



PERCEIVED SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AFFECTS JOB SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Literature Review

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Faculty and staff play a vital role in the success of higher education institutions and thus are critical assets for colleges and universities (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014; Cordeiro, 2010; Ragaisis, 2018). Satisfied faculty and staff enhance organizational effectiveness by improving the learning environment for students, enhancing student performance, and boosting the institution’s public image (Chen, Yang, Shiau, & Wang, 2006; Siddique, Aslam, Khan, & Fatima, 2011) and long-term success (Kebede & Demeke, 2017). Job satisfaction (JS) is increasingly the focus in managing higher education institutions. High JS among faculty and staff improves productivity and cuts costs by reducing underperformance (Webb, 2009), turnover, absenteeism, and employee errors (Dartey-Baah, 2010). For example, the estimated salary premium required to replace a single dissatisfied faculty member is \$57,000 (Finch, Allen, & Weeks, 2010).

As educational institutions face declining state and local funding (Fethke, 2018; Webber, 2018), as well as the “enrollment cliff”—a predicted decrease in enrollments brought on by low birth rates during the 2008-2009 recession (Sokol, 2019), administrators are struggling to control runaway tuition rates. Colleges and universities



recognize that lower tuition is one way to remain competitive (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014). Job satisfaction of faculty and staff offers an additional avenue for cutting costs and enhancing the institution's reputation.

An institution's economic viability is indirectly affected by JS among its employees (Wong & Heng, 2009; Zaheer, 2013). In addition, JS is directly tied to customer perceptions of service quality in higher education (Snipes, Oswald, LaTour, & Armenakis, 2005). From a management perspective, leadership drives faculty and staff JS (Webb, 2009). According to Moore (2009), academic institutions in the 21st century require transformation: Leaders must build "autonomous, systems-thinking organizations, revolving around professional learning communities that can embrace change and create a high performing learning environment" (p. 166).

Servant-leadership (SL) shows promise in this regard, judging from its positive association with various employee outcomes, including extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction (Cerit, 2009; Chung, Jung, Kyle, & Petrick, 2010; Hebert, 2003; Mayer, Bardes, & Piccolo, 2008) and need satisfaction (Mayer et al., 2008). Spears (2005) claims that SL has made a "deep, lasting impression on leaders, educators, and many others who are concerned with issues of leadership, management, service, and personal growth" (p. 31). The servant-leadership-to-job satisfaction link (SL-JS) appears robust, at least in the U.S., and across industries. Studied industries include healthcare (Amadeo, 2008; Jenkins & Stewart, 2010), women-led small business interests (Braye, 2000), and businesses employing undergraduate students (Mayer et al., 2008). Its broad success makes SL a promising leadership style for improving JS (and thus business efficiencies) for institutions of higher learning.

However, empirical studies exploring SL's impact on employee



outcomes are limited. Of note, three systematic reviews currently summarize the SL-employee outcomes literature: Parris and Peachey's (2013) systematic review examined conceptual and operational definitions of SL, as well as its effects on employee outcomes. Baqai's (2018) systematic review identified servant-leader characteristics most strongly correlated with job satisfaction among faculty and staff in K-12 education. Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, and Liden (2019) analyzed SL literature published in the last 20 years. The authors developed a new definition of SL, evaluated 16 existing measures of SL, and proposed a detailed agenda for future research. However, few studies specifically explore the SL-JS correlation in higher education (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Drury, 2004; Farris, 2011; Guillaume, 2012; Harris, Hinds, Manansingh, Rubino, & Morote, 2016; Inbarasu, 2008; Rubino, 2012; Thompson, 2002; Van Tassell, 2006). A review of these studies can identify challenges for future research and opportunities for theory development. Moreover, such a review might equip university leaders to manage the challenges currently facing institutions of higher learning.

