



RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION

A Holistic Orientation for Servant-Leaders

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Robert Greenleaf's vision of servant-leadership continues to grow, attracting leaders and organizations who resonate with its values (Ferch, Spears, McFarland, & Carey, 2015). Servant-leadership scholarship furthers this vision and supports growth in a variety of ways, including: defining and clarifying the essence of servant-leadership, inspiring those who aspire to serve and lead, operationalizing theory through application to organizational settings, creating measures for servant-leadership, and reviewing and synthesizing literature (van Dierendonck, 2010).

Amidst the growth of servant-leadership, however, exists a lack of clarity as to the essence of servant-leadership (Block, 2006). Significant research has been applied to a diverse understanding of the core characteristics of servant-leadership, resulting in further multiplication of the various interpretations of servant-leadership framework (Focht & Ponton, 2015). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) suggested there is "more differentiation than integration in the literature" (p. 304). To support those who aspire to serve and lead, and for organizations that seek to embody servant-leadership, a more holistic, integrative approach to understanding servant-leadership is necessary. This reflection offers such a holistic approach.



A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

A holistic approach to serving and leading views all aspects of life as interconnected, seeing life in its wholeness, an approach that is consistent with Greenleaf (2002), who linked servant-leadership to healing and restoring the natural wholeness of persons, communities, and societies (p. 50). For centuries, a holistic perspective permeated lives and cultures throughout the planet. In the East, ancient traditions such as Daoism point to a fundamental unity of all that is, with parts interdependently and complementarily related (Bai & Morris, 2014). In the West, Jewish thought sees the central human activity as *tikkun olum*, restoring the whole and repairing the world (Dorff, 2005). Christian scripture and theology view the global community of Christians as one body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12, NSV), asserting that Christians are all parts of the body of Christ in the world (Rolheiser, 2014).

Many indigenous cultures partake in this holistic way of knowing, rooted in the life and ecosystems out of which they arose (Green & Raygorodetsky, 2010). Geurts' (2002) research on Africa's Anlo-Ewe culture points to a sense of personhood that is hardly individualized or separate (p. 170). Similarly, the Sng'oi tribe of Malaysia makes clear to Wolff (2001) that a peoples' awareness of their participation in the life of their environment opens for them an "ancient way" of knowing (p. 196).

Less holistic streams of thought, however, also shape contemporary perspectives. The influential Greek philosopher Parmenides "insisted upon the permanent and unchangeable nature of reality" (Chia, 2003, p. 114). This mode of perception led to scientific study that engages in "the analytic breaking-up and objectification of phenomena" (p. 116). Centuries of analysis, defining, describing, and breaking up whole reality into parts ensued,



all carried by the mechanistic worldview offered by Descartes, Newton, and others (Chatterjee, 2013). The mechanistic worldview suggests that, “a process (i.e., a whole) can be broken up into a fixed number of fundamental parts ... in which the parts are thought to be independent, unchanging and self-existent” (p. 77).

A seismic shift in scientific thought began in the early 20th century with a wave of insight that birthed quantum physics. Bohm and others brought forth evidence that the universe is best understood as an undivided whole (Bohm, 1980; Bohm & Hiley, 2006). Bohm (1996) wrote, “ultimately the nature of the world is that it is all mutual participation – everything is everything . . . everything ‘enfolds’ everything” (p. 102). For Bohm, the wholeness of life includes what is visible or experienced and what is hidden. What is visible he called the unfolded. That which escapes awareness and perception by the senses is enfolded, yet still present. “The ground of everything is the *en-folded*, and the *un-folded* is just a display, or a show of the enfolded” (p. 102).

A key to understanding this holistic perspective is that everything participates and is partaking in everything else. Bohm (1996) wrote, “We are partaking of the planet itself and to plunder it would be absurd” (p. 99). He called this holistic way of thinking participatory thought, which he asserted, “sees that everything partakes of everything. It sees that its own being partakes of the earth – it does not have an independent being” (p. 99). This view of reality as emerging from mutual, interdependent participation was supported by Mead (1934). Francovich (2017) wrote, “Reality is understood by Mead not as a Parmenidean universe of objects in empty space but a tangle of perspectives with which human bodies and reflective consciousness participate” (p. 9). Thus, Mead (n.d.) saw persons becoming through interaction: “The self arises through social conduct” (p. 19).



