, which tend to be more specific and quantitative in nature. This is also why Collins and Porras (1991) note that purpose is not so much set or created as it is simply recognized or discovered. The key is for leaders to work with organizational members to capture what is already there in the passions of its people.

Such distinctions are important at the personal level as well. Purpose points to the heart and soul of the leader and those they lead. Bringing the discussion of purpose and goals to the personal level rather than the organizational level, Blanchard et al. (2016) write: “each of us also has a specific purpose, a personalized reason for being. ...your purpose is the meaning of the journey of your life, not the destination” (p. 135). Purpose is powerful because it speaks to this deeper meaning. When

leaders see and act on a purpose to serve others, this infuses the practice of leadership with great significance. On this point, Blanchard et al. continue: “In the context of leadership, your purpose must include serving the best interests of those you lead, or your ‘leadership’ becomes manipulation and exploitation, the absolute opposite of leading like Jesus,” the one Blanchard sees as the ultimate example of servant leadership (p. 135). Purpose and service have a natural place together in the lives of servant leaders.

The concept of leader purposefulness in the context of servant leadership reflection must be inclusive of both the organizational and personal levels. Emphasizing the importance of purpose for leaders at the personal level, Albrecht (1994) writes: “Those who would aspire to leadership roles in this new environment must not underestimate the depth of this human need for meaning. It is a most fundamental human craving, an appetite that will not go away” (p. 22). For leaders and followers, a personal sense of purpose and meaning is deeply connected to the human condition. Rohr (2011) notes, “As the body cannot live without food, so the soul cannot live without meaning” (p. 113).

This universal desire for meaning holds particular importance for leaders. Leaders set the cultural tone in organizations, and provide the context within which organizational members may connect their work to a deeper sense of meaning. Engaging a similar point related to purpose and meaning, Fry (2003) writes that it is well-established that “almost universally, people have the intrinsic drive and motivation to learn and find meaning in their work” (p. 702). This is partly due to the unique capacity of purpose to provide clarity for leaders and followers alike. On this point, McCloskey (2014) writes, “A clear and compelling purpose—a larger transcendent story—provides the emotional scripting to properly interpret and constructively respond to adverse and even tragic circumstances” (p. 125). Through both the tragedies and triumphs of leadership, purpose provides a unique and centering compass heading, enabling leaders to serve followers as they remain true to who they are and their primary commitments along the leadership journey.

Organizational members value seeing how their work is connected to a greater good. This was a reality that Greenleaf’s reflections addressed. Reflecting on Greenleaf’s essay “The Servant as Leader,” Bordas (1995)

writes, “Just as the servant-leader is ‘servant first’ and begins with a ‘natural feeling that one wants to serve,’ seeking the guidance of personal purpose begins with the desire to connect with the ‘greatest good,’ both within oneself and society” (p. 180). For servant leaders, this greatest good includes the movement beyond self-interest to prioritized consideration of the needs of followers and organizational members.

This sense of connecting with the greater good also relates to the desire to make a difference in the world. Reflecting on this desire in the hearts of organizational members, Warren Bennis (2001) writes,

They all believed that they would make a dent in the universe. What leaders need to realize is that people would much rather live a life dedicated to an idea or a cause that they believe in, than lead a life of aimless diversion. Effective leaders are all about cause and meaning—creating a shared sense of purpose because people need purpose. That’s why we live. And the power of an organization will be in that shared sense of purpose. With a shared sense of purpose, you can achieve anything. (p. 104)

This shared sense of purpose begins with a leader having a sense of their own purpose as a leader.

When personal purpose is clear for leaders, it becomes possible to connect this personal sense of purpose with the purposes of others and the larger organizational purpose. Bennis (2001) affirms: “Leaders have a strongly defined sense of purpose and vision. They also develop the capacity to articulate it clearly” (p. 103). This is why Rost (1993) prefers to use the language of mutual purposes, with an emphasis on the plural nature of purpose. On this point, Rost writes, “One of the reasons the word purposes is pluralized is to alleviate this problem. When leaders and followers have several purposes, the likelihood of mutuality is enhanced because different leaders and followers can emphasize related purposes and still achieve some mutuality” (p. 118). This becomes the basis for followers and leaders building a common vision for their organization as mutual purposes are brought together.

Authentic leadership theory also affirms the priority of purpose at the individual leader level. Leader purpose is one of five core dimensions of authentic leadership theory (George 2003). In this discussion of purpose,

it is not simply about leaders adopting the purpose of an organization or the purpose of another individual. It also includes the priority of a leader understanding and embracing his or her particular purpose. On this point George writes: “There is no way you can adopt someone else’s purpose and still be an authentic leader. You can study the purposes others pursue and you can work with them in common purposes, but in the end the purpose for your leadership must be uniquely yours” (p. 19). Personal purpose strengthens the capacity of a leader to move beyond self-interest; moving beyond self-interest through leader purposefulness provides a basis for authentic follower focus.

Beyond the servant leadership and authentic leadership literatures, additional literature threads affirm the importance of purpose for leaders. These threads include meaning centered approaches to leadership and management found in the work of individuals such as Paul Wong (Wong 1998, 2006; Wong and Fry 1998), and discussions of spiritual leadership found in the work of individuals such as Jody Fry (2003, 2005; Fry and Slocum 2008). Building on the work of Fry, Markow and Klenke (2005) note that meaning and purpose are embedded in a number of definitions of spirituality (e.g., Tepper 2003; Cash and Gray 2000; Zinnbauer et al. 1999). For Fry, purpose as closely tied to calling and the experience of transcendence: “how one makes a difference through service to others and, in doing so, derives meaning and purpose in life” (2003, p. 703). Fry’s comments draw attention to the mutually reinforcing relationship between purpose and service. On the one hand, purpose and calling feed into a transcendence of self-interest in service of others. On the other hand, service of others contributes to a great sense of purpose and meaning. I emphasize the former throughout this chapter, but the latter is a complementary reality.

Although these diverse threads support the priority of purpose for leaders, others lament the decoupling of meaning from leadership studies in past decades. One example of this lamenting is Podolny et al.’s (2010) examination of trends in leadership studies. They note that early theoretical work in management and leadership studies emphasized meaning and purpose, but that as leadership studies emerged leadership research began decoupling the notion of meaning from leadership. They diagnose this as

coinciding with increased prominence being given to performance over meaning. As performance began to be separated from broader ideals, the concept of meaning went away with these segmented ideals.

This decoupling is problematic for any leadership theory, but it is particularly devastating if applied to servant leadership theory due to the theory's emphasis on transcendent ideals such as service of others beyond self-interest. Although not addressing servant leadership specifically, Podolny et al. (2010) argue for a solution that holds promise for servant leadership theorists and practitioners as well. They argue that the meaningfulness of work must be brought back together with a focus on performance, thus returning discussions of performance back to their historical roots in leadership study's early focus on purpose and meaning. This is particularly important because of the capacity of purpose to infuse meaning into the lives of organizational members.

Research agendas relate to this historic decoupling of leadership and purpose. When concepts are difficult to measure, over time this can lead to research growing around the concepts that are more inviting for researchers. Podolny et al. (2010) note this reality: "social processes involving meaning-making are difficult to quantify and operationalize" (p. 74). This observation highlights the important contribution of the Purpose in Leadership Inventory (PLI). While not the final word on integrating leader purposefulness into leadership studies, the PLI is one tool that provides an explicit pathway for incorporating leader purposefulness into research agendas (Irving 2014; Irving and Berndt 2017).

One of the three scales in the PLI enables followers to assess their leaders around leader purposefulness through such items as "my leader understands how his/her personal life's purpose connects to the organization's purpose," and "my leader sees the importance of our organization's mission in light of a larger sense of purpose." Along with leader purposefulness, the PLI also provides a measurement for follower focus, arguably the distinguishing feature of servant leadership practice. Bringing both follower focus and leader purposefulness together in a validated and reliable instrument, the PLI opens new pathways for reintroducing purpose and meaning as a central component in servant leadership studies.

## Leader Purposefulness: Implications and Practice

Throughout this chapter, I have argued for the importance of purpose and meaning for leaders. While leader purposefulness is important for all leaders, I see it as nearly essential for anyone wishing to embody and practice servant leadership. The necessity of leader purposefulness within servant leadership is primarily derived from the capacity of purpose to empower leaders to move beyond self-interest and toward serving the good of others.

In this final section, I propose several next step considerations for leadership practitioners and leadership researchers.

### Implications for Leadership Practitioners

If leadership practitioners are persuaded that leader purposefulness matters, what can leaders do to help nurture an awareness of purposefulness and lead out of this awareness? Here are two recommendations to help leadership practitioners engage leader purposefulness at a practical level: (1) Clarify Your Purpose and (2) Lead with Constancy of Purpose.

*Clarify Your Purpose* The first step is for leaders to clarify the purpose or purposes guiding their life and leadership. At this stage, it is not about clarifying organizational purpose but rather clarifying personal purpose.

Leaders will know how to lead their organizations with purpose if they first get in touch with the purpose that motivates them as people. Many experts agree on this point. For instance, Baldoni (2011) writes: “Purposeful organizations need leaders who know themselves first; that is, they have an inner compass that points them in the right direction. Such leaders catalyze their own purpose to help their organizations succeed” (p. 3). Baldoni argues that it is only when a leader is convinced of his or her own purpose that he or she can effectively lead others or an organization. This means that effective leadership of others begins with effective self-leadership, including the clarification of personal purpose.



But clarification of purpose must not be confused with creation of purpose. You are not required to invent purpose out of thin air. That is not clarification. Instead, clarification means you uncover your purpose that already exists. Collins and Porras (1991) make this argument for organizations: that purpose is not so much set or created as it is simply recognized or discovered. This is true for individual leaders as well. Purpose need not be manufactured. The key is to find what is already there—what is already present, infusing life and leadership with a sense of meaning and purpose.

However, just because purpose is more about identification than creation does not mean that this is easy work for leaders. This work requires time and space for thoughtful reflection. Baldoni (2011) emphasizes this leadership principle: “Sound purpose begins with sound thinking—with taking time to think before we do” (p. 125). In other words, leaders need to take the time to think clearly about purpose if they hope to clarify it.

In part, this time to think allows you to engage practical questions and suggestions for self-reflection. Here are some recommendations from Baldoni (2011, pp. 138–139):

- From whom and from where do I draw inspiration?
- What am I doing to ensure that I make time to think before I act?
- How well am I reflecting on my purpose and how it affects my team?
- For reflection: Think of people you admire who live purposeful lives. Consider what gives them their sense of direction. Think of how such purpose can help you become more purposeful. Find ways to draw inspiration from those who set examples that you would like to emulate.

Leaders generally find their purpose when they look at their own lives. George (2015) notes that most leaders find the purpose of their leadership emanating from their life stories. He encourages emerging leaders to work toward discerning their purpose through the combination of introspection and real-world experience. They can do this by examining key transformative events that inspire them, or by reflecting carefully on ongoing leadership experiences. When this is done, the rewards are significant because the process empowers leaders to influence the world

around them. George explains, “When you gain clarity about your purpose and find or create an organization aligned with it, you are ready to make an important difference in the world through your leadership” (p. 205).

When you have clarity of personal purpose, you will be better able to face hardships and challenges to your leadership. The challenges will not be quite so confusing and you will not feel so tripped up by them. This is because you will know how to interpret the hardships as they hit you. McCloskey (2014) writes, “A clear and compelling purpose—a larger transcendent story beyond self-interest—provides the emotional scripting to properly interpret and constructively respond to difficulty and delay, obstacles and adversity” (p. 70). In other words, instead of being paralyzed by challenges, a clear purpose enables leaders to understand them and meet them effectively. This is an affirmation of the importance of taking time to clarify your purpose. Identify what matters most to you. This way, you can engage with others and your organization out of what is deeply meaningful to you, and not simply over the tyranny of the urgent or out of the trivialities of day-to-day work life.

After all, when leaders connect with their purpose, they find emotional strength to persevere. They find the emotional strength to be enthusiastic about what they do. Stoner et al. (2007) argue, “Great organizations have a deep and noble sense of purpose—a significant purpose—that inspires excitement and commitment” (p. 29). If this is true for great organizations, I would argue that it is even more important for effective servant leaders. Such leaders clarify and operate out of a “deep and noble sense of purpose.”

*Lead with Constancy of Purpose* Once leaders have clarified their purpose, it is time to lead with constancy of purpose. On this point, Blanchard et al. (2016) argue that one of the most important services that leaders can provide followers is constancy of purpose. They argue that when the going gets tough—when temptations to short-term success arise or when distractions or setbacks arise—this is when people look most closely at their leaders to see how they will respond in these circumstances. In *these* times, will leaders stay true to what George (2015) calls the leader’s True North? Will they remain on course, consistent with their purpose, or will they give way to short-term thinking and set their ultimate purpose aside?

This is where the call to constancy of purpose is felt the most, and this is when the priority of purpose becomes most essential for leaders desiring to lead well over the long-haul.

## Implications for Leadership Researchers

Finally, if leadership researchers are persuaded that follower focus and leader purposefulness matter for both leadership practitioners and the field of leadership studies, how can research related to these themes expand? Although several helpful servant leadership measures are available to researchers, the Purpose in Leadership Inventory (PLI) provides unique features that will help to complement these instruments and provide two distinct contributions. First, the PLI provides a focused measure of leader follower-focus. Although implicit in other measures, this explicit measure of follower focus provides a scale for servant leadership researchers wishing to study leader focus on followers. Second, the PLI provides a focused measure of leader purposefulness. The study of leader purposefulness as a dimension of servant leadership is in its infancy; however, the PLI provides a scale for servant leadership researchers wishing to study leader purposefulness. As a new area of servant leadership research, the focus on leader purposefulness facilitated by the PLI opens up new possibilities for researchers seeking to better understand leader purposefulness and its effect on other leader, follower, and organizational measures.

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# 4

## Maintaining Your Stance: History Reveals the Cost to Servant-Leaders

Carolyn Crippen

### Introduction

History is full of various leaders and their leadership. This chapter will introduce five servant-leaders from history, and ask how did following a philosophy of servant leadership, specifically defined by Robert K. Greenleaf (1991), impact their lives? Was there a price to pay for this philosophical loyalty? Although several of the five servant-leaders in this chapter lived before Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990), it seems fitting to begin with Greenleaf's thoughts about a person's choices in life. A small 18-page essay, written in 1966, called, *Choosing Life with a Purpose* (2006), relates to making life choices. Greenleaf describes six possible choices we make in our lives and the differences they may make. They are (1) choosing to be responsible, (2) choosing to be aware of and foresee, (3) choosing to grow, (4) choosing to be human, (5) choosing to be

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ourselves, and (6) choosing to be great (pp. 3–12). These six choices provide a frame for analysis of actions and directions of each person. In addition to Greenleaf's choices (2006), it seems two concepts, that of servant-leader (Greenleaf 1991) and crucibles (Bennis and Thomas 2002; Snyder 2013), provide the understanding needed before proceeding. These two terms, servant-leader and crucibles, need clarification for the reader.

## Servant-Leaders

Although the philosophy of servant leadership has existed for centuries, Robert K. Greenleaf put a name to it and a definition. As well, Spears' (1997) careful examination of Greenleaf's writings identified ten indicators of servant-leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Greenleaf wrote (1991),

A servant-leader is servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead...The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (p. 15)

These words provide a description to begin our examination of the five individuals who overcame specific life changing challenges; one could name each challenge, a crucible of adversity (Snyder 2013, p. 7). The life story of each historical figure provides evidence of several crucibles of adversity throughout their lives and reflects the servant-leader indicators (Spears 1997).



## Crucibles

Bennis and Thomas (2002) introduce the concept of *crucibles*. They state ‘that a crucible moment is a defining moment that unleashes abilities, forces crucial choices, and sharpens focus. It teaches a person who he or she is’ (p. 17). It can be an opportunity or test. More recently, Snyder (2013) adds that individuals see the defining moment ‘as a natural part of leadership and that it is often the struggle itself that unlocks the potential for the greatest growth...Consequently, they develop skills, capabilities, and practices that help them cope with – and even thrive in the midst of – challenges and adversity’ (p. 3). ‘A new narrative surfaces, emphasizing the realization of human potential through the crucible of adversity’ (p. 7). Both Bennis and Thomas (2002) and Snyder (2013) are in harmony with the concept of crucibles. Whether the crucible was harrowing or not, ‘it is seen by the individual as the turning point that set him or her on the desired, even inevitable course’ (Bennis and Thomas 2002, p. 16).

## Five Servant-Leaders in Brief

When reviewing the lives of servant-leaders in history, it is relevant to acknowledge the times and context in which these people lived, that is, the circumstances, influences, and repercussions upon each of the selected servant-leaders: William Penn, UK; William Wilberforce, UK; Margret Benedictsson, Iceland; Eleanor Roosevelt, USA; and Nelson Mandela, South Africa. Three lived into their 70s—Penn, Wilberforce, Roosevelt—and two of them, into their 90s—Benedictsson and Mandela. Historically, the time spans 1644 until 2013, approximately 369 years. It is important to note five preconditions, that is, first, these were all persons in history with frailties and strengths, not perfect individuals; second, they consistently exhibited particular leadership beliefs and behaviours throughout their lives; third, specific influences seemed to steer their life’s purposes and choices; fourth, they made significant contributions to the moral imperative of their time; and fifth, history has recognized these individuals for their contributions as leaders, specifically, servant-leader. A series of five short vignettes follow as an

introduction for each servant-leader. Differences in time, location, gender, social issues, and religion are obvious, but, our first two servant-leaders displayed several commonalities.

**William Penn** (1644–1718) was born in London, England, a child of privilege. He was known as a politician, social reformer, early Quaker, real estate entrepreneur, and he fought against the slave trade (Benge and Benge 2002). He was an early advocate of religious freedom. He attended Oxford University at the age of 16 and was a serious student. He founded the American State of Pennsylvania.

**William Wilberforce** (1780–1825) was born nearly 62 years after Penn's death, in England, in the City of Hull and was also a child of privilege (Metaxas 2007). He was a politician and led the movement to eradicate the slave trade. This remained his life's work. At the age of 17, he attended Cambridge University. Wilberforce was an evangelical Anglican.

**Margret Benedictsson** (nee Jonsdottir) (1866–1956), was born into poverty and out of wedlock in Hrappsstadir, Iceland. She was a Unitarian, journalist, social activist, and suffragist who through her service to the Manitoba Icelandic communities in Selkirk, Gimli, and Winnipeg championed education, improved working conditions, and human rights (Cleverdon 1974).

**Eleanor Roosevelt** (1884–1962) was born in Manhattan, New York City. She was known as a politician, diplomat and activist (Burns and Dunn 2002). Her parents were wealthy socialites (Elliott Roosevelt and Anna Hall) and she was the niece of President Theodore Roosevelt. Eleanor was a plain and serious child whose parents were both deceased by 1894. She was Episcopalian.

**Nelson Mandela** (1918–2013), original name: Xhosa, Mandela (clan name: Madiba), was born in Mvezo, South Africa's Cape Province to the Thembu royal family, another child of privilege (Sampson 2000). His parents were devout Christians and sent him to a local Methodist school. His first teacher gave him the English name, Nelson. He completed his secondary school in two years and developed his interest in sports, and gardening. He was known as an anti-apartheid revolutionary, politician, and philanthropist.

## Their Stories and Their Struggles

### William Penn (1644–1718)

When William Penn entered Oxford University at 17 years, he became a serious student while developing opinions and beliefs in justice and fairness. He realized that he would be in this world only once, so any goodness he could do, should be done here and now. He bravely resisted injustice towards his Dean at Oxford University and deliberately and defiantly attended studies at the Dean's home. Additional strict university rules were ignored and ultimately, Penn was expelled from Oxford. By the age 22 years, Penn had joined The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and was imprisoned for religious dissent. Regardless, he was released from prison because of his father's influence- Admiral Penn, but disinherited and Penn was forced to leave his family home and live with Quakers. This crucible experience set Penn on his first choice for his future: Quakerism. Penn believed Quakers did not have a political agenda. He became friends with George Fox who founded the Quakers and they travelled through Europe and England and spoke of individual rights that are the basis of democracy (Crippen 2012). Penn's deliberate and constant writings and comments against all religions, but the Quakers, resulted in his being imprisoned several times over his lifetime.

King Charles charged him with blasphemy and had him put in solitary confinement in the Tower of London. Penn was released after eight months in prison, but remained steadfast in his Quaker beliefs. He maintained his stance. Subsequent situations generated additional court appearances, that is, refusing to remove his hat in court (contempt of court); gathering with five or more people in a public place for religious purposes; and involved the refusal of jury members from removing their hats; and from rendering a not guilty verdict when directed by the judge to do so. In doing so, this case shaped the concept of jury nullification.

His father had provided a lifetime of service to the Crown. Admiral Penn was promised that his son William would be protected as a royal counsellor. After the Admiral's death, Penn inherited a large fortune, but continued to create tensions owing to his religious writings (he spent six months in jail), and he married Gulielma Springett in 1672, after a

four-year engagement. The persecution of Quakers was growing and Penn appealed to the King directly. Penn's solution was a mass emigration of English Quakers to North America. In 1677, Penn and others purchased the colonial province of West Jersey and in 1682, East Jersey (now the state of New Jersey).

Penn wanted to expand the Quaker region and received a generous charter from the King to do so. In 1681, King Charles II named the newly acquired land Pennsylvania in honour of his father, Admiral Penn. Soon after, William Penn drafted *a charter of liberties guaranteeing free and fair trial by jury, freedom of religion, freedom from unjust imprisonment and free elections*. Many religious minorities arrived, including, Mennonites, Amish, Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews. Penn was not wise when handling money and lost considerable amounts through unwise investments. He was placed in debtor's prison at age 62. Sympathetic Friends helped to secure his release and financial payback for monies lost during his fight for ownership of Pennsylvania. Penn remained in England for 18 years and returned to Pennsylvania where religious diversity was succeeding. The emphasis on education helped establish Philadelphia as a leader in medicine and science. During 1712, Penn suffered two strokes that left him unable to speak and he slowly lost his memory. He died penniless in 1718 at Ruscombe, England, but remained true to his opposition to slavery and faithful to his Quaker beliefs.

## Choices and Challenges of William Penn

Penn's deliberate choices often got him into trouble. His defiance while at Oxford included his loyalty to the Dean and Penn's attendance at the home of the Dean for his classes. This action had been forbidden by the Oxford administration. Penn felt the Dean had been treated unfairly and Oxford had exhibited injustices. Penn continued to ignore strict university rules and was ultimately expelled. As a young man, Penn developed a strong sense of moral purpose and values and through his careful listening to discussions of the time, he was convinced to join the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). His beliefs and acts of responsibility caused him to be imprisoned for religious dissent (Penn's crucible of adversity)

several times over his lifetime. These consequences were an embarrassment to his well-known father and resulted in young Penn being turned out from his home. While living in the homes of fellow Quakers he became close to their founding leader, George Fox. Penn took action for significant practices for which he was held in contempt (refusing to remove his hat while in court). He also spoke out strongly against slavery and its lack of humanity. Due to family connections with the Crown, Penn was able to establish what is now Pennsylvania, additionally he encouraged freedom for religious minorities who had emigrated there as well as helped craft their Charter of Religious Freedom and the establishment of free elections. Sadly, when he returned to England penniless, it led to his death while languishing in prison. His story exemplifies choices based upon equality, stewardship, justice, and empathy, and the building of good communities and his relentless journey to meet those challenges (Crippen 2010).

### **William Wilberforce (1759–1833)**

William Wilberforce's main aims in life were the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners. He was a small, sickly, and delicate child with poor eyesight, who as a young boy lived with puritan relatives. At 12 years, his mother brought him back to Hull to raise him with traditional Anglican ideals. He was well liked and, apparently, a fine singer who loved horticulture. He received a BA in 1781 and an MA in 1788 from Cambridge University. During his years there, he became friends with the future Prime Minister of England, William Pitt. Wilberforce decided to run for parliament as an independent and he formally entered politics at age 21. Wilberforce was often disorganized and late and this may have prevented him from being appointed to a future ministerial position. He became independently wealthy upon the death of his grandfather and uncle. While on a tour and family vacation to Europe in 1784, Wilberforce enjoyed gambling and dining. But, in 1785, after reading *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (Doddridge, c. 1746), Wilberforce became an evangelical Anglican and this resulted in many changes (his crucible of adversity) to his lifestyle and a lifelong concern for reform, and he read the Bible each morning to start his day.

His religion strongly influenced his outlook on life. This crucible experience, perhaps the most significant one of his lifetime, set the path for his commitment to social change. He believed strongly in religion, morality, and education. In 1786, he became involved in the anti-slavery movement and was encouraged by his political colleagues to lead the abolitionists. At first, he doubted his ability, but eventually took on the initiative in parliament. Wilberforce presented a bill in 1789 and spoke eloquently and passionately about slavery—the bill was defeated. Wilberforce tried again the following year, but the anti-abolitionists were well organized and the topic was delayed for many years. This was due in part to the war with France in 1793 and the development of a strong sense of conservatism within England. In 1790, Wilberforce joined the Clapham Sect in London because of their focus upon spiritual and moral values. He wanted to provide all children with regular education in reading, personal hygiene, and religion. Wilberforce did not abandon the cause against slavery and he tried again by making it illegal for ships to aid the French slave trade. This bill effectively ended 75% of the slave trade.

By 1807, both houses of parliament passed the Slave Trade Act and Wilberforce had a strong show of support with the votes going 283 to 16 in favour of abolishment. He retired from parliament in 1825. The fight against slavery was not over and Wilberforce campaigned the rest of his life for the rights of slaves in Africa and other parts of the world and on 26 July 1833, a few days before his death, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed. Slavery was outlawed for most parts of the British Empire. It is important to note that Wilberforce supported other social issues such as prison reform, education, missionary work in India, and public health. He was a part of The Society for the Suppression of Vice, British missionary work in India, the creation of a free colony in Sierra Leone, the foundation of the Church Mission Society, and the Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He received criticism for his personal choice of helping others outside of England. Wilberforce married late in life and he and his wife had six children in ten years. He maintained his stance against slavery, regardless of opposition until his death. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

## Choices and Challenges of William Wilberforce

It seems that Wilberforce's challenges began with his adoption as an evangelical Anglican. Although independently wealthy, he chose to give up drinking and gambling and he began each day with reading the Bible. He chose to devote his life to the abolishment of slavery (beginning in 1786 until his death in 1833) and to the stewardship of others, in and out of England, through his parliamentary and missionary initiatives. His lifetime choices were all-consuming and he did not marry until late in life and was away much of the time. He continued to learn and grow through his involvement with external organizations, his travel, and became keenly aware of global issues. His ability to be patient, deliberate, persuasive, and a moral leader were indicators of his servant leadership.

### Margret Benedictsson (1866–1956)

Margret Jonsdottir was born out of wedlock on a poor farm in northern Iceland, the daughter of Jon Jonsson, a farmer, and Kristjana Ebenesarsdottir, a maid and caregiver to Jon's wife Margret, who was bedridden with leprosy. Soon after giving birth to Margret, Ebenesarsdottir left and Margret was left in the Jonssons' care. The couple had two sons, both had leprosy. When Margret Jonsson died in 1868, Jon remarried and moved several times. Margret was put into foster care and worked on local farms for two years. Though Margret's father eventually came to get her, he soon died in 1879, when she was 13 years old. Margret was now on her own (Crippen 2008).

Margret heard that girls could get an education in America and by 1887 she borrowed money for fare and sailed to the United States. Margret settled in Gardar, an Icelandic settlement in Pembina County, Dakota Territory, where she worked to put herself through grade school and two years at Bathgate College, a business school. In approximately 1891, Margret moved to Winnipeg, where she attended evening classes in bookkeeping, shorthand, and typing at the Winnipeg Central Business College and became a member of the Icelandic Women's Society (Crippen 2008). She staged plays and held raffles, banquets, and tombolas

(a kind of lottery) at the Winnipeg Unitarian Church to raise funds for scholarships for young women, financial assistance for newly arrived immigrants, and a counsellor to help Icelandic girls find suitable employment. Unitarians encourage social improvement, individual freedom, tolerance, and a belief in the unity or oneness of God (<http://online.ksm.edu/univ/>).

In 1893, Margret married Sigfus B. Benedictsson, a well-known writer, poet, printer and publisher in the Manitoba Icelandic community. In Iceland, women could vote in church elections, and since 1882, widows and single women could vote at the municipal level. On 2 February 1893, Benedictsson gave her first lecture on women's rights to the Winnipeg Icelandic community. She became a well-known women's suffrage speaker and organizer. However, because of her daytime household duties and childcare responsibilities as a wife and mother, Margret usually lectured in the evening and pursued her writing late at night. She maintained meticulous handwritten journals during her life. These are kept in the archives of the Reykjavik Library (reviewed in person, September 2015).

Margret and Sigfus Benedictsson established a printing press in Selkirk, Manitoba, and in 1898 began printing the monthly magazine *Freyja* (woman). The magazine featured serialized fiction, biographical sketches, poetry, literary reviews, letters, and a children's corner. But it was also a place to discuss women's suffrage. Benedictsson went so far as to encourage female readers to withhold affection and sexual relations in order to influence men to vote for candidates supporting equal rights for women and social welfare. Sigfus moved the printing press to Winnipeg and refused to allow Margret access. In 1910, Margret divorced Sigfus, a bold and courageous move. At the time, marriage could only be dissolved through a lengthy process, requiring an *Act of Parliament*, usually proof of adultery and upwards of \$500 in fees. Until 1971, it's estimated that less than 1% of marriage in Manitoba ended in divorce (Crippen 2008).

With failing eyesight, Margret left Manitoba in 1912 with her son, Ingi, and daughter, Helen. They moved to Seattle and then Blaine, Washington. Margret Benedictsson died on 13 December 1956, at her daughter's home in Anacortes, Washington.



## Choices and Challenges of Margret Benedictsson

Benedictsson was a survivor. Born into poverty and orphaned by her early teens, she worked relentlessly on farms and home service to improve and to assist others to grow too. She was a voracious reader and kept meticulous journals of her life. She lived originally in Iceland and bravely emigrated alone to North Dakota and then Manitoba. She focused on her education and obtained clerical and bookkeeping skills by her early twenties. Benedictsson was completely self-sustaining. The Unitarian Church and particularly the Icelandic women of Manitoba provided her foundation for community outreach and service and human rights and suffrage. Benedictsson married an Icelandic writer and together they established the magazine, *Freyja*, which encouraged the voice and opinions of others. She spoke and wrote in the evenings so this would not interfere with her daytime responsibilities working in the print shop and as a mother. Courageously she divorced her husband, Sigfus, on grounds of adultery and no longer had access to the printing press. Thus, her speaking and travel escalated to deliver her message of human rights until her failing eyesight became a detriment to her health.

## Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962)

Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt lived in Hyde Park, New York. Her mother-in-law lived in a connecting home and dominated their children. Eleanor did not feel comfortable with children in general, but she and two friends bought the Todhunter School for Girls. It was a finishing school and offered college prefatory course work. Eleanor taught upper level courses in American history and literature while reinforcing independent thought. She gave up teaching after her husband became President. Although Franklin Roosevelt had an affair with Eleanor's social secretary, Lucy Mercer, Eleanor remained devoted to him after his diagnosis of polio. As a result, Eleanor began serving as a stand-in for her incapacitated husband. She made many public appearances on his behalf.

Eleanor redefined the role of First Lady. She continued her work in feminist activism and gave regular press conferences and, in 1940, was the first to speak at a national party convention. She was also the first to write a daily newspaper column and wrote for a monthly magazine and hosted a weekly radio show. Most of the salary was given to charity. She maintained strong support for the rights of women and civil rights. What started out as listening for a local state legislator ended up with her travelling to the war fronts during WWII, comforting and listening to wounded GIs, and those that were going into battle for the first time. She became a passionate advocate for the unemployed, the poor, and especially black Americans and women (McCarthy and Crippen 2003).

Eleanor was invited to participate in a conference being held in a church. She arrived late and took the closest seat available. She was sitting in the black section. She was asked to move and she refused. The speaker refused to continue. Both sides of the church encouraged her to move so things could go on. Eleanor called for a folding chair. She placed the folding chair squarely between the black and white sections and sat down. The meeting proceeded, but Eleanor had sent a strong message (crucible of adversity). Most newspapers in the US and some international too showed pictures of her sitting there with whites on one side, and blacks on the other.

She started a national tour so she could report to the president. She visited industrial plants, daycare centres, women's organizations, industrialists, labour union representatives, and listened far more than she talked. She gathered much compelling evidence of labour shortages, the need to run plants 24 hours a day, the women's compelling desire to help the war effort, and the economic necessity to employ every possible person in the war effort that President Roosevelt moved into a leadership role in supporting and pushing key legislation through both houses of Congress (Gerber 2003). Without the compelling evidence gathered by Eleanor, the President could not have challenged cultural norms.

In 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt was a national icon, but no one knew what to do with her after the death of her husband. President Truman appointed Eleanor as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1946. Official Washington underestimated her, and her determination to make it work went on for two years.

She met with voting members of the United Nations to support the document. She left nothing to chance. The document was radical and too threatening to national sovereignty to pass. But, it did. Eleanor never referred to herself as a leader (McCarthy and Crippen 2003).

## Choices and Challenges of Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt was a hidden steward. Although shy and privileged, she developed skills in the finishing school she and two friends established that included her teaching American history and literature, but, most importantly, independent thought to young women. This was outside the norms for women at the time and such practice encouraged careful listening skills, persuasion, and foresight. Eleanor's own personality developed when her husband became President and she became his eyes and ears when he was stricken with polio. Her service was ongoing and consistent for all demographics, that is, blacks, military, unemployed, the poor, women's rights, and civil rights. She believed that she must take action when things needed to be done. It was the right thing to do. She served tirelessly, responsibly, and justly into her old age. She was a feminist and strong woman and perceived by many males as a threat. She was ahead of her time.

## Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)

Nelson Mandela was a South African revolutionary who served as the President of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. He was the country's first black head of state. He had a love of gardening and became a long-distance runner and boxer. He began a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Fort Hare (an elite black institution). Mandela wanted South Africa to become independent of the British Empire. He was known for his energies towards anti-apartheid, politics, and philanthropy. Mandela fled to Johannesburg in 1941 to avoid an arranged marriage. He obtained a job as an articled clerk at a law firm. Here he met ANC (African National Congress) and Communist Party members. Mandela

was fascinated that Europeans, Africans, Indians and Coloureds mixed as equals. He completed his bachelor's degree (University of South Africa) at night through correspondence courses. He returned in 1943 to Johannesburg to follow a political path as a lawyer.

Over the next eight years Mandela was involved with various political groups and actions, especially the ANC where he and his colleagues advocated direct action against apartheid, such as boycotts and strikes (Boehmer 2008). His interests were mainly political and he faced racism at the university as the only black student. He failed his final year at the University of Witwatersrand three times and was denied his degree in 1949. At the ANC national conference in December 1951, he argued against a racially united front and was outvoted. From then on, he embraced the idea of a multiracial front against apartheid. In 1952, at a rally in Durban, Mandela spoke to the crowds and was arrested briefly. The numbers of ANC members grew from 20,000 to 100,000. The Public Safety Act of 1953 permitted martial law. Mandela became well known in South Africa as a black political leader who was elected regional president in October 1953.

The next few years saw him accused and jailed for statutory communism, attending meetings or talking to individuals of more than a few people at a time. His speech, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (1953), was read out at a Transvaal ANC meeting and it became known as the Mandela Plan. He worked for several law firms and finally in August 1953, Mandela became a full-fledged attorney and he and his friend, Tambo, opened a joint law firm in downtown Johannesburg. By 1954, Mandela was regarded as a part of the elite black middle class and had much respect from the black community. It was during this time that his marriage became very strained and his wife left him. (Nelson Mandela, Wikipedia, Jan. 25, 2017). He was initially committed to nonviolent protests. In 1962, he was arrested for conspiring to overthrow the state and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia Trial. He served 27 years in prison on Robben Island and later in Pollsmoor and Victor Verster Prisons. This was another crucible of adversity for Mandela.

His deep concrete cell on Robben Island measured 8 feet by 7 feet plus a straw mat upon which to sleep. He spent his days breaking rocks into gravel and later was assigned to the lime quarry. His eyesight suffered

without sunglasses in the glare of the lime. He completed his LLB degree from the University of London through correspondence. Newspapers were forbidden. He was classified at the lowest level of criminal—Class D—and was permitted one letter and one visit every six months. He was relentless, consistent, and determined to choose to do right, be a humanitarian, and continue to grow regardless of the circumstances.

President F.W. de Klerk released him in 1990 due to international pressures and growing fears of racial civil war. In 1994, Mandela led his ANC party to victory and became president. He led a broad coalition government which created a new constitution. He created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He introduced measures to encourage land reform, combat poverty, and expand healthcare services. He declined a second term as president, but went on to focus on charitable work, combating poverty and HIV/AIDS through the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

## **Choices and Challenges of Nelson Mandela**

Mandela was a man against all odds. Although born into African royalty, he was raised in an atmosphere of prejudice, injustice, and violence. He chose to respond carefully, respectfully, and always with the focus on building a better community and country of South Africa. His time in prison would have crushed the identity of many a person, but, instead it fortified him to continue to challenge the status quo. He wrote about the gift of time to reflect while incarcerated. Listening to self and then others is regarded as the key point in servant leadership. Mandela obtained the highest office in South Africa as a black. His service and recognition through peaceful means remains as a beacon for others today.

## **What Can We Learn?**

Each historical figure seemed deeply influenced by a religion and a set of values over their lifetime. Penn was a Quaker by conviction and came to that belief at 22 years of age. Wilberforce was strongly influenced by a strong evangelical Anglican faith foundation. Benedictsson was a member

of the Unitarian Church. Roosevelt (Episcopalian) and Mandela (Methodist) were both Christians. Often these religious beliefs and circumstances created adversity in their lives (Snyder 2013, p. 23). When reading about their religion and faith, the impact of Penn's Quakerism was strong and in some regards, almost penalizing. He never relented and went to prison and jail for his beliefs several times. It seems that Penn, Wilberforce, and Mandela encountered tension within their beliefs and actions when they entered university in their teens and early 20s. They made connections with other students and senior scholars and other faiths and political affiliations. They were keen to learn and grow. Entering university seems like a crucible for all these young men. They felt a responsibility and awareness of the tyranny of slavery and they saw the grim future for slaves and racism if prejudice was not eliminated. Wilberforce and Penn fought against the slave trade and remained so in the face of failure for many years.

