

# Servant Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

The philosophical foundation of servant leadership existed thousands of years ago. Servant leadership is a unique style of leadership ideology which flows against the grain of self-interest human behavior. The nature of both work and the workplace has changed drastically (Billett, 2006). The focus of leadership needs to be shifted from process and outcome to people and the future. The new challenge for management and leadership education is threefold: (a) How to develop workers and unleash their creative potentials, (b) How to create a positive workplace that will attract and retain talented knowledge workers, and (c) How to reinforce innovations and risk-taking to adapt to an uncertain future. In today's thinking about effective, productive, and enduring organizations, we can reorganize, restructure, or reengineer our organization to be more effective but it will not be successful for very long, unless change is first built on the preeminence of human resources. People and process will always be more important than tasks and organizational structure in accomplishing goals and productivity. Effective systems and processes are only effective if the people who make them work are effective. Highly motivated and well-trained human resources provide the only assurance that any organization will be effective in accomplishing its goals. Servant-leaders motivate followers through investing in them and empowering them to do their best. In this paper, servant leadership is characterized by listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualizing, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and community building (Spears, 2004).

**Keywords:** Servant; Service; healing; stewardship

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Study of leadership – which can be broadly divided into three periods and three generic models (Polleys, 2002). Who the leader is, what the leader does, where leadership takes place. A review of the leadership literature reveals an evolving series of 'schools of thought' from “Great Man” and “Trait” theories to “Transformational” leadership. Whilst early theories tend to focus upon the characteristics and behaviours of successful leaders, later theories begin to consider the role of followers and the contextual nature of leadership.

The traditional understanding of leadership is that leaders are good managers who control and direct their followers, who are obedient subordinates who follow orders given to them by their authoritarian leaders.

## 2. CONCEPT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The nature of both work and the workplace has changed drastically (Billett, 2006). The focus of leadership needs to be shifted from process and outcome to people and the future. The new challenge for management and leadership education is threefold: (a) How to develop workers and unleash their creative potentials, (b) How to create a positive workplace that will attract and retain talented knowledge workers, and (c) How to reinforce innovations and risk-taking to adapt to an uncertain future. Servant-leaders motivate followers through investing in them and empowering them to do their best. In the last ten years, the concept of a leader as a servant has gained increasing acceptance in leadership and organizational literature. Furthermore, a number of leading writers in business management have endorsed servant leadership.

Of the various leadership styles, no other leadership style has a deeper or stronger historical base than servant leadership. The concept of servant-leadership is thousands of years old. During 600 B.C. Lao Tzu: The greatest leader forgets himself and attends to the development of others. In First Century A.D., Jesus of Nazareth: But the greatest among you shall be your servant (Matthew 23:11); The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. (Luke 22:26) and in 1970's Robert K. Greenleaf: The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.

The modern concept of Servant leadership in India dates back to The Mahabharata, written by Rishi Veda Vyasa, is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, the other being the Rāmāyana (Hee, 2007). The Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata and is one of the most revered Hindu manuscripts. Rarick and Nickerson (2009) state that a leader as per Gita tradition is a humanistic leader, a person who acts without self-gain, and who has great personal concern for followers. The Bhagavad Gita, while enlisting the qualities of a superior person, says that "he is one who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving" (Sivananda, 2000: 12:13). Thus, the Bhagavad Gita teaches some important concepts of servant leadership.

Arthasastra, written by Kautilya, is an ancient Indian treatise in management. Kautilya was the minister and adviser of King Chandragupta Maurya, who ruled North India in the 4th century B. C. (Muniapan & Dass, 2008). In Arthasastra, Kautilya (1915), while listing the duties of a king, wrote, "In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good".

Thus there are ample evidences in Indian literature that servant leadership was propagated and practiced in India.