CARTESIAN MECHANISM AND THE SHORTFALLS OF DISSECTION

Although the values of servant-leadership include collaboration, dialogue, and wholeness, it exists in a climate where academic rigor often is associated with analysis by breaking the whole into its parts. This Cartesian, mechanistic dissection is evident in the servant-leadership literature. A wide variety of scholars analyze servant-leadership and identify its essential qualities. Spears (2010) identified 10 characteristics common to servant-leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) affirmed these characteristics but added an eleventh: calling. Sipe and Frick (2015) identified seven pillars of servant-leadership: person of character, puts people first, skilled communicator, compassionate collaborator, foresight, systems thinker, and moral authority. Van Dierendonck (2010) noted:

Laub (1999) developed six clusters of servant leadership characteristics . . . Russell and Stone (2002) . . . distinguished nine functional characteristics and eleven additional characteristics of servant leadership . . . Patterson's (2003) model . . . encompasses seven dimensions. (p. 5)

Van Dierendonck (2010) counted 44 different servant-leader characteristics while Focht and Ponton (2015) noted, "over one hundred servant leadership characteristics have been defined in the literature" (p. 44).

Each of these characteristics are viewed as essential by their respective authors. The number of essentials, however, and the seemingly endless search to identify and operationalize the best ones, suggest that something in this approach is awry. Laub (2005) warned



of the limitations of analysis and categorization:

There certainly are inherent limitations to the scientific study of such concepts. Servant-leadership involves issues of the heart and of the soul, topics that don't fit well within the cold analysis of the scientific model. We must be careful not to obscure the truth by attempting to categorize and fully explain it. (p. 104)

Although categorizing and delineating servant-leadership may be useful to leaders and organizations (McClellan, 2010), I argue that it needs to be made whole. A holistic approach may lead to increased clarity rather than the vagueness and diffusion currently evident (Block, 2006).

SEEING LIFE AS WHOLE

An increasing body of scholarship suggests that following and leading are mutually influencing, participatory activities (Crossman & Crossman, 2011). The etymological roots of the words follower and leader implies this interdependence. The words follower and leader are rooted in Gothic words that sound like *folden* and *laeden* (de Lange, 1998), both of which describe creative activities. *Laeden* emphasizes service to community or a work that moves community forward. *Folden* describes completing an activity fully. The two terms were interdependent and viewed as inseparable among Gothic peoples (de Lange, 1998).

Natural activity can be seen as this inseparable flow of following and leading. Ants follow their senses and one another in finding and gathering food. Bees follow scents emitted by flowers. Sandhill cranes wait for a moment at sunrise to move from their nighttime resting place to a place of daytime feeding. In doing so, cranes attune to light, warmth, one another, and their surroundings. What the above



examples have in common is that they listen with their whole being in response to their surroundings. Following is a natural step in whole-being listening; it expresses a receptivity and responsiveness to what is being communicated. Creatures' ability to survive, thrive, and pass on life is tied to their ability to listen to the array of communication present in an ecosystem and then discern and respond. This ability to respond is what Maroosis (2008) called "response-ability" (p. 20), which is a core competency for leading and following as understood through the interplay of *laeden* and *folden*.

Following and leading, understood as interdependent unfolding activities are rooted in a sensitized, attuned interplay of communication (Lipari, 2014a, pp. 206-207). "Communication," wrote Lipari (2014b), is "how we co-construct worlds with ourselves and others" (p. 507). The natural way in which the world is in relationship with and responsive to itself is what I call receptive communication. This understanding of communication is consistent with Lipari's (2014a) concepts of attunement (pp. 205-222) and interlistening (Lipari, 2014b), which occurs "across multiple sensory modalities ... and (is) a dense patterns of movements co-arising and passing away with a holistic gestalt" (p. 512). Like interlistening, receptive communication is not something to get right, not "something to do or not, or to do more or less—it is something we are always already doing," (p. 512).

