

# Toole Final Research Paper

*by* Eileen Toole

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In What Ways Does Servant Leadership Create Successful Work Environments?

Eileen Toole

Granite State College

### Abstract

In view of a rapidly changing, complex, and competitive business environment, leaders must adapt and reshape their approach to management. Leaders need to apply strategies that will help bring people toward growth, purpose, and fulfillment. It is important to depart from dictatorial leadership styles toward approaches that are more authentic, all embracing and collaborative (Heyler & Martin, 2018; Liden, Wayne, Chenwei, & Mueser, et al. 2014). This paper examines the present literature and research regarding servant leadership and its impact on creating a successful work environment. Many empirical studies infer that servant leadership can improve the emotional wellness of their followers by building confidence, awareness, and responsibility; which inevitably produces successful outcomes (Finley, 2012; Mahapatra & Virani, 2017). ~~This paper studies the present research regarding servant leadership and its impact on generating a successful work environment. Duplicative.~~ The purpose of this study is to clarify what servant leadership is, and to provide an in-depth overview of the underlying attributes and characteristics of a servant leader. Moreover, the research conceptualizes the elements of a successful work environment. This study provides leaders with valuable insight for the future as they develop, synthesize and implement a servant leader approach.

Keywords: Servant leadership; Organizational Success; systematic literature review

### In What Ways Does Servant Leadership Create Successful Work Environments?

I am eternally grateful for all the leaders and mentors throughout my life who accepted, appreciated and inspired me. They brought out the best in me and I was able to grow and develop in a meaningful way. Because of them, I was able to hear the subtle, quiet voice that emanated from inside of me that whispered you are capable, and you are worthy. As a result of this occurring in my life I became motivated and eager to learn more and face future challenges. I reflect on past experiences with leaders who were authoritative, commanding, and self-seeking, I felt dissatisfied, misunderstood and despondent. I am thankful for them as they were a valuable part in my journey as a leader and they helped me to recognize and differentiate between leaders who made a positive impact and those who did not. I look at it as an opportunity in which to learn which has led me to this research. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of servant leadership in creating a successful work environment. In this review I will also discuss the elements of a successful work environment.

Understanding servant leadership and its influence on organizational success can provide valuable knowledge for leaders as they develop strategies and techniques that will assist others in developing motivation, engagement, and satisfaction. The paradigm of organizational leadership has evolved over time in both theory and practice, Leaders must exemplify an ability to remain agile and adapt their style to create and sustain success in a rapidly changing world (Mahapatra & Virani, 2017; Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017). The goal for leaders is in helping their followers attain success, thus creating achievement for the entire organization. Through a review of the literature I will explore the role of a servant leader and discuss some of the current misconceptions of the term servant and leader. Van Dierendonck and

Patterson(2014), explain that one of the most intriguing challenges of servant leadership is the dilemma incorporated in the term servant leadership itself: serving and leading become almost exchangeable, being a servant allows a person to lead; being a leader implies a person serves (p.120). Serving others is an ability to nurture and care for others in an authentic way, which sends the message that they are valued and appreciated. Others will be more inclined to follow when we lead them in this way.

## **Literature Review**

### **Background**

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the role of servant leadership in creating a successful work environment. Today's leadership styles recognize that it is essential to guide others, and assist them toward growth and development, thus creating organizational success (Russell & Nelson, 2009; Shek & Lin, 2015). Servant Leadership aims to serve others and involves supporting their well- being by meeting their needs. Servant leadership's fundamental concept is in appreciating, empowering, and valuing their followers.

### **Elements of a Successful Work Environment**

Organizational success is dependent on effective leadership. A leader must be equipped with the skills necessary to develop and unlock people's potential. They must build self-belief in others so that they grow and become empowered. In a rapidly changing world, the old paradigms of leadership no longer serve in an approach to create successful work environments. Some leaders in the past controlled all the decision makings, they held the notion that a follower's sole purpose was to obey orders and comply with expectations, they were