All five stories demonstrate the resilience and tenacity of each servant-leader in the face of life struggles. Four of the five were persons of privilege. Regardless, their ideas were contentious surrounding slavery, religion, racism, and social status. Only Benedictsson grew up in poverty. None of these five historical figures passed through life without confronting resistance to their ideas or actions. Each crucible experience set the rest of their life's journey. What was the cost for their tenacity? Penn and Mandela were both imprisoned for their democratic beliefs and practices. Benedictsson and Roosevelt acted outside the accepted female norm, worked for women's right to vote, and spoke in public and supported childcare and human rights. Penn and Wilberforce stood firm against slavery with courage and seemed fearless in opposition to their new ideas and efforts to change society for the better. Benedictsson divorced her husband Sigfus, and paid the cost for the procedure. The charge was adultery and less than 1% went through such a separation at that time. They were all keen listeners, thoughtful observers of their environment and others, champions of the downtrodden by economic hardship or slavery. Roosevelt was completely underestimated. She substituted for her husband, Franklin, during his illness. She was a persuader and collaborator for the United Nations and persevered to bring the document

to fruition. Mandela's lengthy time in isolation in prison remains an example of complete resiliency, whereby he was released from prison without harbouring vindication or hatred. All five maintained their stance under hardship with resolve. The five made choices named by Greenleaf (2006, pp. 9–12): responsibility to one's self and others; awareness/foresight of the moment and situation; continuing to grow and learn; relationships/humanness; being ourselves (how one chooses to live one's life); and being as great as they could be (using the moment as best you can). They were change agents for the greater good regardless of the high cost of isolation, rejection, imprisonment, ridicule, and economic hardship. They remain as exemplars of courage, responsibility, and social conscience for present aspiring servant-leaders and for future investors of the greater good.

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# Part II

## Becoming the Servant Leader



# 5

## The Motivation to Serve as a Corner Stone of Servant Leadership

Peter Sun

### Introduction

What motivates a leader to serve? To transcend beyond self and serve the legitimate needs of others. What motivates them to seek the growth and development of others, to be more effective and better servant leaders? Graham (1995) suggests that servant leaders are at the post-conventional moral stage, and therefore exhibit moral behaviors that incorporate consideration of others. Sun (2013) extends this perspective by suggesting that servant leaders incorporate a well-defined servant identity, and hence are motivated to exhibit behaviors that align with their salient servant identity. This chapter seeks to examine the motivational foundation for servant behaviors by incorporating these ego, moral, identity, and cognitive perspectives, to understand what drives servant behaviors.

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The chapter also challenges our assumption of self-sacrificing altruism, and examines the possibility that leaders can exhibit servant behaviors from a self-serving angle. In a recent study, Owens et al. (2015) show how narcissism and humility – a key dimension of servant leadership behavior – can co-exist; and such paradoxical co-existence is in fact beneficial for both leaders and their followers. Does this point to different shades of servant leaders, and if so, what motivational foundation drives these shades of behaviors?

## The Motivation to Serve as a Corner Stone of Servant Leadership

‘Servant leadership,’ coined from two paradoxical words ‘servant’ and ‘leader,’ has seen an increase in interest in recent years. Of all the positive forms of leadership such as authentic, ethical, and spiritual, servant leadership explains larger performance variance over and beyond the most widely researched transformational leadership style (see Hoch et al. [in press](#), for a meta-analysis).

What distinguishes servant leadership from all other forms of positive leadership style? In his theoretical review of servant leadership, van Dierendonck (2011) suggests that although servant leadership style shares some similarities with other positive forms of leadership, none of them combine the drive to be a leader with a focus on serving followers’ needs. In their recent meta-analysis, Hoch et al. ([in press](#)) suggest that their propensity to serve may be the factor that distinguishes servant leaders from all other forms of leadership style. Neubert et al. (2016) state that ‘what makes servant leadership distinctive from other forms of leadership is its unique focus on other-centered service’ (p. 3). Robert Greenleaf who brought servant leadership into workplaces says that the servant leader is servant first (Greenleaf 1970). Given the exclusive focus on serving followers’ legitimate needs is the distinguishing factor, what is the motivational foundation for serving? The next section describes servant leaders’ motivation to serve, and uses adult development theory to explain how such motivation evolves.

## Motivational Foundation for Serving

An individual's motivation for particular behaviors stems from his/her identity (Day et al. 2009). Instead of having a singular identity, an individual's self-construct is a 'multi-faceted and dynamic cognitive structure consisting of all of a person's *identities*' (Campbell et al. 1996; Obodaru 2012, p. 36, italics added). These identities can take many forms, defining a person by their personal characteristics, their memberships in groups and organizations, their personal roles, and so on. An important identity is the self-identity, which is the identity that relates to self and relationships with others. Such a self-identity is constituted by attributes, which are evaluative standards that individuals cognitively engage with when triggered by situations and context (Hannah et al. 2009). This ensures that behaviors that a person enacts align with their particular self-identity. Identities are therefore people's desire to be self-expressive, that is, to express their feelings and values (Shamir et al. 1993).

Sun (2013) argues that a particular self-identity, at the root of servant leadership, is the self-identity of a servant. It is this self-identity that is the foundation for the motivation to serve (MTS) others (Sun 2013). Attributes such as a calling to serve, humility, empathy, and love are the evaluative standards constituting such a servant identity (Sun 2013). Such an identity is what drives servant leaders to want to serve first.

It is important to distinguish between MTS and motivation to lead (MTL). Like MTS, the MTL can stem from a leader self-identity. Individuals who have the desire to lead, sees him or herself as a leader in most situations, thinks that leadership is ingrained in them by nature, has a strong self-identity as a leader. Chan and Drasgow (2001) refer to this aspect of MTL as affective-identity MTL. However, unlike MTS, MTL does not focus on those who are being led. Rather, the focus is on the leader—whether the leader will personally benefit by leading (i.e., 'Noncalculative MTL') or whether it is a duty or obligation to lead when called upon to do so (i.e., 'Social-Normative MTL') (Chan and Drasgow 2001).

A fruitful direction for future research is to investigate the dynamics of the relationship between the MTS and MTL bases for servant leaders. Servant leaders' natural desire is to serve first; however, to take on a lead-

ership role is a conscious choice if it affords the platform to serve the legitimate needs of others (Greenleaf 1970). What drives this conscious choice to lead? Is it driven by a calling and duty to lead (i.e., higher 'Social-Normative')? Will servant leaders who aspire to lead be less likely to consider the personal cost of leading (i.e., they have a higher 'Noncalculative' MTL)? There are no studies that the author is aware of consider these dynamics. The only study incorporating MTL is the research done by Lacroix and Verdorfer (2017). Instead of considering the dynamics between MTS and MTL, this study shows how followers' core self-evaluation mediates the relationship between their managers' servant leadership behaviors and their (i.e., followers') affective-identity MTL and Noncalculative MTL.

Because MTS links to self-identity (Sun 2013), the MTS will evolve with ego development as identity formation is an important component of adult development (Moshman 2003), in which a highly organized and principled structure of self-conception evolves (Day et al. 2009). The section to follow briefly explains the adult development stages. The relationship with servant leadership will also be unpacked.

## Adult Development Stages

The literature on constructive development suggests that adults undergo development stages through personally relevant life experiences (McCauley et al. 2006). McCauley et al. (2006) summarizing the constructive development state that '*there are identifiable patterns of meaning making that people share in common with one another; these are variously referred to as stages, orders of consciousness, ways of knowing, levels of development, organizing principles, or orders of development...orders of development unfold in a specific invariant sequence, with each successive order transcending and including the previous order...in general, people do not regress; once an order of development has been constructed, the previous order loses its organizing function, but remains as a perspective that can now be reflected upon*' (p. 636). The constructive development moves beyond the study of children to include lifelong adult development; it moves from a study of cognition to include emotions; it goes beyond external influences on development to development through internal experiences; and it

provides understanding of the processes involved in bringing the stages of development to being (Kegan 1980; McCauley et al. 2006). In short, adult development is about construction of meaning making that takes into account individuals' emotional, personal, and their social worlds (Kegan 1980).

With increasing experiences (that usually come with age), leaders tend to take on behaviors that are transformational and exhibit ethics of care if they are driven to leave a positive legacy behind for the succeeding generation (Zacher et al. 2011)—an attitude of servant leaders. It is therefore more common to see servant leadership behaviors that embrace an altruistic focus on others in those leaders who have matured in their moral and self-development (Graham 1995).

Using Kegan (1980) constructive development theory that explains the motivational foundation for adult behaviors, this chapter expands on our understanding of what underpins servant leadership behaviors. Kegan's constructive development framework has been used to study the foundation of transformational and transactional leadership (e.g., Kuhnert and Lewis 1987), as well as research on leader development (e.g., McCauley et al. 2006). It is a theoretical framework that explains the formation of self-identities that has relevance to moral leadership such as servant leadership (Day et al. 2009). For this reason, Kegan's framework is a useful theoretical base for this study.

When progressing through the stages of development, the deep structures of the person's meaning-making system evolves to developing a distinction between self and others. Making the distinction between self and others, and the meaning of its interrelationships, involves the distinction between what is 'subject' and what is 'object.' The 'subject' is the structure (or the lens) through which the individual makes sense of the world. It is those underlying beliefs and assumptions, the difficult-to-examine value system that is central to the individual self-construct, which govern meaning making. The 'object' is what is consciously manipulated. Kegan argues that for development to occur, it is essential that what is 'subject' must surface to become the conscious object of manipulation.

Kegan (1980) proposes six stages of development (starting with Stage 0). Of these, the Stages 2 to 5 link to leadership (Kuhnert and Lewis 1987; McCauley et al. 2006). Kegan's Stage 2 (Imperial) demonstrates an

individual whose subconscious focus is self (i.e., self-needs, self-interests, and wishes). The self is the subject. The interpersonal relationships become the conscious object of manipulation for purposes of self-gain. Leaders at Stage 2 exercise lower order transactional behaviors (Kuhnert and Lewis 1987). At the extreme, they could be narcissistic, exercising pseudo-transformational leadership behaviors.

When they progress to Stage 3 (Interpersonal), the interpersonal relationship becomes the subject, while they consciously manipulate self as the object (i.e., self-needs, interests, and wishes) in order to satisfy interpersonal mutuality. Such leaders tend to conform to social expectations, and their leadership effectiveness derives from being prototypical of their group. At this stage, the individual is able to integrate and regulate the way they work with others. Kegan (1980) suggests that this is the base stage needed for a person's employability. As they progress to Stage 4 (Institutional), their autonomous self becomes the subject. They consciously manipulate interpersonal relationship, distinguish the opinions and actions of others, and are subject to their own internal compass and ideology. At Stage 5 (Interindividual), the individual is able to hold self as the object of manipulation, and hence better suited to hold contradictions between different belief systems and ideologies. They develop a self-transforming mind.

Other studies have come up with a similar approach to that of Kegan. In line with Kegan's six stages of consciousness, Torbert and colleagues have developed their own constructive-developmental stages. They suggest seven stages that are relevant for leadership: Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Individualist, Strategist, and Alchemist (Rooke and Torbert 2005). In a review of constructive-developmental theories relevant to leadership, McCauley et al. (2006) integrated Kegan's (1982), Torbert's (1987), and Kohlberg's (1969) stage theories, and suggested three main sense-making stages: Dependent, Independent, and Interdependent. The three orders of sense making have been utilized by Valcea et al. (2011) to theorize how leaders and followers can progress in their development order through their interactions with each other. The three orders of sense making by McCauley et al. (2006) closely align with Kegan's Interpersonal, Institutional, and Interindividual stages of development, where self and others become increasingly the focus of change and transformation.

## Servant Leadership ‘Base Camp’

Stage 2 is not the stage where the motivation to serve can start. At Stage 3, serving others can begin, provided an appropriate serving culture exists in the organization. Liden et al. (2014) describe serving culture ‘*as a work environment in which participants share the understanding that the behavioral norms and expectations are to prioritize the needs of others above their own and to provide help and support to others*’ (p. 1437). It is the perceived collective behavior, and is set as an expected behavior of the work unit as well as of the formal leaders (Liden et al. 2014). If the expectation of others is to engage in serving behaviors, the individual at Stage 3 will be able to manipulate self-expression to engage in such behaviors, as it is a collective expectation.

Another culture that can be a collective expectation is a culture of humility. Humility is a foundational virtue for serving, and in fact many studies on servant leadership regard humility as the essential characteristic needed to serve as a leader (e.g., Sun 2013). Humble servant leaders are able to set aside their position, status, and talents, in order to utilize the talents of others (Dennis and Bocarnea 2005; Van Dierendonck 2011; Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011). They are able to keep their position and capability in proper perspective (Patterson 2003). They are willing to be held accountable by their subordinates, receive criticism and feedback, and even retreat to the background when tasks are accomplished (Van Dierendonck 2011; Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011). Such exercise of humility by servant leaders, through social learning, will filter through to the culture of the unit they are leading.

Humility has two dimensions: intrapersonal and interpersonal. The intrapersonal dimension necessitates a balanced internal processing of personal strengths and weaknesses, while the interpersonal dimension is to seek to learn from others (Owens et al. 2013). It is the interpersonal dimension that is the expressed humility and can exist as an organizational culture. Such expressed humility is seen in the organization when:

- Individuals within the organization are encouraged to be transparent about their personal limit, seek feedback, and acknowledge mistakes, that is, a culture where ‘seeing oneself accurately’ is encouraged



- Individuals within the organization readily know and acknowledge the strengths and skill sets of others, and not be threatened to utilize others' skills.
- Individuals in the organization are teachable by showing a willingness to learn, receive feedback, and receive new ideas.

A culture of serving and humility are boundary conditions for servant leadership behaviors to emerge in Stage 3 of adult development. Individuals at Stage 3 of their development can be socially conditioned to exercise serving and humility when it is an expectation within the organization. An example of social conditioning is seen in productive narcissists (Owens et al. 2015). Productive narcissists can temper their desire for self-enhancement (i.e., to temper their desire to inflate their self-worth), and look for the strengths of others. Such contradictory behaviors are possible and can exist simultaneously and persist over time (Smith and Lewis 2011). Leaders at Stage 3 of their ego development can be socially conditioned to manipulate their inflated sense of self-worth and look at strengths of others because that is the collective expectation.

The majority of adults, unfortunately, tend to plateau at this stage of development. Holt (1980) in his study of US adult samples shows that majority of adults can be categorized as 'conformists.' As conformists, they tend to place high value of being accepted by their reference group, and have the capacity to delay and redirect impulses to conform to social expectations. They place emphasis on stereotypes and show beginning stages of self-awareness. However, at this Stage 3, if utilizing others' strengths is disadvantageous to self, then it is likely they would resort to some self-enhancement tendencies, thereby vacillating between expressed humility and self-enhancement behaviors. This is the 'base camp' of the motivational foundation for serving.

### **Servant Leadership 'Mid Camp'**

At Stage 4, the identity of a servant evolves as an important self-construct. Self-identity is a powerful motivating factor for engaging in self-congruent behaviors. How does such a 'serving' identity evolve? Is it driven by a higher sense of calling to serve (Sendjaya and Cooper 2011; Sun 2013)?

Does it evolve out of a spiritual experience, as, for example, Christians are asked to emulate their Lord Jesus Christ, who can be regarded as the greatest servant of all (Sun 2013)? It can be argued that the basis of serving arises out of one's self-concept as a servant and such an identity will have attributes of self-transcendence (Sun 2013).

The transition from 'base camp' to 'mid camp' of servant leadership is important. From being socially conditioned to display servant leadership behaviors to expressing behaviors that are congruent to self-identity, this transitioning marks an important step change. How does this step change occur? Servant leadership literature is largely silent about this. Adult development literature speaks of the need for personally relevant life experiences, cognitive development through learning and experiences, as well as immersing in different cultural contexts as important triggers for transition to occur (Kegan 1982; McCauley et al. 2006). Development movement occurs when complex experiences reveal the limitation of current ways of constructing meaning (McCauley et al. 2006). The role of development experiences cannot be ignored, as it has an impact on leadership development (Howard and Irving 2014). There is therefore a need for literature to research this important area of transition as it can be of practical significance for servant leadership development.

The existing literature implicitly conceptualizes servant leaders as belonging to this Stage of development. Literature argues that servant leadership behaviors cannot be normalized and proceduralized and taught as a technique that needs practicing. For this reason, Greenleaf (1970, 1977) conceptualized servant leadership behaviors as a way of life rather than a management technique to be learnt and practiced (Parris and Peachey 2013).

Such a servant orientation, a way of life of the servant leader, can have a positive impact on others through social learning. Empirical research has shown that there will be a trickle-down effect of servant behaviors through social learning (Ehrhart 2004; Hu and Liden 2011; Neubert et al. 2016). For example, servant leadership behaviors of nurse managers encourage nurses to engage in helping one another (Neubert et al. 2016).

Although studies have shown that servant leadership behaviors will trickle down to their teams through social learning and enhance team effectiveness, can it have an overall positive impact on the organization?

Servant leadership can enhance the organizational citizenship behaviors of individual team members (OCB-I) due to their trust and relational bond with the servant leader. It can also enhance OCB toward their team members through provision of pro-social support (Liden et al. 2014). However, will it effectively translate to OCB toward the organization? Unlike transformational leadership that encourages individuals to go beyond self for the sake of the organization, servant behaviors encourage relational-orientated extra role behaviors at the interpersonal level.

Literature does point to this possible downside of servant leadership for the organization. *Servant leaders...serve followers as an end in themselves—their needs and development takes a priority over those of the organizations* (Sendjaya and Cooper 2011, p. 418). Although some literature argue that this aspect of servant leadership ensures organizational growth as a long-term by-product (e.g., Stone et al. 2004), others do not necessarily agree. Some argue that servant leaders are not effective in navigating an organization in times of change (e.g., Humphreys 2005; Parolini et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2004). This possible limitation has been noted in previous research, where the servant leaders' preoccupation in serving the needs of followers can come at the detriment of the organization (Sun 2013). It can therefore be argued that an institutional servant identity can hinder the servant leader from engaging with multiple and conflicting ideologies that often come when dealing at the organizational level. This stage is referred to as the 'mid camp' of servant leadership. For leaders to engage with multiple ideologies at the organizational level and yet engage with servant behaviors at the individual level, requires servant leaders to be at a different stage of their development—the servant leadership 'summit' stage.

### **Servant Leadership 'Summit'**

It is at Stage 5 of development that servant leaders have the motivational, as well as cognitive, foundation to balance the paradox of 'serving' (at the individual level) and 'leading' (at the organizational level). A quick review of some recent empirical studies sheds some interesting insights. Van Dierendonck et al. (2014) show servant leadership behaviors significantly

relate to meeting psychological needs of individuals. Another study by Panaccio et al. (2015) shows that servant leadership fosters higher psychological empowerment in their followers. Servant leaders, because of their dealings at the individual level, foster high social exchange with their followers. Their communication exchanges with individual followers are in keeping with others' relational norms (Abu Bakar and McCann 2016), and hence fosters high quality relationships. Such high quality social exchange results in higher psychological contract (Panaccio et al. 2015) and higher LMX (Newman et al. 2017). While servant leadership significantly relates to meeting psychological needs of followers, the association with leadership effectiveness was much lower (van Dierendonck et al. 2014). In contrast, van Dierendonck and colleagues found that transformational leadership was significantly associated (with a much higher unstandardized coefficient) to leadership effectiveness and not psychological needs of followers. These studies show tension for servant leaders to keep an optimum balance of serving psychological needs of followers while maintaining leadership effectiveness at the organization level. How does a servant leader ensure that while serving others in order to enable them to grow in various aspects of their lives, they also simultaneously optimize the long- and short-term goals of the organizations? Maintaining such a tension is the 'summit' of effective servant leadership.

Why is there a tension? Investing in skill development of individuals, especially when there is a clear line of sight with organizational benefit, is an easy decision for leaders to make. Effective leaders are good at recognizing and supporting such employee development. This is the basis of the 'individualized consideration' component of transformational leadership (Bass 1985, 1998). Leaders are able to look at individual skills and competencies, and structure personally relevant experiences and development. However, this clear line of sight blurs when dealing with individual needs that are not directly skill or competency related. Investing time to consider individuals' psychological needs comes at a personal cost to the leader. Especially when leaders are time-poor and resources are scarce, there is tension in investing in such individual needs. In fact, one reason why women prefer not to pursue leadership within organizations is the high personal cost involved, and its detrimental effect on work-life balance (Roebuck et al. 2013).

What about those marginalized within the organization? Those marginalized in the organization can be misfits due to various reasons: does not fit into the culture or personality of the organization; skills and competencies are increasingly irrelevant. For servant leaders to manage such people out of the organization, but in doing so to ensure their individual needs are met is a tension (Sun 2013).

Another tension worth noting is when to let go of servant behaviors. Exhibiting servant behaviors are not necessarily beneficial to all types of followers. For example, followers having extroverted personalities (Panaccio et al. 2015)—such personality characteristics are linked to leadership and leadership emergence and having a proactive personality (Newman et al. 2017)—are less dependent on their leader's servant behaviors for psychological contract fulfillment (Panaccio et al. 2015) or higher quality social exchange (Newman et al. 2017). In fact, a high level of servant behaviors can be detrimental to the social exchange between the servant leader and such followers. The capacity for the servant leader to recognize the possibility of such a detrimental effect, and to restrain certain servant behaviors, comes with greater cognitive and social intelligence. To display servant behaviors differentially, depending on the type of followers, may create some sense of injustice. Understanding these tensions and ensuring behavioral complexity for the benefit of the organization and the individual is the capacity of the 'summit' of servant leadership.

A recent study points to the need for structure, as a boundary condition, for servant leadership effectiveness (Neubert et al. 2016). This study finds that under conditions of high structure (note: structure is a substitute for leadership), the impact of servant leadership on various follower outcomes such as creative behavior is stronger (Neubert et al. 2016). Structure provides substitute for leadership. When there is low structure, servant leaders and followers expend much time to deal with ambiguity, and this reduces the impact of their leadership behaviors. This study shows that the ability to initiate structures that can act as positive moderators of their leadership behavior is a capability required of servant leaders. Initiating structure is a requirement of effective leadership, but existing literature does not include this as a requirement of servant leaders.

What do these discussions on the servant leadership ‘summit’ tell us? They tell us that servant leaders must be able to deal with multiple—at times conflicting—identities while holding an institutional servant identity. To manage individuals out of the organization, to engage in behavioral complexity, to initiate structure for the organization are leadership behaviors that come from a leader rather than servant identity. It tells us that the servant leadership ‘summit’ is a ‘full-range’ of leadership behaviors driven by several identities of which the servant identity is a salient and valued one. Structural symbolic interactionism tells us that self-identities can be arranged in hierarchy of salience (Shamir et al. 1993). Instead of the hierarchy of salience being fixed, the salience of the self-identities can change depending on the situation and context. Such changes can happen in relatively short periods (Sun 2013), enabling the servant leader to deal with multiple and at times conflicting situations.

Future research needs to look at the various personal resources required by the leader engaging in servant leadership ‘summit.’ It requires high cognitive and behavioral complexity as well as morality that are able to deal with conflicting ideologies. This comes from servant leaders who are at Stage 5 of their constructive development.

## Conclusion

Having looked at the motivational foundation of servant leadership, how does it distinguish this style of leadership from other positive forms of leadership? The identity of serving that translates to congruent behaviors is the distinguishing factor. The motivational foundation to serve will reflect in different ways, depending on their stages of development. At the base camp, ‘serving’ occurs as long as it simultaneously enhances the self-enhancement needs of the one who serves. It is conditioned by social expectations. At mid camp, self-sacrifice occurs, but is limited to the followers they serve. At summit, ‘serving’ extends to other constituents, beyond the followers closest to the servant leader. They are able to balance different perspectives and challenges, with the required capability to navigate through such complexities. In essence, their serving is universal rather than follower-focused, and this is what distinguishes servant leaders from other styles of leadership.

This discussion points to the need for future studies on servant leadership to consider the development stages of the leader and their motivation to serve at these stages. It is likely, as argued in this chapter, that serving behaviors can come from a self-enhancement motive as long as it is a social expectation. However, as the servant leader grows along his/her development trajectory, his/her serving behavior will extend beyond self, to those who are closest, to other stakeholders. They are able to embrace different ideologies and work across individuals and organization. Therefore, investigating human values that constitute the servant leader maybe a fruitful direction for future research. By examining the human values that underpin servant leaders, we develop a better understanding of which attributes constitute their self-identity. For example, examining the basic individual values (Schwartz et al. 2012); it can be argued that ‘Universalism concern’ can be that component of value that will distinguish servant leadership from other leadership styles. It goes beyond those who are closest to embrace the larger constituents. In terms of practical application, it points to the need for those engaging in servant leadership development to consider the development stages of the leader.

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# 6

## Self-Reflection and Wonder as Keys to Personal Growth and Servant Leadership

Johan van 'T Zet

### Personal Development and Servant Leadership

In my conversations to managers about what it means to become a good leader, many of them emphasize the importance of personal development and personal growth. The two terms—growth and development—can be interchanged and both refer to the dynamic processes of a person becoming mature (Rogers 1989). It is a process within which a person develops his potential possibilities. According to development psychology, an orderly pattern can be detected underlying this process (Baltes et al. 1980). At the same time, individuals differ in the path they walk and the extent to which they develop and grow during the course of their lifetime; there is considerable variation from person to person.

Given the continuous changes happening in the world around us, it may come as no surprise that personal development is more and more seen as important for allowing the interaction between ourselves and

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society to take place properly. Since our western world is changing at an increasingly fast pace, it appears necessary for a person to also develop at a fast rate. As a result, such a person remains better attuned to one's environment, can become a creative agent within the organization and gain a feeling of control over life.

A key aspect of servant leadership is its emphasis on the growth and development of colleagues for the benefit of the greater whole (Greenleaf 1977). It is, therefore, very important for a leader to first work on himself in order to gain better insight into one's own worth. Personal development will help in obtaining a realistic view of one's character and oneself so as to become more of the person that is already there in potential. If a leader fulfils a leadership role on the basis of this inner potential, it will give stability to both the leader and the other people within the team and organization. As such, personal growth is an essential part of servant leadership.

Servant leadership is strengthened by being more congruent with one's thoughts, feelings and actions and having a better sense of one's own value, (Spears 2004). It is only then that the servant leader will really be able to evaluate the full potential of the other persons in the organization and be able to deploy this potential in the correct way. A leader with more self-awareness is more effective and naturally has a more accepted influence on one's environment. A greater effectiveness as a leader is due to the intrinsic enrichment of self-knowledge, knowledge of the world and its mutual reinforcing relationships. As a result, such leaders can be expected to be more capable of achieving special and lasting results within their team or organization.

According to Carl Rogers (1989), personal growth is a primal urge which is present in all organisms and therefore also in human life. Primal urge is the urge to expand, grow, become autonomous or realize development in order to express and fully activate all the capabilities and talents of the organism for the benefit of the greater whole. It is often described as a universal driving force in life to achieve self-fulfilment.

The process of development takes a lifetime and influences the entire human being. From discovering of one's talents, norms and values, boundaries and limitations, adding knowledge, learning behaviour, growing out of learned patterns and beliefs to learning to see the value of the moral or mastering the art of living.

Personal growth concerns the relationship a person has with oneself, which can give the strength to remain faithful to one's feelings. Insight into the inner feelings and values can lead to the regeneration of them and give content to the identity of and fulfilment as a person (Ryff 1989). As such, personal growth can help increase well-being, whereby the influences from the outside world are less likely to lead to an imbalance.

This chapter will discuss how personal growth can be stimulated via the human abilities of self-reflection and wonder. To create this learning experience, arts-based learning can be instrumental because the artistic processes can facilitate new insights and perspectives about a leader's place and responsibility in dealing with current-day organizational challenges (Nissley 2010).

## New Forms of Organization Require New Leadership Styles

In the past, for an organization, it was only possible to distinguish itself with an effective strategy or an efficient production process. In our current western society, everything comes together and they must also be dealt with simultaneously. This no longer a question of 'either-or' but a question of 'and-and'. This changes the demands of the team, the organization and also of the leader.

As David Ulrich (1977) described in his four-quadrant model, companies and organizations balance on at least two axes at the same time: the axle of operational excellence and effective innovating strategy and the axle of correct processes and skilful people. Within the current era of our western society, 'the human being' must make the difference again. Fortunately, organizations are becoming continually aware that the human being is a vital success factor, particularly with regard to improvement and innovation. To give direction to this movement, 'people' and therefore also 'leaders' have to change too.

Frederic Laloux's (2014) book *Reinventing Organizations* describes how the new forms of organization can be considered as living and open systems. The book describes how every time humanity achieves a new paradigm in its consciousness, radical and more productive organizations

are also developed at the same time. At this moment in time, are we faced again with a critical point for repeating such a developmental step within organizations and society?

The developmental step described above in order to reach a new organizational paradigm of a living and open system is of a very different level of complexity than in the past, and it requires a different type of leadership: the leadership that pays attention to the personal development of people as well as achieving business objectives. Organizations and their leaders must enable employees to work autonomously and at the same time be able to feel united. Servant leadership can play an important role in this.

On the basis of Einstein's statement that we cannot resolve the current problems with the same intellectual level with which we created them, self-reflection and wonder help us to be able to view the challenge from other sight lines. Increasing self-awareness is necessary to make this paradigm shift. Since people are 'part' of teams and teams form organizations, this process begins with gaining insight into the self-awareness of individuals.

## The Art of Self-Reflection

Personal development can be achieved by means of self-reflection as an important ability of the human being (Rogers 1989). This ability enables the human being to develop and advance himself in an active way. Looking at other inhabitants on this earth makes this human being unique.

Self-reflection or 'self-contemplation' is a term from psychology. It is an activity whereby one's own thoughts, feelings and memories become the subject of reflection. Reflecting is recognizing and fathoming processes and patterns which take place consciously and unconsciously within one's own system. This concerns thought processes, behaviour and feelings which occurred from previous experiences and events.

By means of the process of analysing and fathoming these experiences, a human being learns to look at himself more objectively. The honest and factual analysis of one's own behaviour can ensure that idealized perceptions or underlying beliefs are recognized. Recognition is followed by processes of acknowledgement and acceptance.

After acceptance, the idealized perceptions or underlying beliefs can be let go of more easily and replaced by more effective ones. The process of 'growing out of' old beliefs or patterns clears an enormous space in the human thought system. Or as Carl Rogers (1989) describes it: the human being is able to free himself from his own incorrect and limiting thought patterns. As a result, space is created for choosing something new. Consciously creating new perceptions allows the human being for instance to handle similar experiences more effectively in the future.

Analysing oneself truthfully and honestly and looking at one's own thought patterns in a different way is not at all easy. It is actually a real skill to be able to look at oneself in a pure way and without manipulation—to look behind the scenes as it were. In turn, this looking behind the scenes is necessary for being able to perceive one's own values, thoughts and beliefs in an objective way, at a deeper level. This is (Frankl 1959) an 'existential analysis' of the greater issue: the 'why?'

What is someone's driving force? What is someone's life vision? From what perspective does a person view things? How conscious are people of their own personal values? In what way is this influenced by the collective image of the environment, the collective consciousness? How conscious is someone of how one's own thought patterns emerged from the family of origin or from experiences from the past? Self-reflection leads to asking all these difficult questions.

Within this existential analysis, self-reflection is linked with taking responsibility of oneself. Taking responsibility is reowning one's own values, norms, beliefs, actions and behaviour. After all, it is the individual thought patterns which determine how the human being experiences something, how the human being feels and how the human being acts. How the human being looks at oneself (Rogers 1989).

Our personal values play a role in taking self-responsibility for our behaviour, which cannot be underestimated. They are the individual values which are ultimately the assessment criteria by means of which we approve or disapprove of our behaviour. The values are the yardstick, as it were, of our behaviour.



## **Self-Reflection Is the Most Elementary Step Towards Servant Leadership**

Often, people, and leaders in particular, are inclined to place the responsibility or blame outside of themselves. As if we are dependent on and have no control over our thinking. Taking responsibility for one's own thinking and behaviour, 'ownership', is a tremendous challenge which the human being encounters during self-reflection. It is easier to place the responsibility for an undesirable situation with the other person than to look at oneself in all honesty and with vulnerability. This requires courage and leads to answers to issues regarding the meaning of life.

In daily practice, we often see the opposite – that leaders do not take responsibility for their behaviour and its consequences. This leads me to the question of 'how can a manager take responsibility for other people, while he cannot do this for himself?' The reason is that without healing one's own (negative) experiences, there is a great risk that the leader will project their own deformities or unprocessed emotions onto the people and situations around him with its resulting consequences.

Fathoming one's own life story is however an example of taking one's own responsibility. By extending self-reflection of a few situations to considering the entire lifespan, deeper insights into the realization of one's own personality emerge. As a result, experiences and events from life are processed and they receive a recognizable meaning (Verstraeten 2003). One's own life story can therefore be brought to a more meaningful whole. As a result of this self-knowledge, the servant leader is experienced as more authentic by the followers.

Although self-reflection can lead to a tremendous space in the human thought system, it is not desirable to enhance existing unhealthy thought patterns in themselves. For example, if a person is very helpful and is not appreciated or not noticed by other people, it is not the intention that this person becomes even more helpful, losing oneself and 'giving away' even more for the benefit of the other person. Self-reflection can give an insight into why someone is too helpful so this person can learn to set boundaries in a better way.

## Reflection Can Be Learned

The ability of self-reflection can be improved by being alert to two types of signals, the internal and the external signals. Feelings such as becoming angry, getting a headache, organs becoming cramped, suddenly breaking out in a sweat and feeling wobbly are examples of internal signals. Fortunately, the physical body can only react in an honest way and this is therefore where the signals usually first occur. Sometimes the signals occur quickly and with immediate effect, and sometimes they only occur after some time.

The physical body is often seen as a mechanism, as a well-oiled machine, where illness is something that is 'wrong', that disrupts the mechanism and must therefore be eradicated or 'cured'. However, according to Zohar, D. & Marshall, I (2000), some doctors are beginning to develop a different vision. They claim that heart conditions, skin conditions, tiredness, alcohol abuse and drug abuse point out to us the meaninglessness of our existence, which has even penetrated the cells in our body.

They see diseases as internal signals from the body to seek attention for something in our life which, if neglected, could result in potential (irreparable) damage (Zohar and Marshall 2000). Could the 'mechanical problems' be caused by not listening to our deep needs, our attitude to life or our lifestyle?

A particular situation or incident in the world around us is an example of an external signal. If the outer world is a manifesto of your inner world, it could well be the outer world mirrors your own internal state. The reason for this is that often a particular situation or incident is not about the situation in itself. It is about what that situation shows you, what it can 'tell' you about how you think, feel and what you think about it. With the central question 'what may I learn, or grow out of, from this?'

Internal and external signals can provide valuable information about the situation that has occurred. More knowledge and insight can be obtained by asking oneself the question 'why did this situation occur and what does this say about me?'

In the case of personal development, the human being 'must' therefore make a disciplined and actual effort to discover what it is really about. Reflecting in that case is a verb. A coach or intervention sessions can be very valuable for gaining insights.

## The Art of Wonder

Wonder is another important ability of the human being in order to realize personal development (Carson 1956). Wonder is the emotional experience that is caused by an unexpected perception of something new. The experience is characterized by an intense feeling of authenticity, beauty, wisdom or vitality. This wow-effect, 'being in awe' or 'awesome', can be achieved for instance by looking at the firmament during a walk in nature, studying the light fall, looking at a puppy, during a special conversation or upon the birth of a child. The human being can be amazed about the entire whole or about very small things.

On the basis of science (Fuller 2006) it is known that evolution has the purpose of continual control and effective connection with the environment, certainly where the environment is changing fast as is the case in our current era. In the course of time, evolution has adapted our body and brains so we are capable of acquiring new knowledge and skills and becoming wiser. Wonder is one of the main emotions with regard to this. It mobilizes curiosity, enhances empathy and increases openness to gain new experiences and to enter into relationships. This is the opposite of fearful emotions, whereby our attention narrows, a distance is felt, and we wish to withdraw into ourselves or withdraw from a relationship.

Wonder is an expression of compassion and love and ensures positive feelings and emotions which radiate freshness, vitality and connection (Fuller 2006). The human being is impassioned to discover himself, the situation and the unknown. A human being in wonder is capable of compassionate love and, on this basis, enters into a relationship with himself and with his environment.

In order to build up and maintain relationships, a real interest in people is required. Compassionate love is also a core value and an underlying motivation for servant leadership, and the basis on which the other characteristics of servant leadership emerge (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015).

In a Journal of business ethics, Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015), state that a servant leader is naturally curious about the team members, the 'followers'. The fundamental attitude of a servant leader is listening empathetically to every follower, seeing one's talents and learning from one's advice. A servant leader is amazed at the personalities, knowledge and wisdom of the followers. This has a favourable and positive effect on mutual relationships, involvement and employee satisfaction. Research (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011) shows that such relationships are based on values, contributions to the mutual trust and therefore to the solid performances of the team.

The 'servant' aspect of servant leadership is manifested in the mutual work relationship between leaders and followers. And that this relationship may be based on compassionate love, which goes hand in hand harmoniously with wonder, is explained in a clear way by the following statement by Greenleaf: 'Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.'

In the case of art, wonder also plays an important role. Confrontation by means of art can stimulate memories, gratitude, reflection and a meeting with another inner world. Just as in the case of artworks, you can return each time afresh, whereby you can experience, see or learn a new perspective with continuing interest and wonder each time.