Receptive communication involves an attunement and openness to self, others and the environment which is sorely needed in our times (Lipari, 2014a, p. 206). In the natural world, even the leading animal—the first ant to move toward food or the first crane to fly into the dawn—are following something bigger. They attune to the elements around them and follow the signs they sense. Each ant or crane who then follows the first becomes a leading sign for those



who follow them. A sunrise symphony of cranes, colors, and cackles is a collective dance of following and leading. This image from the natural world speaks to Bohm's (1996) observation of everything partaking in everything else, of all of life participating. It also speaks to a holistic view of leadership and following that Mary Parker Follet (2003) called, "a reciprocal relationship . . . a partnership of following" (p. 303).

Shepherd (2017) suggested the purpose of this leading and following in the natural world is mutual service and that nature loves to serve. Creatures are not simply meeting their individual needs. Their response-ability fosters harmony in the whole ecosystem. Shepherd stated:

There is so much happening. There is a little spider building a web. There are ants on the move, there are bees coming by. There's this butterfly with a random kind of movement . . . Every one of those creatures was busy weaving the world into harmony, in ways it didn't understand but was utterly devoted to . . . There is this codependence in nature. And ultimately, everything is codependent on everything. (as cited in Tumolo, 2018, p. 4)

What Shepherd referred to as co-dependence he referred to elsewhere as interdependence (Shepherd, 2017). All of life, Bohm (1980) suggested, is one fully interdependent system. Shepherd gives this example:

You look at Yellowstone park and the reintroduction of the wolves. When the wolves were wiped out the deer population was out of control. They brought the wolves back to Yellowstone park . . . and you'd think of wolves as a self-serving creature, might be inclined to. But the wolves served the river, served the deer, served the beaver . . . The wolves



were introduced and suddenly the deer are wary of coming out in the open, and suddenly they are not eating as many of the young trees, the young saplings. And then the beavers come back. The whole ecosystem of the park was made healthier by the introduction of the wolves . . . There is no creature in nature that is not in service to the whole . . . The wolf on the prowl, the spider spinning a web, they are all in service to this delicate balance of co-dependence. (as cited in Tumolo, 2018, pp. 4-5)

Each aspect of creation is involved in the interplay of following, leading, and serving (Shepherd, 2017, pp. 30-36). The earth serves all through its soil, waters, and gravitational tug. In this way, the planet may be considered a leader. Earth, however, leads through its responsiveness; its elements act in response to each other, the sun, and moon. The earth, in response to the gravitational pull of the sun, remains close enough to receive and share warmth and light. Although clearly a leader in bringing life to the earth, the sun humbly and incessantly serves, conveying warmth, light, energy, and more.

Following, leading, and serving in the natural world are possible because of receptive communication, a responsive listening attuned to the whole. This is related to organizational leadership in that leaders and followers can be of service to the whole when they are listening, receptive, and responsive to communication from the system in which they operate. Follet (2003) supported this sort of receptivity in leaders and followers, suggesting that, at our best, we all follow something bigger, “the invisible leader, the purpose” (p. 303). Maroosis (2008) pointed toward a holistic understanding of leading and following, writing:

The notion of leading and following as responding to a call centers the whole notion of leadership and followership around



something outside the leaders and followers themselves. It requires that they turn their attention “outward.” They need to use all their senses to scrutinize and pick up what and how something needs to be done. (p. 18)

Receptive communication, as displayed in the natural world and as Maroosis applied it to organizational life, utilizes all the senses, listens to the broader context and call within, and discerns action. This communication is the harmonizing thread of the natural world. As such, it is a natural capacity of humans and our birthright as creatures. If humans are to be of service to the whole of life of which we are a part, then receptive communication, attuned responsiveness to self, other, and environment, is an essential activity (Lipari, 2014a, pp. 205-207).

RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION: A HOLISTIC ORIENTATION FOR SERVANT-LEADERS

There is a need for a holistic perspective on leadership that sees leading and following as intertwined activities, as activities that cannot be understood outside of each other (Riggio, Chalef, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008). A far-reaching, holistic perspective can be learned by observing leading and following throughout the natural world. Nature is a faithful teacher of leading and following (Shepherd, 2017).

In addition, a holistic perspective on servant-leadership would benefit from a unifying intention or orientation as a starting point (SanFacon & Spears, 2009). Shepherd (2017) stated, “We all need ideals by which to orient our lives” (p. 61). Many ideals, however, bring what he called a “subtle risk” (p. 62). He gives compassion as an example,



It's one thing to realize your soul needs to live with compassion; but to decide you *should* live with compassion is something else. As soon as you ... say, "I should be compassionate here," you are in a top-down state of division. (p. 62)

Shepherd advocates for an orientation, a guiding star, that does not motivate from obligation. Thinking rooted in the mechanistic paradigm, such as "I should be serving here," or "I need to lead," could stimulate a power-over response within oneself, triggering the push of obligation rather than inspiration (pp. 61, 63).

Servant-leadership scholarship, like many perspectives, has been heavily influenced by the mechanistic world view that seeks to understand through breaking apart (Chia, 2003). A holistic approach can lead to new insight and creative activity aligned with Greenleaf's intent to inspire. A holistic look at servant-leadership and at the processes of following, leading, and serving might yield a simpler, clearer vision of the essence of servant-leadership. Toward this end, identifying receptive communication as a holistic orientation for servant-leaders may prove useful and inspiring. Receptive communication, understood as the natural flow of life, may function more clearly and cleanly to guide servant-leaders in disposition and action. This possibility is explored below.

TEN CHARACTERISTICS AND RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION

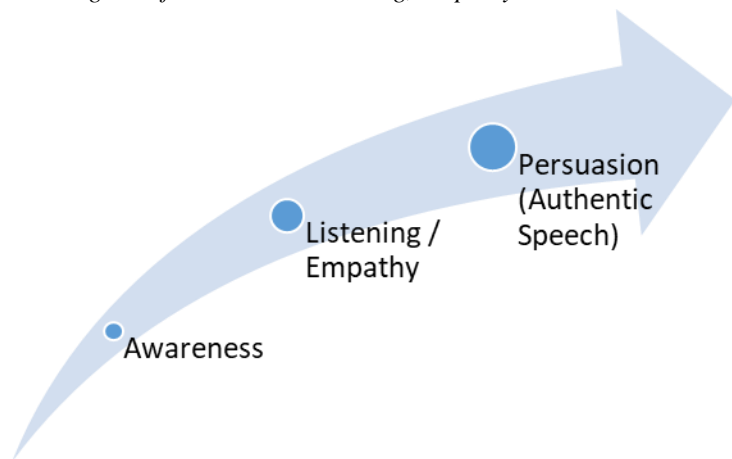
One way to explore the power of a guiding intention is to experience how well it unifies. In the field of servant-leadership we can take up Spears' 10 characteristics, which are the ones cited most often (van Dierendonck, 2010). Spears (2015) is intimately connected to the life and writings of Greenleaf, as he was the first to



identify servant-leader characteristics and disseminate these broadly (van Dierdonck, 2010). These 10 characteristics seem to connect intimately with the concept of receptive communication. This paper explores the interrelatedness of the 10 characteristics of awareness, listening, empathy, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, healing, and building community and their integration through the concept of receptive communication. In order to visualize the interconnectedness of these characteristics I offer three images.

The first, Figure 1, suggests awareness as the basis and springboard for servant-leadership. As awareness grows it is experienced as listening and empathy. Persuasion, what I see as authentic speech, is an extension of listening and empathy. Each of these characteristics is an expression of receptive communication.