simply regarded as a means to an end (Finley, 2012, p.135). The conventional, authoritative, top-down styles of leadership are being exchanged for a more virtuous and compassionate approach (Finley, 2012; Cable, 2018). Followers are now encouraged to become leaderful and assume a more autonomous and independent role. The primary goal in our position as leaders is in our ability to authentically connect with others. We must create relationships that are built on empathy, and compassion, we must have a genuine concern for their well-being. When we exemplify this approach, we will inevitably create long lasting relationships that bring out the best in the people we lead (Jit, Sharma, & Kawatra,2017). Silvia (2018), explains that "leadership is not perceived only as an individual quality of a certain person but also as a decisive condition of culture; this means that leadership is the result of some specific actions well planned by one or more leaders who want to create a strong managerial culture characterized by intern harmony of a vision of some values that they have and manage to transfer to their supporter."(p.41)

Warrick (2018), explains that "There are many factors that are necessary to create success in an organization, and particularly, in its ability to sustain it overtime Building organizational success is generated by developing quality work environments, strong employee engagement, providing superior customer service, and social and environmental factors. (p.34). Organizations need to create the physical, psychological and emotional environment to encourage members to follow them, and to be in alignment with the organizational mission (Silvia,2018, p.42). Research that has been conducted in the past discovered that members in an organization demonstrate high achievement results when they engage in jobs that contain greater levels of autonomy, skill, variety, feedback and support, which encourages them to improve engagement with others (Yang, Ming &Ma,2017; Luthans,2002). Leaders play a pivotal role in the

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enhancement of strategies and goals in an organization. Followers emulate and model the behavior that is demonstrated by their leader. Therefore, leaders must exemplify behavior and actions that create cohesion, collaboration, and engagement. Leadership is an approach that is practiced by encouraging members in an organization to work eagerly towards the objectives explicitly identified and determined for the good of others. (Barrow 1977; Parris & Peachy,2013)

### **Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership is an approach that seeks to serve the needs of others before themselves, hence, enriching the follower's lives, creating success universally. The idea of servant leadership originated from a biblical stand point. (Shirin,2015, p.11) Robert Greenleaf (2014), describes servant leadership as the desire to serve others by placing their needs above themselves. A servant leader inquires whether their followers' needs are being served. Do those individuals grow and develop? Do they prosper, and attain more knowledge, and autonomy? Do they in turn become servant leaders themselves? (Greenleaf, 2014, p.21). Servant leaders endeavor to meet the needs of the people, so they feel a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction; which will invoke a greater desire to be creative and inventive. Servant leaders are identified as having strong visionary skills, an extraordinary level of honesty, and compassion for followers (Liden, Wayne, Liao & Meuser, 2014). Servant leaders have an innate ability to understand the process around them and have a genuine interest in learning about the followers whom they lead (Liden, et al.,2014, p. 1445). Owens and Hekman (2012), explained that "leaders who are more concerned about others rather than themselves are humble, and their humility stimulates strong relationships with followers and encourages

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followers to become fully engaged in their work." (as cited in Liden et al; 2014, p.1434) When servant leaders demonstrate a genuine concern for their followers the followers are more inclined to feel at ease and will demonstrate their authentic self, which will unleash their unique abilities, gifts, and talents. When members in an organization are led with inclusiveness and acceptance, they are more inclined to feel connected to the greater purpose and vision of the organization.

According to Schneider (as cited in Parris and Peachy (2012), "The most important part in building an organization with a legacy of success is the people in it, which includes the followers (i.e. employees and volunteers), as well as the leaders." (p.377). It is important for leaders to establish an environment where all the individuals feel engaged, accepted and challenged. Leaders must inspire and model the behavior they wish for others to emulate.

Next, I turn my attention to the research which discusses the characteristics of servant leadership. In the following section attention will be focused on the role of servant leaders in creating a successful work environment.

#### **Characteristics of servant leaders**

Several researchers (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017; Parris & Peachy, 2013; Russell & Stone, 2002; Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015; pp. 123- 127). identified some common attributes among servant leaders and they are as follows: Indent the numerical list e.g.

(1) Authenticity- this is the ability to be transparent, admit mistakes, and be true to ourselves.

(2) Humility- this is our ability to remain humble, demonstrating acceptance and understanding toward others.



(3) Compassion- is our ability to feel empathy for others, and to place ourselves in their position. Having a genuine interest and concern for them.