## 3. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before explaining the term 'Servant Leadership' necessary to understand term 'Servant' 'Service' and 'Leader' Servant means one who serves, or does services, voluntarily or on compulsion; a person who is employed by another for menial offices, or for other labor, and is subject to his command; a person who labors or exerts himself for the benefit of another, his master or employer; a subordinate helper, a person in the service of another. Service means An act of assistance or benefit; a favor, an act of helpful activity; help; aid,

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work done by one person or group that benefits another, The performance of work or duties for a superior or as a servant, be of service, to be helpful or useful. Leader is a person or thing that leads, a guiding or directing head, as of an army, movement, or political group, one that lead or guides, one who is in charge or in command of others, one who heads a political party or organization, one who has influence or power, especially of a political nature, a person who rules or guides or inspires others, a person who is in front or goes first, a person who is the head of, organizes or is in charge(of something), The head of any body as of a tribe, clan, or family; a person in authority who directs the work of others.

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test 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? (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 27)

With that definition in 1970, retired AT&T executive Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) coined the term servant leadership and launched a quiet revolution in the way in which we view and practice leadership. Three decades later the concept of servant leadership is increasingly viewed as an ideal leadership form to which untold numbers of people and organizations aspire. In fact, we are witnessing today an unparalleled explosion of interest in, and practice of, servant leadership.

The servant leadership model is based on the idea of the servant as a leader (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977), or more conceptually of a leader having the duty to serve his/her followers. Servant leadership was created as an attempt to link previous paradoxes concerning leadership. Task accomplishment is a focus, yet it is also recognised that leaders should be aware of the social implication associated with task accomplishment. The servant leadership model goes a step beyond the transformational leadership models. Servant leadership stresses ethical practice, whereas, only certain transformational theorists suggested that ethical behaviour is a necessary component of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990, 2000).

SL is opposed to the command-and-control type of autocratic leadership. There is now a clear consensus among modern management theorists (Avolio, 1999; Bennis, 1990; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Rinzler & Ray, 1993; Senge, 1990) that autocratic leadership needs to be replaced by leadership that empowers workers. In today's environment, command-and-control leadership no longer works, because leaders must earn people's respect and trust.

Servant leaders are free to be flexible and situational (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003; Wong, 2003), because they are no longer imprisoned by their own need for power and pride. They are willing to employ different kinds of legitimate power to facilitate worker development and accomplish organizational goals (Bass, 1998; Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 2001).

Servant leadership places the interest of followers before the self-interest of a leader, emphasises personal development, and empowerment of followers. The servant leader is a facilitator for followers to achieve a shared vision (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1998; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Laub, 1999).

Several authorities on servant leadership have suggested that to learn servant leadership, individuals need to undergo a journey of self-discovery and personal transformation.

Kent Keith, author of *The Case for Servant Leadership*, states that servant leadership is ethical, practical, and meaningful. He identifies seven key practices of servant leaders: self-awareness, listening, changing the pyramid, developing your colleagues, coaching not controlling, unleashing the energy and intelligence of others, and foresight'.

#### 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Spears (1998) identified ten characteristics of servant-leadership: (1) listening, (to self and others) (2) empathy, (understanding) (3) healing, (search for wholeness of self and others) (4) awareness, (of self and of others) (5) persuasion, (building consensus) (6) conceptualization, (dreams and of day-to-day operations) (7) foresight, (intuitive ability to learn from past and see future consequences of actions) (8) stewardship, (holding institution in trust for the good of society) (9) commitment to the growth of others, (personal, professional, spiritual of self and others) and (10) building community (benevolent, humane, philanthropic, to benefit others) . Possibly these qualities are in a hierarchy that begins with the internal action of listening. Servant Leadership demands those traits and characteristics in a leader that are absent in most of the other style of leadership are as follows:

1. **Listening:** A critical communication tool, necessary for accurate communication and for actively demonstrating respect for others. Active, not just passive, 360°, top to bottom listen completely before deciding.