Just as with art, leadership is about making the still intangible reality increasingly tangible. This intangible reality is often recorded by the management in a mission and vision documents. Once these documents have been distributed within the organization, it is important for the management that they understand and sense it in their inner world. It is only when the managers feel it themselves, experience the value of this, that they can actually start to build on making this truth a reality along with their team.

For instance, the simple act of sawing a plank of wood was an eye-opener for my children. 'This takes much longer and costs much more effort than a mouse click on the computer which allows the little man to saw, dad.' These types of sensual experiences of 'doing' are important for allowing new concepts to be 'launched' and wonder is a vital part of this.

Last summer, I was on the beach in Italy, staring mindlessly. Suddenly a little Italian boy about two years old came towards me with his mother. He had big eyes, and he was jabbering excitedly, pulling his mother along to show her something special! He stopped in front of me and pointed to the 'flowers' which he had already seen from a distance. I was touched and became alert, thanks to his insistent and infectious wonder. Then I saw what the two-year-old boy saw. I also enjoyed his wonder and was amazed at the beauty. It was fantastic!

Psychologists tell us that we feel that the experience of wonder is often greater than our physical boundaries. This special moment, a moment of being amazed, releases us from our ego and ensures an increase in empathy and gives the humble feeling of being connected with something greater than ourselves.

Directors typically believe that transforming a company from good to great requires an extreme personality, an egocentric chief to lead the corporate charge. But that's not the case, says author and leadership expert Jim Collins. 'The essential ingredient for taking a company to greatness is having a "Level 5" leader, an executive in whom extreme personal humility blends paradoxically with intense professional will. In this 2001 article, Collins paints a compelling and counterintuitive portrait of the skills and personality traits necessary for effective leadership. He identifies the characteristics common to Level 5 leaders: humility, will, ferocious resolve, and the tendency to give credit to others while assigning blame to themselves.'

Humbleness is also a very important characteristic of servant leadership, Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015). A servant leader realises that he is not omnipotent and omniscient, that the leader may also 'just' be a small cog in the large timepiece of the organization, or an even smaller part of the entire humanity. Not unimportant but small. Colleagues are always required to achieve the desired result. Or according to an African proverb: 'If you wish to go fast, then go alone. If you wish to go far, then go together.'

In my opinion, it is suitable for a servant leader to be amazed every day. To be amazed like a child that is curious about the unlimited, the new. To remain a pupil lifelong. As soon as the human being or the leader decides (unconsciously) to stop learning, the risk of increasing egocentrism, pride and rigidity creeps in.

## **The Dynamic Path of Personal Development**

One could imagine personal development as a path of advancing insight, with self-reflection on the left-hand side of the path, and wonder on the right-hand side of the path. In between there is a path – ‘a personal consciousness field’ which can be enhanced by the combination of self-reflection and wonder. This personal consciousness field consists of all the knowledge, experience, skills, insights, feelings, thoughts, beliefs and patterns of the person in question. It comprises the ‘own wisdom’ of that person.

By continually balancing between self-reflection and wonder, dynamics and growth occur as progress in the personal development. As more self-reflection and wonder take place, the consciousness field can be increased, which results in more balance and a deeper understanding of situations which a person encounters in his life. And especially more understanding of oneself and one’s role in the mutual relationships with other people.

## **Balancing Like a Pendulum of a Mechanical Clock**

It is a dynamic balance because, in my opinion, being ‘in balance’ in itself does not exist. After all, people only realize that they were balanced when they are ‘out’ of balance again. The aim to be ‘in balance’, which you come across all over the world, is on the other hand a very good starting point. As a result, people search for new experiences and they continue to be amazed.

The art of balancing fits in my experience well with the metaphor of a pendulum of a mechanical timepiece. Steadily, the pendulum of the clock swings back and forth, with a two-way and continuing movement. From left to right and back again. Around an imaginary centre to thus determine the tempo of the timepiece. The longer the pendulum, the calmer the clock, the shorter the pendulum the more rushed the clock.

For increasing personal awareness, I also often use the metaphor of 'throwing a stone in the water'. As soon as the stone is thrown into the water, with a still surface, a ripple effect occurs which continually increases in diameter. In the water, the process appears simple, but do not forget that 'to increase' is also a verb. It does not happen of its own accord. The human being who also wishes to develop must be prepared to break through one's own boundaries, to allow walls to fall or to be willing to crawl through gaps which he did not yet know about. To be willing to shift paradigms and to dare to look under every stone which he encounters.

### **'I Don't Have Time, I Will Make Time'**

It is important to realize that personal development requires a time investment and that time must be made free for this purpose. Here, I deliberately choose the verb 'to make' because for most people it is a considerable challenge to 'make time' in their busy lives. Generally, people find it difficult to make choices, never mind change their routines. By shifting one's priorities, it is indeed possible to create time and space. The question is therefore: where do you put your priorities for the coming time?

It is important to create space in one's diary, in one's mind and to consciously make this choice. Personal growth and a good character do not suddenly appear out of the blue. Genuine attention and space are required for listening to the inner needs and the own voice.

Making time is a condition for personal development and requires courage, calm and surrender in order to continue to look at oneself in the mirror in an honest way. To continue to ask oneself the question how willing one is to learn to give further shape to one's personal development. It requires discipline and trust to repeat this every day.

As soon as personal growth, self-reflection or wonder become a subject of discussion, I expect the word 'meaningless' or 'pointless' to soon be included in the conversation. Unfortunately, the feeling of meaninglessness causes a sort of emptiness as a result of which, on the basis of our culture, an automatic urge to fill this emptiness again occurs. While it is precisely important to allow this emptiness. And to see this as purposeful

and meaningful to allow new perceptions and insights to be launched and to mature. The confusion between purpose and meaninglessness (Verstraeten 2003) could possibly ensure that, also on the basis of one's beliefs, less time is created for emptiness, reflection and wonder.

Some people lose themselves in the search for identity, values and truths of other people. From the desire to believe in something or to mean something, people chase illusions and barely listen to their own inner voice. However, if the human being does not give any space to oneself, the new information will not reach the depth which it could reach. How can the consciousness field be increased if people only follow the beaten tracks of other people?

Other people confuse their own role with their identity, in other words, the focus on all those different roles which someone 'should' fulfil. As a result of which they are rarely conscious of the fragmented attention that they have, or do not have, for themselves or for the people with whom they live. And, on the basis of that busy life, there is barely any attention to self-reflection and wonder, never mind personal growth.

## **Have the Courage...**

The dynamic path of personal development is not a linear growth path. It is a continual spiral within which the deeper meaning of one's themes will be continually understood. This search makes one powerful, self-aware, emotionally stable, worldly and humble, and leads to deep personal insights, contact with one's originality and gives the feeling of being really 'autonomous, authentic and free'.

One's boundaries are pushed as a result of which the autonomy of the leader increases considerably. This makes it possible to be an authentic leader who can bridge and connect apparent conflicts for oneself and one's environment in a meaningful way (Verstraeten 2003).

It is a continual innovative process of continually becoming and being oneself. With compassion and love, on the basis of one's wisdom, congruent in mind, heart and actions. The authentic self will take up more and more space in one's consciousness field. Have the courage and nerve to 'drink the cup'. Make courageous choices and run the risk of living a relaxed, spontaneous and loving life and giving leadership in the same way.



## The Art of Servant Leadership

In various books about leadership, the analogy has been made about leadership and art (O'Malley and Baker 2012). Art works on various levels of consciousness and is therefore extremely suitable as support for personal development. It is a cumulative form of learning and experiencing, based for instance on past history, previous experiences, feelings, people and the urge to want to create something new. Art is the ability to express what lives in the spirit or mind in such a way that it can move people due to its beauty (O'Malley and Baker 2012). Art is a craft intended to stimulate the senses.

Good artists distinguish themselves from mediocre artists, just as special leaders distinguish themselves from 'ordinary' leaders. The best leaders and artists sense what it is about and name that or show that. They challenge themselves and us to leave our comfort zones and to continue to be amazed, to innovate and to develop. They bring us closer to each other by offering a platform for a community spirit. This is servant leadership in practice.

### Project: Artful Leadership

A practical example of the combination of art and servant leadership can be found in the project Artful Leadership (Advancis 2016). This international European project has resulted in a free platform, an interactive website ([www.artfulleader.eu](http://www.artfulleader.eu)) whereby, via art assignments, the participant can gain more knowledge about the six characteristics of servant leadership as formulated by Van Dierendonck (2011). That is, the essence of a servant leader is someone who is humble, authentic, understands and experiences the feelings and motivations of others, expresses stewardship, demonstrates empowering and helps developing people and provides direction. Together, these six characteristics present as 'a strong indication of how a servant leader should function' (van Dierendonck 2011).

The artful leadership project developed a digital toolkit that helps participants approach these characteristics from a different perspective and thereby gain more content for the participant. This new perspective

developing servant leadership within persons can be instrumental with the implementation of servant leadership within organizations and may be a tremendous gain for spreading the philosophy of servant leadership.

Servant leadership is a vital factor in how organizations develop over a longer period. A good leader is a person who reforms a company carefully and in an artistic way so that it fits better with the challenges which are anticipated. This project aims to help develop a new generation of servant leaders through arts. The Artful Leadership Project is an example of how an innovative and creative set of digital learning resources can create a new learning pathway with an arts-based approach to inspire and nurture a new generation of Servant Leaders. A good leader is someone who minimizes the negative effects on the future perspectives of the company and removes the blocks. This is a long-term process of serving and leading, and it gives a different perspective to the relationships that the leader enters into with oneself and his environment.

## **Set to Work!**

On the basis of my coaching practice, I know that it works differently for everyone with regard to starting the process of personal development. For one person, an insight is enough while another person continues to fight, even after the third crisis or burn-out. Continuing to do the same thing offers a feeling of safety and comfort. Many people are attached to their own routines and do not even dwell on the fact that it could be done differently. Some people wish to adhere in particular to what they have and that deserves a great deal of respect. Everyone has the freedom to choose their own path and to organize their life as one wishes oneself.

However, if someone is dissatisfied with how life is and keeps on doing the same thing, the trap is to ultimately stay stuck in a feeling of being the powerless victim of the situation. If the perceptions of that person about how life should be are not congruent with the reality, there are three choices to be made. The person decides to change one's perceptions, decides to adjust the reality or leaves it as it is and remains stuck in a dissatisfied situation.

With regard to a dissatisfied situation, Einstein says that 'stupidity is to keep on doing the same thing and expecting a different result'. If the human being really wants something else, then one will also have to take hold of the reins again. It is wonderful to realize that the human being may surprise oneself and the environment by doing things differently or expressing things differently. 'Do what you fear!' is a stimulating motto for pushing one's own boundaries.

There is no correct way of achieving something. There is always a profusion of choices, as long as the person in development is capable of seeing these options. The science that at any time there is always the freedom to choose can ensure independence from pathogenic systems or unhealthy work relationships, that you yourself have and maintain the influence to create a different result.

## Leadership Programmes

There are various leadership programmes which explain servant leadership. It goes beyond the goal of this chapter to assess them here. However, in my view, it is important that these programmes begin with attention to the person of the participant. Personal development as a human being and as a leader precedes the development of leadership relationships within the organization. Discovering one's values, driving force and personal mission are parts which may be dealt with at the start of the programme, followed by insight into character traits and talents. A sense of morality is also an important anchor point for the servant leader.

## Practical Tips

In conclusion, wonder and self-reflection can be enhanced by using the activities suggested in the points below. They are an excellent way of starting or precisely restarting personal development. For ideas on how to complement this practice with exercises that specifically enhance self-reflection on one's servant leadership potential, check out the [www.artfulleader.eu](http://www.artfulleader.eu) and [www.flexwater.eu](http://www.flexwater.eu) websites.

1. Be really interested in learning more about yourself than you already know now. Try to see yourself as the most important project of your life! Much has been written about self-reflection and there is most certainly a book that you will come across spontaneously. In addition, a talk with a good coach or therapist will be useful for another insight into yourself.
2. Look into your beliefs about experiences or situations that you find a source of tension. From what viewpoint do you look at the experience or situation? Is your glass half full or half empty? In my role as a team coach, I regularly come across people who are very occupied in particular with inventing arguments regarding why something 'is not working' or 'is not possible'. This is a focus on the denying and negative side to the situation, which unconsciously leads to exhaustion. It is much more effective and more fun to look at what is 'indeed possible'. By regaining personal control, the feeling of progress emerges and gives the stimulus to carry on.
3. Make free time in your diary, which is intended for you alone, even if it is just a few hours a week that are really only for you. You will then already be taking an important step in beginning with this process.
4. Begin with something that really recharges you, from which you gain energy or recover. This could be to do with learning something or letting go of something. Both are equal starting points, it doesn't matter; it is all about what you feel most comfortable with.
5. Be aware of your body and feel the signals from your body. Practising breathing techniques, reading poetry, painting, sculpting, yoga, Japanese martial arts and/or other types of mediation will give you new knowledge and a complete view of your authentic self.
6. In addition, following communication training courses and reading literature are valuable for increasing your vocabulary. This will help you tremendously as a leader so that you can mention matters which play a part in the relationship with colleagues.
7. Take care of yourself and nourish yourself with healthy food and a healthy lifestyle. You are worth it and this is necessary for your personal growth on your dynamic path to awareness.

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# 7

## Mindfulness as a Building Block for Servant Leadership

Armin Pircher Verdorfer and Johannes Arendt

### Introduction

When you think of mindfulness, you probably envision a specific Eastern spiritual practice or, maybe coming from a more skeptical angle, you may simply think of it as another buzzword in today's age of self-improvement. It is true that the concept of mindfulness is rooted in contemplative traditions such as Buddhism. However, it is important to note that mindfulness is not owned by any specific spiritual or religious perspective or dogma (including new age) but rather represents a secular approach nowadays (Brown et al. 2007). It can of course be a powerful vehicle to deepen one's personal spiritual path; at the same time, however, mindfulness can be simply seen as a tool to support introspective practices which,

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in turn, help seeing things more clearly, attenuating distress and enhancing well-being. Greenleaf already hinted toward its relevance for servant leadership “The prudent person is one who constantly thinks of now as the moving concept in which past, present moment, and future are one organic unity” (Greenleaf 2002, p. 38). Taken together, mindfulness is neither about religion or esoteric beliefs nor is it a magic pill that transforms people overnight. Rather, from a psychological perspective, mindfulness simply describes a state of mind in which individuals intentionally focus on their experiences, anchored in the present moment, while adopting a stance of objectivity and acceptance (Brown et al. 2007; Shapiro et al. 2006).

Before we delineate the relationship between mindfulness and servant leadership, we make two important distinctions. First, we distinguish between several dimensions or parts of servant leadership. Whereas the literature describes a series of distinct servant leadership behaviors (such as putting followers first as well as being humble and authentic), other behaviors that have been included in servant leadership models (such as empowering others, holding followers accountable, and having conceptual skills) pertain to a more general and broader conception of positive leadership (see the extensive overviews provided by Coetzer et al. 2017 as well as Van Dierendonck 2011). While in the long term, mindfulness may generally help leaders to regulate their behaviors more efficiently (Sauer and Kohls 2011), we believe that a stronger and more direct connection refers to those genuine and distinct servant leader behaviors that posit servant leadership as a truly unique approach in the leadership landscape. The second distinction we make refers to mindfulness. In line with Reb et al. (2015), we differentiate between mindfulness as a psychological construct and mindfulness as a practice. As a psychological construct, mindfulness refers to a trait-like disposition or mental state; as a practice it refers to certain formal and informal practices aiming at enhancing mindfulness skills and trait mindfulness, respectively. Such mindfulness interventions have been evidenced as efficient routes to mindfulness development (Eberth and Sedlmeier 2012) and may thus represent promising vehicles for servant leadership development as well. It is, however, pivotal to note that we are not advocating for mindfulness as the only or exclusive pathway to servant leadership. The motivation to



serve and thus the inclination to become a servant leader may emanate from several sources, ranging from religious or spiritual beliefs, past experiences with servant leaders to “crucibles of leadership” that is a transformative, often traumatic experience “through which an individual comes to a new and altered sense of identity” (Bennis and Thomas 2007, p. 6). As we will see later in this chapter, mindfulness can help leaders to transcend self-interest. It is, however, neither the only nor a necessary condition for servant leadership development.

## What Is Mindfulness?

The term mindfulness is the English translation of the Pali language word *sati*, meaning “memory” or “remembrance” (Nyaniponika 2014). In Buddhist traditions, however, it has only occasionally been used to describe the recollection of past events. Rather, it mostly refers to a kind of present-moment awareness that, in the sense of the Buddhist vocabulary, can be described as wholesome, skillful, right, and virtuous (*kusala*). Recent secular approaches use mindfulness as a general psychological term, describing a “kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is” (Bishop et al. 2004, p. 232). As such, current theorizing identifies several key characteristics of mindfulness. First, mindfulness refers to an open and receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience. Second, in a mindful state, individuals fully engage with the present moment instead of focusing on past memories or future plans. Third, mindfulness involves a direct observation of experiences without analyzing or evaluating of what is occurring in the present moment. This should not be confused with being indifferent or aloof. Rather, mindfulness helps people become “alive” to the present moment (Hanh 1976, p. 11) and accept it for what it is.

Most researchers agree that mindfulness represents an inherent human capacity and can thus be experienced by everyone. This capacity, however, varies in strength across individuals and situations. Related to this is the question whether mindfulness is best described as a psychological

state that varies from moment to moment (i.e., state mindfulness) or as a relatively stable individual difference (i.e., dispositional or trait mindfulness). In fact, many researchers have argued that mindfulness is inherently a psychological state since it is defined as a nonjudgmental experience of the present moment (Bishop et al. 2004). On the other hand, researchers have also recognized that “the average frequency with which individuals experience states of mindfulness may vary from person to person, suggesting that people may have trait-like tendencies toward mindfulness” (Glomb et al. 2011, p. 119). Accordingly, an essential stream of current research focuses on these trait-like, dispositional properties of mindfulness by using self-report measures of mindfulness (for a comprehensive overview see e.g., Bergomi et al. 2013).

## Mindfulness in the Workplace

Initially, mindfulness was quite slow to attract scholarly attention outside the fields of philosophy and religious or spiritual studies. In the past 30 years, however, this has significantly changed and mindfulness has gained much interest in various fields of research, stimulating numerous lines of inquiry. The bulk of research has been expended in the field of health sciences showing that dispositional mindfulness as well as mindfulness-based interventions are efficient routes to psychological health in clinical and non-clinical populations (e.g., Baer 2003; Grossman et al. 2004). Other positive effects of mindfulness have been documented in social- and personality psychology (e.g., Chatzisarantis and Hagger 2007), sports sciences (e.g., Kee and Wang 2008) and education (see Zenner et al. 2014). Accounting for these effects, current research suggests that mindfulness permits individuals to view events and experiences more objectively (Shapiro et al. 2006) and to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors more effectively (Glomb et al. 2011). This resonates with research indicating that the cultivation of mindfulness is associated with increased cognitive abilities and ultimately with improved decision-making and performance across a broad range of tasks (Chiesa et al. 2011; Karelaia and Reb 2015). Against this background, a rapidly

growing body of research is focusing on the effects of mindfulness in the workplace. Besides theoretical works (e.g., Dane 2011; Glomb et al. 2011), a number of empirical studies are available showing that dispositional mindfulness as well as mindfulness-based interventions positively relate to relevant outcomes in the workplace including physical and psychological well-being of employees as well as various indicators of job motivation and performance (see Good et al. 2016 for a comprehensive overview). Such beneficial patterns have been documented for leaders as well, especially when it comes to stress reduction (Roche et al. 2014). In contrast to this, far less research has been undertaken to answer the question how leaders' mindfulness may regulate their leadership style. Current theorizing suggests several ways of how mindfulness may influence concrete leadership skills. It is suggested that leaders' mindfulness promotes more accurate information processing, active listening, emotional intelligence and, crucial for the argumentation presented herein, it "may reduce tendencies of narcissism in leaders, thereby increasing their interpersonal capacities" (Sauer and Kohls 2011, p. 299). If mindfulness can help individuals to become less self-absorbed, the connection with servant leadership becomes rather obvious.

## The Role of Mindfulness for Servant Leadership

Before we examine in more detail, why and how mindfulness may be related to servant leadership, a comment on the meaning of servant leadership is warranted. In fact, servant leadership has been described and defined from different perspectives. Also, it is usually described as a multidimensional concept, focusing on different behaviors servant leaders may show (Coetzer et al. 2017; Van Dierendonck 2011). Despite this variety and despite the fact that none of the existing measurement approaches describe servant leadership in exactly the same way, we nonetheless have a quite clear and solid idea about what makes servant leadership unique among leadership approaches. In essence, servant leadership is fundamentally concerned with the well-being of others and thus posits

humility and altruism as the central components of the leadership process. Most notably, servant leaders put followers first (Liden et al. 2008), develop and value people (Laub 1999), are authentic and humble (Van Dierendonck 2011) and, overall, ready “to renounce the superior status attached to leadership and to embrace greatness by way of servanthood” (Sendjaya 2008, p. 407). Importantly, service is not the same as being servile (Van Dierendonck 2011). Rather, true servant leaders work from a stable and accepting self-concept. They know their strengths and limitations and put themselves in perspective, thus not seeking power for its own sake or solely because of external aspirations. Taken together, these features reflect what Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) refer to as the genuine “*servant-side*” of servant leadership. According to their integrative servant leadership model, genuine servant leadership is about “being able to be authentic and stand back, thereby allowing the employees to flourish” (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011, p. 261). This is complemented by the “*leader-side*”, which refers to “enabling followers to express their talents by setting clear goals, providing a meaningful work environment, challenges and the necessary tools and conditions” (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011, p. 261). As noted above, we argue that mindfulness is inherently linked to the features of genuine servant leadership, whereas the connection with the genuine leader-side appears as more proximal.

To examine the link between mindfulness and genuine servant leadership we draw on the IAA model of mindfulness (Shapiro et al. 2006). This model includes three central axioms of mindfulness, *Intention (I)*, *Attention (A)*, and *Attitude (A)*. The intention component refers to the underlying motives for cultivating mindfulness. Attention involves the different capacities involved in attending to one’s moment-to-moment internal and external experience, most notably sustained focus and flexibility of focus. The attitude axiom describes that mindfulness includes paying attention in a particular way, namely, with an attitude of openness and acceptance. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this does not mean that mindfulness reflects a state of indifference or even bare happiness. Rather, both positive and negative experiences are held with kindness and curiosity, reflecting genuine interest in one’s own experiences. According to Shapiro et al. (2006), these three axioms of mindfulness, Intention,

Attention, and Attitude, are not discrete stages but, rather, they go hand in hand and help us to understand mindfulness as a “moment-to-moment process” (Shapiro et al. 2006, p. 3), in which individuals simultaneously pay attention in a particular way: “on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn 2003, p. 145). A core tenet of the IAA model is that the process of mindfulness changes one’s relationship to experience. Specifically, it posits that mindfulness triggers a significant shift in perspective, referred to as *reperceiving*. Reperceiving can be described as a “rotation in consciousness in which what was previously ‘subject’ becomes ‘object’” (Shapiro et al. 2006, p. 6) and thus, “rather than being immersed in the drama of our personal narrative or life story, we are able to stand back and simply witness it” (Shapiro et al. 2006, p. 5). In brief, reperceiving is the capacity to adopt a detached stance on one’s thoughts and emotions thus promoting a sense of objectivity in relationship to one’s internal and external experience. In our view, this represents the fulcrum in the link between mindfulness and genuine servant leadership given that putting oneself in context and transcending self-interest is key to genuine servant leadership. More specifically, through increasing the capacity for objectivity, mindfulness can help leaders to recognize “their interdependence with others rather than their independence from others” (Nielsen et al. 2010, p. 34). Such an increased sense of objectivity is also very likely to promote more accurate self-knowledge, including personal strengths and limitations. As such, mindfulness fosters what Deikman (1982) referred to as “the observing self”, helping individuals to process their own values and needs in a more objective, unbiased manner, resulting in a higher level of authenticity (Heppner and Kernis 2007). In a similar vein, mindfulness can help leaders to interrupt dysfunctional automatic habits such as stereotyping followers or searching for and interpreting information in a way that prioritizes and confirms one’s preconceptions.

Initial empirical support for the link between mindfulness and a genuine servant attitude comes from two studies, conducted by the first author of the present chapter (Pircher Verdorfer 2016). In the first study, young adults from Germany provided self-ratings on dispositional mindfulness and their motivation to lead (Chan and Drasgow 2001). In addition, other-ratings from a close acquaintance (e.g., significant other,

close friend, coworker) were collected to assess their level of expressed humility (Owens et al. 2013). Individuals who exhibit a non-self-centered motivation to lead are less concerned with their own interests and benefits when it comes to striving for or accepting a leadership position, which is central to the notion of genuine servant leadership. Also expressed humility can be seen as a central feature of genuine servant leadership since it refers to the ongoing willingness to gain accurate and realistic self-awareness and reflects “attitudes that are other-enhancing rather than self-enhancing” (Owens et al. 2013, p. 1519). Moreover, it includes teachability, that is, an attitude of openness and receptiveness to feedback and ideas from others and the willingness to ask for advice or help. Based on 104 dyads for data analysis, the results revealed a positive relationship between dispositional mindfulness and both a non-self-centered motivation to lead and expressed humility. In the second study, this pattern was confirmed in a leader sample. Specifically, data from 82 leaders and their followers ( $N = 223$ ) were collected. Whereas the leaders provided self-reports on dispositional mindfulness, followers were asked to rate their leaders in terms of servant leadership, measured with the servant leadership survey developed by Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011). Results revealed that leaders’ mindfulness was positively related to followers’ ratings pertaining to genuine servant leadership (i.e., humility, standing back, and authenticity), but not to other, more active leadership behaviors, such as empowerment or accountability. In summary, these results support the notion that dispositional mindfulness represents an inner resource that may help “quieting the ego” (Niemic et al. 2008) and facilitate less egoistic, more autonomous, and altruistic forms of self-regulation and leadership.

## Mindfulness Practice and Servant Leadership

Research provides evidence that mindfulness is a malleable and thus trainable skill (Eberth and Sedlmeier 2012). In what follows, we give a brief outline of the most common mindfulness interventions, before discussing their potential for servant leadership development.

Overall, most existing mindfulness interventions can be integrated along two general lines. First, many of the classic “Western style” mindfulness interventions refer to Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR, Kabat-Zinn 2003, 2005) and its variations. The second line refers to “pure” mindfulness meditation and related techniques, as it is usually taught in many meditation centers. While the MBSR program has originally been developed as a treatment for pain patients, a great deal of research has documented its positive effects in non-clinical populations, including a reduction of stress, depression, and anxiety (Khouri et al. 2015). Accordingly, the main focus of most MBSR applications is the cultivation of mindfulness as a coping resource for dealing with stress. In its standard form, the MBSR program is an eight-week course, including weekly group meetings and a one-day retreat. Furthermore, participants are expected to practice mindfulness at home for about 45 minutes on six days a week. Besides the instruction in formal mindfulness techniques, such as sitting meditation (i.e., focusing attention on the sensations of breathing), body scan (moving one’s focus of attention around the body), and Hatha yoga (i.e., developing awareness during slow movements), participants are also encouraged to integrate informal mindfulness practice in their daily routine by paying full awareness to their thoughts, emotions, and sensations in everyday activities (such as eating, walking, etc.). The integration of mindfulness practice in everyday activities is also a part of many approaches that seek to shorten and adapt existing mindfulness programs, especially in organizational contexts. Usually, such low-dose-mindfulness interventions refer to brief mindfulness exercises that take only a couple of minutes and can be included into employees’ daily (work-)life (e.g., Hülshager et al. 2013).

In contrast to MBSR, pure mindfulness trainings refer to more traditional approaches for teaching mindfulness, most notably *Vipassana* meditation, which can be translated as “insight meditation”. These trainings are not primarily concerned with stress reduction but focus more on the liberative and transformative purpose of mindfulness practice. Among the different variations of this approach, Vipassana in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin (Hart 1987) has probably been one of the most influential. Here, mindfulness is usually taught in intensive residential

ten-day courses, following a demanding schedule which includes about ten hours of sitting meditation per day. Furthermore, participants are required to observe silence, not communicating with fellow students from the beginning of the course until the morning of the last full day (communication with the teacher and the course management are excluded from this rule). During the first days, participants practice “respiration awareness” (*anapanasati*), focusing attention on the breath. On this basis, the remaining days consist of actual Vipassana meditation, “which involves systematically and repeatedly scanning the body from head to feet, observing with detachment and non-reaction whatever sensations or experiences arise, and developing calmness and non-reactivity to sensations that arise” (Szekeres and Wertheim 2015, p. 374). The course closes with the practice of *metta-bhavana*, which is known as *loving-kindness-meditation* in the scientific literature (e.g., Hutcherson et al. 2008; Szekeres and Wertheim 2015). The main aim of this practice is to cultivate and promote feelings of care, concern, and warmth toward the self and others. Here it is helpful to note that also MBSR programs include elements of loving-kindness-meditation although in a less pronounced form (Kabat-Zinn 2005).

With this presentation of mindfulness practice in mind, we see two basic lines of arguments on how mindfulness practice may aid servant leadership development. First, as Reb et al. (2015) state, the purposeful practice of mindfulness will be most effective for those wanting to be or to become servant leaders. In fact, research indicates that the motivation why one is practicing mindfulness correlates with the outcomes (Shapiro 1992). Hence, if someone has a strong need to serve and actively looks for ways to be of service to others, it is plausible that he or she will use mindfulness practice with the explicit intention to cultivate humility and authenticity. This holds especially for pure mindfulness training with its explicit focus on personal transformation and the development of compassion. In fact, and in line with this, a recent meta-analysis indicates that pure mindfulness meditation fosters outcomes associated with the concept of mindfulness, most notably increased trait mindfulness, whereas MBSR-interventions seem to have their main effect on higher psychological well-being (Eberth and Sedlmeier 2012).



However, and this is our second line of arguments, we believe that genuine servant leadership qualities can also arise as a “side effect” of mindfulness practice. It is true that, at the beginning, many leaders may have a somewhat self-centered motivation to engage in mindfulness practice, most notably stress reduction and increasing individual productivity, running counter to the idea of genuine servant leadership. However, the intentions behind mindfulness practice appear as rather dynamic and research suggests that, with deepening practice, they tend to shift from self-regulation to self-exploration and finally to self-transcendence (Shapiro 1992). That said, a leader may, for instance, begin an MBSR program with the exclusive goal of stress reduction. However, as his/her practice continues, he/she may increasingly gain a more objective view on his/her capabilities and weaknesses as a leader and thus possibly develop greater humility and the desire to give back.

## A Word of Caution

Thus far, we have provided reasonable arguments for why and how mindfulness may be beneficial for servant leadership development. At this point, however, a word of caution is needed. As mindfulness is increasingly turning into an industry, practitioners and scholars are voicing concerns that a sort of superficial “McMindfulness” is taking over (Purser and Loy 2013), selling mindfulness practice as a simple commodity or quick-fix solution to all sorts of life’s challenges. Whereas short mindfulness interventions can have positive effects on employee well-being (e.g., Hülsegher et al. 2013), such a reduced and in many cases shallow practice can also have counterproductive effects, because it often separates mindfulness from its self-transcending potential (Reb et al. 2015). For instance, a recent study revealed that a single brief (i.e., five minutes) mindfulness exercise could indeed raise empathy in participants (albeit with a small effect size). However, this was only true for non-narcissistic individuals, while individuals who scored high on narcissism showed even a decrease in empathy. Thus, with this single short intervention, “mindfulness backfired among those who seemed to need it the most” the study said (Ridderinkhof et al. 2017, p. 261),

because they seem to “focus even more exclusively on their self-aggrandizing thoughts”. Thus, organizations should be careful when it comes to the integration of mindfulness training in formal leadership development programs. Mindfulness practice, if taken seriously, takes time and sustained practice to unfold its benefits, especially with regard to the qualities of servant leadership.

That said, we believe that the role of mindfulness for servant leadership development is best understood from a constructive developmental perspective. In this theory, effective leader development refers to qualitative differences in the ways leaders make sense of their experience, reflected in qualitatively distinct stages of growth (McCauley et al. 2006). On lower stages, leaders work from an impulsive and rather self-centered perspective. Others are seen as enablers or obstacles to the realization of their own interests. Developmental movement implies that, with higher stages, leaders become increasingly able to take a step back and hold personal desires and goals, as well as their relationships with others as objects. This perspective of an evolving self is clearly reflected in mindfulness practice. Concretely, Shapiro et al. (2006, p. 6) state that “the practice of mindfulness is simply a continuation of the naturally occurring human developmental process whereby one gains an increasing capacity for objectivity about one’s own internal experience”.

## Conclusion

In closing, we believe that servant leadership development can greatly benefit from mindfulness practice. Even short-term practice, assuming, of course, that it is well designed and guided by experts, can help leaders become more self-reflective, which is an important ingredient of servant leadership. However, as Sendjaya et al. (2008, p. 406) aptly noted “servant leadership is not only about ‘doing’ the acts of service but also ‘being’ a servant”. Mindfulness practice, taken as a sustained transformative journey, can serve as a powerful catalyst in this effort.

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# **Part III**

## **Building a Servant Leadership Culture**



# 8

## Practising Compassionate Leadership and Building Spirals of Inspiration in Business and in Public Sector

Jari J. Hakanen and Anne Birgitta Pessi

Compassion at work has been defined as an interpersonal process involving the noticing, feeling, and acting to alleviate the suffering of another person (Dutton et al. 2014). The significance of compassion in the working life has become particularly topical due to several factors, especially due to those that are threatening it. Continuous changes in the working life, increasing uncertainty across industries, bad news as people are losing their jobs, increasing demands with less resources, stress and burnout, as well as bullying have created a pressing need and wish for a more humane working life where compassion has its place. There is a strong will to counterbalance a climate of indifference.

The sense of community in many workplaces has declined not only because of changes and a sense of having to rush but also because work has become untied from any particular time or place: while it is possible to convey compassion through computer screens, it is much harder than

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doing it face-to-face when the close proximity enables the leader to notice, for example, weak signals of employee's need for extra support. The first step of compassion is already critical: Do the leaders notice what is happening around them? Do they sense how those around them are feeling?

Reoccurring concerns of many people suffering at their work are indifferent or otherwise poor leadership and a lack of compassion. For example, it is rarely excessive workload alone that causes burnout. It is the high job demands together with lack of needed job resources, such as support, autonomy, appreciation, and possibilities to develop and grow professionally (Hakanen et al. 2008) which finally may prove to be impossible for the worker's well-being. It is also evident that the suffering of a colleague affects the work morale and well-being of others, and even their job performance and levels of commitment to the organization. It is difficult to be proud of an organization where one witnesses both suffering and indifference to the suffering of others.

For these reasons, compassionate leadership can have a decisive effect on whether an employee is able to survive the stressors and hardships that are an inevitable part of working life whilst retaining her ability for engagement, creativity, and productivity as well as self-compassion and compassion. At best, we are all responsible for the collective well-being of our fellow workers—one key sign of a true servant work culture.

Compassionate leadership does not end in the offering of commiserations ("I feel sorry for you", "that is unlucky", "try to carry on"). Dutton et al. (2014) conceptualize compassion as a path and a process where a person (in this case, the manager or the leader) first *notices* the suffering of another (e.g., the employee) and pauses by it, actively listening and giving her/his time to the sufferer. This observation and pausing is followed by feelings of *empathic concern*. The manager adopts the follower's (employee's) perspective on the situation altruistically: s(he) is able to step into the follower's shoes with warmth and without selfish motives. The third element of compassion is *acting*. It is important that compassion does not end in emotion.

The manager's purpose is to ease the situation of the follower and to help her/him with concrete actions. There can be many kinds of actions that serve the situation and the follower's recovery: active listening, asking questions, the wish to understand, looking into new required resources

such as increased support, new work assignments that better match the employee's strengths, or lessening the job demands of the work, for example, by decreasing the workload, temporarily cutting work hours, and reprioritizing tasks. A compassionate leader also pays attention to the follower's wider life context, to the extent the follower is willing to share it: for example, is there something going on at home that drains the resources available for work? The life of all of us human beings, with its joys and burdens, is always a sensitive whole.

## Leadership Theories and Compassion

Leadership theories have been changing fast in the recent decades, and never before has so much attention been paid to the study of leadership, while at the same time, their focus has switched from the attributes of leaders towards the employees—followers—and on the contexts of work and the specific challenges of leadership, for example, during organizational changes (Avolio et al. 2009). The replacement of the word “subordinates” with “followers” in the discourse of leadership reflects a wider change in attitudes towards leadership. Considering the ample academic and practical interest in leadership, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to compassion as a part of the job description and interpersonal skillset of a leader.

Until these days, the dominant theory of leadership, in other words, the transformational leadership theory (Bass 1990), directs attention in particular to the utilization of the leader's charisma and the inspiring of followers, the main focus being on the targets and goals of the organization rather than on the employees (Gregory Stone et al. 2004). Therefore, although transformational leadership has been linked to employee well-being, the theory itself has very little to say about compassion.

Ethical and authentic leadership both include the idea of good and genuine leadership of people, thereby enabling emphasis on compassionate leadership. For example, the theory of authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005) sees leadership as including balanced processing of information before making decisions; an internalized moral perspective that enables the leader to regulate her/his behaviour;

relational transparency, in other words, presenting oneself authentically through openly sharing information and feelings appropriate for the context; and self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, ways to comprehend the world, and one's conception of human nature. Although these leadership theories do have space for compassion, it is not one of their explicit components.

Interestingly, the significance of compassion—or the significance of *a lack of* compassion—can be seen more clearly in those research concepts of leadership from which compassion is entirely absent or that go against compassion. For example, avoidant leadership (Skogstad et al. 2014) and abusive leadership (Liu et al. 2012) are known to significantly impair employee well-being, health, and work performance—and undoubtedly, a substantial factor in these adverse effects is the lack of compassion in leadership.