This literature review critically appraises empirical research pertaining to the SL-JS link in higher education. First, a brief history and definition of SL is presented. Next, two major foci present in the literature are highlighted and their implications discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research, including speculation about SL in distance education.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Robert Greenleaf proposed a theory of servant-leadership as a result of the inspiration he found in *The Journey to the East* by Herman Hesse (1956), a novel describing travelers on a journey, attended by a servant named Leo. Though Leo is primarily



responsible for menial chores, he also sustains the group with his singing and good cheer. When Leo disappears, the group “falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 87). In Greenleaf’s mind, Leo’s guidance and support epitomized the altruistic leadership so desperately needed in Greenleaf’s contemporary professional and political environment.

Greenleaf worked for AT&T for 38 years, eventually retiring as the Vice President of Management Research (Laub, 1999). He perceived the social unrest of the 1960s as a crisis of leadership, both in the United States and around the world. Though Greenleaf read *The Journey to the East* in the mid-1950s, he said the servant-leader concept remained dormant until he concluded 11 years later that “we in this country were in a leadership crisis and that I should do what I could about it” (Greenleaf, 1971, p. 2). Greenleaf introduced the SL concept in his 1970 essay, *The Servant as Leader*, explaining that a servant-leader is a servant first who focuses on meeting the needs of his or her followers (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Greenleaf wrote, “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then, conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27).

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AFFECTS JOB SATISFACTION

The SL-JS correlation holds in a variety of cultural and organizational contexts (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Chung et al., 2010; Hebert, 2003; Mayer et al., 2008; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Presumably, SL motivates subordinates, creating an achievement mindset and fostering perceived intrapersonal fulfillment (DeWoody, 2016). This effect is explained by Herzberg (1968), who claimed that growth and advancement are “deep-seated” human needs (p. 87). Indeed, this effect is empirically supported (Wang, 2005) in a variety of organizational settings (Cummings, 1975; Kacel, Miller, & Norris, 2005; Lundberg, Gudmundson, &



Anderson, 2009), including educational institutions (Gaziel, 1986; Islam & Ali, 2013).

Greenleaf envisioned servant-leaders satisfying followers' needs by enabling them to grow personally and professionally to reach their highest potential (Russell & Stone, 2002). Servant-leaders provide subordinates guidance and offer challenging new responsibilities along with empathy, emotional support, feedback, and resources (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). These create a climate in which followers feel important and encouraged to do more and create more. In this process, the followers become "healthier, wiser, freer, [and] more autonomous" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27).

Servant-leadership's empirical value lies in its universal utility. Specifically, SL improves both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. Though Hebert (2003) argues that leadership should attend to the intrinsic factors of job satisfaction, other scholars argue convincingly that lower-level employees are more likely to judge their job satisfaction from extrinsic factors (Saleh & Hyde, 1969). Both Hebert (2003) and Cerit (2009) found SL was more strongly correlated with intrinsic than extrinsic job satisfaction, but both improved as SL increased.

MEASURING SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Much of the SL research focuses on concept development (Parris & Peachey, 2013). More than 40 dimensions of SL have been suggested. Some of the most influential and widely used models of SL are those developed by 1) Spears (2009), 2) Patterson (2003), 3) Russell and Stone (2002), 4) Laub (1999), and 5) Barbuto and Wheeler (2006). Several studies explore SL at the group, team, or organizational level (Hu & Liden, 2011; Irving & Longbotham, 2007; Reinke, 2004), while others focus on individual-level SL (Cerit, 2009, 2010; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009a,



2009b; Jenkins & Stewart, 2010).

Despite efforts to qualify and quantify SL, it remains an abstract, perceptual, values-based construct. SL instruments lack concrete, behavior-based indicators. For example, Spears' (2009) work identified 10 general SL characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to others' growth, and community building. Patterson's (2003) work articulated seven SL values: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Russell and Stone (2002) identified 20 characteristics of SLs, classifying nine as "functional attributes" and the remaining 11 as "accompanying attributes" (p. 147). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) extended Spears' model with an 11th characteristic, *calling*.