Figure 1: *Rising out of Awareness: Listening, Empathy and Persuasion*



Awareness involves a receptivity which employs the senses, attuning to the whole, giving rise to a knowing that “accords with our understanding of the body as a resonator, attuning to the world and reverberating to it” (Shepherd, 2017, p. 88). Awareness opens “wide



the doors of perception, so as to enable one to get more of what is available from sensory experience and other signals from the environment than people normally take in” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 40).

Greenleaf’s broad understanding of awareness supports the sense that awareness is foundational for the other servant-leadership characteristics, especially for listening, empathy and persuasive, authentic speech (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 40). Awareness includes a sensitivity to the systems in which people and organizations operate, what Scharmer & Kaufer (2013) call “eco-systems awareness” (p. 13). It is both awareness of the past and all that has brought a work or endeavor into being, and awareness of the future and its needs or its calling. This awareness pointed forward in time attunes to “the future that is wanting to emerge” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p. 141). Receptive communication as I am using the term incorporates communication of the past’s wisdom and the calling of the future. This sort of attunement and listening can guide servant-leaders in following a calling and serving the whole. Awareness across time and space is what I see as the ever-present root of receptive communication and servant-leadership.

It is no coincidence that Spears (2010) placed listening first and empathy second in his naming of characteristics. Greenleaf (2002) stated that a true, natural servant “automatically responds to any problem by listening first” (p. 31), an indicator of how much he valued receptivity in communication. Linking the characteristics of empathy and listening, empathic listening may have the most recognizable relationship with receptive communication. Receptive communication, as expressed through listening and empathy, gives rise to what Buber (1970) called “the world of relation” (p. 56), a way of being in which relating is approached with reverence. This sort of reverence and receptivity to the other, which Buber called I-



Thou relating, is made possible by receptive communication in three spheres: the natural world, among humans, and with spiritual beings, a world that lies outside language (Buber, 1970, pp. 56-57).

Persuasive, authentic speech arises out of listening and empathy in that it is built on connection with self and others. Greenleaf (2002) identified persuasion as “gentle, nonjudgmental argument” (p. 43). Greenleaf’s (2002) servant-leadership, Rosenberg’s (2015) *Nonviolent Communication*, and Gonzales’ (2015) *Living Compassion* all prioritize an intention of “mutual connection” (p. 42) over outcome. Receptive communication, as I am describing it, is built on this prioritization of connection. Furthermore, the term receptive communication is what Buber (1970) calls a “basic word” (pp. 53-54). “Basic words are not single words but word pairs ... by being spoken they establish a mode of existence” (p. 53). Receptive communication is such a basic word pairing. As a basic word it is a guiding intention, offering an orientation that can bring to life that which it signifies. This is the power of intention (Lau, Rogers, Haggard, & Passingham, 2004). Since receptive communication is understood as the natural way in which all of life operates, it can orient servant-leaders in all contexts and moments.

An important aspect of what I am calling receptive communication is attunement to the deepest needs and values that are alive in dialogue. In this way people experience that they and their needs matter (Gonzales, 2015, p. 43). This sort of receptivity to the needs active in self and others can be compared to the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills identified in emotional intelligence (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006). Emotional intelligence seeks to cultivate the abilities of “perception, assimilation, understanding, and regulation of emotions” (p. 8). Receptive communication, as I am using the term, includes these four emotional abilities and goes deeper—understanding feelings as



indicators of the state of one's needs and "needs at the root of feelings" (Rosenberg, 2015, p. 52). Receptive communication suggests, then, something deeper than emotional intelligence, something rooted in the needs that give rise to emotions.

Receptive communication in speech invites a quality of presence experienced as authentic. It connects and motivates, with speech arising from one's whole being. This sort of speaking is more than delivering words or emotions; it is attuned and receptive interiorly and exteriorly as it flows. Speaking from receptivity is "an experience that is felt in the mouth and the body ... words ... that could be directed 'with the intention of hitting a mark' as your senses might direct an arrow" (Shepherd, 2017, p. 13).