## The Possibility of Compassion at Work: Servant Leadership

There is also a theory of leadership approaching the topic in a positive and empowering manner that clearly considers both compassion and co-passion; both how to ease suffering at work and how to build proactive engagement and innovativeness at work, namely, servant leadership. Servant leadership as a philosophy of leadership and a set of practices provides several approaches and tools to lead compassionately and passionately.

It is interesting, though, that Robert Greenleaf (1977), when introducing the theory of servant leadership, did not explicitly write about compassion and servant leadership. However, he discussed empathy and acceptance as essential parts of being a servant leader. With good reason it can be said that servant leadership is the theory of compassionate leadership, as it is fundamentally based on the principle of a servant leader being motivated by the flourishing and well-being of his or her followers: “[...] The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier,

wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf 1991, p. 7). Healing is also one of the key ideas in servant leadership, which Greenleaf connotes “to make whole” (Greenleaf 1977). Without compassion, it is difficult to become and stay “whole”. Today, Greenleaf might also refer to the increase in self-leadership and proactivity.

More recently, van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) have explicitly integrated the concepts of servant leadership and compassion. They consider compassionate love as the cornerstone of servant leadership and underlying motivation to become a servant leader. Compassionate love means unselfish moral love that centres on the good of the others (Patterson 2003). Thus, it explains why certain leaders have a motivation to serve (and not only to lead).

Consequently, a servant leader leads selflessly and strives to ensure that her/his team succeeds and achieves their goals while each of its members develops in their work and grows as a person. This is not possible unless the leader is ready to genuinely face the team and everyone in it, not only as workers, but also as human beings, each with their unique joys and sorrows. In this way, compassion becomes a natural part of the leader’s interaction with her/his followers. Compassion becomes the core, not an appendage. Compassion is not required constantly at work, but its need—as that of leadership in general—is relative to the situation from which it arises. A good servant leader is able to recognize this need and is ready to give time to encounter the person in need of compassion genuinely.

On the other hand, one may think that compassion is also about attitude and emotional climate: the leader radiates gentleness and presence in her/his everyday actions—the follower knows that she/he will not be left alone in a moment of need. When faced with injustice, there is a defender. In this way, servant leaders make the culture of their teams and the organization compassionate: the climate of the team will be compassionate and engaging, and the followers of servant leaders are thus more likely to be compassionate—and more like servants—towards each other as well.

## A Compassionate and a Co-passionate Leader Is Both a Leader and a Servant

Servant leadership is a holistic and multidimensional view on human-centred leadership. Figure 8.1 represents our model of servant leadership and compassion. The model also uses the currently most researched model of work stress and motivation: the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Hakanen et al. 2008; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). According to the JD-R model, two groups of psychosocial work characteristics, namely job demands and job resources, trigger two interrelated processes, namely high job demands will lead to burnout and other health problems. In contrast, job resources will, in addition to decreasing burnout, particularly enhance work engagement—feeling vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed at work—which in turn will positively impact job performance, commitment to one's organization, and, for example, innovativeness. We consider servant leadership and compassion as salient antecedents to full realization of available job resources and keeping the job demands reasonable. A servant leader strives to strengthen the job resources the followers need in their work, to mitigate the negative effects of job demands and take into account factors pertaining to followers' unique life contexts.

After Robert Greenleaf, many researchers inspired by his groundbreaking essay have added several attributes to servant leadership and devised instruments for its assessment. In our research and interventions, we have mainly relied on the conceptualization of servant leadership by van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) comprising eight dimensions, in other words, four dimensions in which emphasis is more on leadership: empowerment, accountability, stewardship, and courage, and four dimensions on being a servant: standing back, authenticity, humility, and forgiveness (interpersonal acceptance). Next, we will go through each of them, specifying how compassion is connected to and deepens them all.

Leading people within the context of servant leadership is firstly about empowerment. It means that followers are given space and freedom and are encouraged to use this space and freedom for self-development and taking initiative. The aim is to strengthen the employee's self-respect and

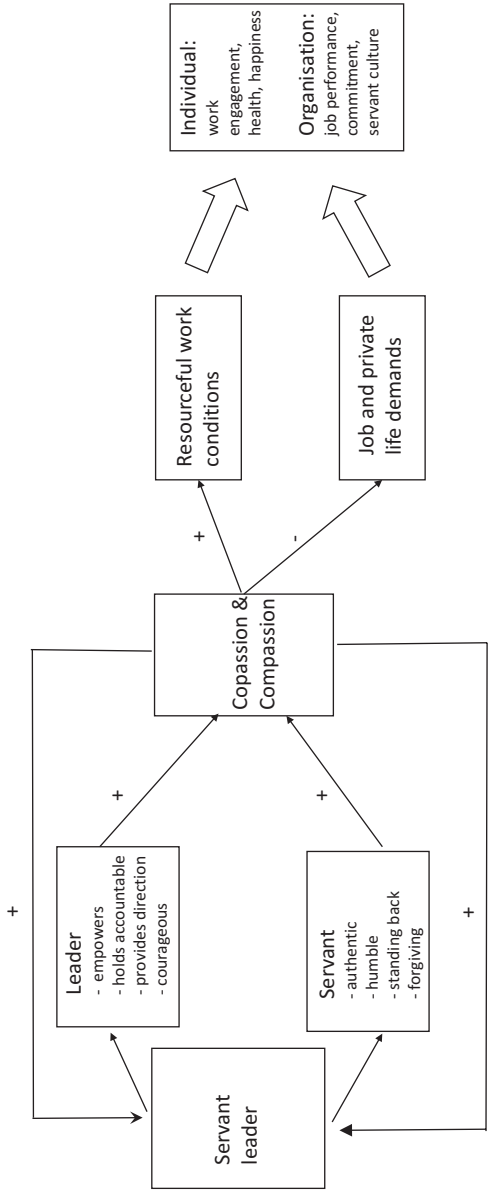


Fig. 8.1 Conceptual model for servant leadership, compassion, and healthy organizations

professional competences. Secondly, servant leadership is about holding the followers accountable of their performance: clarifying to one's followers what their responsibilities are and what is expected of them. Thus, freedom is always coupled with responsibility. Assigning responsibility does not mean forcing anyone, giving orders or abandoning anyone, but it is rather based on persuasion that is followed by autonomy. Assigning responsibility to an employee is a sign of trust when it is accompanied by encouragement, sufficient autonomy, and positive feedback of the follower's successes in carrying out that responsibility.

Assigning responsibility always carries its own responsibility, as the manager has to take into account the preconditions of each employee surviving the responsibilities, while not underestimating the employee's potentials. The balance of power and responsibility is portrayed well by the idea of the union of assertiveness and compassion; compassion is noticing, empathizing, and acting for the good of another. Feelings and empathy are in its core, but not intrinsically valuable. A servant leader does not get stuck dwelling on emotions with the followers, but knows how to empathize, support, and empower in a balanced manner, while also assertively leading the team forward, especially during crises and other emotional rollercoasters. Compassion is empathy, but precisely assertive empathy.

Thirdly, servant leadership is about stewardship and pioneering. The servant leader leads the organization towards the new, while never forgetting what "the new" means and what is required from the staff in order to achieve it. Such a leader will direct the attention of the group to the big picture and long-term goals. A good leadership of people is not merely about surviving day-to-day operations, but it brings to the fore deeper and more long-term goals and purposes that are ethical and socially sustainable. One source of these purposes, deeper visions, and wider stories is compassion. Is the leader able to paint the big picture: What higher purpose is our team working towards, both directly and instrumentally? Why does our labour make the world a better place? It is difficult to imagine a line of work that does not somehow promote compassion and co-passion—a good life for a human being. In the end, work is always for our fellow humans and humanity at large, virtually regardless of what is being done.

Fourthly, a servant leader has the courage to defend her/his views and to take risks, to walk ahead of the followers and to show the way. In the upheavals of contemporary working life and organizational turbulences in many workplaces, a courageous leader is one that dares to speak for the well-being of the followers and to act accordingly. Being an easy and pleasingly spineless leader is compassionate neither towards the team nor towards an individual employee. Comforting is a part of crises and even some smaller everyday challenges, but a good leader—a compassionate leader—wants what is best for the followers and the team, which can also be something that does not feel particularly pleasant or inviting at the moment. A servant leader sees the big picture, without selfishly striving for popularity and a reputation of being a “nice boss” or “nice guy” to her/his superiors. A compassionate leader has the courage to make decisions that do not make her/him popular, at least not in the short term. S(he) seeks the best of what is possible for the followers, and thus dares to challenge the superiors, too, if necessary.

These four aforementioned leadership dimensions of servant leadership are those that particularly strengthen the motivational path in Fig. 8.1 by evoking co-passion and ensuring that the followers have access to sufficient resources, such as autonomy, opportunities for development and for utilizing one’s strengths, appreciation, and positive and forward-looking feedback as well as support to achieve the goals and stay engaged. A servant leader her/himself is also directly an energizing resource, a role model, and a motivational factor for the followers.

There are also four servant-dimensions of servant leadership. First, only a genuine and authentic leader can create the kind of trust that enables people to come forward with their problems and requests for help. Trust also enables best work performance. Authenticity is about being able to fit one’s “real self” into one’s professional role and being true to one’s own self as a leader, not through one’s professional standing or power. In Finnish leadership literature, perhaps the strongest example of servant leadership can be found in Saska Saarikoski’s book (2015) on Henrik Dettman, the coach of the Finnish national basketball team. He describes how the first thing he did as the coach was to change the doorplate “leader of coaching” to “servant”. According to Dettmann, only genuine authenticity can generate trust.



Second, a leader capable of compassion is also humble. This includes the readiness to reevaluate her/his own behaviour and to learn from feedback and critique. A humble leader has come to terms with her/his own strengths and weaknesses, and is ready to improve in order to become an even better leader. S(he) has an ability to respect those in the team who are more competent than s(he), and gives credit when credit is due. Third, a servant leader is willing to work for the benefit of the team even “behind the stage” and in situations the team will never hear of, and even in those situations, s(he) is expressing gratefulness for the team and praising them for their successes.

Fourth, servant leadership is linked to a readiness and skill to forgive and not bear a grudge. Forgiveness is great compassion. It signals that making mistakes is human and that it is possible to move on from them unharmed. Several studies (e.g., Cameron and Caza 2002) show just how significantly forgiveness can improve one’s health and how, on the other hand, the inability or refusal to forgive and the bearing of a grudge impacts our health negatively.

From these ways of *being* a leader—that is, not merely from ways of leading—it follows that a leader also listens, is empathetic and ready to act for the team and its each individual member. It is precisely about listening—not telling. A compassionate servant leader introduces even the most sensitive topics and conversations during crises through open questions, beginning from the perspective and experiences of the employee, even when faced with the challenging situation of having to discuss the employee’s mistakes. Owing to the combination of all of these elements, the healing effect of servant leadership has been regarded as one of its strengths. The employees feel that they receive compassion and thereby recover and regain their well-being as well as their energy to do good work. In the centre of it all is appreciation of the employee. Appreciation is compassion and compassion is appreciation, even at work.

Servant leadership is holistic, and therefore it is somewhat artificial to say, for example, that of these eight dimensions, only the four pertaining to leadership cultivate and strengthen co-passion, while only the four servant-dimensions cultivate and strengthen compassion, or even that compassion is particularly connected to the servant-dimensions. A genuine and humble leader who appreciates her/his followers and is

ready to listen to them is energizing, while a stewarding leader who shows the direction, paves the way, empowers, and assigns responsibility to people is also able to act compassionately. This kind of leadership also enables the transmission of compassion and co-passion from the staff to the manager, in other words, the transmission of compassion in both directions (Fig. 8.1).

In all, by following the eight core behaviours of servant leadership, one is also able to cultivate compassion by facilitating all of its three steps: noticing, empathizing, and acting for the good of another. In addition, a servant leader turns compassion into a reality at the meta-level as well: the servant leader's behaviour reflects her/his conception of human nature and of her/his visions related to work. While all this can seem a bit grandiose, in fact very many leaders already manifest the seed of these elements: they want what is best for their team and their followers, and this want is reflected in their everyday actions, for instance in the tone of their emails. It is precisely the leader's conception of human nature that becomes manifest in her/his actions, whether s(he) wants it or not: what you truly believe of people is evident in your gaze, words, and actions. A servant leader has both a compassionate conception of human nature and compassionate actions. All in all, we believe that by building a human-centred, in other words, serving, empowering, compassionate, and gentle approach in leadership, it is possible to build more flourishing workplaces, both in terms of organizational performance as well as employee well-being and motivation.

## **Servant Leaders Build Compassion and Co-passion in Organizations: And How to Promote It?**

Our CoPassion project ([www.copassion.fi](http://www.copassion.fi)) focused on promoting—via interventions—compassionate, co-passionate, and inspiring servant leadership in various work contexts. As noted above, in the same way as compassion is about encountering another person's suffering and pain, co-passion concerns encountering another person's joy and excitement.

Co-passion is a term coined by us, and it is formed by the same three elements as compassion: the ability to notice another's emotion, to empathize with them, and the actions used to express sympathy, but all three elements concern positive emotions, joy, as being passionately excited about something. Importantly, our belief is that in the core of humans' encountering each other, and humans being in intersubjective relations with each other—like in the everyday of leadership—we can never truly separate compassion from co-passion. Their synergy enables employees to be fully engaged at work (Hakanen and Roodt 2010). According to William Kahn (1990), when engaged, people can be fully present at work and employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances—experiences of compassion and co-passion may be considered preconditions for such engagement (see also Fig. 8.1).

In our project CoPassion, one of the sub-studies was exploring the effect of emotion skills trainings. Participants in this intervention were leaders from five different Finnish organizations including Nordea, a large Nordic finance group, LocalTapiola, a large insurance and banking services company, City of Espoo, Finland's second biggest municipality, National Gallery, the largest art institution in Finland, and MTV3 Uutiset, the news section of a large commercial television channel. In each context, an intervention group consisted of 10–20 individuals in the treatment group and at least an equivalent number of individuals in the control group. We conducted pre- and post-surveys for all the participants and in the control groups. We also conducted the same survey 6 months later, as well as group interviews for all intervention participants approximately 18 months after the treatment. The emotion skills cultivation training (ESCT) that we utilized has been developed by a psychologist, consultant Jarkko Rantanen, and a researcher from our team (Miia Paakkanen) conducted the trainings. Rantanen's training programme draws from research and literature on a wide range of fields and topics looking at emotions and emotional intelligence. It was designed to be used as a structured protocol that consists of six 3-hour classes and home exercises between classes. The classes were planned to adjust to an organization's everyday constraints allowing flexibility in the overall time frame. The 3-hour classes were either spread out over a six- to eight-week period, or partly merged together to form one or two days

with two consecutive 3-hour classes. Each treatment group met for a minimum of four independent times. Classes were held either weekly or maximum every two weeks, in the case of two 3-hour classes being merged into one (Paakkanen et al. 2017).

The objective of the ESCT was to foster compassion and emotion skills in an organization and among employees through better understanding, awareness, and management of emotions in the self, in others, as well as in the emotional climate of an organization. More specifically, the objective was fourfold: first, to increase awareness and understanding of emotions, second, to promote courage to lead emotions, third, to increase emotional competence and sense of self-efficacy to lead emotions, and fourth, to foster behaviour and actions to lead emotions. Through these four sub-objectives, the programme aimed to further all elements of compassion. The classes consisted of literature, discussions, exercises, and home assignments designed to deliver both didactic and experiential training in emotion skills across six modules: (1) increasing the awareness of emotions at work, (2) understanding the forces behind emotions, (3) increasing and strengthening positive emotions, (4) facing and dealing with negative emotions and difficult situations, (5) leader's toolkit to lead emotions, and (6) systematically leading the emotional climate of an organization (Paakkanen et al. 2017).

In our group interviews 18 months after the training, we focused, among other matters, on what had hindered putting the content of the training into praxis. Five particular themes appeared: too small a portion of the personnel had participated in the training, and there had been organizational and personnel-related changes hindering the effect. In addition, the training did not have continuation in the everyday, nor systematic maintenance or follow-up in the everyday of the work place. Furthermore, also the hectic work life was experienced as hindering the effect of the training. Finally, leading emotion was considered by some rather challenging, and also, there was some fear of wrong interpretations and the experience of not being authentic. The Finnish work culture is not at its best in expression and talking about emotions; for some, the intervention may have been a bit too far from their comfort zone. All in all, however, the overall feedback on the trainings was positive and enthusiastic. Particularly, the training had been experienced as having

promoted understanding of one's own role and responsibility in the atmosphere of the workplace. Also, the intervention was experienced as having fostered interconnectedness of people and compassion and co-passion among them at work, as well as having given concrete tools to promote these positive emotions in the future. Concerning the intervention angle, one particular theme yielding statistically significant pre- versus post-treatment differences in the treatment versus the control groups deals with the lessening of the fear of expressing compassion at work places.

What concrete steps could leaders take to improve the compassionate and co-passionate culture in their workplaces? What have we learned from our CoPassion project? We would conclude five core notions (based on Pessi 2017); First, *truly notice what is happening around you, leader*. All leaders should keep a very sharp eye out for the signals: Can I see how people are doing? Am I also looking out for those quieter signals? Similarly, how well am I looking after my own rest and relaxation? It is important to secure the leader is frequently enough actively available and truly present. Furthermore, how can leaders support day-to-day awareness and encountering of people between themselves: Is, for instance, the office layout constructive towards getting to know one another, and to share also their excitements and joys in the everyday? Do the people in the workplace know one another, and not just through a limited work-self?

Second, *accept the power of emotions*. During a crisis, people are not able to handle the crisis mentally, until the emotional onslaught has subsided. Emotions do not need to, and should not, be wallowed in for the sake of wallowing, but it is important that leaders face emotions and emotion triggers. Therefore, a manager should not focus primarily on fixing issues but also truly face people's emotions. Honesty and integrity, particularly when faced with changes, is compassionate: a leader should not hide behind processes or their own managers. A servant leader also understands the power of the positive; how to lead people to take pride in each other's joy and success, and to share also their own accomplishments proudly?

Third, *focus on and cherish empathy*; particularly when it comes to conflict situations, emotional outbursts, or confusing situations, it is a crucial exercise if a leader is capable of viewing the situation from the

other person's perspective. Why does s/he feel as s/he feels? Also, the power of example is great: as a leader, what kinds of emotions am I strengthening, and what kinds of emotions am I trying to reduce in our workplace—and why, and how? One of the greatest corrodors of compassion and co-passion in the workplace is an experience of unfairness and lack of transparency. A leader has a great responsibility in how much they can strengthen the experiences of fairness and being in it together within their workplace community. Unfairness places people in a corrosive devious zero-sum game battle with each other. It is much easier by far to feel empathy in a workplace that is perceived to be just and fair.

Fourth, *dare to act compassionately and co-passionately*; true compassion always involves action. Leaders, in particular, need to keep up compassion through small actions in the ordinary daily grind. Interestingly enough, “deep-acting” is powerful, too: even if something does not elicit deep empathy in the leader, it is possible to awaken the feeling through compassionate acts. Through their actions, a compassionate leader can create a sense of elevation (Haidt 2003), for example, “working in this place is great!” Then, when a crisis strikes, leaders, in particular, cannot fall prey to the natural thought process of “someone else is probably helping already” or “somebody must have already done something”; the leader needs to dare to be compassionate in her/his actions.

Fifth, *dare to receive compassion and co-passion*; the ability to accept compassion can be especially challenging for leaders. Accepting help, however, is a sign of strength, and at the same time, the leader offers the helper the gift of joy and meaning. Leaders must ask themselves: Am I being wary of sharing my humanity at work—which leads to setting an example that may be too restrictive in terms of compassion and co-passion? Am I setting an example that strengthens a culture of coping or a culture of humanity? Do I dare to boost co-passionate spirit and share my pride of myself too; you did great! I did great!

As Fig. 8.1 illustrates, servant leadership is not only about compassion but also about building proactive engagement and inspiration; we firmly believe that the above five steps can help in boosting inspiration and mutual engagement too. Next, we focus on two further examples of boosting servant leadership to gain positive follower and organizational outcomes.

## Servant Leaders Build Well-Being and Inspiration in Organizations

The first Finnish project to boost servant leadership both in research and practice was called *Spiral of inspiration—Innovative and flourishing workplaces*, conducted by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. It started with a survey study in 87 organizations representing various industries in the private, public, church, and third sectors (Hakanen et al. 2012). The aim of this phase was to investigate and identify the key job resources (e.g., autonomy, skill discretion, feedback, servant leadership, justice, friendliness, team empowerment) for positive outcomes, such as work engagement, in each organization.

After the first phase, the project continued with interventions in some of the organizations aimed to boost both (i) job crafting, in other words, self-initiated proactive behaviours of employees to balance the demands and resources with their personal needs and abilities and (ii) servant leadership behaviours among supervisors and managers. The interventions were developed by the researchers and consultants of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health together with the consultants of the Taitoba House, a solution-oriented consultancy company focusing on, for example, psychotherapy, coaching, and training. The overall aim was to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to build more innovative and engaged workplaces. The simple win-win idea introduced in the participating organizations was that when supervisors become more like servant leaders, the supervisors' followers will be more able and willing to do a *good job* and become more engaged. Similarly, by crafting their own jobs, for example, by voluntarily developing their skills, seeking support and feedback, and taking on interesting new challenges, employees are doing a *good job* and thereby become more engaged. Thus the goal was based on mutual possibilities and not on responsibilities, as we considered discussing mutual possibilities more motivating and engaging than the traditional way of talking about the duties and responsibilities each role position holds.

Using evidence-based findings of the huge survey in 87 organizations and 11,468 participants, we could motivate the organizations to participate in the interventions. For example, we could indicate that after taking into account several organizational and employee characteristics,

servant leadership as measured with the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) developed by Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) still accounted for a considerable variance of work engagement and team innovativeness. According to the stepwise regression analyses, structural factors of the organizations (type of business, number of employees, average age of employees, gender distribution, etc.) explained 4.6% of the variance of work engagement and 3.2% of the variance of team innovativeness in these organizations; organizational changes (magnitude, positivity/negativity) and economic situation during the past 12 months explained an additional 10.3% of engagement and 5.8% of team innovativeness; employment-related (work hours, job status, full vs part time contract, permanent vs fixed-term, etc.) and individual-related characteristics (age, gender, marital status, number of children) further added 0.7% of engagement and 0.4% of team innovativeness; after which workload did not contribute significantly either to work engagement or to team innovativeness. Instead, after all these previous factors were taken into account, servant leadership still explained 5.6% of employees being engaged at work and 10.7% of teams behaving innovatively and developing new innovations (work methods, services, etc.). Thus, servant leadership clearly was valuable for organizational practices and employee well-being.

The servant leadership interventions thus far have been carried out in several municipal day care centres, factories, and in one safety-critical engineering organization. The interventions consisted of pre-meetings, four workshops, interim individual and group assignments, and personal goals related to becoming more like a servant leader. In the pre-meetings, the aims of the organization at improving particularly leadership, employee well-being, and innovativeness were discussed and fitted with the interventions. The main topics of the workshops and assignments comprised brief lectures about servant leadership, survey feedback of the results particularly related to servant leadership, participants' thoughts about good leadership and previous experiences of servant leaders and acting like a servant leader, in which situations and by whom can servant leadership be experienced in the organization, and what is already going well and which aspects should be improved in the organizational and personal level.



After the introduction part, the workshops consisted of many practical role trainings on how to act in different situations and in different leadership tasks, such as giving feedback, encouraging proactivity, empowering bored employees, leading through organizational changes and during times of insecurity, and showing compassion for a colleague suffering from a private life crisis. In addition, each participant chose and built a personal servant leadership development plan that was followed, discussed, and supported during the intervention. Many other topics were also discussed, such as possible negative consequences of servant leadership and servant leadership as a workplace culture.

In addition, participants typically enjoy workshops and get many new insights and much inspiration, which may all be forgotten when returning to hectic daily work. Therefore, we also developed a mobile application to remind participants of the behavioural patterns of servant leaders. This application included two new questions for every morning (e.g., “Do you usually show appreciation to your followers?”) for a three-week period, and the same questions at the end of the working day (reformulated as “Did you show appreciation to your followers today?”), with three further questions on feeling engaged at work that day. The participants could then see their personal fluctuations in their leadership behaviours and engagement compared to those of their colleagues.

Generally, the interventions were evaluated positively. However, the organizations involved were anticipating or facing considerable changes, and therefore attention needed to be given to discussions related to insecurities and daily hassles. Apparently, for these reasons, the interventions seemed to buffer against the impacts of job insecurities on many positive outcomes as compared to the control groups in a six-month follow-up. All in all, challenges similar to in the CoPassion project of stabilizing the new ways of leading and working were met in these interventions.

As a follow-up project to *Spiral of inspiration*, we launched a new project called *People as Strategic Resource* in 40 municipalities all over Finland. Again, we started with a survey targeted at all employees and managers in these municipalities, and in total, 10,920 employees responded. The research aims concern how human resource management (HRM) practices and especially servant leadership may support proactivity and adaptive performance and employee well-being before and during

restructuring of services in these municipalities. The results will be used in developing HRM practices in municipalities and training frontline and other managers in servant leadership.

Servant leadership is a holistic and comprehensive set of practices that are all required for being a true servant leader. However, for practical purposes, to train servant leaders it may be valuable to know whether some dimensions of servant leadership are, relatively speaking, more important to certain outcomes than others and thus deserve more attention.

Our dominance analyses (Budescu 1993) indicated that empowering employees was particularly important for work engagement (employees feeling vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed at work), job crafting (self-initiated proactive changes employees do to better balance the demands and resources at their job with their personal needs and abilities), and later preferred retirement age. In addition, showing courage seemed to be the key servant leadership factor for followers to feel self-compassion and standing back for adaptive performance in the midst of organizational changes and insecurity. Empowerment has a strong influence on motivational employee outcomes. On the other hand, by showing courage, the leader is a role model for standing for what is felt to be right and for being more approving of oneself and of one's limitations during changes. Similarly, standing back and giving credit probably paves the pathway for more adaptive employee behaviours. However, it is noteworthy that all the sub-dimensions of servant leadership were positively associated with these outcomes.

## **The Future Is for Compassionate Servant Leaders and Compassionate Servant Followers**

Van Dierendonck (2011) discusses many individual antecedents to becoming a servant leader. Among those are the need to serve and the motivation to lead and thus to become a servant leader; being self-determined, in other words, satisfaction of basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence; strong human value basis; and the levels of moral cognitive development and cognitive complexity and

humane orientation. We suggest that one important antecedent for being a compassionate servant leader would be self-compassion, including self-kindness, shared humanity, and mindfulness (Neff 2003). Self-compassion is a bridge to others' experiences, but it also protects servant leaders from becoming too demanding of themselves, forgetting their own needs and thereby self-sacrificing to the point of burning themselves out.

As part of the Dialogue project between large Finnish companies and students (Piha et al. 2012), students at a Finnish business school were asked what they expect and hope of their future managers. The most often mentioned characteristics of a good manager were: helps others to succeed; clarifies goals and assignments; does not micromanage; provides sufficient support and freedom and space for being different; is easy to approach, to talk to about one's issues and to ask for help; gives not only feedback but also "feed forward", in other words, forward-looking feedback that enhances future performance; has courage to deal with issues as they arise; is genuine and does not hide behind one's role and status. Generation Y students' characterizations of their expectations of and hopes regarding their future managers were a perfect match with the tenets of servant leadership—these all fit perfectly well with what characterizes servant leaders. The younger generations have grown to equal relationships, and authoritarian ways of leading is not what they are ready for.

When Robert Greenleaf developed his ideas on servant leadership, he definitely was way ahead of his time. Servant leadership is about giving and doing good things for others and encouraging similar behaviours in others, too. By boosting compassionate and engaging servant leadership in research and in practice, it is possible to build organizational cultures of generosity, benevolence, compassion, and engagement.

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# 9

## A Conceptual Framework to Operationalise Servant Leadership Within an Organization

Michiel Frederick Coetzer

### Introduction

Organisations today have a moral responsibility to society. Business is like an ecosystem that holds society together. For example, without employment, people cannot pay tithes to churches, put bread on their tables, send their children to school, afford medical treatment, or even pay taxes to the government. More notably, without employment, people cannot buy any products or services from organisations. New products and services are generally developed in the business sector, which enhance the quality of living of people, stimulate economic growth, promote individual health, and provide employment opportunities to people. In return, societies look after organisations by buying their products and services, working in organisations, and providing the necessary infrastructure to function optimally. Organisations are thus essentially responsible to promote and sustain a humane society. According to

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Mackey and Sisodia (2014), business organisations were responsible for increasing the average individual income, standard of living, life expectancy, education levels, economic freedom, and life satisfaction of people and for a reduction in poverty and undernourishment in the world. It is thus evident that business organisations play a major part in creating a humane society.

Organisations also have a moral responsibility to employees. People spend most of their time at work, even more time than they spend with their loved ones or family. The work environment not only affects the physical health of employees, but also the psychological health of employees (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). The spillover effects of work also influence other dimensions of individual life, such as personal and family life (Bakker et al. 2013). Organisations therefore influence every aspect of individual life. When the work environment is favourable, individual lives flourish.

Organisations, furthermore, have a moral responsibility to other stakeholders such as shareholders, suppliers, customers, and the environment. The very existence of an organisation is based on serving people. Organisations originate from serving the needs of a customer while using the natural resources from the environment (in some form) to develop a product or service. Organisations also make use of suppliers to deliver a final product and employ people to serve customers. Shareholders, additionally, invest capital in organisations and expect a decent return once the employee served the customer. Customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders are all human beings (people). The core purpose of an organisation's existence is thus to serve people and to add value to society while sustaining the environment.

However, organisations today seem to have lost that perspective. Many organisations focus primarily on making more profit, becoming more efficient, and dominating the market without considering the impact on people, the society, or the environment. For example, the World Economic Forum (2016) estimated that approximately 5.1 million jobs will be lost in a period of five years (from 2015 to 2020) due to technology advancements in disruptive markets such as artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, 3-D printing, and genetics and biotechnology. Another study revealed that about 47% of the total employment in the United

States is at risk due to computerisation (Frey and Osborne 2017). Although these technologies would create some jobs, the rate at which they are diminishing jobs is far greater (World Economic Forum 2016). This is just one example demonstrating how business has lost its core purpose: to serve people and society.

Organisational reformation is thus required to sustain people and society in the future. Organisations need to shift from being a self-serving organisation (that only serves selfish ambitions at the expense of people, the society, the environment, or other stakeholders) to becoming a servant organisation (that serves multiple stakeholders including employees, customers, the society, the environment, and shareholders). Servant organisations focus not only on being a high-performing organisation but also on becoming a high impactful organisation. However, high performance is needed first before high impact can be achieved. An organisation first needs to make a decent profit before it can make a long-lasting positive impact on people and society. Laub (1999) defines a servant organisation as an organisation in which the leaders and workforce practise servant leadership. The implementation of servant leadership is therefore imperative to change a self-serving organisation into a servant organisation.

Servant leadership is a comprehensive leadership theory and practice that starts with an intent to serve (Greenleaf 1998) that flows into effective principles and practices to empower employees (Van Dierendonck 2011), build sustainable organisations (Sendjaya 2015), and to create a humane society (Barbuto and Wheeler 2006). The original teachings on servant leadership were initiated by Jesus Christ, more than 2000 years ago (Sendjaya 2015). For example, Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 22: 26–26 (New International Version) that “the kings of the gentiles lord it over them and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.” In the 1970s, Greenleaf (1998) first introduced servant leadership to the business and educational sectors. Servant leadership includes dimensions of transformational leadership, authentic leadership, charismatic leadership, enterprise leadership, level five leadership, situational leadership, spiritual leadership, and leader-member exchange. However,



servant leadership is different from these leadership theories because it focuses on people first, it serves multiple stakeholders (customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, the organisation, the society, and the environment), and it includes additional leadership principles and practices that are absent from the aforementioned leadership theories. Servant leadership is also a universal leadership practice that can be applied to any race, culture, or religion. It is like gravity—a “natural law” to lead people effectively in any context.

Although servant leadership is conceptualised well in the literature and the impact thereof is reported regularly, the practical application of servant leadership still needs more attention. A framework to implement servant leadership within organisations is not yet conceptualised in the literature. This makes it difficult for researchers and practitioners to apply servant leadership effectively in organisations. The general aim of this chapter is to provide researchers and practitioners with a framework to operationalise servant leadership in any type of organisation.

The first part of this chapter explains the functions of a servant leader with the characteristics and competencies of servant leadership as described in the literature. The second part combines these functions, characteristics, and competencies into one conceptual model and provides practical ways to operationalise servant leadership.

## The Functions of a Servant Leader

The literature reveals that servant leadership has four main functions, namely (1) to set, translate, and execute a higher purpose vision, (2) to become role models and ambassadors, (3) to align, care, and grow talent, and (4) to continuously monitor and improve (Coetzer, Bussin, and Geldenhuys 2017). These functions are clustered into strategic servant leadership and operational servant leadership. A summary of the objectives, characteristics, and competencies of each function is provided in Table 9.1.

**Table 9.1** The functions of a servant leader (Coetzer et al. 2017)

Performance area	Strategic servant leadership		Operational servant leadership	
Function	Set, translate, and execute a higher purpose vision	Become a role model and ambassador	Align, care, and grow talent	Continuously monitor and improve
Objectives	Set a higher purpose vision Translate the vision into a mission, strategy, and goals Execute the vision by serving others Stand up for what is right	Self-knowledge Self-management Self-improvement Self-revealing Stay within the rules	Align followers Care for and protect followers Grow followers	Good stewardship Monitor performance Improve systems, policies, processes, products, and services
Characteristics	Courage Altruism	Authenticity Humility Integrity	Listening Compassion	Accountability
Competencies	Compelling vision	Personal capability	Building relationships Empowerment	Stewardship
Analogy	Soldier	Athlete	Farmer	Steward
Leadership question	What is the mission?	How can I improve?	Who needs me?	Who is the owner?

Four analogies are used to describe and simplify the objectives of each function, namely a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, and a steward. Four leadership questions are in addition used to remind servant leaders of the basic principles and practices of each function, namely (1) What is the mission? (2) How can I improve? (3) Who needs me? and (4) Who is the owner? The four functions with their objectives, characteristics, and competencies are discussed in more detail below.

## Strategic Servant Leadership

Strategic servant leadership consists of two functions, namely the soldier-leadership function and the athlete-leadership function.

### The Soldier-Leadership Function

The first function of a servant leader is to set, translate, and execute a higher purpose vision. Many authors agree that this is one of the primary roles of a servant leader (Laub 1999; Page and Wong 2000; Dennis and Bocarnea 2005; Barbuto and Wheeler 2006; Hale and Fields 2007). In general, this function has the following four objectives: (1) to set a higher purpose vision; (2) to translate the vision into a mission, strategy, and goals; (3) to execute the vision by serving others; and (4) to stand up for what is right.

The analogy that is being used to describe this function is a soldier. Soldiers strive to achieve a higher purpose mission and put their own lives in jeopardy to promote the interests of others. They stand up for what is right and do this with courage and selflessness (altruism). In the same way, a servant leader moves beyond their own interests to achieve a higher purpose vision in the best interest of employees, the organisation, and the community. A servant leader stands up for what is right and do this despite negative adversary. They portray courage and altruism in similar ways than soldiers.

The first objective of this function is to set a higher purpose vision. According to Blanchard and Hodges (2008), servant leaders first set the direction before they serve, empower, and support others to achieve the vision. A higher purpose vision refers to an organisational vision that goes beyond profit to add value to people (customers, employees, and the society). Such a higher purpose vision does not focus primarily on making more profit, but on improving and sustaining the world to be better (Sisodia et al. 2014). However, an organisation with a higher purpose vision understands that it needs to make a good honest profit to produce value-adding products and services, to create employment opportunities, and to enhance socio-economic development in society. The focus of

such organisations is therefore on ways to utilise profit to make a positive impact on people (customers, employees, and the society) and not on making more profit at the exploitation of people (customers, employees, and the society). Theories such as conscious capitalism (Mackey and Sisodia 2014) and shared value (Porter and Kramer 2011) align well with this concept of a higher purpose vision.

Once a higher purpose vision has been set, a servant leader translates that vision into a mission, strategy, and goals. This translation process will make the higher purpose vision meaningful and tangible for employees (Laub 1999). When an employee's work-related goals are aligned with personal goals as well as the higher purpose vision of the organisation, employees experience a sense of purposefulness in their work and their levels of intrinsic motivation increase. In this way, employees commit to the higher purpose vision and work becomes a means to fulfil a life purpose instead of a transaction between the employer and the employee. The translated mission, strategy, and goals should focus primarily on the customer and the society because that is the reason why the organisation exists and secondarily on employees because they are closest to serve the customer and the society. After the higher purpose vision was translated into a mission, strategy, and goals, a servant leader needs to serve and support employees to obtain that vision (Blanchard 2010). This might include coaching, mentorship, development, encouragement, or providing the necessary job resources to employees to maintain high levels of work engagement and commitment. The last objective of the soldier-leadership function is to stand up for what is right. This means that servant leaders stand up for the rights and interests of others, whether it is employees, the organisation, the society, or any other stakeholder.

The soldier-leadership role is characterised by courage and altruism. Courage can be defined as the willingness to take worthwhile risks and to stand up for what is right, even in the face of adversary (Russel and Stone 2002; Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011). Altruism is described as having a desire to help others (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2014) and to contribute positively to people, business, and society. Servant leaders have the courage and altruism to set, translate, and execute bold and selfless visions that focus on making a long-lasting, positive impact on others,

the society, and the environment. Servant leaders also apply courage and altruism to stand up for the interests of customers, employees, the society, and the environment even to their own detriment. A relevant competency of this role is setting a compelling vision, which is a combination of persuasive mapping (Barbuto and Wheeler 2006; Sun 2013) and vision (Hale and Fields 2007). Setting a compelling vision refers to the ability to construct a higher purpose vision by linking past events and current trends with future scenarios to leave a long-lasting, positive legacy in people, society, and the environment.