Laub's (1999) work probed deeper. He suggested categorizing SL dimensions by "behaviors, attitudes, values, and abilities" (p. 44) and offered six primary dimensions: values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership. Consistent with Greenleaf's writings, wherein SL spreads from the individual servant to the institution-as-servant, Laub devised a measure of organization-wide SL, or SL culture. His Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) asks employees at every level of the organization to rate their superiors. Averaging these ratings, Laub (1999) classified organizations into six orientations from lowest to highest SL culture: 1) absence of SL characteristics, 2) autocratic organization, 3) negatively paternalistic organization, 4) positively paternalistic organization, 5) servant-oriented organization, and 6) servant-minded organization. In his recent work, Laub (2018) suggested that SL should not be viewed as a style of leadership but rather a *mindset* of leadership theory and practice. He proposed that if SL is considered a way of thinking



about leading others with a specific goal of putting others first, then it is possible for a servant-leader to utilize any other type of leadership, like transformational, charismatic, or situational leadership, with a servant mindset (Laub, 2018).

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND JOB SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This section critically reviews empirical literature exploring the correlation between SL and job satisfaction exclusively in higher education. All told, 11 relevant studies were retrieved from peer-reviewed journals. Five of these feature samples from religiously affiliated higher education institutions. Four feature institutions with no religious affiliation. One surveyed the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), which hosts both religious and non-religious institutions. Four of the studies explored the SL-JS relationship among higher educational faculty; the remaining seven samples included both faculty and staff. All were quantitative studies. Seven employed Laub's (1999) OLA measure of SL. The remaining studies featured other SL instruments, none appearing in more than one study. All studies save one were conducted in the United States; the exception featured a Lithuanian sample (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016).

Consistent with Greenleaf's (1982) writing, *Teacher as Servant: A Parable*, this review assumes faculty occupy SL positions in higher education institutions, primarily due to their role as mentors to undergraduate and graduate students. Yet faculty have no exclusive rights to this role. Rather, every member of the institution, including administrators and staff, may approach their professional role as "servants" to their subordinates, as well as their division's internal and external customers. Therefore, sample articles for this review focused on all relevant work regarding SL and job satisfaction within the higher education arena.



Deep reading of the studies revealed two themes worthy of reflection and analysis. First, the literature demonstrates varied employee perceptions of SL, depending on rank and department. Second, SL scholars are intent on distinguishing the aspects of SL most strongly correlated with job satisfaction. These two themes are discussed in turn in the following section.

EXPLAINING VARIANCE IN EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Several researchers employing Laub's (1999) OLA reported institutional differences and/or hierarchical differences in employee perceptions of SL (Drury, 2004; Inbarasu, 2008; Rubino, 2012; Thompson, 2002; Van Tassell, 2006). First, as might be expected, findings revealed that faculty and staff rate some colleges and universities more servant-oriented than others. Employees in Thompson's (2002) and Inbarasu's (2008) subject universities rated their institutions Category 4, Positively Paternalistic, meaning an organization where the leaders operate in the role of a parent, viewing subordinates as dependent, compliant, and capable children who need the wisdom of the parent (Laub, 2005). Faculty and staff in Van Tassell's (2006) sample rated their institution Category 3, Negatively Paternalistic, Laub's (2005) label for organizations where the leaders operate in a role of a parent, viewing subordinates as rebellious and less-than-capable children who need strong guidance and control from the leadership. Rubino (2012) did not categorize participating institutions but did find evidence SL was practiced in the university.

These four studies confirm the more general conclusion that SL is present on college campuses (Adamson, 2009; Dimitrova, 2008; McDougale, 2009). Nevertheless, none of the universities included in this review received a Category 5 (servant-oriented) or Category 6 (servant-minded) rating. This may indicate that SL is more an ideal



than a common practice among higher education managers and supervisors.

Importantly, employee rank may affect perceived SL, though this finding is not consistent across studies. Three studies (Inbarasu, 2008; Rubino, 2012; Thompson, 2002) found no differences, but two authors (Drury, 2004; Van Tassell, 2006) uncovered significant differences by rank and by department. For example, Van Tassell (2006) found administrative employees and part-time operational staff ranked their university Category 4, Positively Paternalistic. Yet faculty ranked it Category 3, Negatively Paternalistic and full-time operational staff considered it Category 2, Autocratic. Similarly, Drury (2004) discovered that hourly employees perceived the lowest levels of SL, whereas faculty, top leadership, and management perceived the highest levels of SL. Van Tassell (2006) also found variance across departments.