For any leader, there is a need for communication skills. This is vital for decision making (a future topic). It's important that the leader understand what the will of the group is. And this can be obtained by listening to what is said and what is not said. Further, listening is a vital skill to deal with conflict resolution (another future topic) or even avoiding conflict.

Greenleaf emphasizes the need for silence, reflection, meditation and active listening and actually "hearing" what is said and unsaid. The best communication forces you to listen (DePree, 1989). Servant-leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Servant-leaders seek to identify and clarify the will of a group. They seek to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's inner voice, and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating. In the words of Steven Covey, "you must first seek to understand, then to be understood." Problems, whether they are coworker disputes or handling a large spurt of production delays or downsizing your workforce, all require a degree of listening first to what employees need to understand how to effectively deal with and solve the underlying problem.

2. **Empathy:** The ability to mentally project one's own consciousness into that of another individual. Separate person from their work, Walk a mile in their shoes, Personable with appropriate individuals.

Empathy is the capacity to know what the other person is experiencing from an emotional plane within the frame of reference of that other person.

Empathy is perhaps the most important leadership skill that involves leader relationship with others. Empathy is the leader's ability to understand the other person's point of view. Empathy is your ability to truly put yourself in the other person's shoes and understand how they are feeling. It's the ability to understand the

impact change can have on someone else, and taking their feelings into consideration before making a change.

A good servant-leader strives to understand and empathizes with others. Secretan (1996) describes empathy as “identifying with the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others” (p. 240) and suggests that “civility is built upon empathy” (p. 78). Managers who reach out to employees and extend a caring attitude may present an inviting and safe atmosphere for employees. This type of environment may encourage employee’s effort, problem solving, and business risk taking. "Empathy" is also a vital communication skill, as it's about understanding others. Workers may be considered not only as employees, but also as people who need respect and appreciation for their personal development. As a result, leadership is seen as a special type of human work, which ultimately generates a competitive advantage.

Individuals grow taller when those who lead them empathize and when they are accepted for what they are, even though their performance may be judged critically in terms of what they are capable of doing. Leaders who empathize and who fully accept those who go with them on this basis are more likely to be trusted (p. 81).

- 3. Healing:** The servantleader recognizes the shared human desire to find wholeness in one’s self, and supports it in others, Help your staff become whole, consider their history and Build a future together.

Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. In "The Servant as Leader", Greenleaf writes, "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between the servant-leader and led is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something that they have."

A servant leader tries to help people solve their problems and conflicts in relationships, because he wants to encourage and support the personal development of each individual. This leads to the formation of a business culture, in which the working environment is dynamic, fun and free of the fear of failure. The servant leader tries to understand the cause for such broken spirits and helps people overcome such blots. This facilitates healing relationships and contributes to organizational transformation through better team integration.

- 4. Awareness:** Without awareness, “we miss leadership opportunities” Self & Organization.

The servant-leader has a general awareness, especially self-awareness. One develops awareness through self-reflection, through listening to what others tell us about ourselves, through being continually open to learning, and by making the connection from what we know and believe to what we say or do. This is called in the vernacular, “walking your talk” (Bennis and Goldsmith, 1997, p. 70-71). Palmer (1998) tells us that we must find every possible way to listen to that [inner] voice and take its counsel seriously. General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader.

Having the ability to look within strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness to one-self can enable the servant leader to react with greater sensitivity towards others and through one's own unique journey, leaders can be of greater service to others by helping them grow and seek greater self-awareness among themselves. Self-awareness also inspires a sense of authenticity in one's

interactions with others, enabling them to feel the leader is sincere and has their best interests at heart. In this way, servant leaders can develop employee loyalty to the firm by focusing on followers' individual needs for achievement and growth and demonstrating an acceptance of their individual differences.

Leaders who are self-aware and have awareness of general matters have a better understanding of issues related to ethics, power and values, and this helps them view situations and make decisions from a more holistic perspective.