### **The Athlete-Leadership Function**

The second function of a servant leader is to become a role model and ambassador. This function has five objectives or practices, namely (1) self-knowledge, (2) self-management, (3) self-improvement, (4) self-revealing, and (5) staying within the rules. These principles align well with the servant-leadership model of Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry (2014), which proposes that servant leaders must first lead themselves before they can lead others. Other authors agree that servant leaders should have high self-awareness (De Sousa and Van Dierendonck 2014; Patterson 2003), the willingness to learn new things (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2014), the ability to portray themselves authentically, (Peterson and Seligman 2004), and strong moral principles (Russel and Stone 2002). Hence, servant leaders need to know, manage, improve, and reveal themselves to become role models and ambassadors for others. As good role models and ambassadors, servant leaders also abide by rules and regulations and encourage others to do so as well.

The analogy of an athlete is used to describe the objectives and practices of this function. Professional athletes strive towards improving their personal performance by building on their strengths; mitigating their weaknesses; exercising mental, emotional, and physical regulation techniques; training endlessly to improve their performance; and by reflecting on their performance after a competition. They also compete within the rules and understand that breaking the rules will have negative consequences or even result in disqualification. The same principles apply

for a servant leader in the role of being a role model and ambassador. Servant leaders practise the principles of self-knowledge, self-management, self-improvement, self-revealing, and staying within the rules.

Self-knowledge is about knowing personal strengths, weaknesses, and potential in terms of cognitive ability, personality, values, emotional intelligence, skills, talents, and passions to be activated or improved to the benefit of others. Servant leaders know their personal strengths, weaknesses, and potential and are able to align their strengths and potential to a relevant job or cause. In this way, servant leaders use their strengths to serve others and to leave a long-lasting positive impact on society. Self-management refers to managing one's mental, emotional, and physical state to become more effective. Servant leaders can manage their mental state by applying neuroplasticity principles to create new productive habits. Servant leaders should also manage their emotions to interact effectively with others and to handle difficult situations well. For example, Barbuto, Gottfredson, and Searle (2014) found significant correlations between emotional intelligence and five servant-leadership attributes. Servant leaders should furthermore manage their physical state to ensure they have the human energy capacity to fulfil their servant duties. Self-improvement means to improve oneself continuously to remain effective and relevant in a continuously changing world. Servant leaders cannot empower others if they do not have the knowledge or skill themselves to do a task. Self-revealing refers to being authentic and revealing one's true identity. Servant leaders are authentic and humble, and reveal their true selves when dealing with others (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2014). They perceive their talent in the right perspective and show consistent behaviour. The last objective of this function is to stay within the rules. This means that servant leaders apply good business ethics (Ehrhart 2004; Liden et al. 2008) and practise integrity (Page and Wong 2000) in every situation. Servant leaders obey virtuous law and do things ethically.

The personal characteristics needed to obtain the objectives of this function are authenticity, humility, and integrity. Authenticity can be defined as showing one's true self (Pekerti and Sendjaya 2010), following ethical principles and practices (Russel and Stone 2002), and communicating one's true intentions and motivations (Peterson and Seligman 2004). Humility is characterised by high self-awareness

(De Sousa and Van Dierendonck 2014; Patterson 2003), openness to learn (Van Dierendonck 2011), modest behaviour (Bobbio et al. 2012), and perceiving one's talents in the right perspective (Patterson 2003). Integrity means to abide by ethical principles and practices (Melchar and Bosco 2010; Pekerti and Sendjaya 2010) and to be truthful and fair (Russel and Stone 2002). A competency relevant to this function is personal capability. Personal capability is defined as the ability to become highly effective by continuously managing one's physical, mental, and emotional state; developing oneself to activate individual talents; and by applying self-awareness principles and practices (Coetzer et al. 2017).

## **Operational Servant Leadership**

Operational servant leadership consists of two functions, namely the farmer-leadership function and the steward-leadership function. Before these functions can be applied, a servant leader should invert the hierarchy for the leader to serve the employee. If the hierarchy is not inverted, employees will serve leaders and the customer and society will suffer. Hence, a servant leader first sets a higher purpose vision and then flips the hierarchy upside down to serve employees to achieve that vision.

### **The Farmer-Leadership Function**

The third function of a servant leader is to align, care, and grow talent. This function has the following three objectives: (1) to align followers, (2) to care for and protect followers, and (3) to grow followers. These objectives are in line with the thinking of several other authors, which confirms that caring for employees (Laub 1999; Page and Wong 2000; Dennis and Bocarnea 2005; Barbuto and Wheeler 2006) and developing employees (Wong and Davey 2007; Liden et al. 2008; Sendjaya et al. 2008; Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011) are two fundamental roles of a servant leader.

The analogy of a farmer is used to describe this role. A farmer grows, cares, and protects livestock or flora. For example, a farmer will select and plant a specific seed in the ground that fits the environmental conditions.

Thereafter a farmer will serve the needs of that seed to grow and harvest it. A farmer will provide all the necessary resources to help that seed grow and will protect the seed from anything that could hurt or hinder its growth. The ultimate task of a farmer is to harvest the seed (to release it for a higher purpose). The same principles apply for a servant leader. A servant leader firstly identifies and aligns individual passion, purpose, and talent with the requirements of a position and thereafter serves the employee by creating the right working climate and culture to enhance work engagement and by providing the opportunities, resources, and autonomy to grow. A servant leader also identifies and removes anything that could hurt the employee, the organisation, or the community. The fundamental task of a servant leader is to grow and empower employees to achieve personal and organisational goals independently and to release individual talent and purpose to achieve a higher purpose vision to the benefit of the customer and the society.

The first objective of this function is to align an individual's personal interests, knowledge, skills, abilities, talents, and life purpose with the requirements of a position and with the higher purpose of the organisation. This is done by applying effective person-job fit and person-organisation fit principles and practices. The second objective of this function is to care for and protect followers. This means that servant leaders create an effective working climate and culture for employees that will activate individual talent and help employees to flourish. Servant leaders also provide the necessary job resources to employees while managing their job demands to improve work engagement levels. These caring principles align well with the job demand-resources theory (Bakker and Demerouti 2016). The third objective of the farmer-leadership function is to grow followers. Servant leaders continuously develop their direct reports, empower them, and release their natural potential (Patterson 2003) to achieve personal and organisational goals linked to a higher purpose vision, mission, and strategy.

The farmer-leadership function of a servant leader is characterised by listening and compassion. Servant leaders listen actively to understand the needs of others. Listening enables servant leaders to understand what type of job resources employees need to flourish. Spears (2010) defines listening as the action to listen attentively to others, to understand verbal



and non-verbal communication, and to provide an opportunity to reflect on what was being said. Servant leaders also show compassion, which is defined as being caring, empathetic, kind, forgiving, and showing unconditional love towards others (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2014). Servant leaders cannot align followers, care for and protect followers, or grow followers without listening first and then showing compassion.

## **The Steward-Leadership Function**

The fourth function of a servant leader is to continuously monitor and improve. Previous literature has emphasised that servant leaders keep people accountable (Van Dierendonck 2011) and that they apply good stewardship (Barbuto and Wheeler 2006; Sendjaya et al. 2008; Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011). The fourth function consists of three objectives, namely to (1) apply good stewardship, (2) monitor performance continuously, and to (3) improve systems, policies, processes, products, and services continuously.

The analogy that is being used for this function is a steward. A steward is an official who manages the belongings of another person and looks after the things entrusted to him. A steward knows he is not the owner, but rather a manager who is accountable to the owner. The same principles apply to servant leadership. Servant leaders are stewards of their life-time, talent, positions, finances, resources, or assets and use them well to produce a meaningful outcome for the benefit of others. Servant leaders take accountability for what is entrusted to them and apply good stewardship to produce the best return on investment for others in the shortest timespan. Servant leaders diligently monitor progress made towards achieving a higher purpose vision and continuously improve systems, policies, processes, products, and services for the benefit of multiple stakeholders.

The first objective of the steward-leadership function is to apply good stewardship. Good stewardship means that servant leaders do not perceive themselves as owners of life, but rather as stewards of life. Servant leaders see themselves not as owners of their talents, positions, lifetime, resources, or assets, but perceive these as mechanisms to achieve a higher

purpose vision to improve others, the organisation, and the society. Servant leaders understand that they are accountable to the Owner of life. Good stewardship is therefore the ability to produce the best return on investment for others in the shortest timespan to the benefit of multiple stakeholders (customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, the organisation, the society, and the environment).

The second objective of the steward-leadership role is to monitor performance continuously. This means that once the vision is set and translated, a servant leader needs to keep employees accountable by monitoring progress on the set goals. The third objective of this function is to improve systems, policies, processes, products, and services. Servant leaders improve and simplify systems, policies, and processes to make the organisation more effective and also improve the products and services of the company frequently to stay relevant in a continuously changing world. The characteristic of accountability and the competency of stewardship fit this function well.

## The Heart, Head, and Hands of a Servant Leader

Strategic servant leadership can be seen as the “head” dimension of servant leadership, whereas operational servant leadership can be perceived as the “hands” dimension of servant leadership. Both strategic and operational leadership will flow from the “heart” dimension. The heart of a servant leader refers to an individual’s leadership intent, the reason why a person wants to lead. Greenleaf (1998) is of the opinion that servant leadership starts with an intent to serve that flows into a desire to lead. Others suggest that servant leadership starts with a heart of love (Blanchard and Hodges 2008; Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2014). Hence, servant leadership originates from a loving heart, from which a servant leader then applies the “head” dimension to provide strategic servant leadership, and thereafter applies the “hands” dimension to provide operational servant leadership.

The “heart” dimension is thus the most important part of servant leadership, as it will influence a leader’s approach towards both strategic and operational leadership. For example, if a leader leads out of a heart of

pride or fear, the vision of the company will focus primarily on being better than the opposition and making the most profit as possible without considering the impact on employees, the society, or the environment. However, when a leader leads from a loving heart, he will create an organisational vision that serves a higher purpose vision beyond profit or status to the benefit of multiple stakeholders. Russell (2001) concurs that personal values are instrumental to practise servant leadership. Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2014) also agree that compassionate love is the basis from which servant leadership originates. The core values and intent of a leader therefore determine whether a person will apply self-serving leadership practices or servant-leadership practices.

These three dimensions are also summarised by Sendjaya (2015) as the know-why, know-what, and know-how elements of being a servant leader. With the right “heart” or character, servant leaders know why they lead. When applying the cognitive dimension of the “head”, servant leaders know what the higher purpose vision is. When applying the “hands” dimension, servant leaders know how to implement servant leadership effectively to empower people, to build better organisations, and to create a humane society.

## Operationalisation of Servant Leadership

### The Talent Wheel of Servant Leadership

According to Greenleaf (1998), the test of true servant leadership is when followers become servant leaders themselves. Hence, the four functions of a servant leader can be used as a framework to transform employees into servant leaders. In Fig. 9.1, the four functions of a servant leader are consolidated in a wheel format with its relevant characteristics and competencies. This can be defined as the talent wheel of servant leadership.

The talent wheel of servant leadership is a conceptual process to develop servant leaders in organisations. It consists of four phases to transform employees into servant leaders. The first phase is to transform employees into “athletes”. In other words, to empower employees to become role models and ambassadors by optimising individual potential

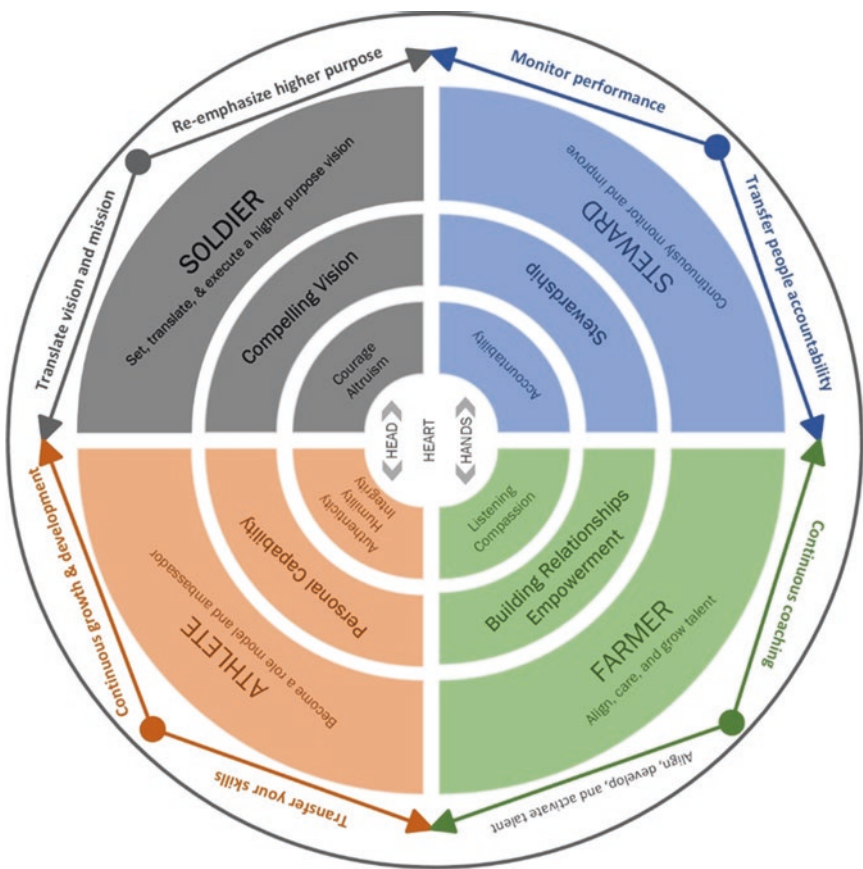


Fig. 9.1 Talent wheel of servant leadership

and performance in line with their personal interests and current position. This is done by applying the farmer-leadership functions to align the passion, purpose, and talent of an employee with the requirements of a position and then by continuously developing that employee to activate individual talent. The second step in this phase is to translate the higher purpose vision into clear personal goals. This is done by the soldier-leadership function.

The second phase is to transform employees into “farmers”. In this process, the talent wheel rotates clockwise and the servant leader equips the employee to lead others. A servant leader does this by transferring some form of people accountability to the employee (from the steward-leadership function) and by transferring his own expertise to the employee (from the athlete-leadership function).

In the third phase, the talent wheel rotates again clockwise and a servant leader transforms the employee into a “steward”. This is done firstly by re-emphasising the higher purpose vision from the soldier-leadership function and secondly by coaching the employee towards optimal performance from the farmer-leadership role. It is important to re-emphasise the higher purpose at this stage as the employee might become selfish when receiving more authority and accountability. Employees might forget they are stewards rather than owners if they do not focus on the higher purpose vision. A servant leader should also coach the employee to become a good steward of finances, assets, resources, positions, and people.

The last phase in this development process is to transform employees into “soldiers”. This is done by monitoring employee performance consistently (from the steward-leadership role) and by ensuring continuous employee development while role modelling the desired behaviour (from the athlete-leadership role).

This process of leadership development seems to correlate well with the leadership pipeline model of Charan, Drotter, and Noel (2011). In their model seven phases of leadership development are described, namely (1) manage self, (2) manage others, (3) manage managers, (4) functional manager, (5) business manager, (6) group manager, and (7) enterprise manager. Managing self relates well to the athlete-leadership objectives of

self-knowledge, self-management, self-improvement, self-revealing, and staying within the rules. The roles of managing others and managing managers are similar to that of the farmer-leadership role to align, care, and grow employees. The functional and business manager relates well to the steward-leadership role to monitor performance continuously; to improve systems, processes, and policies; and to manage the finances, resources, and assets of a company to produce the best return on investment. The group and enterprise manager roles relate well with the soldier-leadership function to set, translate, and execute a higher purpose vision.

The difference however between the leadership pipeline model and the talent wheel of servant leadership is that in the talent wheel of servant leadership a leader will apply all the leadership functions simultaneously irrespective of the occupational level. Servant leaders will practise all four leadership functions concurrently to serve the needs of employees irrespective of their position in the organisation. For example, individuals can apply the objectives of the soldier-leadership function without being in a group or an enterprise management position. The same is true for the athlete-leadership role. Individuals in an enterprise or a group management position should still apply the principles and practices of the athlete-leadership function to improve themselves continuously and to be role models for others.

## **A Conceptual Model to Operationalise Servant Leadership**

In this section, the four functions, the talent wheel, and the dimensions of the “heart”, “head”, and “hands” of a servant leader are combined into one conceptual model to operationalise servant leadership. This model proposes five standard procedures to apply servant leadership in organisations. From the strategic servant-leadership sphere, a servant leader first sets a higher purpose vision by applying the soldier-leadership function from a loving heart. This higher purpose vision is then translated into a mission, strategy, and goals. The mission, strategy, and goals should focus primarily on the customer and society and secondarily on employees

because they are closest to serve the customer and the society. Thereafter the capability and capacity frameworks are designed and business processes, systems, and policies are developed to support the mission, strategy, and goals. Once a higher purpose vision is set and translated, the servant leader applies the athlete-leadership function to become a role model and ambassador for the higher purpose vision. These two strategic servant-leadership functions are done from the “head” dimension of servant leadership.

Once the functions of strategic leadership are applied, the hierarchy is inverted and the functions in the operational servant leadership sphere are activated. This is the “hands” dimension of servant leadership. The servant leader applies the farmer-leadership function as a third step to align, care, and grow employees using the capacity and capability frameworks as guides. Thereafter the steward-leadership function is applied as a fourth step to continuously monitor progress on the goals using the developed business processes, policies, and systems as mechanisms. The servant leader also improves the developed processes, systems, and policies continuously to enhance organisational effectiveness. The fifth step is then to activate the talent wheel to transform employees into servant leaders. This five-step procedure to operationalise servant leadership is summarised in Fig. 9.2.

## **Standard Procedure to Implement the Servant-Leadership Model**

In this section, a standard implementation procedure is provided to implement the conceptual model in a systematic way. A summary of this implementation procedure is presented in Table 9.2.

This procedure starts with the evaluation of a leader’s heart, as this will influence strategic and operational leadership. The objective of this activity is to evaluate the personal values of the leader using personal value assessments and to align them with servant-leadership values via coaching. The next activity is then to provide strategic servant leadership, which include setting, translating, and executing a higher purpose vision and to become role models and ambassadors. One way to set a higher

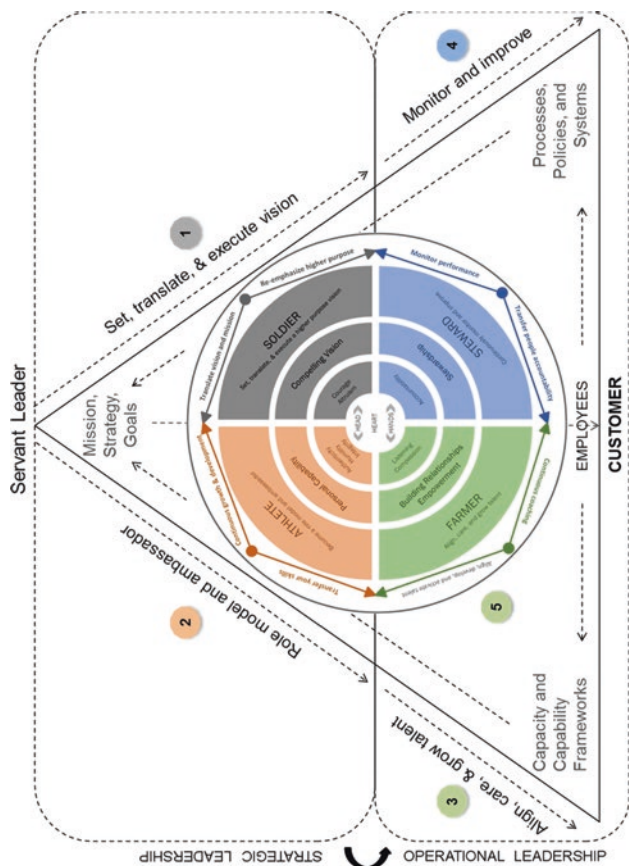


Fig. 9.2 Conceptual model to operationalise servant leadership



Table 9.2 Standard procedure to implement servant leadership

Activity	Step	Leadership function	Objective (what)	Interventions (how)
Evaluate heart intentions			Evaluate leader values	Personal values assessments
Provide strategic leadership	1. Set, translate, and Soldier-executive a higher purpose vision	Soldier-leadership function	Align to servant-leader values 1.1 Set higher purpose vision  1.2 Translate higher purpose vision into mission, strategy, and goals 1.3 Develop processes, systems, and policies to support the vision, mission, and strategy 1.4 Develop capacity and capability frameworks to support the vision, mission, and strategy	Coaching Employee focus groups Strategic workshops Management workshops     Management workshops
	2. Become a role model and ambassador	Athlete-leadership function	2.1 Become aware of personal strengths and weaknesses (self-knowledge)  2.2 Enhance personal effectiveness (self-management and self-improvement)	Management workshops Job analysis processes, systems, policies, resources, and application toolkits Psychometric assessments (cognitive ability, personality, emotional intelligence) 360 servant-leadership surveys  Personal development plan Coaching

Provide operational leadership	3. Align, care, and grow employees	Farmer-leadership function	3.1 Align employees	Recruitment and selection processes, systems, policies, resources, and application toolkits
			3.2 Care for employees: create and sustain an effective working climate and culture	Psychometric assessments Organisational diagnostic surveys Organisational development projects
			3.3 Grow and empower employees	Learning and development processes, systems, policies, resources, and application toolkits Personal development plans Coaching and mentorship
	4. Continuously monitor and improve	Steward-leadership function	4.1 Monitor performance continually	Performance management processes, systems, policies, resources, and application toolkits Management workshops Entrepreneurial and innovation programmes and rewards.
			4.2 Evaluate and improve processes, systems, policies, products, and services	
	5. Activate talent wheel	Farmer-leadership function	5.1 Activate talent wheel	Talent management processes, systems, policies, resources, and application toolkits Personal development plans Coaching and mentorship

purpose vision is to consult employees on their perception of a higher purpose vision for the organisation. This can be done by means of conducting employee surveys and employee focus groups. Thereafter the results of the employee surveys and focus groups are used in strategic workshops to compile a higher purpose vision for the organisation. Once a higher purpose vision is set and communicated, management workshops should follow to translate the higher vision into a mission, divisional strategies, and employee goals. Management workshops should also focus on developing the business processes, systems, and policies to support the vision, mission, and strategy and developing the capacity and capability frameworks to mobilise the vision. A capacity framework refers to the organisational structure in terms of the type and number of positions that are required to execute the vision. The capability framework refers to the competency framework of the company that defines the type of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to accomplish the vision. Capacity and capability frameworks are normally done in a job analysis process in which job profiles are defined for each position in the organisational structure. This is then used as a basis for recruitment and selection, performance management, and talent management. It is therefore necessary to develop and implement appropriate job analysis policies, procedures, systems, resources, and application toolkits.

The second step in this procedure is for leaders to become role models and ambassadors for the higher purpose vision. Leaders should therefore become aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses and be equipped with the resources and opportunities to manage and improve themselves to become more effective. Psychometric and other 360 assessments can be used to become aware of personal strengths and weaknesses in terms of cognitive ability, personality, emotional intelligence, and leadership capability. Thereafter, a personal development plan can be compiled to build personal strengths and to bridge personal weaknesses as identified by the assessment results. Coaching can also be used to help leaders transform into the desired role models.

The third step in this procedure is to align, care, and grow talent. Recruitment and selection policies, processes, systems, resources, and application toolkits should be designed to align individual interests, pur-

pose, passion, knowledge, skills, talents, and abilities to the requirements of a position and to the higher purpose vision of the organisation. Thereafter the leader needs to create an effective working climate and culture in which individual talent is activated and employees can flourish. Organisational diagnostic surveys can be useful in this regard to understand how employees experience the current climate and culture and to identify ways to improve it. The diagnostic results can then be used to develop and implement organisational development solutions to enhance the organisational climate and culture. Servant leaders should also grow and empower employees in this step by implementing effective learning and development policies, processes, systems, resources, and application toolkits. As part of these learning and development processes, servant leaders create personal development plans with employees and provide the necessary coaching and mentorship to help employees grow.

A fourth step in this procedure is to monitor progress on the goals continuously and to improve processes, systems, policies, products, and services regularly. Effective performance management policies, processes, systems, resources, and application toolkits should be developed and implemented to equip leaders with the framework and resources to monitor performance continually. Regular management workshops can in addition be used to evaluate and improve current business processes, systems, policies, products, and services. Other methods to improve organisational processes, systems, policies, products, and services are to cultivate an entrepreneurial and innovative culture within the company by implementing entrepreneurial, innovation, and recognition programmes.

A fifth step in this procedure is to activate the talent wheel to transform employees into servant leaders. Effective talent management policies, processes, systems, resources, and application toolkits should be designed and implemented according to the talent wheel of servant leadership. Personal development plans can be compiled for employees as part of the talent management process, and continuous coaching and mentorship can be provided to help employees apply the functions of servant leadership effectively.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to introduce a conceptual model to operationalise servant leadership within organisations. This model was built using current literature on servant leadership and provides a systematic procedure to implement servant leadership. Researchers and practitioners can use this conceptual model and framework to implement servant leadership in organisations to ultimately experience the benefits that servant leadership produces such as empowered people, sustainable organisations, and a humane society.

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# 10

## Building a People-Oriented and Servant-Led Organization

Dirk van Dierendonck

So, why do we get out of bed each morning? Do you ever ask yourself, why you get up, take a shower, have breakfast, get dressed, and go to work? Because that is what most of us do, day in, day out. Of course, we need money to pay for a roof over our head, to eat, to pay the rent or the mortgage, and to put our children through school. However, this cannot be the only reason. It was Peter Drucker who allegedly stated: “Profit for a company is like oxygen for a person. If you don’t have enough of it, you’re out of the game. But if you think your life is about breathing, you’re really missing something.”

So, what is life in general and life in organizations specifically about? Money has taken up such a central role within our world and in our organizations that we sometimes seem to forget what it means to be human. One has only to look at the skyline of cities like Rotterdam or The Hague

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to realize that our places of worship have changed. No longer is the view dominated by churches or castles; skyscrapers of financial institutions have taken over. We seem to almost forget that what we want from life is simply to be happy, to flourish, to become the best we can be. And this pursuit of happiness may be as old as history itself (McMahon 2007).

Reading organizations' annual reports shows us that most of them agree that people are their most valuable asset. Alternatively, to put it more bluntly, people are the organization. The only way to be successful as a company is through its people. This means that as an organization you have to find the right people and entice them to work for you, to build a structure that enables them to use their capabilities and improve on them, and to motivate them to contribute continuously and to the best of their potential.

Toward the end of the last century, this focus on people became more important with the shift from a manufacturing and production economy to a service sector asset-based economy. It is therefore not surprising that next to finance, marketing, and operations, people management is now a core area for successful organizations. Research into the impact of human resource (HR) practices of the last 20 years has clearly shown that attention to people matters for the performance of companies (Huselid and Becker 2011). People management can even be seen as the earliest management function (Deadrick and Stone 2014). In the earliest tribes, it was the leader's responsibility to divide the labor and look after the needs of the people in the group. With the advent of civilization, for centuries work was done by craftsmen often organized in guilds. It was only with the rise of the manufacturing industry in the late eighteenth century when work could be done by unskilled workers that laborers became perceived as resources that needed only a little care.

In the twentieth century, attention to the needs of workers was acknowledged again with the rising influence of the human relations movement. Quality of work life in terms of autonomy, job security, job clarity, working hours, pay satisfaction, and employment conditions became a focus of attention. It has been an intensively studied area for many years, and this research has confirmed the importance of job quality for both the well-being of employees and of organizations (Findlay et al. 2013).

Starting at the end of the last century, the strategic importance and the role of HR were acknowledged and professional HR managers became part of top management teams in modern organizations. With it came the potential pitfall of perceiving employees more as resources serving the goals of the organization and less as people with needs and values of their own. In many organizations, there is a disconnect between what HR sees as important and what it spends its time and energy on. Within Europe, this is—among other things—influenced by the replacement of our traditional Rhineland model of ‘humane capitalism’ with a focus on collaboration and consensus by an Anglo-Saxon model with more room for the market and neoliberal capitalism emphasizing the need to maximize profits and shareholder value.

New developments are taking place within organizations. The importance and the impact of a people-oriented organizational culture on knowledge management are being acknowledged (Cappelli 2015). Within organizations, work and the way work is organized are rapidly changing. With it comes the need for a different leadership culture that is grounded and intertwined with the organizational HR practices. Driven by increasing globalization, the virtualization brought on by the internet and the need for constant innovation are increasing the pace of work and our interconnectedness (Dolan et al. 2015). What works today may not work tomorrow. Dolan et al. (2015) identified ten areas that are quickly changing our work: the impact of technology, the type of work, where people work, the balance between work and non-work, portfolio employment, the social context of work, the physical context, the changing mix of skills and education, a stronger focus on productivity instead of on commitment, and an increasing risk of losing one’s sense of meaning at work.

Addressing these changes means building an organizational culture where servant leadership can play an essential role; it is clearly linked to the most recent call within the human resource management (HRM) field to put ‘human’ back into HRM (Wright and McMahan 2011) and to develop a different framework for looking at people, including their full potential as human beings and their innate desire to be happy. An organization that aims to build a culture grounded in servant leadership requires what I call optimal performance HR practices (OP-HR),

combining insights from research and from the discussion on the ‘best fit’ versus ‘best practice’. Basically, it requires a focus on a universal people-oriented prescription of preferred HR practices, while taking into account the organizational setting and the societal context.

The model introduced in this chapter aims to combine servant-leadership theory with HR practices. It can be placed within the current wave of change in HR, where the focus on administrative practices and strategy come together in what Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) call the outside/inside approach. It requires HR professionals to really understand their business context and their key stakeholders. The societal contribution of the organization and the organizational leadership culture are becoming more important to ensure that employees are motivated and productive. HR practices need to be organized around people and need to be an integral part of line management. Within this broader context, and addressing the clear practical needs of organizations, I would like to put forward some key organizational challenges at various interconnected levels that place the individual within the organizational setting and the societal context. Figure 10.1 presents a visual depiction.

## The Individual: The Essence of Flourishing

The first challenge is to perceive people within organizations differently, taking into account the full breadth of who they are and what they can be. When it comes to employee well-being at work, it is essential to realize that people change, grow, and develop; this holds true for their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), and also for their values and their physical abilities. Within this context, one of the challenges for organizations is to develop effective management strategies to encourage workers to remain engaged as active members of the workforce (Barnes-Farrell and Matthews 2007). If we want to shift the focus of our organizations from a short-term to a long-term perspective, we need a model with a developmental perspective that balances economic concerns and environmental sustainability (Cleveland et al. 2015). This means a move beyond the current focus on employee engagement. It includes a bottom-up approach, addressing the needs of employees as a starting point. We need

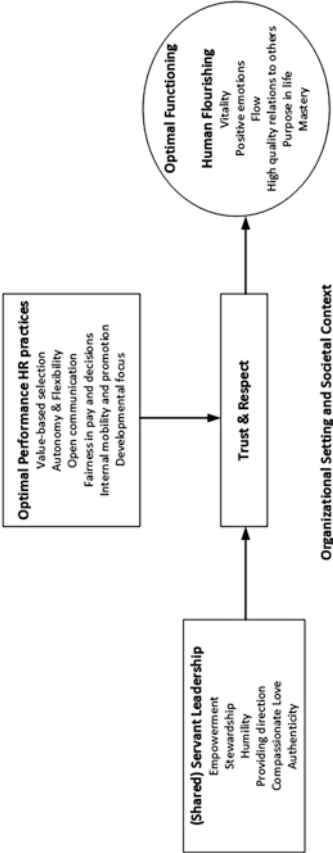


Fig. 10.1 The essence of a people-oriented organization

a model that takes into account basic human needs such as the need to belong and the need to express. If we want to understand people and their needs, theories from the adjoining area of personal well-being are insightful.

In defining well-being, two schools can be distinguished: hedonic well-being and eudaemonic well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001). The hedonic view, advocated by the Greek philosopher Aristippus (fourth century BC), states that life is about achieving pleasure. It states that well-being comes from experiencing as much joy as possible and avoiding pain and discomfort (Kahneman et al. 1999). The eudaemonic view, in contrast, states that the essence of well-being is more than striving for as many pleasurable experiences as possible. Ryff (1989a, b) argued that the Greek term *eudaemonia* encompasses more than happiness in the hedonic sense. Aristotle made a clear distinction between positive feelings that come from activities we do just because they give us pleasure and activities that are an expression of the best within ourselves. Eudaemonic well-being comes from doing things in life that ask us to be the best we can be in life. It means to live in accordance with one's 'true self' or *daemon* (Waterman 1993). Defined in this way, well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning. Aristotle stated that every man has unique individual talents and that true happiness can be found when these talents are put to full use. In modern times, similar ideas were formulated through Maslow's concept of self-actualization, Jung's individuation theory, and Allport's concept of maturity (Ryff and Singer 1998). Translating these insights into the work context, we can see that hedonic well-being is more related to job satisfaction, whereas eudaemonic well-being is more related to engagement and meaning at work. In other words, the hedonic view represents how good one feels and the eudaemonic approach represents how well one does relative to one's potential. Whereas the former may lead to a treadmill effect, with people pursuing ever-fleeting positive emotions from the acquisition of material things, the eudaemonic approach means living from the perspective of self-actualization (Waterman 1993).

I would like to propose a holistic approach to well-being at work where servant leadership is particularly suited, one that signifies an optimistic outlook on life and that emphasizes personal growth and

development. Building on the insights gained from Ryff and Singer's (1998) analysis, and extending Seligman's (2011) synthesis, I propose six principal components of employee flourishing: vitality, positive emotions, a sensation of 'flow', high-quality relationships, purpose in life, and mastery. *Vitality* is the experience of feeling full of energy, life, and enthusiasm (Ryan and Frederick 1997). Vitality also brings a sense of control over one's life. *Positive emotions* refer to pleasant feelings that a person can experience. Joy and interest are the most typical positive emotions. *Flow* is an experience of focused happiness when a person's skills and challenges are in balance (Csikszentmihalyi 2003). *High-quality relationships* signify having warm, satisfying, and trusting relationships. Baumeister and Leary's (1995) review gives abundant evidence of the central place that belongingness has as a fundamental human need. *Purpose in life* is a central element in many philosophical writings. It is also frequently mentioned in relation to spirituality. Purpose in life gives a sense of directedness, reason, and meaningfulness. Ryff and Singer (1998) suggest that *Mastery* is a secondary dimension of positive psychological health. It points toward a sense of mastery, competence, and trust in handling the environment.

Within this holistic view on well-being, it is essential that we acknowledge the reciprocal influence between individual employees and their immediate organizational environment (Cleveland et al. 2015). Not only do organizations change individuals as soon as they enter the organization, these individuals also change the organization (for a more elaborate explanation see Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems model). Over time, context has a reciprocal influence. The explicit acknowledgment of these processes over time suggests that attention to the health and well-being of employees is essential for long-term organizational performance and survival (Cleveland et al. 2015).

Such a long-term perspective takes into account the notion of a psychological contract that underlies the evaluation of the social exchange processes governing the relationship between employee and organization (Rousseau and McLean Parks 1993). A psychological contract is defined in terms of employee expectations about the nature of their exchange with the organization. Expectations may be related to concrete issues such as workload, as well as to less tangible matters such as esteem and

dignity at work, and support from supervisors and colleagues. This is why I argue for well-balanced HR practices that combine a long-term developmental perspective on organizational performance with explicit attention to employee flourishing. Leadership plays a crucial facilitating role in creating a work environment that encourages and motivates employees toward functioning optimally.

## The Servant Leader: Facilitating Optimal Performance

The second challenge is to build a servant-leadership culture and a work environment that encourage employees toward flourishing in terms of optimal performance, self-development, and personal growth. Building on the aspirations and intrinsic motivations of employees, leadership can help give meaning to employees' day-to-day work by encouraging them to use a wide variety of skills and abilities and thereby continuously working toward optimal human performance. Even within the context of more traditional hierarchical organizations, our vision of good leadership in organizations is quickly changing. One important trend is that organizations are removing management layers and are explicitly empowering their people. Increasingly we see that management in organizations has a facilitating role. In my view, servant-leadership theory can help us in this regard.

In my 2011 article (Van Dierendonck [2011](#)), I brought together the conceptual models and the operational definitions of servant leadership of that time. This model has been further elaborated in a recent conceptual article (Van Dierendonck and Patterson [2015](#)). I distinguished 44 (!) characteristics of servant leadership. I differentiated the characteristics into three antecedents: leader behavior, mediating processes, and follower outcomes, and proposed six key characteristics of servant-leader behavior that represent our best understanding of the servant leader at this moment. *Empowerment* refers to giving autonomy to followers to perform tasks, to develop their talent, and to engage in self-leadership. *Stewardship* refers to taking care of and being responsible for what is important for the company as a whole and its societal, long-term impact.



*Humility* is putting one's own interests, talents, and achievements in the right perspective and being open to learning. *Providing direction* is letting followers know what is expected of them by structuring support, providing goals, and helping them see the complete picture. *Compassionate love* is understanding where people come from and who they are, accepting the feelings of others, and considering them as a complete person. *Authenticity* is being honest about oneself, being open about inner thoughts and feelings, and aligning inner values with behavior.

Research, both by myself in collaboration with colleagues and by other leadership scholars, has shown promising results for servant leadership, in terms of its measurement (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011; Liden et al. 2008), in relation to well-being and engagement at work (Asag-Gau and Van Dierendonck 2011; Kool and Van Dierendonck 2012; Correia de Sousa and Van Dierendonck 2014), and performance (Peterson et al. 2012). Our research also confirmed that servant leadership can be differentiated from more established leadership theories such as transformational leadership (Van Dierendonck et al. 2014). Its link and relevance for our modern knowledge-driven organizations with a specific focus on flourishing at work were conceptually discussed in two other articles (Correia de Sousa and Van Dierendonck 2010; Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015) and in one book chapter (Van Dierendonck and Correia de Sousa 2016).