Because Van Tassell's (2006) and Drury's (2004) findings are consistent with Laub's (1999), this group of studies may reveal limiting conditions of SL. In particular, higher-ranked employees, especially those in leadership positions, tend to perceive their organizations higher in SL. Van Tassell (2006) argued that because administrative and part-time operational staff worked closely with the university president (a self-described SL), they were more likely to rate the institution higher in SL. This argument represents a flow down theory of leadership, presupposing that (a) self-reported SLs are indeed enacting SL characteristics and (b) direct reports who interact most frequently with SLs are more likely to notice SL practices and thus perceive greater SL in their organizations overall. This flow down perspective would explain Van Tassell's (2006) finding that full-time operational staff and faculty, who are one or two steps removed from the office of the president, ranked their institution lower in SL.

The literature offers competing explanations for this effect.



Drury's (2004) perspective represents an exposure principle, arguing that front-line employees in higher education are more likely to be recipients of SL and thus report higher SL in their organizations. Drury (2004) asserted that hourly employees, those farthest removed from students, were less likely to feel valued for their expertise and thus less likely than faculty and staff (recipients of superiors' praise for reaching departmental and institutional goals) to perceive SL.

Thompson's (2002) explanation starts with a different premise: Noting that SL perceptions varied across functional areas, he speculated that career culture affects faculty and staff perceptions of SL. Thompson argued that functional areas differ in norms, values, and job characteristics, and therefore differ in both the enactment and perceived prevalence of SL. For example, SL may be more common in the campus counseling center than the payroll and benefits office.

Careful examination of the SL measures employed in these studies supports this cultural explanation over the exposure and flow down theories. From a cultural perspective, employees in top leadership will perceive their organization differently than lower level employees (Laub, 2005) because each deal with different daily realities, including oversight and reporting requirements. In effect, the organization is not a single culture, but a system of organizational subcultures (Lok, Westwood, & Crawford, 2005; Morgan, 1997), each with its own functional focus and professional background (Bloor & Dawson, 1994; Bush & Middlewood, 2005). This is no less true in colleges and universities (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Heidrich & Chandler, 2015; *Institutional Subcultures*, 1988). Also, given that self-report measures are plagued by social desirability and self-serving biases, we would expect administrative and upper level management to rate the organization



(a reflection of the self) relatively “high” in SL. It is in their best interests, professionally, politically, and psychologically, to rate their role behaviors and work environment positively.

Additional support for the cultural explanation comes from studies conducted at faith-based educational institutions (Inbarasu, 2008; Rubino, 2012; Thompson, 2002), where perceptions of SL were consistent across the institution (no differences by role or department). Perhaps because SL is closely aligned with the teachings of the world’s major religions, SL is expected in religious institutions (Aabed, 2005; Anderson, 2005; Bovee, 2012; Elsegeiny, 2005; Jacobs, 2016; Salie, 2008; Svoboda, 2008). Either leaders in religious institutions more often exhibit SL, or faculty and staff are more sensitive to its presence in the workplace. Indeed, both these suppositions may be true. Though the SL concept does not require adoption of a specific faith (Laub, 2018), there is a strong alignment between SL and religious doctrine.

MAPPING SERVANT-LEADER DIMENSIONS TO JOB SATISFACTION

Given that SL is treated as a multi-dimensional construct, scholars compare impact, searching for those SL characteristics having the strongest correlations with job satisfaction. They approach this task using the measures listed below:

- Laub’s (1999) OLA (DeWoody, 2016; Drury, 2004; Inbarasu, 2008; Rubino, 2012; Thompson, 2002; Van Tassell, 2006),
- Barbuto and Wheeler’s (2006) Servant-Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) (Guillaume, 2012),
- Sendjaya et al.’s (2008) Servant-Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS) (Barnes, 2011),
- Patterson’s (2003) servant-leadership model (Farris, 2011),



- Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson's (2008) Servant-Leadership Survey SL-7 (Ragaisis, 2018).