(4) Accountability- is in our ability to hold ourselves accountable. To admit when we are wrong or make a mistake. own our own behavior and learn from mistakes.

(5) Courage- is having a spirit of boldness within. To proceed forth despite apprehension and fear, to face challenges and at times be comfortable with the uncomfortable.

(6) Altruism- is acting selflessly, showing concern for something greater outside of self. Meeting the needs of others.

(7) Integrity- is being faithful and acting on what we know is right, behaving in an ethical and virtuous way and being honest and dependable even during times of stress and being challenged.

(8) Listening- is having the ability to understand and hear what is being conveyed. Part of listening effectively is reflecting and checking for clarification. Validating and acknowledging the message being sent. Listening involves paying attention to words and dialogue, facial and body language, tone of voice and things not being said.

(9) Stewardship- meeting the duties an obligation of the organization as well as delegating roles and tasks.

(10) Persuasion- is in being able to influence others in a meaningful and positive way. Not through control or coercion.

Servant leaders carry forth these qualities as they are what make them novel and distinct. The fundamental purpose is in their pursuit to lead others and in their ability to touch the lives of their followers and connect with them in a meaningful way. They have a keen understanding of their humanness. Followers respond to this approach by performing well, they take feedback and

contribute more effectively. Satisfied people who are taught to respect, accept and value their co-workers help to create synergy and cohesion thus generating success for themselves, and for the organization (Heyler, & Martin, 2018; Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys,2017).

### **The Role of Servant Leaders in creating Successful Work Environments**

A Servant leaders approach involves an inherent desire to serve others. Within the research servant leadership and organizational success are clearly defined and synthesized to conceptualize how servant leadership is beneficial in creating organizational success. A servant leader has a deep love for people and truly wants to assist them (Trompenaars & Voerman,2009). The purpose of a servant leader is consequently, to determine the needs of the followers and to try and meet those needs (Trompenaars & Voerman,2009). People grow and feel inspired to accomplish greater things when they are accepted and appreciated just the way they are; accepting the reality of that person. Trompenaars and Voerman (2009), explain that "servant leadership is more than just another variation of leadership styles. It is a lifestyle that arises from the deep belief that the heart of your mission as a leader is to continually challenge others, to encourage them and give them a chance to develop their talents." The act of serving and leading is interconnected. Serving others is the palpable act of caring, nurturing and cherishing people.

Trompenaars and Voerman (2009), claim that " Companies that were built on the concept of servant leadership often turned out to be especially successful, owing to the fact that people

there were valued for their talents, which in turn resulted in highly motivated employees, better production metrics, fewer absences due to illness and higher profits."

### **Underlying theories and their potential impact**

Servant leaders create the conditions that enhance the well-being and success of others by meeting their needs and demonstrating a positive regard for them. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Human Needs Theory of motivation (1943) can be applied in an organization to meet employee needs while motivating and maximizing levels of performance. This theory offers a basic structure in the development and motivation process that can help to achieve company objectives. An organization that fulfills Maslow's principles can promote high employee satisfaction, outstanding employee retention and cohesive teams.

According to Whitmore (2009), "Abraham Maslow developed a theory in the 1950's that focused on mature, complete, successful people and he determined that this was the most favorable human condition." (p.108) He suggested that it was necessary to remove our internal obstacles to reach growth and maturity. Furthermore, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (as cited in Whitmore, 2009, p.108). were in favor of a positive more hopeful flow of psychology. This philosophy is replacing the reward and punishment behavioral system by exemplifying an attitude of positive regard and acceptance for others as we coach and mentor them (Whitmore,2009).

Maslow (1943) is most recognized for his theory of a hierarchy of human needs. He proposed that our greatest need is for food and water and that this need must be satisfied before we can continue with other elements such as shelter clothing and safety. When

those needs are sufficed, we can move toward meeting our social needs and our desire to belong (As cited in Whitmore,2009, p.109). Maslow (1943) explained that these needs are satisfied in some ways by our family, however, we also meet these needs through friends, co-workers, and those people we encounter outside of our families (as cited in Whitmore,2009, p.109)

The next part of the process as we move higher up in the pyramid are esteem needs. These needs are in our ability to believe in ourselves and attain self-esteem. In this category, we must have the ability to utilize our inner strengths and gifts. As we draw from these characteristics, we gain confidence and responsibility (Whitmore,2009).