Current changes in what constitutes good leadership in modern organizations do not stop with a stronger emphasis on different characteristics within the more traditional hierarchical setting. Today's organizations tend to move toward more decentralized, team-based structures (Houghton and Yoho 2005) with more employee autonomy when it comes to how they perform their work. Self-management teams have found their way into organizations. As such, organizations pay more attention to what Spreitzer et al. (2012) called organizational enablers. These include decision-making discretion or giving employees the right to make decisions on aspects concerning their work; providing information about the organization and its strategy or enabling an open book management and transparency on strategic and financial matters; minimizing incivility or being considerate in words and deeds, providing performance feedback, and promoting diversity.

As a result, we have seen a complete shift from top-down management to leadership that is characterized by a more facilitating and motivational approach, explicitly encouraging followers to take responsibility themselves (Bass et al. 2003). Particularly in such self-management teams, the phenomenon of shared leadership is emerging. This type of leadership may play a fundamental role in creating an encouraging and supportive team culture. Shared leadership is defined as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (Pearce and Conger 2003, p. 1). Shared leadership changes the focus from a vertical leadership approach where one leader influences several followers to a horizontal approach where leadership becomes a joint activity of the team members showing leadership behavior toward each other (Bligh et al. 2006). Especially in a knowledge-intensive environment where information sharing and knowledge creation are essential for team effectiveness, shared leadership may be of great value. Research on shared leadership has already shown its value in better understanding team effectiveness in terms of ratings by managers, customers, and in self-ratings (e.g. Pearce and Sims 2002; Hoch et al. 2010). Within such a team or project-based structure and way of working, combining insights from servant leadership and those from shared leadership may be what best describes leadership for current organizations (Sousa and Van Dierendonck 2015).

## The Organization: Creating Conditions for Flourishing

The third challenge is to redesign HR so that it encourages and reinforces a shared servant-leadership culture. The focus on human flourishing within OP-HR practices is well expressed in the concept of optimal functioning (Ford and Smith 2007), which in a sense is the practical translation of human flourishing as defined above into actual performance. Optimal functioning means that individual goals are aligned and well integrated; there is a feeling of ownership, and one experiences a sense of mastery

resulting in proactive behavior (Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015). This is expected to help employees feel competent, work more intuitively, and have a greater tolerance for ambiguity, which allows them to think outside the box. In other words, employees are encouraged to use their full creative potential.

Developing OP-HR in organizations starts with the realization that respect and trust are two integral elements of the organizational culture that should be in the forefront of HR practices. Respect and trust are essential mediating mechanisms through which employees' attitudes toward themselves, their work, and the organization are formed.

Showing respect to another signifies believing another person has value (Grover 2013). Being treated with respect is an innate need that underlies the success of many human relations. Grover (2013) distinguishes between recognition respect (a general attitude) and appraisal respect (based on behavior shown). He argued that the combination of both forms of respect is a necessary condition for an employee to feel valued both as worker and as a person. Rogers and Ashforth (2015) formulated possible mechanisms that drive this effect. Recognition respect (which they call generalized respect) fulfills the satisfaction to belong, and appraisal respect (which they call particularized respect) fulfills the need to be recognized for one's actions. Organizations need to address both forms of respect, but combining them ensures that fairness principles both in terms of equality and equity are in place and fosters a culture that combines cohesiveness with an achievement orientation.

The importance of trust in interpersonal interactions in organizations cannot be underestimated. Trust signifies a willingness "to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998, p. 395). The fact that we trust others, sometimes even complete strangers, goes against "an economic (game-theoretic) perspective-assuming that humans are rational utility maximisers primarily motivated by self-interest" (Thielmann and Hilbig 2015, p. 1). Creating a trusting climate within organizations facilitates innovation by allowing a risk-taking attitude among employees, by reducing feelings of fear and anxiety, and by the organization's capacity to forgive mistakes (Thielmann and Hilbig 2015).

I place trust and respect as intermediators between work and individual motivational conditions on the one hand and between human flourishing and optimal functioning on the other hand (Dirks and Ferrin 2001). In a sense, they grease the wheels. In organizations which have a high trust and respect culture, others' behaviors are perceived more positively, and employees will be more willing to share information and to be cooperative toward their colleagues.

To help us understand what OP-HR practices could look like, we can start with the often used description of best practices described in Pfeffer (1998). In the literature, these best practices are known as high-performance management (Walton 1985), high-involvement work systems (Lawler 1986), and high-performance work systems (HPWS) (Kepes and Delery 2007). Especially the latter perspective is currently often used. An HPWS is based on a good and consistent fit between a series of HRM best practices that are positively related to organizational performance. The emphasis is on the fit between the practices, as the whole becomes stronger than the sum of its parts. Despite evidence for the separate elements of the best-fit approach, research also clearly shows that they work best in certain coherent combinations focused on the organizational strategy, the competitive and institutional environment, and on the cultural context (Boxall and Purcell 2011). Following these authors, I would like to emphasize that we can define the general principles of HRM, but that translating them into practice requires adjusting them to the specific context, focusing both on economic and sociopolitical goals. Developing such practices requires the explicit expertise and experience of HR professionals. It should also not be forgotten that we are dealing with people here. HR practices send important messages to the people in an organization about how they are valued.

Boselie et al. (2005) distinguished five key fundamental areas for an HPWS: selective recruitment and selection, compensation and performance-related pay (PRP), appraisal and performance management (PM), training and development, and employee participation. Acknowledging the need to link overarching HR principles to organizational strategy that are translated into actual HR practices, several key HR practices can be suggested within these areas (Lengnick-Hall et al.

2011). Starting from a position that encourages value-based recruitment, empowerment, open communication, and fair results-oriented appraisals, a culture needs to be built that allows for experimentation and making mistakes, flexibility in the work setup, and attention to individual flourishing. It starts by getting the right people on board, providing job security and long-term employment, adopting broad work assignments with developmental opportunities linked to internal mobility and promotion, and finding the right balance between autonomy and team work with attention to the home-work balance.

In conclusion, what we need in organizations is a holistic, multilevel focus, pinpointing KSAs that facilitate employee flourishing. Servant leadership can be instrumental in this respect. It will mean broadening the HR-Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to include employee flourishing and organizational sustainability with a stronger link to the context outside the organization (Cleveland et al. 2015). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that leadership and HRM practices within companies do not function in a vacuum. Companies are based within countries that have their own rules and customs. Within our globalizing world, a focus on rules and customs instead of on national cultural differences may be most relevant, given that the latter has been shown to be of limited influence (Gerhart 2008). Linking servant leadership with OP-HR implies redesigning work so it is better aligned with people's needs and long-term development. Training needs to take place throughout the whole organization and be available to all. Most importantly, this perspective emphasizes the creation of conditions for continuous growth and development, underlining an enhanced sense of meaningfulness and social recognition. It is about creating work consisting of meaningful tasks that require both routine and new skills, developing a people and societal focused leadership culture, and allowing people to experience a sense of both competence (from the routine) and growth and learning (from the new) (Kahn 1990).

This is an exciting time for people management in organizations. We need to know how to develop all people within organizations so that they are willing to accept their responsibility. We need leadership that has the capacity to lead complex challenges with integrity. We need a good understanding of what drives people to become the best they can be, and

we need to build a structure and culture so that people can function optimally within a changing world, at a personal and at an organizational level. In facilitating new working practices: do not just copy what worked in another organization, dare to be innovative.

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# 11

## Building Teal Organizations with Servant Leadership?

Robert Jack

One thing a leadership approach has to grapple with is how well it is in tune with the times. In the twentieth century we saw leadership approaches come into fashion and then go out of fashion again. In spite of the term being coined in 1970, servant leadership has been gaining popularity in the last two decades or so, with more research taking place on it and more leaders applying it. None of us can be sure of what the future holds and whether servant leadership will last longer than other approaches, but we can still try to evaluate how it is keeping up with the times.

Of course, there are many developments going on at any given time and there is no one way of fully conceptualizing the change, but an exciting new way of approaching leadership and management in organizations is the one presented by Frederic Laloux in *Reinventing organizations* (2014). In his book Laloux describes a stage-like model of organizational development. The fundamental claim is that organizations develop through stages, much like individuals, and that we can more or less identify the stage from which an organization is operating. On the basis

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of the model, Laloux gives an overview of the current organizational landscape and describes the characteristics of the organizations which are now emerging at the highest stage of development, called the Teal stage.

In this chapter I summarize Laloux's model and use it to try to understand servant leadership's place in the current leadership and management landscape.

## Organizational Development

Laloux mentions seven human developmental stages. The first two are not relevant for the discussion of organizations, but in today's world we find organizations operating from the other five paradigms—Red, Amber, Orange, Green, and Teal.

Red and Amber organizations play only a small role in this chapter and will therefore not be elaborated on. Red organizations are very much based on the strength of a single leader and today they are, for example, found in the form of street gangs. The Amber organization is based on conformity to rules and norms as stability is very important to the Amber paradigm. The power structure is hierarchical with highly formal roles and a top-down command and control approach. Today this is visible in some very traditional organizations, especially in the governmental sector as well as in religious settings.

The main characteristic of the Orange paradigm is the striving for measurable achievement, like profit or the size of the organization. This is a big step forward from Amber in terms of creating more innovation, a willingness to do better, and rewarding people for a job well done. The Orange paradigm is very common in all kinds of organizations today and is the norm in the business sector where its achievements are predominantly measured in the form of more profit, greater size, and increased market share. A prominent feature of Orange organizations is also their competitiveness. The Orange CEO is therefore expected to be strong and able, leading his team to victory.

Before introducing the Green paradigm it is helpful to make a distinction between the interior and exterior dimensions of phenomena (cf. Laloux 2014). Belonging to the interior dimension are

beliefs and feelings of individuals, as well as, for example, the shared culture of an organization. The exterior dimension, on the other hand, is made up of tangible, measurable things, and behaviors. For example, the structure of an organization, whether it is hierarchical or nonhierarchical.

The Orange and Green paradigms attach different meanings to these two dimensions. The CEO and shareholders of an Orange business tend to place the biggest importance on exterior measurable growth (profit and sales), having much less regard for the interior thoughts and feelings of employees and customers. Green organizations, on the other hand, are run on the opposite assumption, namely that the feelings of individuals and the shared organizational culture are most important. The Green paradigm therefore values equal respect to different opinions and seeks fairness, community, cooperation, and consensus (Laloux 2014).

Laloux says that the three key breakthroughs of the Green paradigm are empowerment, a strong, shared culture, and a multiple stakeholder perspective of organizations. Empowerment means that top and middle managers are asked to share power with their subordinates, listen to them, motivate them, develop them, and allow them to make some decisions. In this context Laloux says that managers in Green organizations should be servant leaders (2014).

Concerning the breakthrough of shared culture, whereas Orange organizations tend to dismiss culture as “soft” stuff (Laloux 2014), what guides Green organizations is shared cultural values, rather than “hard” rules. As an example, in Green organizations it is generally more important to be fair to a customer than to follow some rule set by management.

The third Green breakthrough can also be seen in opposition to the Orange paradigm. Organizations operating from the Orange paradigm may reward its employees for good work, but what ultimately matters is the profit of shareholders. Green organizations, however, tend to take a multiple stakeholder perspective, seeing it as the responsibility of the organization to take into account the perspectives of all those affected by the organization’s operation. This, among other things, leads them to be generally more socially and environmentally responsible than Orange organizations.

The Teal paradigm is the focus of Laloux's research. To understand how it differs from Orange and Green it is helpful to go back to the distinction between the interior and exterior dimensions of phenomena. Here it is important to notice that the interior and the exterior are quite connected. For example, a person may act exteriorly in a certain way because of his or her interior beliefs about the world. Reversing the direction of influence, the exterior power structure of an organization will also influence its interior culture. So the interior dimension affects the exterior dimension and vice versa. The core insight of the Teal paradigm is that both the interior and the exterior dimensions are important and have to be worked with. This is based on the experience that if you focus too much on the one dimension you will neglect the other and this will cause problems. Teal is therefore more holistic than the other paradigms, valuing the Green emphasis on the interior dimension, but adding structure, processes, and practices to the organization.

Laloux maintains that the Teal paradigm has three key breakthroughs: self-management, wholeness, and evolutionary purpose. Self-management has to be seen as the core breakthrough. This is the structure of Teal organizations and the way they are run. A source of constant tension in Green organizations is the fact that they have a hierarchical structure and a nonhierarchical culture (Laloux 2014, p. 228). This means that managers have the power, but are asked to share it. Teal organizations try to overcome this tension with self-management (p. 229). Every employee is given power to make decisions without having to ask for permission. There is a process to follow, but the decision is ultimately yours. In this way the structure of self-management and the culture work together.

Wholeness means to bring all of who we are to work (Laloux 2014). Particularly in Amber and Orange organizations one is required to show up at work with only a narrow "professional" self. In the typical Orange business, this "self" is a masculine, determined, strong, rational self. Other aspects of the personality are not accepted. Green organizations are much more open in this way, allowing men and women to show their feminine, emotional, and spiritual sides at work. In a subtle way Green, however, tends to rein in individuals who are not devoted to the

shared culture of the organization, for example, by insisting on consensus (Laloux 2014). In Teal organizations, self-management does not require people to reach a consensus and there may be more genuine understanding that wholeness really does not mean the same thing for everyone.

The third Teal breakthrough, evolutionary purpose, is the insight that everything is evolving and that it is therefore artificial to state once and for all what the purpose of the organization is. In Orange organizations, the purpose is really to work for the shareholders. Mission statements of Orange organizations are therefore not worth much and are seldom consulted. In Green organizations people try their best to serve the different stakeholders, trying to understand what each stakeholder wants and creating a solution that incorporates all the perspectives. The Teal perspective, however, sees the organization as transcending its stakeholders by “pursuing its own unique evolutionary purpose” (Laloux 2014, p. 221). Every member of the organization is encouraged to listen in and understand what purpose the organization wants to serve (p. 56). And self-management means that Teal organizations can react quickly to the evolving needs that the organization wants to serve.

## Servant Leadership Finds Fault with Orange Characteristics

When trying to position servant leadership in the developmental model just described, it is useful to observe what servant leadership is reacting to and finding fault with. This is helpful because it is common in human development to criticize the developmental stages that precede the stage one is at.

Robert K. Greenleaf, the founder of servant leadership, can sometimes be seen as criticizing the Amber paradigm, for example, when he talks about oppressive bureaucracies and the failures of the hierarchical structure (cf. Greenleaf 2002). Most of his criticism is, however, aimed at the Orange paradigm. For example, when he mentions the type of leader who is the extreme opposite of the servant leader, he seems

to be talking about the typical Orange business leader. Such a leader is not servant first, but leader first (Greenleaf 2008), and he is someone who may have an unusual power drive or wants to acquire material possessions.

McGee-Cooper and Trammell (2002) also see the servant leader as standing in sharp contrast to the typical American definition of the leader as a “stand-alone hero” who always wins, referring to the winning mentality of the Orange leader (cf. Wong and Page 2003). And concerning competition, Greenleaf says that serving and competing are antithetical (2013) and maintains that moving toward a more serving society means “competition must be muted, if not eliminated” (2013, p. 30). He even claims that competition destroys people and creates abuses (2002, p. 106).

This last point is in line with what Laloux calls “Orange’s shadow over people and society” (2014, p. 30), that is, its lack of regard for the interior dimension and its emphasis on the exterior dimension. This aspect of the Orange organization seems to be what Greenleaf has in mind when he talks about the “intelligent *use* of people” (2008, p. 41), which consists in using “gimmicks” like profit sharing. Instead of building people, a carrot is dangled in front of them to make them temporarily happy and get them to work harder.

Talking about modern business practices, Greenleaf (2002, p. 66) says:

Too many firms are manipulated as financial pawns for short-term gain with little regard for social consequences or even for the long-term good of the firm.

The criticism of Orange’s excessive emphasis on financial gain is apparent here. Greenleaf even challenges the “usual assumption” that a company is in business to make a profit, saying that “the new ethic requires that growth of those who do the work is the primary aim” (2002, p. 158). This point and Greenleaf’s criticism, just mentioned, make it clear that servant leadership does not operate from the Amber or Orange paradigms, but from a higher stage of development.



## Servant Leadership's Green Characteristics

As we have seen, the Green paradigm focuses on the interior dimension of phenomena. We also see this emphasis in Greenleaf. An example is when he writes: “the servant views any problem in the world as *in here*, inside oneself, not *out there*” (2008, p. 44). Furthermore, he is very concerned with the feelings and thoughts of others, stressing acceptance and empathy (2008, 2002), and even demanding that people have unlimited liability for each other in certain organizations (2008).

The servant leadership literature is full of similar expressions of the importance of the interior dimension. Autry says from the point of view of the leader as servant (2001): “Business is about people. Business is of, by, about, and for people.” And the following traits which have been put forward as characteristics of servant leadership are in line with this: interpersonal acceptance (van Dierendonck 2011; van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011), valuing people (Laub 2010; Focht and Ponton 2015), caring (Focht and Ponton 2015), empathy (Spears 2010), emotional healing (Liden et al. 2008), listening without judgment (McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2002), having faith in people (Wheatley 2004), love (Patterson 2003, 2010; Focht and Ponton 2015), being genuinely interested in employees as people (Winston and Fields 2015), and moving “*from the leader as hero, to the leader as host*” (Wheatley 2004, p. 15).

### Empowerment

Concerning the first key Green breakthrough, empowerment, motivating people, and helping them to grow are at the heart of servant leadership. Greenleaf (2013) defined servant leadership in the terms of the best test, where the first question is whether those who are being served grow as persons. Greenleaf also sees listening in this light, saying that it is important because it builds strength in others (2008). And he says that the “secret of institution building” is to create a team of people “by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be” (2008, p. 22).

It should therefore come as no surprise that empowerment (van Dierendonck 2011; van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011; Patterson 2003; McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2002; Focht and Ponton 2015; Liden et al. 2008; Keith 2008; Russell and Stone 2002; Greasley and Bocârnea 2014) and helping people develop (van Dierendonck 2011; Laub 2010; McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2002; Keith 2008) and grow (Liden et al. 2008; Spears 2010; Sendjaya et al. 2008) are widely seen as being among the main characteristics of servant leadership.

## Shared Culture

The second Green breakthrough of shared culture is also stressed by Greenleaf. To mention two examples, he talks about rediscovering the “lost knowledge” of community (2008, pp. 38–40) and says that a trustee board would do well to find a coach, whose “primary aim” is to “facilitate consensus – achieving one mind”, where the consensus will be “accepted as superior wisdom” (2002, pp. 137–38).

In the servant leadership literature we also find this emphasis on collaboration (Focht and Ponton 2015; McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2002) and building community (Laub 2010; Spears 2010; McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2002). Moreover, servant leadership is seen as building consensus (Spears 2010; van Dierendonck 2011; van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015) and a foundation of shared goals (McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2002), as well as creating strong relationships built on shared values (Sendjaya et al. 2008; McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2009).

## Stakeholder Model

Concerning the third Green breakthrough, Greenleaf maintains that organizations should operate with the public good and social responsibility in mind (2008, 2002), which means that his thinking is clearly not confined to the narrow interests of the shareholders. And when

discussing how trustees should define the goals and purposes of an institution he takes the time to mention the stakeholders (2002, p. 99, cf. p. 107):

In making the decision, trustees should take into account both how each constituency (owner, creditor, student, customer or client, employee, government, vendor, supplier, administrator, parishioner, etc.) states its expectation and what administrators and employees feel is achievable.

In the servant leadership literature we also find support for the claim that servant leaders learn from the organization's multiple stakeholders (Focht and Ponton 2015), take them into account (van Dierendonck and Patterson 2010; van Dierendonck 2011), and serve them (Asag-Gau and van Dierendonck 2011; Hoch et al. 2016; Liden et al. 2014). This does not only include the primary stakeholders, "without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive" (Clarkson 1995, p. 106), but also the secondary stakeholders who are in some way influenced or affected by it, in other words the larger society (Liden et al. 2008).

Another way of approaching this debate is to stress the servant leader's moral reasoning (Liden et al. 2008; Sendjaya et al. 2008). Graham (1995, p. 50) connects servant leadership to "high level moral reasoning that assesses and balances interests of all stakeholders in terms of universal moral principles". And McGee-Cooper and Trammell (2002) hint that the servant leader appeals to higher moral values, saying that the servant leader does not hide behind the letter of the law, but asks what is the right thing to do to best serve all stakeholders.

## Servant Leadership and the Teal Breakthroughs

Given how strongly the Green breakthroughs can be connected to servant leadership characteristics mentioned in the literature, it is understandable that we would come to the same conclusion as Laloux and see it as a

Green phenomenon. It has to be added though that the scholars, who have been referenced, mention many more characteristics of servant leadership than I have connected to the Green paradigm. This means that the rest of the characteristics could in principle be Amber, Orange, or Teal. Here I will discuss whether servant leadership characteristics can be connected to the three key Teal breakthroughs.

## Self-Management

As we have seen self-management is the core Teal breakthrough. Although the Green paradigm criticizes the traditional hierarchical structure, it does not offer any clear alternatives. The exterior structure is therefore left intact, while the Green interior culture expects managers to share power with their subordinates. Teal on the other hand changes the exterior structure to match the idea that power should be shared.

Going through the servant leadership literature the Green idea of power-sharing is more or less the norm and the servant leader is usually discussed as someone working in a hierarchy. Even a discussion about changing the pyramid is meant metaphorically and not in the sense of changing the exterior structure of the organization (Keith 2008; Blanchard 2001). It is generally taken as a given that the servant leader is someone who has more power than his subordinates or followers and has to share *his* power with them (Page and Wong 2000; cf. Beaver 2008).

Despite this view of power-sharing, it cannot be said that servant leadership literature accepts hierarchy as the only form of structure. Going back to Greenleaf he does not say much about the structure as such, but what little he does say about it is important. First of all it is noteworthy that even though he emphasizes the interior dimension, as we have seen, and does sometimes seem to talk down the importance of the exterior “system” (2008), he at the same time says that there has to be some kind of “order” and “system”. His main point seems to be that we cannot just blame the system for all failure, but have to take responsibility as individuals, which does not mean that the system does not matter.

Another important aspect of Greenleaf's ideas on structure is that he clearly argues against hierarchy, hoping that the "pyramidal structure with a single chief at the top" can be changed (p. 105), and proposes another kind of structure (2002). The structure that Greenleaf argues for is a team of individuals where the leader is first among equals, *primus inter pares* (2002). Interestingly he also says, in another context, that the leader does not always have to be the same person (2002). Actually, taken together this is a form of self-management similar to a form that Laloux describes (2014, p. 65): the leader is first among equals, but different persons can take up leadership in different instances. Greenleaf does not elaborate on this, but we might call it distributed (cf. Spillane 2005) or shared servant leadership (Greenleaf 2013, 1988; Pearce 2004; Denis et al. 2012), and I think we should take it seriously as a genuine servant leadership idea.

Moreover, in the servant leadership literature we find examples of ideas that have affinities with Teal thinking. McGee-Cooper and Trammell (2002) connect servant leadership to "self-management" and say that the servant leader "breaks down hierarchy". They also say that "everyone must become both Leader and Follower" (2009, p. 9), but they at the same time do not discuss the structure change that could follow from this kind of thinking.

A Teal criticism of the relationship between leader and follower is that it can easily turn into a parent-child relationship (Laloux 2014; Robertson 2015). Laub (2003) argues for an idea of servant leadership where such a relationship should be avoided and others are treated as your partner. Another insight that Laub (p. 11) shares with Teal thinking is that employees may experience problems that are not understood by the leadership, which means that they are not acted on. Whereas in Teal organizations employees have the power to act without there being an understanding from a boss, Laub's response, wanting to improve communication, seems more in line with the Green paradigm. Another indication that Laub's ideas may be more Green than Teal is that although he defines shared leadership as a characteristic of servant leadership (p. 3), it is understood that the leader has to "release control", share "status", and promote others.

Wong and Page (2003) insist that servant leadership cannot flourish in a hierarchical organization and call for a “horizontal and participatory” structure and “democratic leadership”. What they propose, however, seems to be more of a democracy than self-management. Instead of giving everyone a role with the power to act in the organization, a leader seems to be chosen democratically. Such a democracy may work for some organizations, but it is neither the self-management that characterizes Teal organizations nor the kind of shared servant leadership that Greenleaf describes.

Irving and Longbotham (2007) discuss servant leadership in the context of “team-based structures”, but they do not consider it in the sense of self-management. Sousa and van Dierendonck (2016), however, discuss an idea of shared servant leadership in self-managed teams, which comes much closer to being Teal. They combine servant leadership behaviors advanced by van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) and an idea of shared leadership where leadership is seen as a “process emerging from interaction between agents, as opposed to an influencing process that flows from a central leader alone” (Sousa and van Dierendonck 2016, p. 1). This way of seeing it is close to the view, I argued above, we can find in Greenleaf, combining the characteristics of servant leadership and the idea of having potentially many leaders.

## Wholeness

Wholeness, as it is described by Laloux (2014), means showing up at work as the human being you are, rather than narrowing yourself down to a professional identity. The concept of wholeness is certainly not alien to servant leadership. Greenleaf tends to talk about the optimal state of the individual as wholeness. Healing for him is thus being made whole (2008) and he suggests that the search for wholeness is what is being shared by the servant leader and the one being led. And it seems we can read the following statement in this light: “the business exists as much to provide meaningful work to the person as it exists to provide a product or service to the customer” (2002, p. 155; cf. p. 157). The organization is meant to provide the employee with a context that is meaningful to him and helps him grow into wholeness.

Apart from what we find in Greenleaf, wholeness as such has enjoyed little attention in the servant leadership literature. Spears (2010), though, mentions it in the context of healing, which he sees as one of the ten characteristics of servant leadership, and Sendjaya (2015; Sendjaya et al. 2008) discusses it as part of spiritual motivation, which is one of the six dimensions by which he defines servant leadership (Sendjaya 2015). Sendjaya's following statement seems more or less in harmony with the Teal idea of wholeness (p. 98):

Servant leaders are fully aware that people are not human resources, but human beings, and that they are much more than the sum of their outputs. They are holistic individuals with an intellectual side, a physical side, an emotional side, a moral side, and a spiritual side, and each needs to be acknowledged and given equal attention.

A conceptual difficulty here is that the idea of wholeness seems quite connected to the Green breakthrough of empowering and helping people to grow and also to the breakthrough of shared culture, because how you show up at work has a lot to do with the organizational culture. Laloux, however, explains the difference between Green and Teal in terms of the practices and processes that are put up in Teal organizations. In Teal organizations there are more vibrant practices; for example, to cultivate an ongoing discussion about values, there is group meditation, peer coaching, storytelling, time devoted to address conflict, and so on (2014). Furthermore, there are processes for recruitment, onboarding, training, and so on.

Although the concept of wholeness is certainly present in the servant leadership literature, it cannot be said that it entails much in the way of practices and processes. However, to mention some examples, Greenleaf (2008, p. 20) discusses the art of withdrawal as a kind of practice and some research has been done on "workplace spirituality" (Chen et al. 2013; Khan et al. 2015) and "dispositional mindfulness" (Verdorfer 2016), which may suggest a willingness to introduce some practice at work. There are also some indications that there is a positive correlation between servant leadership and a good work-family relationship (Tang et al. 2016), which may be a sign that servant leadership supports

wholeness in practice. Furthermore, there is some mention of coaching (Sendjaya 2015; Laub 1999; McGee-Cooper and Trammell 2010) and such things, as one would expect, but it cannot be said that there is much emphasis in the literature on the practices and processes that support servant leadership.

## Evolutionary Purpose

Whereas Orange organizations typically work for the shareholders and Green ones for the various stakeholders, Teal organizations work in accordance with the evolving purpose of the organization itself. This means that people are “stewards of the organization”, and they are “the vehicle that listens in to the organization’s deep creative potential to help it do its work in the world” (Laloux 2014, p. 221). This goes further than the stakeholder model, because that model still presupposes that the organization is an entity that needs to be steered by us humans.

Here I want to mention three considerations in connection to servant leadership. First of all, in a Teal organization, the purpose of the organization transcends any self-interested purpose of any stakeholder, be it an employee, owner, or customer. Interestingly, Greenleaf (2002) states that we must care for not only humans but also institutions. Although these words can be difficult to interpret, the fact that Greenleaf makes a distinction between the care for persons and the care for institutions should make the interpretation more Teal than Green.

Another consideration is that the Teal purpose is so comprehensive that it can hardly ever be stated clearly and its interpretation is constantly evolving. Here again Greenleaf seems to be more or less in agreement with Teal thinking. First, he uses the word “goal” in the sense of “the overarching purpose, the big dream, the visionary concept, the ultimate consummation that one approaches but never rally achieves” (2008, p. 17). This makes it clear that the goal is not the typical budgetary goal or sales goal of an Orange organization, but rather comprehensive and difficult to define. Second, he says that dreams and goals need to be renewed if they lose their force (1986), which certainly means that the mission statement has to be reviewed once in a while.



The third consideration is that just as Laloux uses the word “stewardship” to characterize the people’s role in a Teal organization, so in the servant leadership literature some have put stewardship down as one of the main characteristics of servant leadership (van Dierendonck 2011; van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011; Spears 2010; Barbuto and Wheeler 2006; Russell and Stone 2002), while others closely align servant leadership with stewardship (Keith 2008; Sendjaya 2015; Walker 2003). Some descriptions of stewardship could be understood more in terms of a stakeholder model, while others go “beyond stakeholder values and customer service” (Walker 2003, p. 25). Similarly stewardship is associated with care for the larger community or society (Sendjaya 2015; Barbuto and Wheeler 2006, 2007), the good of the whole (Sousa and van Dierendonck 2016), and the greater good (van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015).

Some servant leadership ideas, therefore, bear resemblance to the Teal breakthrough of evolutionary purpose. It is, however, difficult to say that these ideas have a central place within the servant leadership literature. They are often difficult to interpret and there is little or no discussion of what they mean in practice. This makes it difficult to back the claim that servant leadership is truly Teal in this way.

## A Teal Future for Servant Leadership?

The conclusion of this research seems to be that servant leadership has more Green than Teal characteristics. As Green is a high stage of development we may feel satisfied. At the same time servant leadership seems to lean more toward Teal than Orange. This goes back to Greenleaf, the founder of servant leadership. In fact, there are some grounds for claiming that Greenleaf’s thinking is Teal, because in his writings we find elements of all the three Teal breakthroughs. But if that is true, how come servant leadership is not more Teal? I want to propose two reasons for this.

The first reason has to do with the context Greenleaf is writing in. When *The Servant as Leader* was first published in 1970 it seems certain that the bulk of organizations in Western society were operating from the

Orange paradigm with a significant number of Amber organizations around. Today the majority of organizations is still Orange, but there are certainly more Green organizations than before. Maybe Greenleaf thought that if you want to propose advances in society it is unrealistic to set the mark too high. Attempting to move an Orange society to Teal would be overambitious. Aiming for Green was possibly far enough for the moment.

A case in point is Greenleaf's aforementioned discussion of competition. Having said that he prefers serving to competing (2013), which is quite Teal, he concludes the discussion on competition by saying (2013, p. 31):

But, unfortunately, we have decreed that ours shall be a competitive society. How does a servant function in such a society?

Greenleaf clearly wants to change his society, but understands that you cannot wish things like competition out of society. You have to deal with the reality that is there, which means a gradual change rather than a revolution, that fails to produce lasting results. For this reason Greenleaf favored persuasion to coercion or manipulation, although persuasion may take more time to work (cf. 2008).

The second reason why Greenleaf's servant leadership is more Green than Teal is that he seems to have sensed that there is a better (possibly Teal) way, but did not know what it was. This is apparent in his discussion of competition where he acknowledges that he does not know what to do to move from competition. He also does not know what the system of a better society will be like, but trusts that the future builders will use what they find or invent new (possibly Teal) systems.

Where does this leave servant leadership today? As we have seen it is more Green than anything else, but it is my conclusion that individual proponents of servant leadership could lean more toward Teal without being in contradiction with the spirit of servant leadership. I think such a proponent would do well to look both to the past and the future, as it were. She would take a renewed look at Greenleaf to find the inspiration to create new ways of doing servant leadership. At the same time she would listen to the increasing number of voices calling for a practical

guide to doing shared leadership and increase job satisfaction. It is time, it seems, to introduce Teal ideas.

Whereas servant leadership literature has most often presupposed a hierarchical structure in organizations, advocates of servant leadership could start to question that kind of structure as the only way. At the same time, given that anti-hierarchical ideas are, after all, not uncommon in the servant leadership literature, it should be asked, by way of building something new, how hierarchy can be amended or replaced. What does servant leadership mean in practical terms when it talks about breaking down hierarchy, says that the leader should be “first among equals”, and proposes that anyone can take up leadership? What would shared servant leadership really look like?

Developing toward self-management is most important for a proponent of servant leadership who wants to be more Teal. This entails, as I have hinted at, more emphasis on the exterior dimension. And generally, there needs to be more focus on structure, practices, and processes. Concerning the Teal breakthrough of wholeness it may, for example, be asked: What processes for recruitment, onboarding, and conducting meetings are, for example, in harmony with servant leadership? Or concerning evolution: Given that employees perceive the changing environment of their organization, what practices can be introduced in a servant leadership organization to ensure that every employee can act on those perceptions to help evolve the organization? Probing such questions would not mean to disavow servant leadership, but much rather to create (dangerously) in the spirit of Robert K. Greenleaf and, at the same time, to take part in evolving the present organizational environment further.

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# **Part IV**

## **Towards a Servant Leadership Society**





# 12

## The Servant Leadership Pin: Bursting the Generational Bubble

Jane Waddell and Kathleen Patterson

### Introduction

The Millennial generation has taken over the workforce (Matthews 2015) and with their self-focused lifestyles, agendas, and attitudes, the need has arisen to answer with a selfless approach, notably servant leadership. With this organizational takeover, the investment we make into Millennials matters a great deal. Additionally, this investment could yield great servant leadership influence if we focus on the right things, and we believe these next generations are the right things. “Millennials may be misunderstood. But as the largest generation in the workforce, they have a significant influence. It’s only a matter of time before they begin redefining leadership and other workplace trends” (Morgan as cited by Gullifor et al. 2017, p. 239). Millennials are those born between 1982

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and 2004 (Germersheid 2015); so Generation Z would be those born after 2004. Millennials have been called the “trophy generation” or “trophy kids,” treated as winners and rewarded more for participation than actual performance (Hershatter and Epstein 2010). This has led to an entitlement mentality, which has continued into academia and into the workforce, creating pressure to reward average performance with above average grades, resulting in failed preparation for real life. In all fairness, these negative stereotypes should not be generalized to all Millennials, and the entitlement mentality is not new. Parents want their children to have it better than they had, which unfortunately fosters an entitlement mentality, a trend we propose has increased with each generation. We propose this generational increase in entitlement can be redirected by promoting servant leadership.

An entitlement mentality is self-serving and contradictory to an outward focus that seeks what is best for the majority. Twenge (2006) notes Millennials have “never known a world that put duty before self” (p. 1). Are we truly serving students and/or employees when we perpetuate “trophies for all,” the good grades for all who pay their tuition and perhaps show up for class, or promotions and pay raises for all who simply show up for work? It seems society continues to defer responsibility to someone else—the college level or the future employer or even the next employer of a mediocre employee. In this chapter, we will provide some background on how the entitlement mentality evolved, explore the Millennial generation both in academia and the workplace, and propose servant leadership as the pin that can burst the increasing entitlement mentality as well as be the solution for the Millennial generation’s seeking of purpose.

## **Entitlement Mentality: How Did We Get Here?**

### **The Increase in Narcissism**

Research has shown that the mindset of the Millennial Generation is often about entitlement, described by Twenge and Campbell (2009) as “the pervasive belief that one deserves special treatment, success, and

more material things” (p. 230). Entitlement can result from too much generosity, giving people what they expect while failing to hold them accountable to meet or achieve excellence (Bardwick 1991), resulting in expectations of getting what one wants and getting it instantaneously (Steinmetz 2015, p. 42). This has created a lack of accountability.

In order to reach this point, Twenge (2006) explains the Millennial Generation was influenced societally in our attempts to increase children’s self-esteem, raising children who “should always feel good about themselves” (p. 53). This resulted in what Hershatter and Epstein (2010) describe as “trophy kids who spent their childhood receiving gold stars and shiny medals just for showing up” (p. 217) rather than choosing “extraordinary efforts to praise publicly” (Scheder 2009, p. 43). Consequently, we propose reward for simply showing up, or demonstrating minimal performance, then establish the standard for achievement. This is evidenced in a study of ethnically diverse Millennial college students whose academic abilities were unrelated to the good grades they felt entitled to receive (Laird et al. 2015).

Additionally, the effort to raise self-esteem succeeded so well that we now have a generation that seeks self-fulfillment with a mindset of being overly self-involved and over-confident. But these efforts are the opposite of what Sax (2016) proposes children need; that is parents modeling humility and conscientiousness, both of which run counter to actions that inflate the child’s self-esteem and sense of entitlement. The “trophies for all” mentality has produced young people who cannot comprehend that their efforts will not result in success, or even fathom the idea that their efforts could result in failure (Laird et al. 2015). In fact, Millennials have been described as entitled (Twenge and Campbell 2009), fragile (Sax 2016), and coddled (Jones as cited by Wilson 2015; Wolcott 2015) young people who seem “to require much more counseling, hand holding, and pats on the back” (Scheder 2009, p. 40). We also propose that due to having been over protected, many of these young people appear to have no concept of the consequences of their actions. We are concerned the current trend will have serious ramifications if the self-centered entitlement mentality continues, resulting in disappointment and frustration in Millennials as they face unrealistic employment expectations, and frustration in employers and colleagues attempting to work with them.