Across studies, eight SL dimensions are most highly correlated with JS: values people (DeWoody, 2016; Rubino, 2012), develops people (DeWoody, 2016; Harris et al., 2016; Rubino, 2012), humility (Farris, 2011), vision (Farris, 2011), wisdom (Guillaume, 2012), organizational stewardship (Guillaume, 2012), and transforming influence (Barnes, 2011).

Given the more than 40 dimensions of SL, variable reduction is critical for future SL research and for increasing the content validity of SL measures. Hargadon (2018) is the sole investigator relying on Confirmatory Factor Analysis to improve measures of this multidimensional construct. As another step in that direction, this literature review makes apparent the substantial conceptual overlap in the various models of SL. At this juncture in the field's development, integrating the existing models may be more productive than model propagation. Laub's work is to be commended in this regard. His OLA measure effectively encompasses the major concepts from previous models (Laub, 1999). Areas of conceptual overlap are demonstrated in Table 1 below.



Table 1: *Mapping Servant-Leader Dimensions to Laub's (1999) Model*

| Laub (1999) | Sendjaya et al. (2008) (SLBS) | Patterson (2003) | Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| Values people | Voluntary subordination; Covenantal relationship | Agapao love; Altruism; Trust; Service | Altruistic calling |
| Develops people | Transforming influence | Empowerment | |
| Builds community | | | Emotional healing; Organizational stewardship |
| Displays authenticity | Authentic self; Responsible morality; Transcendental spirituality | Humility | |
| Provides leadership | | Vision | Persuasive mapping; Wisdom |

To illustrate, the key SL dimension “values people” includes believing in people and their potential, respecting them, accepting them as they are, trusting them, appreciating them, putting their needs ahead of his or her own needs, showing love and compassion towards them, and listening to them in a non-judgmental fashion (Laub, 1999, p. 46). As revealed in Table 1, this description closely aligns with Patterson’s (2003) “agapao love” and “serving” values, as well as Barbuto and Wheeler’s (2006) “altruistic calling.”

The logical overlay suggested in Table 1 can point future research toward the most fruitful possibilities for investigating the SL-JS link. Specifically, based on the conceptual overlap suggested in Table 1, “develops people” seems to have the strongest overall correlation to job satisfaction. Indeed, “develops people” had the strongest correlation with job satisfaction in three of the studies included in this review (DeWoody, 2016; Harris et al., 2016; Rubino, 2012). Additionally, Barnes (2011) found “transforming



influence”— which, according to the conceptual overlap suggested in Table 1 is similar in meaning to “develops people,” to be most strongly correlated with job satisfaction. Relatedly, in primary education, Cerit (2009), Chambliss (2013), and McKenzie (2012) all found a strong correlation between “develops people” and job satisfaction of K-12 school employees. Similarly, in light of the observed SL differences between religious versus non-religious institutions described earlier, there may be theoretical value in determining whether this “develops people” dimension remains the strongest correlate of job satisfaction in faith-based colleges. For example, Rubino (2012) approached this research question in the faith-based context. He found a statistically significant interaction, such that “develops people” had the strongest correlation with job satisfaction at the workforce level, while “values people” was most strongly correlated with managers’ job satisfaction.

Several speculations emerge from this single study: First, might the workforce perceive more opportunities for professional development (“develops people”) than management? Is it possible that managers in faith-based institutions are appointed because of their strong religious commitments and such appointments help them feel valued (“values people”)? Do faith-based universities, as a result of doctrine, direct more development efforts toward lower level employees? Might SL, as Laub (2018) suggests, be better understood as a mindset of leadership theory and practice than a leadership “style?” If so, how might SL be empirically explored in organizations? Each of these speculations offers opportunity for additional theory-building and empirical investigation in the servant-leadership realm.



RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND SCHOLARSHIP

The extant literature shows that servant-leadership is indeed practiced in higher education. However, SL is not uniformly woven into college and university culture. In none of the sample institutions did staff and faculty rate their institution as Category 5 (servant-oriented) or Category 6 (servant-minded). It appears the SL mindset that shapes a leader's attitudes and behaviors (Laub, 2018) is not commonplace in higher education institutions. As such, perceived SL differs across functional areas and organizational levels. As a result, Eva et al. (2019) recommend that university leaders strive to practice SL thoughtfully and consistently across functional departments until SL becomes part of the organizational culture. This would require long-term discipline, role-modeling, and deliberate practice.