Speech arising in this manner carries presence, needs, values, and energies the speaker wants to convey (Rosenberg, 2015). This sort of expression is integral to receptive communication. The words themselves are carriers of the living energy of the needs behind them (Gonzales, 2015), prioritizing presence over presentation (Shepherd, 2017), and connection over compliance (Rosenberg, 2015). When servant-leaders are receptive to the life, needs, values, and energy inside themselves, speech carries the intention and energy of the speaker. Inner-outer receptivity in speech allows for authentic meetings, encounters, to occur. Buber (1970) affirmed the value of this sort of meeting, "all real living is encounter" (p. 62).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Through awareness, empathy, listening and authentic speech, leaders and followers can shift their attention toward the future. With this progression, foresight and conceptualization emerge. The servant-leadership characteristic of foresight is what Greenleaf (2002) called the "central ethic of leadership" (p. 37). It is "a better than average guess about what is going to happen when in the



future” (p. 38). Greenleaf wrote, “foresight is the lead that the leader has” (p. 40). Foresight is a capacity that can be cultivated through receptivity in the present that extends into the future (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 37-40; Sipe & Frick, 2015, pp. 105-130). The activity that Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) call *presencing* may connect foresight to receptive communication (pp. 19-25). Presencing is “a blended word combining sensing (feeling the future possibility) and presence (the state of being in the present moment)” (p. 19). Presencing involves dwelling in a state of presence and receptivity, engaging what Einstein called the intuitive mind, which is “present not just in the brain, but throughout the body” (as cited in Jaworski, 2012, Kindle location 1667 of 3302). From this whole-being attunement, servant-leaders tap into their capacities for foresight (Jaworski, 2012).

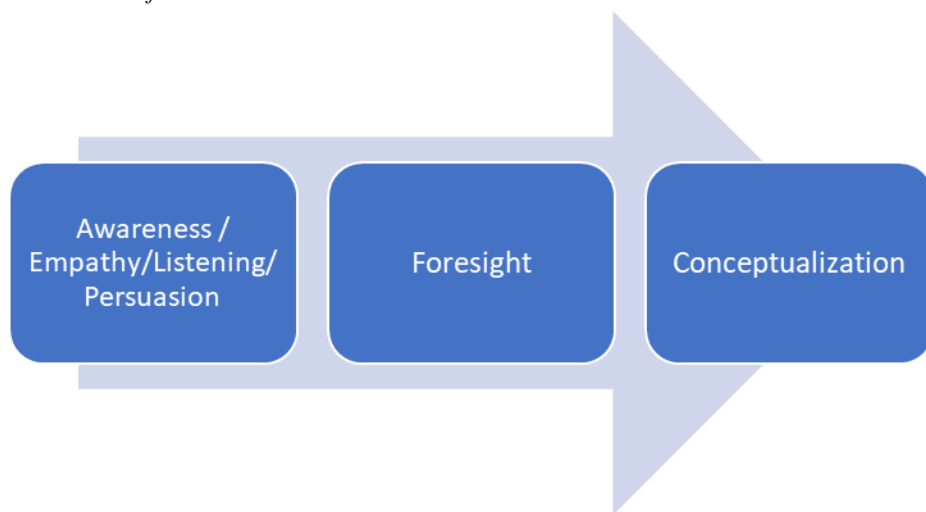
Greenleaf’s (2002) understanding of *now* suggests receptive communication can lead to foresight. The now is like light, which might be centered on one area yet still shares its capacities for seeing beyond the center. The light may get dimmer as it moves away from the instant of the now, but it persists in the minutes, hours, days, and even years that go out from the center. Greenleaf (2002) wrote, “Now includes all of this, all of history and all of the future” (p. 38). Through receptive communication or presencing, servant-leaders exercise and extend their capacities for foresight, making “leading from the emerging future” possible (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p. 239).