## Helicopter and Lawnmower Parenting

Millennial parents “hovered” over their kids, intervening and arguing on the child’s behalf as a way of life, called “helicopter” parenting (Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan 2014). This trend of advocating for grades in school or sports awards has expanded to “lawnmower parenting,” which involves “mowing down all obstacles” (Martinko 2016), and protecting children from harm, anxiety, and the consequences of their actions has also carried into academia and the workplace. We propose a new concept called “Helicopter Academia” where hovering has continued, with parental intervention for grades not earned. This hovering further conveys into the workplace with parents accompanying children to job interviews and advocating for job promotions (Elmore 2010; Litzenberg 2010).

## Ramifications of Over Protection

As young people transition from academia to the workplace, many Millennials face frustration, since their career goals and expectations are “‘supersized,’ unrealistic, and disconnected between reward and performance ... [with] no relationship between GPA and promotion expectations” (Laird et al. 2015, p. 88). The disconnect between graduates’ and employers’ perceptions of their abilities is apparent as 59% of recent college graduates felt they were well prepared to analyze and solve problems while only 24% of employers agreed, and 62% of those graduates believed they had good ethical judgment and decision-making skills while only 30% of employers agreed (Khadaroo 2015). Additionally, Ellin (2014) reports Millennials are “stymied when facing the much less glamorous reality of the entry level” (p. 60). We will proffer some potential long-range effects of the self-centered entitlement mentality if left to continue this trend to what Twenge and Campbell (2009) term the “narcissism epidemic.”

## Long-Range Effects of Increased Narcissism

We are concerned about the negative impact on society if several trends continue. Specifically, we are concerned regarding the increase in alcohol/drug dependence, the increased need for counseling, the decreased accountability, and the diminished critical thinking skills of young people. We will address each topic individually, but keep in mind that according to Matthews (2015), “If you’re one of those who considers the millennial generation a bunch of entitled, narcissistic, know-it-alls, I have bad news for you: there’s more of them than there are of you;” therefore this is a leadership issue that must be engaged. And interestingly, the Millennial mindset is ripe for servant leadership, which we will discuss later.

There is an increased dependence on both alcohol and drugs amongst Millennials. Alcoholics Anonymous “has long theorized narcissism to be a root cause of addiction” (Carter et al. 2012, p. 166); and absolute unselfishness (altruism) is one of the cornerstones of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. If left to follow this frightening trend, what might this mean for the next generation, Generation Z, and beyond? Furthermore, are these indicators that young people are not learning self-control? Are they being encouraged to think through their actions and foresee potential ramifications of those actions as well as take responsibility for their actions? We fear not as counseling needs among college students is increasing (Gray 2015).

Young people today seem to lack the inner strength we saw and “took for granted in young people a few decades back” (Sax 2016, p. 100). Sax further describes today’s youth as “fragile,” stating “it doesn’t take much for them to give up and retreat ... or fall apart” (p. 99). Blaming an increase in value of peers’ opinions over parents’ values and opinions, Sax opines this “sets kids up for catastrophe when failure arrives ... And failure will come, sooner or later” (p. 113).

The dramatic increase in fragility is evident when one compares young Americans today with those from just two or three decades ago and is further evidenced by the extraordinary increase of young people in

America being diagnosed and treated for anxiety and depression (Sax 2016). Further evidence is the increase in emergency calls for counseling at colleges and universities, which have “more than doubled over the past five years.”

## Helicopter Academia and Decreased Accountability

We propose that the “handholding” of today’s college students, this Helicopter Academia, actually hinders their growth by failing to prepare them for college and real life. Rather than “handholding,” young people need to “practice being adults – that is, practice taking responsibility for themselves” (Gray 2015). Perhaps Sax’s insights on conscientiousness bridge the gap between “handholding” and helping these young people grow into responsible adults. Sax (2016) proposes conscientiousness (which includes aspects such as self-control, honesty, integrity, responsibility, and industriousness) as the single most important trait explaining increased earning and saving potential plus increased happiness. Additionally, self-control, the best single measure of conscientiousness, was the best predictor of whether a young person would grow up to be an alcoholic or drug addict (Sax 2016). In fact, data indicate children “who had the most self-control at age 11 had the highest incomes and the best credit scores at age 32 and were least likely to be struggling financially” (Sax, p. 122). Additionally, promoting self-control will help young people learn virtues such as integrity, persistence, reliability, and self-discipline (Sax 2016).

Consider the well-intended parent who interferes with the consequences of actions or choices ... who argues the need for a grade above what was earned by the student. Does this teach self-control? It does not, and furthermore, it fails to reinforce the concept that actions have consequences. Studies cited by Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014) reveal “over-parenting was related to young adults’ beliefs that someone else should solve their problems for them” (p. 318). What will be the impact on businesses if no one is accountable for actions and/or decisions made? Might lack of accountability be related to diminished development of critical thinking skills, the ability to consider if/then and cause/effect outcomes when considering situations they face?

We propose academia and organizations owe it to their students, employees, and society in general to render grades or promotions earned while being willing to guide young people with feedback that allows them to *earn* the grade or promotion they desire. This will foster ownership and accountability for one's actions.

## Critical Thinking Skills

These findings and questions emphasize the need to proactively address concerns both at college and in the workplace. But how likely is this to occur in light of research that found the “student gains very little in terms of critical thinking ability between the beginning of the freshman year and the end of the senior year” (Sax 2016, p. 88), with approximately one-third showing no more than one percent improvement on a one hundred-point scale. Additionally, how likely are students to gain critical thinking skills if universities create safe spaces where students are free from having to defend their ideas, or hand out coloring books and establish napping rooms or opportunities to frolic with puppies as destressers (College Fix Staff 2016). Gray further explains many students now view a C, or even a B, as failure, and perceive that as the end of the world. What is even more disconcerting than this exaggeration of what constitutes the end of the world is the increased tendency for students to blame faculty for their low grades, not viewing the grade as accurate feedback of their performance requiring him/her to study more, or more effectively (Gray 2015).

We are concerned that the ramifications and expectations from this type of upbringing will carry over to the future employers as young people begin their careers with excessive (and perhaps unnecessary) college debt, but failure to own up to their responsibility for that debt and the actions that caused them to incur that debt. As adults, our focus should be on helping prepare young people for the “real world.” Instead, we hear or read of parents who run the home as a democracy, letting kids decide, and/or wanting to be their kid's friend (Sax 2016).

Are we destined to see business problems emerge because people fail to identify and address the root cause due to the lack of critical thinking skills or inability to reflect and learn from both their successes and failures

(Ng and Kelloff 2013)? Will this spawn “reactive individuals rather than thoughtful and thorough leaders” (Ng and Kelloff, p. 38)? Effective leaders need to make decisions, even in the midst of adversity, whether the problem is similar to an issue handled before or deals with an issue they were never taught (Ng and Kelloff). Will the lack of critical thinking skills hinder young people from becoming fully functioning adults and productive members of society, much less, the competent and confident leaders of tomorrow?

## Impact on the Workplace

One might ask why we need to address this situation, or question what is wrong with having healthy self-esteem. First, Twenge and Campbell (2009) opine our desire to increase self-esteem resulted in this “narcissism epidemic.” Second, colleges are seeing an increased demand for counseling services. Might Millennials expect this same level of counseling services in the workplace? Third, this increased attention to self is creating a challenge for employers. A survey conducted by Duke University and *CFO Magazine* found many of today’s corporate executives are making no effort to attract Millennials (those under age 35). One reason is “Millennials are developing a reputation as workplace divas who need more handholding and who will bolt from jobs at the drop of a hat. – Kim Peterson, CBS Moneywatch, December 20, 2014” (as cited by Wolcott 2015).

“Most leaders and managers think today’s young workers may be the most high-maintenance workforce of all time .... [with] the highest expectations for their immediate bosses [and] ... challenge [to] the employment conditions and established reward systems” (Tulgan 2013, p. 38). With more than 50% of Millennials overvaluing their skillset (Beck and Wade as cited by Burch and Strawderman 2014), what will be the outcome when these high expectations do not mesh with the reality of the workplace? Additionally, what does this bode for harmony in the workplace since today’s young workers are “assertive and confident yet lack the basic skills needed to immediately be successful in their work



environment” (Burch and Strawderman, p. 68), but also are “less obedient to employers’ rules and supervisors’ instructions ... [and] less likely to heed organizational chart authority” (Tulgan, p. 38)?

Millennials grew up at a time where they never knew the world without the Internet, and they are considered digital natives (Pinzaru et al. 2016). This is evidenced by the ability to play and learn from the abundance of video and online games which present an opportunity to simply hit the “reset” button or start over if the individual loses at the game. However, Millennials also grew up believing they can always win because the software developer and designer would not have created the game or application without also creating a solution. Additionally, the cost of failure in a game or “app” is inconsequential, so all the user has to do is simply start over and try again (Carstens and Beck as cited by Burch and Strawderman 2014).

While the perception that “failure comes with little to no expense may have originated in a virtual world” (Burch and Strawderman, p. 66), Millennials carry it over into the real one. Since these young gamers play with virtual assets, participants suffer no tangible consequences from losing; thereby, they fail to learn that actions can have very real and serious consequences.

In fact, employees in today’s “real world” must be able to “think on their feet and make sound decisions quickly, effectively, and often independent of direct supervisors” (Insch et al. 2010, p. 50). But employers fear Millennials may lack the ability to cope in this type of environment due to the helicopter parenting with its constant doting and intervention by parents through their childhood (Insch et al.) and the “coddling and cocooning of educated Millennials within a comfort zone patrolled by helicopter parents” (Wolcott 2015, p. 162). We propose the psychological shift in perception of college students from adults to what Arnett calls “emerging adults” (Arnett and Fishel 2013) plus the willingness of parents to take on more responsibility while expecting less from their children will not bode well for future employers. After all, are they hiring the “emerging adult” or the parent? We propose servant leadership, with its others-focus versus self-focus, is the viable pin to burst the expanding balloon of increased entitlement, sometimes seen as narcissism.

## Servant Leadership

### Why Servant Leadership Can Change the Trend

The Millennials have brought a perspective of entitlement into academia and now the workplace. We can ignore the trend, or seek to break this increasing sense of entitlement. Based on the Mayo Clinic definition of narcissism, and Greenleaf's definition of servant leadership, we propose narcissism is the antithesis of servant leadership, and therefore servant leadership logically is the pin needed to burst the expanding generational self-focused entitlement bubble.

### Entitlement in Academia

Millennials are high achievers who "have never been allowed to fail. Therefore, it is difficult to engage the students in what many faculty would call 'paying the price' of learning" (Litzenberg 2010, p. 410). Because parents have told these kids "they can do anything they want, it is hard for them to see why they should work for a grade in class" (Litzenberg, p. 411) and they are "24-hour people" who want to learn only what they need to know, when they want to learn it (Litzenberg). Another concern is that students bring attitudes of disrespect into the college classroom with a belief they are equal to the expert (Zainuddin and Rejab 2010, p. 521) and a display of non-conformance to the lectures and knowledge being imparted. Ellin (2014) reports Millennials desire and demand respect but are unable to give it.

Although today's students may believe they know it all, an increasing number of incoming students bring lower academic assets along with them (Stewart and Bernhardt 2010). Eastman et al. (2012) cite Price's observations that although students came in with unrealistically high expectations of success, they put forth an astonishingly low level of effort to achieve these expectations. Since "this is the generation that has been rewarded not just for winning, but just for trying" (Moore as cited by Eastman et al., p. 298), Millennials' confidence and belief in their ability to succeed may exceed their actual performance and turn into arrogance

(Eastman et al.). Additionally, many students view their education as a commodity to purchase rather than a learning process (McGlynn as cited by Eastman et al.). This is being reinforced by the idea of a customer service orientation in academia and is gaining momentum due to the ever increasing demands of the marketplace, market share, and tuition dollars.

## Entitlement in the Workforce

While Millennials have brought the entitlement mentality into academia, they also ushered it into the workforce (not that it was not already there). Millennials have brought entirely different expectations into the workforce; they are individualistic, overly concerned with activism, focused on self and self-discovery, and dependent on others; and the defining characteristic of narcissism also has followed them into the workforce (Pinzaru et al. 2016).

While we acknowledge the potential challenges this generation brings, we must also highlight the positives Millennials bring to the workforce. They are interested in the “general good,” are highly educated, desire control over their lives, have high levels of self-trust, reject hierarchical/formal systems and the ‘us against them’ mentality, are global, disinterested in inequality, and are deeply interested in purpose for their work and their life (Pinzaru et al. 2016). Additionally, Millennials are high-relationship individuals; this is also uniquely connected to servant leadership where leaders are focused on followers (Patterson 2003). Millennials often want their leader to be their “friend” (Barbuto and Gottfredson 2016, p. 60), focus on their needs such as the desire to be mentored (Campion 2016, p. 13), and they also desire organizations that “cater to their development and financial goals” (Barbuto and Gottfredson 2016, p. 60). Their need to find purpose is a great entry point for servanthood. In fact, Balda and Mora (2011) advocate servant leadership as the direct answer for Millennials in the workforce. In efforts to attract Millennials, Barbuto and Gottfredson (2016) offer that organizations should train their leaders to be servant leaders. They offer this one foundational reason, “What Millennials are seeking matches well with what servant

leaders can provide” (p. 59). Therefore, we advocate the need for demonstration of servant leadership today and the transfer of this mantle to the next generation.

## Seeing the Servant Potential

### The Potential in People

We must see the potential of these generations as the next servant leaders. Greenleaf certainly saw this potential and he faulted the education system for its “refusal to offer explicit preparation for leadership to those who have the potential for it” (2002, p. 176). He also opined some educators were passive about building leaders and even went further to state that some had “an anti-leadership vaccine” (177) based on their resistance to the growing leaders. Elmore (2010) proposes that forthcoming generations must see the leadership potential in all students, and indeed all students have the potential to influence and serve others. The key becomes changing the picture of leadership from power-seeking to what Elmore (2010) describes as leadership that serves a “worthwhile cause.” This allows us to enter into a more positive approach with our students and future leaders in a manner that aligns with their deep desire to live purposeful lives.

Millennials are not the leaders of yesteryears that sought power and money. In fact, according to Rainer and Rainer (2011), money does not drive the Millennial. While money is important to the Millennial, a more interesting driver is the power to serve others, or purpose; amazingly 87% of Millennials affirm that organizations should be more than just profit and are driven to ‘do more’ in society (Lebowitz 2016). They believe they WILL make a difference, as something beneficial that moves society. Maybe viewing their over self-confidence in light of the motivation to serve others could allow us to help them move from arrogance to actual humility, perhaps even servant leadership. This is congruent with the work of Balda and Mora (2011) which shows that Millennials are seeking

workplaces that provide meaningful relationships with their leaders. We propose servant leaders are high-relationship leaders, which affords a perfect fit for this need.

Knowing money is not the motivator of work to Millennials is consistent with Robert K. Greenleaf's (2002) ideas on the primary purpose of work and organizational life. He advocated that workers find meaning in their work, "the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work" (p. 154). Additionally, Greenleaf spoke about the purpose of business as being more than just profit (which aligns with Millennials' beliefs), stating, "I am in the business of growing people – people who are stronger, healthier, more autonomous, more self-reliant, and more competent. Incidentally, we also make and sell at a profit things that people want to buy so we can pay for all this. We play that game hard and well and we are successful by the usual standards, but that is really incidental" (p. 199).

Greenleaf (2002) advocated institutions as social forces; this allows both educational institutions and employers to focus on consistency with Millennials' desire to serve society and thereby achieve purposeful lives (Balda and Mora 2011). Millennials "have a greater willingness to serve" evidenced in their levels of volunteering, interning, and service learning; this is motivated by their desire to live meaningful lives and to make a difference in the world (Balda and Mora).

Coupled with their view of work as a standalone value (Campion 2016), we see an increased need for organizations to consider some innovative measures. In fact, encouraging Millennials to become involved in pro-social activities such as volunteerism helps them see beyond and outside themselves. Volunteerism affords the added benefits of countering narcissism and decreasing the probability of depression and alcohol abuse (Carter et al. 2012). Elmore (2010) proposes that the key is to switch the power narrative from power-seeking, which is power over others that is perverted, or "counterfeit leaders," to a narrative that promotes a more healthy approach where leading is about serving others. The Millennials are tired, fatigued, and done with the leaders they have seen. According to Rainer and Rainer (2011), they have seen a lot of undesirable leadership (the rock stars of their parents' generation, sleazy politicians, unethical CEOs, and morally failed clergy).

## The Potential in Purpose

Ultimately the key in reaching the Millennial, be it student or employee, is to understand their pursuit of one thing—Purpose. Millennials are seeking purpose in what they do—be it their studies or their work. In fact, Lebowitz (2016) describes the “purpose gap” as what Millennials are seeking versus what they are offered. For the Millennial, it will always be purpose before profit (Lebowitz)—the pursuit of something bigger than themselves along with the opportunity to serve. The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey emphasized the pursuit of purpose and alignment of values—specifically that entities are mostly motivated by profit and the need to reach for more. Of great interest, the most “prized” skill or attribute Millennials want developed is their leadership; with 63% feeling their leadership is not being developed, this causes them to feel overlooked and impacts their loyalty to the organization. The key takeaway from Deloitte’s research is that Millennials are seeking purpose—purpose supersedes growth or profit, and this sense of purpose is people-centered. Their “people-first” attitude is a big motivator, though we must also remember that Millennials think highly of themselves. They actually think they can change the world, and it is quite possible we should believe this about them as well, and encourage them to accomplish it. This will be accomplished by understanding the giftings of our students and employees, and nurturing those giftings to maturity. This leads to the next point of consideration, seeing the potential in others.

The opportunity exists to inspire Millennials with servant leadership. Balda and Mora (2011) encapsulate the opportunity by stating “certain basic principles and practices emerging from the servant leader model serve to exemplify the challenges of conceptualizing current leadership theory for the dynamics between Millennials and other generations in the workplace.” They further indicate that Millennials are asking “servants to whom,” “servants to what,” and even “why would I want to be a servant” (p. 19). This fosters the idea that if this generation can tap into the concept of moving towards something bigger than themselves and the idea of others over self, conceivably the stage is set for a new generation of servant leaders. Servant leadership may just be the answer these new generations are seeking, a purpose beyond themselves.

An additional consideration is Campione's (2016) insight that "Employers will not retain Millennial employees until they re-examine some of their unpalatable practices and institutionalized norms and re-focus their attention to the value of human resources" (p. 24), basically iterating a focus on followers (Stone et al. 2004). This resonates with Barbuto and Gottfredson's (2016) call for the *need* for servant leadership with Millennials, specifically that organizations must orient themselves to invest in Millennials or they will go elsewhere for work. Of interest, Barbuto and Gottfredson call for servant leaders to meet Millennials by placing their own interests under the needs of followers. This may involve supporting Millennials' needs for support and development, aiding followers in the restoration of broken dreams, promoting climates of learning, and providing healing when Millennials do not get what they desire in the workplace—such as not being able to move up as quickly as they desire or having unmet needs.

## The Millennial Potential

The question we ask is whether well-intended efforts to "help" our students, our children, our employees is actually helping them; or is all this hovering (helicoptering) only further perpetuating entitlement and narcissism in both academia and the workforce? Is all this hovering and protecting truly a help, or are we hindering their growth—their ability to emerge as self-confident, fully functioning adults and members of our society? Greenleaf (2002) promoted the idea of "the need for rekindling the spirit of young people" (p. 184). With the hope of creating leaders, we propose this is applicable to both academia and the workplace.

Academia, perhaps more than any other entity, is privileged to see the student, the Millennial, as future leaders. Elmore (2010) maintains that leadership is the move from seeing oneself as not the one to be influenced but as the one who can lead and influence others in the world—to serve others. He notes many students do not *feel* like leaders, when in fact these are our potential leaders, the very ones we need to be grooming. This grooming, according to Elmore (2010), will only take place when students, future leaders and servants, find what their passions are in life; in

others words, what their meaning is for being here. Elmore (2010) calls this their sweet spot where they come alive. Many students find their passions, their strengths, and their purpose during the collegiate years. The guiding questions are what are we doing to serve these future leaders in finding this purpose, and further, what are we doing to help them in finding their own place in serving others?

We can guide these students to see themselves as leaders and to find their place in history (Elmore 2010); the power to harness their greatness is within our grasp if we can just see it and inspire it. In order to cultivate their leadership we must understand their motivations. According to Borges et al. (2010), Millennials score much higher than Gen X on the needs for achievement and affiliation, whereas the Gen Xer is more inclined to power. This indicates “Millennials have greater needs to belong to social groups and to share with others, stronger team instincts and tighter peer bonds, and greater needs to achieve and succeed” (Borges et al., p. 574).

Borges et al. (2010) advocate multiple ways to motivate the Millennial student, mostly that faculty members provide feedback, which is highly desired by Millennials so they can monitor their progress and accomplishments. This will include failure at times, and that is okay! Elmore (2015) addresses the idea that we have not taught students “how to evaluate mistakes or failures.” Rather, we have prevented their failure to the extent “that they are absolutely afraid of it.” Yet failure can have advantages (Sax 2016), and the avoidance of it “has cost them greatly” (Elmore 2015).

We can help Millennials grow by creating or providing opportunities for collaboration and consensus; this may involve group projects, or team projects, and certainly could include learning by doing projects and assignments. Additionally, Millennials desire clear goals and objectives with feedback on their progress.

It must be noted that education itself is a domain directly suited as a serving arena; not that we are customer-oriented, but rather we are serving the students in all that we do. According to Stephen (2007), education, specifically higher education, is a *dedication* to serving students with one specific goal in mind, to “create the most effective environment for helping students create their best future.” This is consistent with



servant leadership literature in that the best interest of the followers (Patterson 2003) is the focus of the leader; in this case the professors and administrators are focused on the student and his or her needs. The end objective of the servant leader is to foster the follower to achieve and become the leader they desire to be.

Educators can take the stance of dreaming for their students and serving them to help develop the leaders they will indeed become. Vision is a primary aspect of servant leadership (Patterson 2003), where the vision is person-centered, seeing individuals for their future state. Stephen (2007) encapsulates this with his idea that educators must dream for students, and further that these dreams drive the guidance in our classrooms and universities. The deep dedication educators put into their students is birthed out of love but delivered out of hope, as we can see these students in the here and now; but also we can see them as history makers, societal giants, and world changers. This ability to dream big with them cultivates their own dreams and passions and invigorates their leadership potential.

## Conclusion

Millennials are unique, as is every generation, and our desire to serve and educate them well is strong. Understanding them is a wonderful and unique challenge. We believe their strong sense of purpose-seeking will gain momentum as they continue to move into educational settings and the workplace. We cannot control what has happened before students or employees enter our doors, but we do control whether hovering and helicoptering is perpetuated while they are entrusted to us. We propose that our task is to not perpetuate a coddling role or encourage narcissistic tendencies: in other words, to not hover over and protect them. Our greatest task might just be to encourage them in the struggling phase of becoming adults and help unleash their great potential as “serving” Millennials. We propose people would consider their time in academia and the beginning years in the workforce as transformative to their development. If ever there was a time to infuse servant leadership into an impressionable group such as the Millennials that time is now!

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# 13

## Incorporating Organizational Ambidexterity in the Public Sector Through Servant Leadership

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### Introduction

When Robert Greenleaf further explored the concept of servant leadership in his 1977 seminal book, he made specific reference to the applicability of such paradoxical idea in the realities of business, education, foundations, and churches. In that same book, the specific context of public administration was approached somehow by exploring the idea of “servant responsibility” in a bureaucratic society. Greenleaf alerts to the perils of bureaucracy in moving institutions away from their prime responsibility to serve. This seems to align with the fears of Max Weber (1946), in how an ever-growing bureaucracy would limit liberty and a free society. Not that Max Weber discarded bureaucracy. Quite the

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contrary. He regarded it as the most desirable form of social organization, as the traditional charismatic and authoritative mode was not capable of efficiently managing and coordinating the actions of diverse people in industrialized societies. At the same time, Weber's (1946) principles of an "ideal type" of bureaucracy intended to fight the incompetence, inefficiency, and corruption that dominated administrative systems, emphasizing that civil servants, or bureaucrats, should be subordinate to political power, since "without this moral discipline and self-denial, in the highest sense, the whole apparatus would fall to pieces" (Weber 1946, 95).

In the 1970s, when Robert Greenleaf wrote his first servant-leadership essay, the crisis of political leadership and civic representation was also evident, of which the Watergate affair in the USA was maybe the most obvious example. Robert Greenleaf takes note that citizens felt less and less represented and disenchanted with their political powers. This is evident even today, if not even more aggravated. The most obvious examples pertain to an increase in autocracy and populism with an obvious deterioration of democracy and civil rights in the last years. According to a study by the Freedom House (2017) "a total of 67 countries suffered net declines in political rights and civil liberties in 2016, compared with 36 that registered gains" making this "the 11th consecutive year in which declines outnumbered improvements". In fact, the following quote from Robert Greenleaf seems taken from the headlines of today's news: "Governments rely too much on coercion and too little on persuasion, leadership and example. Although they render indispensable services, they too often impose upon society a bureaucracy that is oppressive and corrupting.... We are prone to adventurous and illegal wars. Confidence in the integrity of elected officials is at a low point. The total tax structure is a perversion. The treatment of prisoners is barbaric. The cost of it all is staggering" (Greenleaf 2002, 66).

To these two aspects of increasing bureaucracy and apparent crisis of political leadership, today we can add three additional factors that put public institutions under an unprecedented pressure. First, the high pace of technological innovation forces public institutions to introduce disruptive changes in their organizational structures. With the crushing power of bureaucracy, such dramatic transformations can be excruciating

for public managers. In line with these developments, some authors even claim the end of new public management advanced by Hood (1996) and the birth of digital era governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006). Secondly, the double edge sword of social media provides on the one hand increased opportunities for public involvement (potentially contributing to solve the problem of representation above), but on the other hand, a fertile ground for misrepresented reality, often in detriment of the public function and political figures. Finally, the higher emphasis on efficiency and limited government (at least in modern western and democratic societies), with an increasingly important role of the private sector in serving citizens, has put a stronger strain on financial and human resources of public institutions. Such changes go down to the core of the public function, challenging its fundamental principles. We seem to assist an important shift in the environment of the public institution that is forcing public managers to innovate in a far more disruptive way than what the public sector is used to. All this while ensuring compliance to a wide range of legal rules and regulations, and safeguarding efficient public services.

It seems therefore that the need for organizational ambidexterity is now moving into the public sector. Just like their business counterparts in the private sector, so too public institutions need to be able to “explore and exploit” simultaneously (Tushman and O’Reilly 1996). Some authors have recently recognized this need and started studying this tension between exploring and exploiting in the public sector (e.g. Aagaard (2011), Burgess et al. (2015), Cannaerts et al. (2016), Palm and Lilja (2017)) with some promising results. However, this field remains pretty much unknown in terms of the role of public-sector leadership in creating the conditions for organizational ambidexterity. While the concept of new public management (Hood 1996) seems to have addressed the greater need for efficiency, by applying management practices from the private sector, it seems to fall short in addressing the increasing need for adaptability and innovation highlighted earlier. For example, in an exploratory article, Aagaard (2011) recalls that “new public management does not significantly promote a mix of integration and differentiation approaches to ambidexterity”. In summary, this chapter aims to provide

new venues for research by establishing a set of possible causal relationships between servant-leadership behaviors and organizational ambidexterity, enlarging this way the broader field of public management.

## Organizational Ambidexterity

Organizational ambidexterity was defined by Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) as “the ability of an organization to both explore and exploit—to compete in mature technologies and markets where efficiency, control, and incremental improvement are prized and to also compete in new technologies and markets where flexibility, autonomy, and experimentation are needed”. Originally developed in the business context, the concept relies strongly on this idea of long-term survival of the enterprise through exploration, while ensuring short-term viability through exploitation (March 1991).

The concept got traction in academia and many empirical studies have followed, with apparent evidence of its impact on business performance. For a review of these studies please consult O'Reilly and Tushman (2013), Lavie et al. (2010), Raisch and Birkinshaw (2008), and Turner et al. (2013). It is important to note that three main lines of study have emerged in the context of organizational ambidexterity.

The first is essentially sequential and defends the idea that firms can create organizational ambidexterity by adapting their organizational structures to the environment (Tushman and Romanelli 1985), oscillating between periods of exploitation and exploration as demanded by market shifts (Brown and Eisenhardt 1997). The transition of IBM from a computer manufacturer to a service company is probably a good example of a temporal shift from exploitation to exploration and back into exploitation again, once the new strategy was established and settled.

The second approach proposes a simultaneous pursuit of exploration and exploitation by using separate units that embody the competencies, processes, and cultures needed to operate in each distinct mode (O'Reilly and Tushman 2008). Holding such separate units together in a way that is strategically consistent while leveraging assets and resources becomes a pivotal element of good leadership in these organizations (O'Reilly and



Tushman 2011; Smith et al. 2005, 2010). An example of this simultaneous mode is the creation of corporate venturing units by large multinationals that allow them to explore new markets and opportunities, while keeping the existing business focused on exploitation.

The third approach, called contextual ambidexterity, advances that such tension between exploration and exploitation can be managed by individual managers who can use their own judgment to determine when to operate in these two different modes (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004). Such autonomy requires a supportive organizational context that provides “stretch, discipline, and trust”, ultimately leading to a combined ability for alignment (exploitation) and adaptability (exploration) (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004). A possible good example of such contextual ambidexterity is seen in the democratic management principles of the Semco Group, whereby employees are autonomous to determine how to conduct their work, while being aligned through mutual accountability (Largacha-Martínez 2011). Google is probably another example of a culture that promotes the freedom of employees to explore on their own time as they see fit, while ensuring proper execution.

One can notice that these three modes of ambidexterity operate at different levels. Sequential and simultaneous ambidexterity operates at the structural level, possibly requiring direct senior management intervention in shaping those structures. Contextual ambidexterity, on the other hand, works at the individual level in a bottom-up decentralized approach, being more the by-product of a certain management style with the support of decentralized processes and incentives. Most naturally, these three modes can complement each other and interact in complex ways to create a broader capability to exploit and explore (Tushman et al. 2013).

A more recent development (e.g. Adler 2013) concerns the analysis of ambidexterity from an interorganizational level, involving the ability of the organization to cooperate and forge alliances with other organizations such as to increase efficiency (exploitation) and the ability to tap into opportunities for more disruptive innovation (exploration). This coincides with recent trends toward more open innovation models (Chesbrough 2006) or the development of network organizations (Borgatti and Foster 2003).

## Organizational Ambidexterity in the Public Sector

While organizational ambidexterity saw its birth within the business context, one observes an increasing interest in applying this concept in the public sector. Such interest is driven by an observation of similar challenges faced by public managers as their private sector counterparts in ensuring efficiency of their operations, while adapting to significant environmental shifts concerning technology disruption and social demands for increased representation and public accountability. As mentioned before, this aligns with (Greenleaf 1977) awareness of the perils of bureaucracy and crisis of leadership in government. The field remains however pretty much unexplored with some recent exceptions.

In a first conceptual exploration, Bryson et al. (2008) listed a set of propositions to achieve organizational ambidexterity in the public sector, namely: effective relations with supervising authorities, relative autonomy in relation to political forces; a clear and explicit statement or purpose that supports ambidexterity; strong organizational culture; effective strategic leadership; well-devised planning and decision-making processes; an organizational architecture that promotes an ambidextrous organization; constructive relations with partners and suppliers; and a good use and management of technology. A qualitative study by Palm and Lilja (2017) expands on these antecedents of organizational ambidexterity. On a similar note, the authors determine nine key enabling factors of organizational ambidexterity in the public sector:

- Organize for good understanding of user needs and situation. The authors highlight the importance of public managers ensuring that both exploratory and exploitative processes incorporate a user perspective, such as to create legitimacy and enable relevance and high quality.
- A management team that realizes and can communicate the need for exploration. This is critical to build an internal case for ambidexterity and to create a supportive environment of exploratory initiatives.

- Dialogue. This encompasses the need to ensure that those involved in exploitation and exploration activities keep regular and productive communication between them. Most notably, on aspects concerning the actual needs for exploration and the integration of new initiatives into the existing exploitative processes.
- Ambassadors. Having people advocating for innovative products, processes, or services is essential to ensure that exploratory initiatives get implemented. These “champions” play a crucial role in sustaining dialogue as suggested before and in stimulating the adoption of new practices and ideas.
- A culture that allows mistakes. The authors propose a “forgiving culture”, in which people can make mistakes and experiment. This aspect of forgiveness to allow for mistakes (together with empowerment) is a key dimension of the servant-leadership construct (Dierendonck 2011). Such a culture is built on the premise of dialogue and empowerment to instill tolerance and learning.
- Budget for exploration and exploitation. Having a specific budget for both exploitative and exploratory initiatives will pass a clear message of commitment to ambidexterity and allow for the necessary control and accountability mechanisms that ensure execution.
- A system view. It is important that employees can abstract from their organizational silos and see the larger picture and interconnections between processes and organizational structures. Developing a holistic approach with continuous dialogue between multiple internal and external stakeholders becomes critical. This is ultimately a responsibility of management to ensure that such system view is stimulated.
- Focus on implementing innovations. For ambidexterity to take ground in the organization, management needs to ensure that innovations are implemented. Moving from idea to practice is critical and equal effort should be put on idea generation and implementation.
- Incentives for both exploration and exploitation. This aspect also relates very closely to the accountability dimension of servant leadership (Dierendonck 2011). Setting clear objectives and measurements for both exploration and exploitation, while linking them to incentives and pay, will increase the adoption of organizational ambidexterity.

When it comes to simultaneous structural ambidexterity (Tushman et al. 2013), there are two recent examples worth mentioning. A study by Smith and Umans (2015) on organizational ambidexterity at the local government level tried to understand the impact of managerial focus (entrepreneurial, leadership, or stakeholder) on the ability to simultaneously exploit and explore. The authors considered two different types of local government organizations: the typical local government administration (LGA) and the local government corporation (LGC). Findings indicated that LGCs could develop increased levels of organizational ambidexterity and that management focus was different from their LGA counterparts. This brings an interesting and important additional variable, which concerns the different organizational forms of the public institution. In their effort to increase adaptability, public entities, most notably local governments, create separate structures with a business-like culture and structure. This seems indeed to be a form of simultaneous structural ambidexterity, whereby some public functions remain in the traditional public organizational structures and others, probably requiring more innovation and autonomy, get placed in autonomous structures resembling businesses. In another study, Cannaerts et al. (2016) explore “how public cultural organizations use ambidextrous design to balance exploitation and exploration given their organizational structure that mainly stimulates exploitation”. Their findings emphasize the importance of considering the informal structure when pursuing both exploitation and exploration.

Finally, when taking a more contextual perspective on organizational ambidexterity (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004), we highlight the following study on the role of middle managers in UK hospitals (Burgess et al. 2015). In their research, the authors emphasize the importance of a hybrid operating mode such as to allow for both exploration and exploitation at the individual level. The contextual factors of professional legitimacy, social capital, and holistic professional orientation seem to influence the ability of these middle managers to reconcile the tension between exploration and exploitation. Interestingly, these factors seem to concur with the need for an organizational climate that supports stretch, discipline, and trust (especially this one) as defended by (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004).

While these initial results seem to show promising venues for research and an apparent applicability of organizational ambidexterity in the public sector, much remains to be understood. In this chapter, we are interested in further exploring the relation between servant-leadership behaviors and organizational ambidexterity in the public sector. O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) already emphasized that “the role of senior team and leadership behaviors in attending to the contradictory demands of exploration and exploitation” remains unclear. Studies on the impact of leadership on organizational ambidexterity do exist (e.g. Alexiev et al. 2010; Carmeli and Halevi 2009; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013). For example, Jansen et al. (2009) found the potential link between transformational leadership and exploratory innovation, in contrast with transactional leadership associated with exploitative innovation. However, studies on the specific role of servant leadership for organizational ambidexterity and in the public sector are non-existent. Given the conceptual notion of servant leadership, we find this model particularly suited for the public sector and an interesting approach toward the reconciliation between exploration and exploitation as explained.

## How Servant Leadership Can Lead to Greater Organizational Ambidexterity

When reflecting upon the relation between leadership and organizational structures, it is worth mentioning that Greenleaf (1977) already emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the formal and informal organizations. The servant leader needs to operate in these two realities and ensure that they both contribute toward the ultimate purpose of serving those people central to the organization. In this regard, Greenleaf (1977) talks about the relevance of keeping very present this idea of servant responsibility to counter the weight of the bureaucracy of the formal organization. Such weight is particularly true in the public sector, often conditioned by multiple stakeholder demands, a stringent regulatory environment, and the additional needs for transparency and public scrutiny. By keeping this serving focus, the leader can prevent that civil

purpose, so central to the public organization, succumbing to the pressure of administrative compliance. In a way, enforcing the purpose of serving ensures that the organization can continuously adapt to the moving demands of others.

In addition to this initial conceptual starting point, further and more detailed observations can be made about the contribution of servant leadership toward organizational ambidexterity in the public sector. To do that, we make use of the core dimensions of servant leadership proposed by Correia de Sousa and van Dierendonck (2014), namely: humility, standing-back, stewardship, accountability, and empowerment. The authors further propose that these dimensions can be split in two basic and complementary concepts of moral- and action-oriented behaviors. The moral side being supported by humility and standing-back, and the action side by stewardship, empowerment, and accountability. Asag-Gau and Dierendonck (2011) and van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) have confirmed through a second-order factor analysis this same potential subset of five core dimensions split between humble service (humility and standing-back) and action (empowerment, accountability, and stewardship). We will now provide further details on these dimensions and their potential role in contributing toward organizational ambidexterity in the public sector.

## **Putting the Purpose of Serving as the Driving Force Through Stewardship**

Stewardship is essentially about ensuring wholeness. It makes the common interest and the good of the whole central, setting this way an overall meaningful framework wherein action be taken. Stewardship provides a sense of purposeful direction and long-term orientation that is critical for servant leadership (Dennis and Bocarnea 2005). Stewardship can contribute to several antecedents of organizational ambidexterity like providing a systemic or holistic view, organizing for a good understanding of user needs and their situation, communicating the need for exploration, promoting dialogue, and acting as ambassadors of novel products, processes, or services (Palm and Lilja 2017). When taking the work of

Bryson et al. (2008) as a reference, stewardship can provide a clear and explicit statement or purpose that supports ambidexterity, a strong organizational culture, effective strategic leadership, and an organizational architecture that promotes ambidextrous organizational and constructive relations with partners and suppliers.