A reasonable intermediate goal for managers in higher education is to recognize and respond appropriately to varying employee perceptions and needs, whether by department or hierarchy (or both). Such an approach would be consistent with the results highlighted in this review. It also would accurately reflect Greenleaf's SL, in which superiors see subordinates as individuals and concern themselves with followers' unique needs, goals, interests, and strengths (Eva et al., 2019). Leadership effectiveness is highest when leadership styles are appropriate to the situation (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016).

Overall, "develops people" appears the most powerful element of SL for promoting job satisfaction among both faculty and staff. This could imply that university leaders should expend more effort collaborating with their direct reports to identify followers' personal and professional goals, as well as paths for achieving those goals. Laub (2018) described "developing people" as providing opportunities for learning and growth, modeling appropriate



behavior, and building up others through encouragement and affirmation.

The correlation between SL and job satisfaction is consistent, significant, and strong across existing SL-JS studies (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; DeWoody, 2016; Drury, 2004; Farris, 2011; Guillaume, 2012; Hargadon, 2018; Harris et al., 2016; Rubino, 2012). From a management standpoint, this single finding is a valuable outcome of this literature review. Practitioners should be generally encouraged; this literature review supports their efforts to promote and implement SL practice for the good of faculty and staff, as well as the longevity of their learning institutions. In particular, because SL focuses on developing employees, its practice should improve self-actualization and thus, job satisfaction (Washington, 2007). As Ferguson and Czaplewski (2008) argue, developing employees should be a high priority for leaders interested in improving individuals' productivity. Greenleaf (1971) put it this way: "Anyone could lead perfect people — if there were any. But there aren't any perfect people. The secret of institution building is to be able to weld a team of such (imperfect) people by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be" (pp. 10-11).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This review identified potential SL boundary conditions. That is, perceptions of SL potentially differ across organizational levels and job classifications. Unless these differences are artifacts of contemporary SL research methods, SL may prove a more effective driver of job satisfaction for some employees than others. Alternatively, SL may be easier to foster in particular organizational units or departmental cultures. Future research might begin unpacking these cultural and/or role influences so that practitioners can more effectively harness the benefits of SL.



Relatedly, future studies should explore the SL-JS correlation outside the United States educational system. Particularly if cultural norms and roles affect perceived SL, and thus “culture-specific perceptions of SL exist based on socialization and national contexts” (Parris & Peachey, 2013, p. 387), cultural comparisons may shed additional light on variability in the SL-JS link in higher education. With the exception of Alonderiene and Majauskaitė’s (2016) study, all of the studies in this review were conducted in the United States. In contrast, Baqai (2018) found elementary education researchers have studied SL across five countries.

Among the many theoretical labels for SL dimensions, this review champions “develops people” as the most theoretically and empirically viable dimension of SL for future investigations. To aid in variable reduction and better distinguish the dimensions of SL, applied research can focus on isolating and measuring “develops people” in for-profit corporations such as Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Men’s Wearhouse, TD Industries, and Synovus Financial Corporation, which implement SL practices (Blanchard, 2017; Hamilton, 2005). For example, Colleen Barrett, President Emeritus at Southwest Airlines, asserts that the purpose of top management at Southwest is to support their people (Blanchard, 2017). Management scholars interested in higher education should be especially alert for relevant crossovers from business contexts to education contexts. Ideally, tracking the crossovers will help researchers develop new measures of SL. For example, Barnes (2011) used the Servant-Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS) developed by Sendjaya et al. (2008) to explore SL in a distance education program. He argued that this scale was appropriate to use in such a program because it was designed to measure SL behaviors without reference to the physical environment. As such, Barnes (2011) asserted, it allowed assessment of faculty members’ perception of their supervisors’ SL behaviors in



a remote learning environment. Such methodological advancements will be critical to future SL studies.