Maslow's highest state was in our ability to become self-actualized, which is described as reaching our fullest potential and becoming the most we can be. though, Maslow believed that self-actualization is a continuum and an ongoing process that will evolve throughout the entirety of our lives. In the context of work, we can conceptualize Maslow's theory in motivating and developing people. Employees must satisfy the initial tier of the pyramid in having the ability to attain enough financial earnings to survive and care for their loved ones. They also must feel accepted in a tangible way and feel connected, therefore feeling like they belong (Whitmore,2009).

Leaders are required to model an attitude where everyone is heard and that each person has a role and a part of importance. Each member must feel safe (physically, Psychologically). The need for esteem can be developed through achievement, autonomy, responsibility, and feeling confident and capable. Leaders must implement proper coaching and mentorship as well as create opportunities to expand their knowledge and learning through training and educational endeavors. Self-actualization is derived from a sense of direction, purpose, fulfillment, and

satisfaction (Whitmore,2009). Aristotle said, (as cited in Anderson (2014) “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Servant leaders understand this concept as they set the standard in their work culture. Success is derived out of the collaboration of ideas and does not evolve and develop without inclusive action where everyone's participation is involved. Servant leaders must translate the vision in to attainable goals that are conveyed in a clear and accurate way. This process involves translating the vision into a mission, strategy and practical goals (Coetzer, Bussin &Geldenhuis, 2017, p.12).

### **Historical Servant Leaders**

Tab in There are many examples throughout history of servant leaders who made a profound impact on their followers. Their gift and passion were in serving and caring for the others around them. These leaders were not focused on being famous or rich, instead, they acted out of a compelling need to enrich the lives of others and make a difference.

Harishi (2015), explains that” when Mahatma Gandhi landed in India after spending twenty-one years in South Africa, he had a clear vision. He led by example, he espoused simplicity, he selflessly gave himself to the masses to such an extent that thousands of people joined him in the freedom struggle.” (p.91). Martin Luther King Jr was a courageous servant leader who led others toward democratic freedom. Marina and Fonteneau (2012), explain that “It was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, who popularized the saying: " Anyone can be great because anyone can be a servant." (p.71) Mr. King died while assisting sanitation laborers on strike. He was a brave and fearless servant leader.

Servant leaders are often observed working alongside their followers demonstrating a willingness to contribute and having the heart to help make a difference so that others’ lives can be improved and changed. Wilfred (2017), explains that " Mother Theresa was penniless but

had all the strength of love and compassion. Wilfred (2017) explains further that "She had no material means, and yet she consequently left the world in which she was comfortable, and began her own path, which led to the founding of a new order dedicated to the poor. She was bold and innovative when she found the existing structures were not able to answer the human issues she was faced with." (p.131)

Servant leaders are gallant and stand up for the things they are passionate about. They lead by embodying an attitude of acceptance, inclusion, trust, and compassion. Servant leaders care about the lives behind the faces they lead, and they teach others to lead by helping them gain knowledge, skills, confidence, and empowerment.

### **Summary**

To summarize my findings in the literature review, I contend that servant leaders create successful work environments. Warrick (2018) explains that Organizational success is generated by developing quality work environments, strong employee engagement, the provision of superior customer service, and social and environmental factors (p.34). Organizations are required to create the physical, psychological and emotional environment to encourage members to follow them, and to be in alignment with the organizational mission (Sylvia,2018, p.42). Leaders play a pivotal role in creating success for others and for the entire organization. They must possess skills and abilities that bring out the best in those around them. Servant leaders exemplify an approach that serves, and cares for others while meeting their needs. Servant leadership originates from biblical times, however Robert Greenleaf (2014) brought it back to the forefront. It is a concept that involves placing the needs of others before your own and seeking to meet all their needs.

When an individual receives the message that they are cared for, appreciated and valued, they are more inclined to grow and develop further. A servant leader asks questions such as: 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.21).