Through stewardship, servant leaders create a greater involvement of community in the reality of the public organization. Servant leaders are therefore likely to create “ambidextrous designs” (Cannaerts et al. 2016) that invite citizens and civic society to actively engage with the public institution. Examples can include participative democracy initiatives such as having the population decide on public projects and initiatives, creating incubators or separate companies for stimulating creative initiatives that address social challenges (e.g. Smith and Umans (2015)), or town-hall meetings with local communities. Such mechanisms create structural ambidexterity, allowing the public organization to adapt by capturing the needs of the populations being served through direct involvement in separate structures that then feed into the internal bureaucracy for execution. This concurs with the simultaneous co-existence of exploiting and exploratory structures (O’Reilly and Tushman 2008). In this way, both exploration and exploitation are addressed and used complementarily. At the same time, stewardship can create better conditions for contextual ambidexterity (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004) to emerge by clarifying the purpose of serving, vocalizing the needs of populations, and making people realize how their daily work needs to contribute to a larger purpose of serving. This is in line with the need for social capital and holistic professional orientation of the study in public hospitals (Burgess et al. 2015).

## **Instilling Contextual Ambidexterity Through Empowerment**

Empowerment is mainly about letting others make autonomous decisions and share information, while coaching and mentoring individuals for increased innovative performance (Konczak et al. 2000). While being central to servant leadership, it is also studied as a form of leadership on

its own (Pearce and Sims 2002). Empowerment is intimately related to the idea of contextual ambidexterity, whereby the leader creates the conditions for followers to judge when to exploit and when to explore (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004). Empowerment also contributes to create social capital through informal support networks and professional legitimacy such that employees feel they have the tools and responsibilities needed to ensure autonomy in their judgment between exploitation and exploration (Burgess et al. 2015). Finally, empowerment underpins a culture of trust, critical for contextual ambidexterity to emerge (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004).

Bryson et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of public managers keeping relative autonomy in relation to political forces. With this regard, empowering employees can play a critical role by liberating them from too many political constraints that might transcend the ultimate goal of serving populations. On a similar note, several of the recommendations provided by Palm and Lilja (2017) can be addressed through empowerment, namely: creating a culture that allows mistakes, setting budgets for exploration and exploitation, and a focus on implementing innovations.

## **Ensuring Integrated Exploitation and Exploration Through Accountability**

Accountability is that part of servant leadership that ensures execution and effective action. Without it, any form of serving motivation stays as an intention. It provides the essential element of result orientation for us to be able to talk about leadership. It provides day-to-day direction through reporting mechanisms and clear metrics that create a sense of responsibility among the workforce. Such reporting and metrics do not necessarily have to be defined centrally, but can also be defined in a participatory fashion. The role of accountability is particularly salient in the organizational ambidexterity dichotomy. First, it ensures that exploration is done in a context of clear performance and impact focus. Second, it also ensures that the results of exploration become incorporated in the exploitation side of the organization, to ensure actual execution. In this regard, accountability seems to fit into the need for creating clear



incentives for exploration and exploitation (Palm and Lilja 2017) but also in the context of conditions for contextual ambidexterity defined by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), especially concerning the provision of stretch and discipline to employees. In summary, the servant leader's accountability focus will instill the development of planning and decision-making processes, with the corresponding use of management technology necessary for organizational ambidexterity (Bryson et al. 2008).

## **Creating a Learning and Adaptive Culture Through Humility and Standing-Back**

Humility is maybe the most distinct characteristic of the servant leader when compared to other forms of leadership (Morris et al. 2005; Patterson 2003; Russel 2001). Humility is at the core of the servant leader's motivation to serve (Morris et al. 2005). According to (Dierendonck 2011), humility is based on three essential components: (1) the ability to put one's accomplishments and talents in perspective (Patterson 2003), (2) admitting one's fallibility and mistakes (Morris et al. 2005), and (3) understanding of one's strong and weak points. The accompanying characteristic of standing-back is also important to understand this overall humble attitude of the servant leader. According to van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), standing-back "is about the extent to which a leader gives priority to the interest of others first and gives them the necessary support and credits... (and) is also about retreating into the background when a task has successfully been accomplished". Somehow, humility is expressed mainly internally while standing-back, which resembles the notion of modesty (Morris et al. 2005; Peterson and Seligman 2004), and represents an external expression of that same humility. Both reflect the same attitude of putting the self in a reserved perspective compared to others. These two constructs work as support mechanisms, amplifying the effect to the other three action-oriented dimensions of stewardship, empowerment, and accountability. This amplifying effect was particularly evident for senior managers in a study by Correia de Sousa and van Dierendonck (2014), which somehow relates to the level 5 leadership concept introduced by Collins

(2001). Humility and standing-back will contribute greatly to create a culture of learning, sharing, interdependence, and continuous improvement so needed for contextual ambidexterity.

## Conclusions

It is somehow surprising how a concept such as servant leadership remains unexplored in the public sector. The idea of service as the prime motivation should be at the core of any public institution, and yet the majority of servant-leadership studies pertain to the private sector. This, we suggest, needs to change. In this chapter, we propose that servant leadership can provide a rather relevant framework to promote greater organizational ambidexterity in public institutions. Most notably, several relationships were established between the key dimensions of servant leadership and ambidexterity. Stewardship can ensure a stronger sense of purpose in connection to the real and changing needs of communities to inspire further exploration. Empowerment can function as a vehicle to stimulate contextual ambidexterity, where people ensure exploitation while taking ownership for change and innovation at the point of action. Accountability can be critical in ensuring relevant exploration and the integration of exploration into the exploitation processes of public organizations. Finally, humility and standing-back can sustain a culture where exploitation and exploration co-exist, allowing for adaptability and continuous learning. From a very practical perspective, this is critical to be able to address the challenges affecting the public sector, namely increasing bureaucracy, an apparent political leadership crisis, increasing technological innovation, the greater participation of citizens through social media and other digital means, and the increasing need for efficiency through limited government in partnership with the private sector. We suggest that future empirical studies try to establish whether our proposed theoretical relationships between servant leadership and organizational ambidexterity indeed exist in their various forms (sequential, simultaneous, and contextual). This can help expand our understanding of public-sector management, and more importantly, ensure that public institutions remain close to their mission

of public service while adapting to the reality of a fast-paced digital and interconnected world. In Greenleaf's (1977) own words, that the public-sector bureaucracy develops a sense of "servant responsibility".

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# 14

## Improving Health Care Organizations Through Servant Leadership

Sigrún Gunnarsdóttir, Kasper Edwards,  
and Lotta Dellve

### Improving Health Care Organizations

Public health care is faced with growing challenges as the government and public demand more health care but the government does not increase funding proportionally. Health care systems respond to these challenges by rationalizing work and implementing new and more cost-effective procedures. Rationalization has been implemented often using the principles of lean manufacturing, which has become a dominating approach (Hasle et al. 2016) with some hospitals developing their own

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approach to lean (Winkel et al. 2015). Rationalization is often initiated by hospital management and pushed to the wards. New procedures are driven by the desire of occupational groups for keeping up to date within their fields. Health care is also faced with changes imposed from outside such as political changes, structural reforms and changes in governance linked to a relentless pace of change.

The practical reality of change is played out in the day-to-day health care work. Here doctors, nurses, therapists and patients converge to carry out treatment. Treatment is an interaction between the immediate idiosyncratic needs of the patient as well as predefined care processes and structures. Health care professionals use predefined processes to leverage efficiency but at the same time bypass the processes and rely on professional discretion should the patient's condition require so. While processes exist they are difficult to maintain due to changing staff and patient requirements. Health care work is a fluid and constantly developing practice where health care professionals navigate and adapt. Such adaptability is admirable and flexible but also a source of variation in treatment, frustration among staff and lack of efficiency.

This self-development of practice reflects that health care adapts and it also highlights what we believe to be a potential problem: development is based on individual professional discretion negotiated by solving concrete patient problems. A blunter statement is that the system relies on trial and error to develop practice. Health care managers and leaders are absent from this development, not because they choose to but because they have no role.

However, literature indicates that the quality of first line management is foundational to organizational empowerment and social capital in health care and facilitates ongoing changes (Strömberg et al. 2016, 2017). In this regard, there are reasons to believe that servant leadership of first line managers can be useful for successful change management. Servant leadership is characterized by intrinsic interest in other people's ideas and interests as well as self-knowledge and a clear vision and foresight (Greenleaf 1970/2010).



The purpose of this chapter is to present a model for developing care processes and well-being at work in hospital wards. We argue that the ward manager/nurse plays a central role for leading change in a hospital ward and develop practice. The ward manager must become a servant leader (Greenleaf 1972/2009) who creates organizational social capital (OSC) (Olesen et al. 2008) and balances a top-down approach where changes are instructed with a bottom-up approach where changes are suggested by staff. We argue that social capital among professionals and employees also has a crucial role and is intertwined with ward managers practicing servant leadership. Servant leadership is practiced by the ward nurse in both the development and implementation of care processes. Social capital grows as processes are developed through collaboration facilitated by the servant leader ward nurse.

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to servant leadership as a practice model and OSC. This is followed by a study that underpins our model which is then presented and discussed in relation to how servant leadership at more organizational levels contributes to improvement work through strengthened OSC.

## Core Elements of Servant Leadership

In his foundational writings, Robert Greenleaf emphasizes that a good leader must first be a good servant (1970/2010). To be a good servant, in this regard, relates to the ability to be a good listener, to develop self-awareness and to have a clear foresight. These characteristics are then related to community of equals, sharing of ideas and demonstrating courage to create and develop new ideas and approaches to solve problems. A servant leader fosters accountability among his coworkers. His daily work is characterized by being tough on the problem and gentle on the person; he is at the same time a servant and a leader. These elements are important for the development of mutual trust and in particular for the creation of trust toward the leader and his or her ideas (Hayes and Comer 2010). A servant leader is known to be a person of principles who decides to use different management and leadership styles depending on circumstances and current tasks (Prosser 2010).

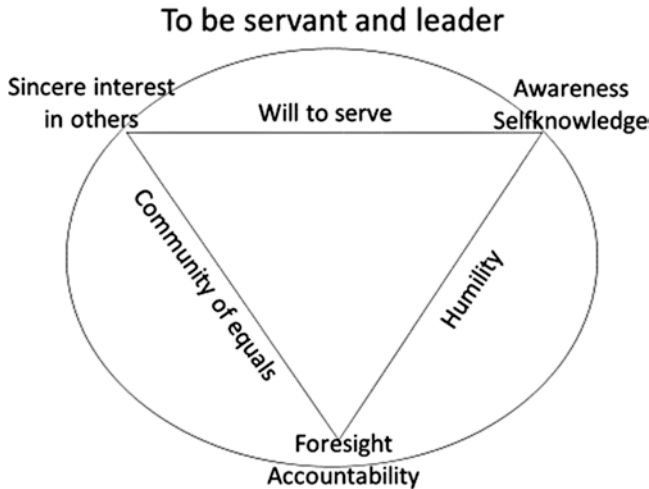
According to Greenleaf's writings servant leadership can be modeled by three interdependent core elements, that is, sincere interest in others, self-knowledge and foresight, see Fig. 14.1. These elements are based on Greenleaf's foundational ideas (1970/2010) and the three elements are related to various sub-elements of servant leadership. The core elements can each be placed on three corners of a triangle. The triangle can be drawn as an opposite hierarchical triangle to emphasize the difference between the two approaches. The elements can also be linked by a circle in line with Greenleaf's emphasis on a circle of equals and friends. Related concepts can be placed on the sides between the triangle's corners to demonstrate how the core elements are interrelated (Gunnarsdóttir 2011).

The first core element of the model is *sincere interest in other people* and is based on Greenleaf's foundational emphasis about the servant leader being a servant first. This is demonstrated by an ability to build strength in other people by true listening, to facilitate dialogue and the ability to empower.

The second core element is *self-knowledge* which is foundational to the ability of the servant leader to know one's strengths and weaknesses. Self-knowledge is developed by reflection and the ability to withdraw to listen to oneself, to develop *awareness* and humility and to open the door of perception of inner voice and intuition.

These two core elements can be considered as building blocks of the servant part of servant leadership—the ability to meet other people's needs, to enjoy inner strength and the ability to be humble.

The third core element is *foresight and clear vision*. This element can be considered as the leader part of servant leadership placed at the bottom corner of the triangle. The leader part is characterized by the ability to provide focus and direction and to create important goals, a common great dream, and shared purpose and accountability. The leader's strength is having overview, and the ability to have foresight is according to Greenleaf a prerequisite and foundational to the leader being able to be a true leader. According to this threefold model servant leadership is practiced through the core elements which are interwoven and linked by related concepts such as the will to serve, community of equals, and humility (see Fig. 14.1).



**Fig. 14.1** Threefold model on core elements of servant leadership based on Robert K. Greenleaf's original ideas (Gunnarsdóttir 2011)

This threefold model underpins the goal of servant leadership according to Greenleaf, which is to contribute to the development of many servant leaders such that there are leaders in every chair of the organization (Greenleaf 1970/2010). For this purpose, Hayes and Comer (2010) state that the servant leader is an empowering role model who facilitates dialogue, helps other people to shine and has a particular ability to create and sustain trust. Recent health care research provides evidence to what Greenleaf called the best test of servant leadership, that is, “that those being served become more autonomous, healthier and wiser and are willing to become servants themselves” (Greenleaf 1970/2010, p. 15). An example of these studies regards a link between servant leadership of first line nurse managers and nursing job satisfaction, nurse freedom to control own work and opportunities for professional development (Rafnsdóttir et al. 2011). Also, a significant link has been identified between higher levels of servant leadership of next superior and higher levels of engagement (e.g. Hakanen and Dierendonck 2012) and commitment to change (Kool and Van Dierendonck 2012).

## Core Elements of Organizational Social Capital

While servant leadership describes a certain way of practicing leadership, a role, OSC characterizes certain kinds of relationship in a group. OSC is a term that can trace its lineage back to the early 1970s where Granovetter (1973) analyzed the strength of weak ties. Bourdieu (1986) extended the concept of capital to a person's ability to mobilize his/her network. Coleman (1988) builds on Bourdieus' notion of OSC as a product of a social network and further added human capital, for example, education, to the concept. OSC became a functional resource tied to the strength of a group's relations resulting in relative higher productivity due to higher levels of trust. Putnam (1995) further developed the concept by characterizing the relations between and within social groups, that is, bridging and bonding social capital. Woolcock (1998) reiterates the importance of the social network and argues that trust, norms and mutual dependency are central to forming OSC. Olesen et al. (2008) focus on the concept of OSC further and point to the group and its *key task*.

We use the definition by Olesen et al. (2008): OSC is the ability of the members of the organization to collaborate when solving the key tasks of the organization based on trust and justice. This definition is extensively used in the Nordic countries and part of the COPSOQ (Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire) (Pejtersen et al. 2009).

Where servant leadership is a behavior, OSC is the resulting group effect and a tangible resource that translates into job satisfaction and high organizational performance. Servant leadership develops relationships based on trust and justice between followers thereby creating social capital. A servant leader has foresight and clear vision of the work, which result in a focus on defining the key tasks. This is instrumental for collaborating in a group, and a common understanding of the key task allows the group to discuss and organize work.

OSC has distinct temporal properties as trust and justice are formed over time and not given. Leadership can influence OSC by working with the elements in the context of the key tasks. Trust is increased if our perceptions are reinforced—a promise made and kept builds trust. Accountability results in trust not only in the leader but also between

workers because the servant leader makes workers accountable for their key tasks. Over time workers learn to trust each other because they are made accountable by and to the leader.

A servant leader's desire to create a community of equals results in perceived justice among followers. Perceived justice is a powerful personal trigger of negative behavior toward the organization if imbalance is perceived. Justice may be broken into several dimensions such as procedural, interpersonal, informational, and so on, which are determined by the leader. In a community of equals there is a high degree of perceived justice.

## Developing a Model of Practice Servant Leadership in Health Care

The recent scientific findings connected to servant leadership highlight the need to better understand how servant leadership actually works in practice in various settings and contexts. In health care service, leaders often operate on a day-to-day basis and often face many difficulties in translating, interpreting, integrating and implementing regulations, improvements and health objectives (Tengblad 2012, 2017; Dellve and Eriksson 2017). Therefore, in further development of successful leadership during organizational changes in health care we applied more practical perspectives of managerial work practices to explore and further understand the complex social practices of managerial work that create sustainable changes (Andreasson et al. 2016; Eriksson et al. 2016).

This perspective shifting is supported by, for example, Barley and Kunda (2001), who argued for focusing more on the work itself than on more abstract ideas of how organizations should look, and Lawrence et al. (2011), who argued for bringing individuals back into organizational studies and institutional theory. They highlighted the importance of individual managers who actively interact with others (their social roles) in institutions allowing for a substantial degree of freedom and choice in the interest of organizational capacity. Results from such studies using shadowing and interviews in the Nordic countries have described

managerial work in public human service organizations in ways that include fragmentation, uncertainties, conflicts of values and loyalties, high-performance pressures, and often a hectic work pace and long working hours (Tengblad 2017; Dellve and Eriksson 2017; Arman et al. 2012; Gunnarsdóttir 2006). The present study contributes to further understanding of managerial practices, and the findings highlight the importance of practice servant leadership in health care.

Inductive, constructivist perspectives that are sensitive to context and defined by managers' handling and organizing in practice were used. Thus, the study was not theoretically driven by the concept of servant leadership but driven by characterizing the practice of leadership that emerged as successful for implementing and sustaining improvements. This successful practice was studied in connection to a research program of sustainable organizational improvements and redesigns of care processes (Dellve et al. 2016).

## Study Context and Method

In Sweden, health care is tax-funded and politically governed by 21 county councils, each responsible for providing health care to citizens within their geographic area. In Swedish health care service, the hospital management group is accountable for the overall strategies in improvement work and the clinical and ward management is responsible for operative day-to-day clinical activities. Governance of public health care service during the last decades has been strongly influenced by ideas connected to New Public Management (NPM). In short, NPM aims to mimic efficiency and clearer control in the private industry through, for example, focus on management responsibility, use of standardized methods and transparency (Berlin and Kastberg 2011). However, the criticism against NPM has been hard from operative managers and professionals due to, for example, reduced influence over their work. This has implied, for example, that they chose not to participate or engage in organizational development work (Choi 2011).

Five middle-sized hospitals in three county councils were observed during a five-year period. We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods and focused on leadership at both operational

and strategic levels. The data collection started with interviews with strategic key persons for the management of development work at the hospitals ( $n = 48$ ). These interviews focused on identifying strategy, planning changes and clinics that were to implement change. Based on this, 22 units were selected and followed. All managers in the first and second line levels in the 22 selected units were interviewed ( $n = 40$ ). These focused on conditions, goals, vision, approaches and approaches to development and took about one hour each. Follow-up interviews with observations of the work were conducted throughout the years or at least yearly, with line managers ( $n = 57$ ), development managers and support functions in the development work ( $n = 51$ ). Focus groups were also held with care professionals at all participating emergency units in the hospitals, at baseline and after two years. In addition, all health care professionals (nurses and physicians) working at the 22 selected units and all managers at the hospitals answered annual surveys.

The 22 units were sorted into two groups: (1) successful implementation of change and (2) failure to implement change. The analysis compared leadership of success and failure in line with the grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). This allows us to identify characteristics of practice servant leadership.

## **The Practice Servant Leadership Approaches Supported the Crafting of Improvements**

The results showed that most improvements at the hospitals' operative units happened slowly. Despite great efforts from the management group and change agents, there were on average small changes in the redesign of care processes and their outcomes with regard to efficiency and quality of care, during the three-year follow-up (Dellve et al. 2016).

There were some units that were more successful with improvement of care processes and increased engagement among professionals. These were characterized by a more practice servant leadership approach focusing on the care processes and work context at the unit. The ward managers' leadership approach played key roles in improving care processes through their crafting and optimizing of resources and engagement

among employees. These managers had good experience as managers and had knowledge of the health care context. They had also arranged more shared or distributed leadership through their servant leadership approach which, in turn, also served their success. However, a practice servant leadership approach at first line was supported by a similar leadership approach at the second level and hospital management levels. Their governance and implementation by balancing the need for cost reductions and improvements with trust and focus on professionals' knowledge were associated with more engagement and less frustration and exhaustion among employees. Thus, change management approaches from all organizational levels, which adjusted the implementation strategies to each unit's specific conditions and core business, had importance for changes in practice.

How can we explain the success in sustainable improvements found at wards where there were practice servant leadership approaches among the ward managers? We believe that the practice servant leadership could bridge over and compensate for the many gaps seen in hospital organizations in management and communication (between politics—hospital management—clinical management—ward management—professionals/employees). These gaps imply challenges for implementation strategies to have impact in practice, and on the other side unrealistic planning of implementation strategies that have poor possibilities to make relevant impact on operative levels. Earlier studies have highlighted this through other concepts such as “hybrid leadership”, that is, managers who are actively bridging and communicating across hospital organizational levels and between professional groups have more success in sustainable organizational developments (Wikström and Dellve 2009; Choi 2010).

However, these could not explain the core aspects of when and how bridging the gaps was conducted. Instead, servant leadership provided best explanations for successful leadership during improvements in health care. The managers in the successful units all showed qualities associated with servant leadership, such as sincere interest in other people expressed by empowering and developing people; self-knowledge expressed by humility, authenticity and interpersonal acceptance; and foresight expressed by stewardship and by providing direction (Van Dierendonck 2011;



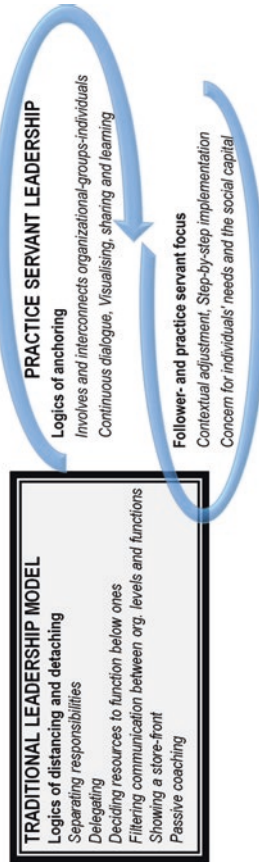
Gunnarsdóttir 2011). Further, they were engaged in the actual practice of the units and approached central patterns of handling strategies in their servant leadership to practical and tangible improvements in the units. Therefore, the approach was labeled “Practice servant leadership” (Dellve 2015).

In the following the core elements of a practice servant leadership in health care contexts are described in terms of anchoring including continuous dialogue, learning through visualizing, and follower- and practice focus. To illustrate the practice servant leadership, as a further contribution to theory of servant leadership, we describe practice servant leadership in relation to traditional leadership in Nordic health care organizations, which has strongly been influenced by the dominating governance through NPM, see Fig. 14.2.

## **Loci of Anchoring**

Loci (Lat: places) of anchoring highlight that anchoring happens at a particular place as a part of practice. Such loci of anchoring are often actual physical places where staff meet and either work or discuss work. Loci interconnect management and practice between various organizational surfaces, that is, levels—positions—functions—professionals. Anchoring practices are to support learning and understanding over levels, to involve in solving continuously arising and complex challenges in practice.

Active and continuous dialogue is one locus to anchor change and refers to how to solve urgent and relevant issues that continuously emerge in different phases of the implementation. The practice servant leader engages in the dialogue when and where it arises—this is the locus of anchoring. In contrast, the opposite approaches could be characterized by distancing and detaching from other positions—levels—functions or professionals with clear assignments, delegated responsibilities and respect for the separated functions. This non-anchoring approach was defended through the argumentation of being more professional, having separate responsibilities, and that one’s function had provided the other with decent preconditions.



**Fig. 14.2** The model describing central approaches in practice servant leadership that support crafting improvements in health care and the traditional leadership model influenced by New Public Management (Dellve 2015)

To support the anchoring, ward managers also used *visualization* of processes, developments, suggestions and follow-up data to support the broader learning and understanding of the development process. Thus, the visualization was a locus and important tool for anchoring leading, communicating and learning. It was important to have a simple, understandable and structured method for the development work, to select a couple of care processes, to illustrate the development process and outcomes, and use the visualizing tool in everyday work. Our studies showed that the daily use of visualization supported employees' cognitive overview, understanding of complex processes, perceived influence and also more active engagement in suggestions to improve care processes (Williamsson et al. 2015). Visualization from strategic management was also used to act as role model, to increase goal clarity and to support employees' understanding of prioritizing and desired outputs of increased quality and efficiency. The more the servant leadership approaches were characterized by two-way communication flow the better the adjustment between operative and strategic levels.

In contrast, the non-anchoring approaches used internal one-way communication (top-down) and store-fronting communication, that is, to show up results to media and county council without connection to real conditions, circumstances and outputs at operative levels. Common for the non-anchoring approaches was their lack of connection to practice and loci.

### **Follower- and Practice Servant Focus: Developing Organizational Social Capital**

Central among practice servant leaders was also having a *follower- and practice servant focus* to build capacity for improvement work through social capital, engagement and trust among employees as well as more patient-centered improvements of care processes. Such a servant leadership approach asked actively and continuously how to support employees and the functions below their positions in their work to adjust implementation and develop care processes in practice. For example, in their monitoring work through key performance indicators (KPIs), the

practice servant leaders increasingly asked the level below about what KPIs to follow that had relevance for their work and best supported a constructive meeting between operative and strategic management and local visualization. The created trust and spurred social capital between leaders and followers ensured that KPIs would support the key task. The KPIs became a reference point to discuss and focus collaboration toward and thus a locus of anchoring.

The choice of KPI was based on the actual needs that exist in practice as well as opportunities and competence to work with developments. The advantages are that the person being checked ensures that the control is effective and fits the reality. This check instills justice in both the KPI and the relation and creates social capital. In addition, the dialogue provides the ability to understand what works and what does not work. It can improve the ability to negotiate and act as well as spread knowledge about opportunities and experience within the organization. Thus, this made the follow-up more effective and created less irritation among professionals over non-relevant administration and control. Governance by these principles also created a focus on KPI related to more patient-centered issues. This form of governance can be compared with more trust-building management and so-called horizontal control (Noteboom 2002). In contrast, traditional control through, for example, NPM governance often takes place with vertical control. Such a “top-down” control can be counterproductive and create illusion of control, despite long distances to the clinical business and inadequate competence about conditions of importance.

The practice servant leaders were characterized by having a *broader awareness of the various aspects and perspectives that influence progress in development work*. Contextual knowledge and experience as manager were important conditions for creating meaningfulness, engagement, trust and a sense of fairness among employees during development work. By managers’ contextual knowledge of the clinical work, they could better adapt the development model to the conditions at the clinic in terms of care, staffing and competences. Thus, organizational improvements through implementation strategies could be meaningful and functional and anchored at the clinic through necessary adjustments and applied communication. In addition, the successful practice servant leaders also

had a good knowledge of the strengths and challenges of individual employees as well as professions, teams and other groups that are linked to the core processes in different ways. More experience as managers was also important to handle the complex challenges that are connected to development work. This broader awareness is often implied in a step-by-step implementation to adjust according to contexts and employees. The adjustments were related to awareness of the following:

- (a) Social capital as a decisive resource for development work and careful supporting of the social capital and equality through leadership, especially relationship oriented
- (b) Individual employees' needs and supporting them by taking into account individuals, listening and ensuring the individual's needs for support and development opportunities
- (c) Importance of clinical significance of development work, that is, awareness of the frustration that may arise among professionals through the top-down implemented rationalizations; that these are sometimes perceived meaningless, administratively burdensome and creating time conflicts

## Discussion

In this chapter we have proposed contributions to the servant leadership theory from a managerial practice perspective exemplified by health care in the Nordic countries. Our findings are derived from close studies of managerial work that, despite great challenges during organizational improvements, was exceptionally successful in achieving results through mobilizing high engagement among professionals.

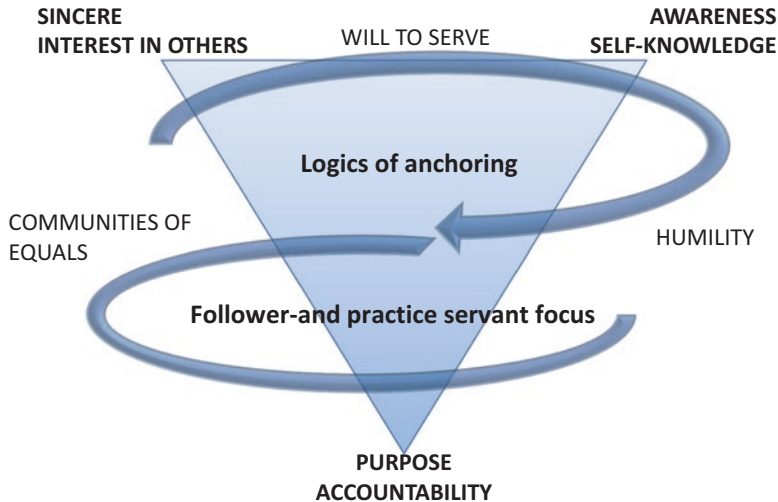
The key elements in their servant leadership approach were anchoring in practice and loci and having a sincere follower- and servant focus. This was conducted through their continuous work involving and interconnecting values, goals and challenges from organizational-, group- and individuals' perspectives; through continuous dialogue, visualizing complex processes as well as through extensive sharing and learning across boundaries. Through a broader awareness of the importance of the social

capital among the professionals for crafting changes, they implemented changes step by step to allow important adjustments according to the context.

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the findings in relation to the core elements of servant leadership and to OSC. Last, we integrate the practice servant leadership, the core elements and the OSC suggesting a development of organizational servant leadership. The integrated aspects may have additional importance for creating organizational improvements in organizations such as those offering health care service.

Practice servant leadership relates to the three core elements proposed in the background. The first core element is the *sincere interest in other people*, such as the followers/professionals and serving them in their improvement work to increase efficiency and quality of care for patients.

Improvements in quality of care during times of necessary cost savings are very complex and demand collaborations and smooth processes of care. Thus, the managers need to build strength in other people from shared understanding of the complexity and goals (through visualization, listening, role modeling) and through true listening and the ability to empower. The studied servant managers also had arranged more shared or distributed leadership to support the engagement and development of others (Gittell 2009). The second core element is the *self-knowledge* and awareness of own strengths and weaknesses as well as of others and within context. The studied managers had extensive experience as managers and had knowledge of the health care context. This certainly supported them in having more balanced communication (Losada and Heaphy 2004), which also supported engagement among professionals. The third core element is *foresight and clear vision*, which essentially should focus on a deep concern for real improvements of core processes in practice, based on their knowledge of impotencies in the context—and not on ideas that are too strategic. These core elements are based on ideas of communities of equals and serving through humility and trust, discussed below in relation to serving OSC and illustrated in Fig. 14.3.



**Fig. 14.3** A proposed model of developing practice servant leadership and social capital through integration of servant leadership (the triangle) and loci of anchoring, follower- and practice servant focus, and developing social capital (the spiral)

## Mobilizing Organizational Social Capital

We argue that the mobilization of social capital among professionals is the core for crafting sustainable improvements, especially in health care organizations, where success relies on professionals' competence and engagement. OSC is the ability of the professionals in the organization to collaborate when solving key tasks of the organization. This ability is based on their trust and perceived justice. Thus the managerial work and leadership qualities have central importance in building the social capital that is needed to craft improvements in health care.

In line with the described findings, a leader must be close to his/her group to do so as promises between colleagues are as important as between leader and employee. A leader must find loci where trust, justice and collaboration may be practiced and ensure anchoring. Coordination meetings are one such locus; however, a leader must engage actively in

coordination and not simply distribute responsibility. Tasks and responsibilities must be assigned and most importantly followed up on. Thus, as described in connection to the practice servant leadership approach, managers need to operate from a broader awareness related to the social capital as a decisive resource for development work, individuals' needs and the importance of clinical significance to mobilize OSC among the professionals. This is an important extension of servant leadership—to be mindful of and take responsibility for the psychosocial dynamics of the group and reflects Greenleaf's original idea about servant leadership as presented by organizations as communities with focus on listening and empathy (Greenleaf 1970/2010). However, this is a tightrope as the practice servant leader must balance between humility, promoting a community of equals and developing the right group dynamics.

## Servant Organizations

Servant leadership has provided understanding of successful leadership qualities. However, servant leadership on its own may fail to acknowledge the crafting aspects of leadership and the importance of crossing system boundaries for gaining positive effect in complex organizations. Here system theory approaches and practice perspective on managerial work and organizing may support the development of a theory of crafting sustainable work conditions that serves to adapt and adjust across organizational boundaries. Further, we argue that health care organizations that manage to improve their service in a sustainable manner need to account for and serve a number of perspectives and values—and integrate these in the overall management. Thus and in line with Laub (2010) we argue that organizations may also exhibit servant properties, that is, that organizations can be servant and non-servant. A servant organization is an organization where the culture values promote servant leadership. As such the values of servant leadership permeate the practice and employees' understanding and expectations of leadership.

Nordic hospitals are predominantly publicly financed and have been subject to NPM (Berlin and Kastberg 2011) with performance and financial goals and demand for increasing productivity. The strict performance



goals foster an instrumental approach to leadership, which is essentially transformed to management of increasing productivity. At the same time hospitals are organizations based on highly motivated and knowledgeable staff who will navigate the system to provide the best possible treatment. Each occupational group, for example, doctors, nurses, has its own professional development but is not directed together toward work processes in the wards. As such wards develop idiosyncratic practices which are adjusted to patients and treatments.

The performance focus and professional discretion generally make hospitals and subsequently wards non-servant organizations. However, as this study has shown, servant leadership can develop under these adverse conditions and be more effective than normal wards in implementing change. We propose that development of care processes constitutes an opportunity, a positive spiral, where servant leadership and social capital may develop and be sustained. This requires putting the needs of the led first and to treat workers as partners within the organization. Laub (2003) presents a model for servant organization which promotes valuing and developing of people, building of community, practice of authenticity, providing of leadership for the good of those led, and sharing of power and status (Laub 2003). Studies across different fields and professional groups have shown associations between servant leadership and positive workplace outcomes, such as team effectiveness, job satisfaction, leader trust, employee safety and employee attrition (Laub 2010). Also the findings in the presented empirical study showed increased work engagement and clinical engagement where there was a practice servant leadership approach from the managerial group to first line manager (Dellve et al. 2016).

## **An Integrated Model: Developing Practice Servant Leadership and Social Capital Through Processes**

Based on our findings we propose an integrated model of developing practice servant leadership and social capital. This model is demonstrated in Fig. 14.3 and shows how practice of servant leadership is developed through integration of servant leadership based on three core elements of a triangle and loci of anchoring, follower- and practice servant focus, and developing social capital linked together as a spiral.

Further our findings show that the key to develop practice servant leadership and social capital is the development of care processes in the wards. This is a radical departure from professional discretion and not an easy change. Public health care experiences high variation among patients and wards must handle this. Consequently there are many different care processes in a ward where practice and skilled employees ensure that patients are well cared for. New processes mean that health care professionals must align practice with the new care processes. This presents an opportunity to develop both social capital and servant leadership. Developing new care processes by visualizing the activities and roles in the ward creates a common understanding of what from a social capital perspective can be understood as key tasks. Such visualizations are loci that allow anchoring of practice. Developing the care process also functions to develop collaboration between roles. A participatory approach allows staff to engage in the new processes thereby developing a common understanding. Mutual trust as a core element of social capital enhances communication and discussion about common goals. Clear foresight and a good sense for the meaning of work enhance motivation at work, in particular intrinsic motivation and willingness to meet the goals and standards of the organization, and thus strengthen accountability among staff.

Trust and justice are developed through the first line manager transforming into a servant leader. The servant leader turns abstract trust and justice into concrete action by taking the newly developed process seriously and insisting that the process must be followed: accountability is strengthened. While it is often difficult to break from existing behavior and follow a new process the servant leaders instill trust by enforcing the new process, and trust is learned over time. Justice is developed by confronting staff not following the new process in the same way. Whether a colleague who is not following the new process is a friend or a stranger the response must be the same.

A servant leader aims at balancing care for the individual and focus on accountability. This is a delicate balance of being gentle with the person and tough on the problem at the same time (Hayes and Comer 2010), being a servant and being a leader at the same time (Greenleaf 1970/2010).

This may be considered as practice of paradoxes or practice of balance. This is characterized by showing sincere interest in other people, knowing oneself, and focusing on goals and procedures. The servant leader is humble while being self-aware and fosters a community of equals (van Dierendonck 2011). This enables the servant leader to encourage people to do the same, that is, practice accountability and true care for fellow staff members and the patients. These core elements of servant leadership are linked together and can be presented as forming a triangle (Fig. 14.1) or a spiral (Fig. 14.2)—or integrated (Fig. 14.3).

## Conclusion

The pace of change in hospitals is relentless and while care processes exist health care professionals use their knowledge and professional discretion to constantly develop practice. This is an admirable adaptability which, however, comes at the risk of variation in treatment, staff frustration and efficiency. We argue that hospital wards must develop stable care processes that support staff and allow for some professional discretion. The ward manager/nurse plays a central role in developing care processes. This role must be based on practice servant leadership, that is, servant leadership embedded in the practice of the ward. This is hands-on leading of the work and developing care processes in a ward. Such leading and developing cannot happen in the midst of treatment and must happen at loci of anchoring. A locus is a place where work processes are discussed, for instance, a wall visualizing care processes. The loci are the physical embodiment of the key task that is the foundation of social capital. The loci are the place to anchor a common understanding of the key tasks. Maintaining and discussing the care processes allow the practice servant leader a locus to develop trust and justice in the group. The practice servant leader is attentive to the psychosocial dynamics of the group and must balance between humility, promoting a community of equals and developing the right group dynamics and accountability.

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