Distance education provides a particularly challenging environment in which to study the SL-JS link. Specifically, to what extent is SL related to job satisfaction among online faculty and staff? How can distance education leaders enact Greenleaf's vision in an online learning environment? The last decade has seen a rapid increase in distance learning programs and exclusively online universities. According to federal data, more than 6.3 million students took online courses in the fall of 2016 (Friedman, 2018). One out of three college students took at least one online course in 2017 (Lederman, 2018). Demand for online learning continues to rise as adult students increasingly enroll in post-secondary institutions. Between 1997 and 2011, enrollment of students aged 25 to 34 increased by 51 percent and were expected to increase by another 20 percent by 2022 (Hussar & Bailey, 2014).

As a result, online program administrators supervise increasing numbers of distance faculty and staff (Zhao, Alexander, Perreault, & Waldman, 2007) who are physically detached from the organization (Barnes, 2011; Hensley, 2015; Looby & Sandhu, 2002). Leader visibility is key in transmitting SL values and principles to followers (Lucas, 2007) and affects the establishment of vision, empowerment, and trust (Tucker, Stone, Russell, & Franz, 2002). Virtual working environments severely limit opportunities for SLs to display random acts of service. Thus, it would seem virtual working environments are ill-suited to supporting Greenleaf's original SL vision. However, at least one study (Lucas, 2007) found no significant differences in perceived SL across face-to-face and virtual settings in for-profit U.S. corporations. Lucas' findings do not diminish the importance of SL in maximizing job satisfaction among employees. However, they



may indicate that enacting SL requires special techniques commensurate with overcoming physical and emotional distance experienced by online workers. The same is likely true in managing distance faculty and staff. For example, Barnes (2011) found a negative correlation between years of experience and job satisfaction of online faculty. This could mean that distance education programs exacerbate faculty and staff burnout and dissatisfaction. If so, it is imperative that investigators identify best practices for implementing SL to reverse this effect in online education programs.

The contemporary part-time and adjunct staffing trend in higher education management offers another challenge for SL research. Colleges and universities prefer part-time staff and adjunct faculty because they are “much cheaper to hire and much easier to fire” (Shulman, 2019, p. 163). In 2016, almost three-fourths of faculty positions were off the tenure track (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], n.d.), indicating most faculty positions are “insecure, unsupported positions with little job security and few protections for academic freedom” (AAUP, n.d., p. 1). Ironically, high adjunct faculty turnover translates to increased costs for support staff (Pferdehirt, Smith, & Al-Ashkar, 2019) and likely staff dissatisfaction with unpredictable workflow. Given its connection to job satisfaction, SL may mitigate turnover and dissatisfaction, potentially enhancing faculty and staff commitment and allowing educational institutions to realize the desired benefits of part-time and adjunct staffing.

Finally, future research might investigate SL in the classroom. For example, coining the term *servant teacher*, Hays (2008) called for empowering, relational, egalitarian, and liberating education to replace top-down, one-way, directive, and authoritative teacher-student relationships. Noland and Richards (2015) described servant teachers as those who put *students first* and prioritize student



development above other goals. Such a teacher does not just impart information; he or she empowers the student to discover knowledge. SL improves students' academic performance (El-Amin, 2013; Eliff, 2014; Herndon, 2007), ultimately strengthening the institution's brand and increasing its mission-critical funding.

CONCLUSION

Faculty and staff job satisfaction is paramount for the long-term success of higher education institutions. Job satisfaction reduces cost, turnover, and absenteeism, yielding greater productivity, organizational effectiveness, and improved student performance. SL is an effective mechanism for improving JS across a variety of organizational contexts, including education. However, given the current methodological challenges in conceptualizing and measuring SL, three scholarly needs have been identified in this review. First, scholars must focus on accurately mapping the theoretical and behavioral dimensions of SL, beginning with the key characteristic, "develops people." The second priority is determining whether and why perceived SL differs across organizational levels and functional units. Finally, the SL-JS link deserves exploration in distance education. As a Chinese proverb stated, "If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people" (Wong & Davey, 2007, p. 8).

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