Servant leadership correlates with Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of the Hierarchy of human needs, in that it is important to remove our internal obstacles to reach further growth and maturity. Maslow proposed that our needs must be met to evolve and grow and become self-actualized (as cited in Whitmore, 2009, p.109). Leaders are responsible for the process involved in meeting those needs so that members will in turn become fulfilled, satisfied and motivated to succeed. It is evident from research that servant leaders have a profound impact on the success in an organization.

#### **Framework for Analysis**

For research I used a qualitative approach which relied on the written works of several scholarly authors found within text books and journals. I analyzed my question," in what ways do servant leaders create successful work environments and examined the relevant elements such as the definition of servant leadership and successful work environments and then looked at the relationship in the two variables. I obtained my literature from professional journals and books retrieved from Ebsco Host. Key words searched included: Servant leadership Organizational Success Systematic literature review

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Having reviewed articles on servant leadership and successful organizations, it is evident that servant leaders have an impact on creating successful work environments. Servant leaders

place the needs of others before themselves. Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of human needs conceptualizes the importance of our needs being met to become self-actualized. In the context of work, we can understand Maslow's theory in motivating and developing people; Leaders must have the ability to meet their followers needs, so they feel motivated, fulfilled and satisfied, thus reaching success. It is incumbent upon leaders to understand the importance of the role they play in creating a work environment that fosters and nurtures employees needs, development and success. While I agree that servant leaders exemplify characteristics and behavior that bring out the best in others which leads to successful outcomes, there did appear to be limited research specifically focused on the negative aspects of servant leadership and if it was in fact a sustainable approach and one that holds up over time. In future research it might be beneficial to focus on the clarification of servant leadership as it is hard to conceptualize because it is an oxymoron.; It is hard to understand that a leader can be both a servant and a leader. Recently, leadership styles recognize that it is essential to guide others and assist them toward growth and development. In a world that is in constant change, the old models of leadership no longer serve in creating a successful work climate. Some leaders in the past were dictatorial and made all the decisions. Leaders evolved and understand the value in developing autonomy, independence, empowerment and leaderful behavior in their followers. Future studies should concentrate on how leaders can create a servant leader work culture.

### Recommendations

I conclude that servant leaders successfully impact organizations. The purpose of this study was to clarify and understand the characteristics, competencies and outcomes of servant leadership by means of a systematic literature review. The results indicated ten servant



leadership characteristics, namely, Authenticity; Humility; Compassion; Accountability; Courage; Altruism; Integrity; Stewardship; Listening; and Persuasion. On an individual level servant leadership positively impacted employee engagement, job satisfaction, fulfillment, and success. These outcomes extended toward all levels of an organization. I would recommend for future research to focus on the functions of servant leaders and how those functions can be carried out by all members in the organization. Experimental type studies may be beneficial in developing a model which highlights how a servant leader creates an effective work culture. Measuring the performance areas of servant leaders can help authenticate and verify servant leadership success in individuals, organizations, and communities.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations**

I conclude that leaders play a pivotal role in the development of their followers, and that servant leaders can be an exceptional influence in the attainment of success. I recommend that leaders communicate the concept that servant leadership is dependent on its collaborative, and unified approach for it to be effective. Furthermore, I have determined that service leaders place the needs of others before their own and demonstrate behavior that shows a genuine concern for their wellbeing. This behavior fosters a climate that is built on helping others attain self-belief, confidence, empowerment, and success.

The purpose of this study was to learn the attributes, features, competencies and outcomes of servant leadership. The examination of what organizational success entails was also provided in this study. The results obtained from a systematic literature review revealed that there were ten specific qualities identified within a servant leaders' character. They are

(1)- authenticity

(2) humility

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- (3) compassion
- (4) accountability
- (5) courage
- (6) altruism
- (7) integrity
- (8) stewardship
- (9) listening
- (10) persuasion.

This study affirmed that servant leadership was positively related to success at an organizational level. Moreover, this study has made an analytical and practical offering toward the knowledge of servant leadership and its impact on creating success.

#### **Limitations and future research suggestions**

I recommend more extensive research on the clarification and understanding of servant leadership and a more in-depth explanation of how a leader can both serve and lead simultaneously. There also seems to be a lack of research involving the negative and adverse effects of servant leadership and if it is an approach that holds up and is sustainable overtime.

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