If foresight is the practice of receptively seeing what is emerging, then conceptualization is receptively responding. It is a response to the calling of the present future (Neafsey, 2006). Foresight speaks to the listening aspect of communication, listening to the broader context and whole system in which one operates. Conceptualization speaks to the expressive aspects of



communication, which, similarly, are built on receiving internally and externally. Whereas awareness, listening, empathy, and persuasion suggest receptive communication in the moment (Buber, 1970, pp. 62-64), foresight and conceptualization embody receptive communication oriented across time, particularly moving into the future (Sipe & Frick, 2015, pp. 115-116). Figure 2 shows awareness, listening, empathy, and persuasion leading attentive servant-leaders into the future and into the experience of foresight and conceptualization. This image shows not as much six distinct characteristics, but rather one movement, the movement of receptive communication.

Figure 2: *Receptive Communication Moving through Present-focused to Future-focused*

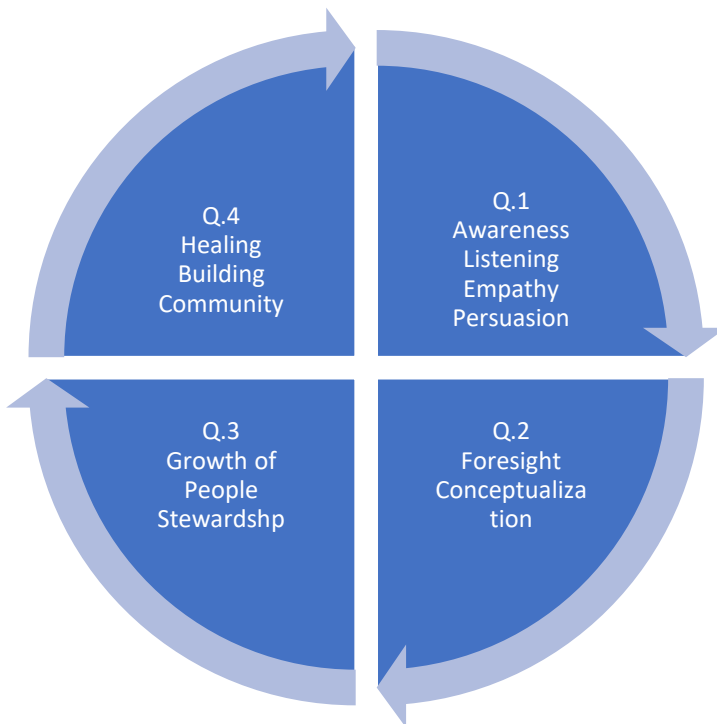


The below image (Figure 3) extends this sense of movement, bringing together all 10 characteristics. In this image awareness is shown as the impetus for all that follows, named first in quadrant one (Q.1). The flow from quadrant one to quadrant two differs from the preceding image in that it is less linear and more cyclical. The second



and third quadrants are related in that foresight and conceptualization (Q.2) suggest attunement across time, while stewardship (Q.3) suggests attunement across space. Quadrant four (Q.4) shows healing and building community as a result of the practice of the first eight characteristics.

Figure 3: *The Interrelationship of Spears' 10 Characteristics of Servant-Leadership*



Greenleaf (2002), like Block (2013), saw stewardship as a service to whole. Stewardship is built upon awareness of the whole organization, including the systems in which it operates and all stakeholders who are a part of or impacted by the work of an



organization (SanFacon & Spears, 2009). Block (2007) encouraged this sort of awareness in leaders, inviting them to create spaces for engagement “through which there can be a shift in caring for the well-being of the whole” (p. 9). Stewardship is possible when a servant-leader is receptively attuned to the whole system, to all stakeholders.

Intimately related to stewardship is a servant-leader’s commitment to the growth of people. Receptive communication, starting with empathic listening, is a foundational expression of commitment to people and their growth (Rosenberg, 2015). Stewardship and commitment to the growth of others involves listening, expression, and action—all of which are forms of receptive communication. Naming an activity as receptive suggests that is deeply attuned to other, self, and context. Thus, receptive communication is action in harmony with the whole and the needs of all. It is action that harmonizes the whole.

The fourth quadrant (Q.4) represents the last of Spears’ (2010) characteristics, healing and building community. I see these as outcomes of living the other eight characteristics—as the fruits of receptive communication. Awareness, empathy, listening, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of people and stewardship are a combination of activities that bring about healing and the building of community.