The servant leadership style uses awareness to fulfill the needs of others and to persuade subordinates.

5. **Persuasion:** The effective servant-leader builds group consensus through “gentle but clear and persistent persuasion, and does not exert group compliance through position power. Opposite of positional authority, Convince and build consensus –quickly. Among the major characteristics of servant leadership is reliance on persuasion instead of positional authority in decision making. The servant leader seeks to convince others and build a consensus instead of coercing compliance through an authoritarian style of functioning. They are Transparent, fair, and consistent in action. A Servant Leader does not take advantage of their power and status by coercing compliance; they rather try to convince those they manage. This element distinguishes servant leadership most clearly from traditional, authoritarian models and can be traced back to the religious views of Robert Greenleaf.
6. **Conceptualization** (dreams and of day-to-day operations): Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. A servant leader has the ability to see beyond the limits of the operating business and also focuses on long term operating goals. A Leader constructs a personal vision that only he can develop by reflecting on the meaning of life. As a result, he derives specific goals and implementation strategies.
7. **Foresight:** foresight, is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future”. Consequences of present decisions on future outcomes. Most leadership theories neglect foresight. Foresight however ranks amongst the most important characteristics of servant leadership. This is the ability to foresee or know the likely outcome of a situation. Greenleaf (1970/1991) says it is a better than average guess about “what’ is going to happen “when,” in the future. He says it is “Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant-leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future. It is deeply rooted in the intuitive mind. This aids in better decision making.
8. **Stewardship:** Organizational stewards, or ‘trustees’ are concerned not only for the individual followers within the organization, but also the organization as a whole, and its impact on and relationship with all of society. Entrusted with resources of others. Stewardship is holding something in trust for another, and the servant leader considers himself or herself as a steward of the institution that employs him or her. Greenleaf believed all members of an institution or organization played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust (caring for the well being of the institution and serving the needs of others in the institution) for the greater good of society. Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than

control. The servant leadership trait of stewardship accounts for servant leaders remaining committed to openness, persuasion, and serving the need of team members.

9. **Commitment to the growth of people:** Servant leaders are committed to the overall growth of people under them and other issues related to human resources. The servant-leader is committed to the individual growth of human beings and will do everything they can to nurture others. Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, servant-leaders are deeply committed to a personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the organization.

10. **Building community:** In the pre-industrialized world, the local community usually shaped an individual's outlook and personality. Industrialization has led to large institutions replacing the local community as the shaper of an individual's life. The servant leader understands this fact and identifies means to build a community among the team, members and other employees of the organization. The servant-leader seeks to identify some means for building community. Approaches to building community include giving back through service to the community; investing financially into the community; and caring about one's community.

Subsequent writers on the subject have specifically identified other attributes that are consistent with Greenleaf's writing and appropriately included in a review of servant leadership. The 20 attributes listed thereafter include all of the Greenleaf characteristics in some form or other. Listening, persuasion and stewardship are specifically listed among the 20, while the rest are incorporated under broader categories.

## 5. THE ADVANTAGES OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

- The main advantage of Servant Leadership is that it is very flexible.
- Coworkers are treated with respect as part of a team who work together to accomplish a task and make decision with shared information.
- Servant leaders always listen to people before making a decision.
- Accountable to the entire organisation.
- Leadership development is possible.
- Servant Leadership develops collaboration, trust, empathy and ethical use of power.
- Servant Leadership removes fear of employee regarding fear of job.
- All the above benefits lead to effective and efficient performance for an organization.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In sum, different from the traditional trait, behavioral, situational, and contingency leadership models, SL focuses on (a) the humble and ethical use of power as a servant leader, (b) cultivating a genuine relationship between leaders and followers, and (c) creating a supportive and positive work environment. However, in terms of the actual exercise of leadership, servant leaders are free to incorporate the positive aspects of all other leadership models except command-and-control dictatorship.

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