Gonzales (2015) describes how awareness, connection, listening and empathy bring forth healing by focusing on “intention over outcome” (p. 42). Healing, or transformation as Gonzales names it, is a fruit of being guided by receptive communication. It emerges through a “shifting from the disconnected, primarily thinking mode, to a mode of ... present, full-embodied aliveness” (p. 14).

May (1993) supported this sense of healing, describing it as an



outcome that occurs organically rather than something a person can do to or for another. He gave an example of a person with a bone that is freshly broken. A doctor may clean the wound, align broken bones back in place, and place a cast around the broken parts to facilitate rest. It is the whole body, however, that knows how to heal and reunite broken bones (Hewings-Martin, 2017). Receptive communication takes place among the bones, tissues, nerves, blood vessels, and more. The cells and tissues of the body communicate, sending and receiving information as to what healing agents are needed, where they are needed, when to send them and how much to send. Healing is the outcome of receptive communication within the body.

Similarly, relational and intrapersonal healing happen in response to natural processes nurtured by supportive conditions. The activity of receptive communication facilitates relational healing in the same way cleaning, aligning, and resting bones facilitates the body's healing. An orientation toward receptive communication facilitates a flow of healing better than the intention to heal because it carries less of a sense of *should* or responsibility to make the healing happen (Gonzales, 2015).

The same may be true with building community. A guiding orientation of building community may lead a prospective servant-leader to set out less than humbly: "I'm going to build this into a community. I'm going to bring these people together." Community may grow more readily through receptive communication. Building community is a holistic development that emerges when a holistic way of being is practiced.

The circular arrows of Figure 3 suggest that what is happening in quadrant four flows back into quadrant one. Personal and relational healing and the development of community are the new ground for deeper awareness, empathy, listening, and speech.



Since awareness is so foundational to receptive communication, awareness might be proposed as a guiding orientation for servant-leaders. The basic word receptive communication, however, suggests something more than awareness; it suggests action. Receptivity suggests awareness and openness. Communication suggests dialogical action or action in tune with another and with the whole. Communication is used here as Swidler (2014) used the word dialogue, suggesting that communication or dialogue is the nature of the cosmos, of all of life. All of life is engaged in a giving and receiving exchange of communication.

Thus, equipped with an orientation in tune with the cosmos, servant-leaders can wade into serving and leading with an increased capacity for congruency and effectiveness (Gonzales, 2015; Lau et al, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Receptive communication is built on a broad understanding of communication as exchange. This understanding of communication includes forms of receiving, such as listening, sensing, feeling, attuning, and forms of expression, such as speech and action. The adjective “receptive” suggests this receiving and expressing is attuned, open, and hospitable (Buber, 1970; Lipari, 2014a). This is a receptivity in relationship with others, self, context, the natural world, and more. Receptive communication as this above-described basic word may be a powerful guiding orientation for those who aspire to serve and lead.

Research shows that a guiding intention or orientation increases the effectiveness of action (Lau et al., 2004). By naming receptive communication as a guiding orientation, servant-leaders may experience themselves as increasingly embodied, present, in communion with their teams and surroundings, and effective



(Shepherd, 2017). Servant-leaders will be both following the flow and leading it, as they experience serving, leading, and following holistically.

The many characteristics of servant-leadership, in this case Spears' (2010) 10 characteristics, can be seen less as different things to do or get right and more as facets of receptive communication. In addition, the basic word receptive communication may be an effective guiding star as it evokes itself into action without the demand or control of other words explored here.

What was not explored in this reflection is how servant-leaders cultivate their capacities for receptive communication. Shepherd (2017) called for the awakening of the oft-neglected intelligence of the body as essential for recovering an array of human senses and capacities for receptivity. Rosenberg (2015) and Gonzales (2015) invited servant-leaders to attune to the needs and values that are at the root of human speech and action. Exploring both avenues of research, how the intelligence of the body is awakened and how humans can more deeply dwell in and act on their core needs, holds much promise.

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