



TOWARD A RESEARCH MODEL OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

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In recent years there has been a shift in the managerial sphere of interest within organisations. Increasingly, managers tend to focus on the creation of sustainable development. This has a positive impact on employees and society as a whole (Spears, 1998; Patterson, 2003). More than ever before, organisations are seeking to recruit leaders who not only manage, but also lead, and lead well, meaning that they show a strong tendency toward the good, the moral well-being of their staff, their customers, and ultimately society (Patterson, 2003). Organisations increasingly focus on what people think, how they behave, and why certain decisions are made. There is a close relation between these aspects on the one hand and human feelings on the other. They prove essential for adequate decision-making (George, 2000). Being interested in people and their feelings turns out to be a prerequisite for good leadership (i.e., making the right decisions).

Within this context, new types of leadership are being developed. New leadership emphasises the importance of interpersonal relations in the leader/follower dynamic, and in the emotions involved (Hartog, Koopman, & Muijen, 1997). These aspects are evident in such types of leadership as charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant-leadership.

This article focuses specifically on servant-leadership. Contrary to other new types of leadership, servant-leadership often remains a very abstract notion, making it difficult to place in the wider concept of leadership theories. Though the concept of servant-leadership was born in the mid-seventies of the last century, lack of clarity sometimes accompanies our understanding of the ways in which servant-leaders distinguish themselves from other types of leaders. Most notably, what is lacking is an inte-



grated conceptual model that can be tested empirically. This impedes real progress of our understanding of the impact of servant-leadership on organisational performance, quality of work life, and profits.

Our aim is to introduce a research model for servant-leadership by drawing an integral conceptual picture of the servant-leader. Beforehand, it should be said that there is no clear-cut definition of servant-leadership. This sort of vagueness is not uncommon within leadership studies. There seems to be an intuitive notion that we “know” what servant-leadership is. However, in order for the servant-leadership concept to shed its abstractness so that it can be studied, we will outline a model presenting characteristics we see as being essential to a servant-leader.

Servant-leadership is based on the principle that one cannot be a leader, cannot help others develop, if one does not know oneself. The best way to be a leader is to work from one's own strength (Wilson, 1993). Questions that need to be addressed before the servant-leader will be able to help others answer similar questions include these: Who am I? What are my values and my incentives? What do I want to achieve? Being a servant-leader means going beyond one's self-interest; the servant-leader is governed by something more important: serving humanity (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The servant-leader is well aware that other people have needs and wishes that ought to be fulfilled and helps them achieve these (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). This was described by Greenleaf as follows: “*The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead*” (Greenleaf in Spears, 1998, p. 1).

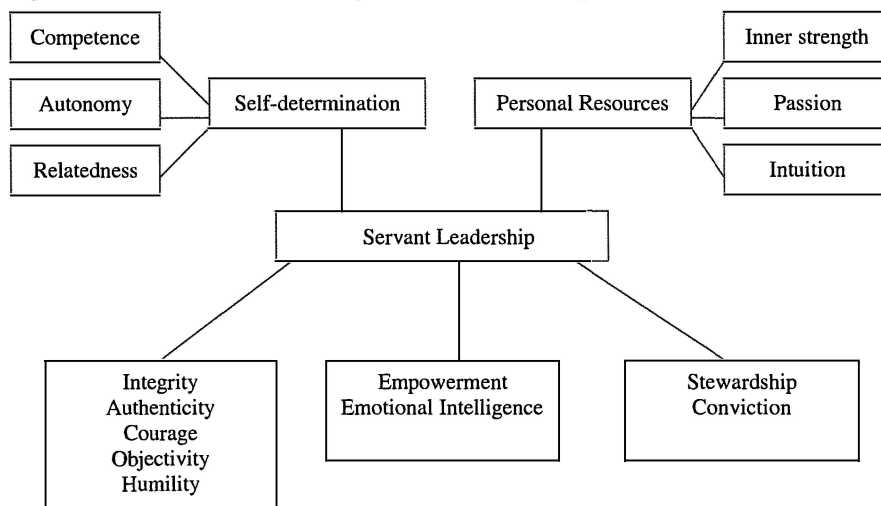
When the main focus of leadership behavior is on the people within the organisation, a safe and secure relationship in the leader/follower and follower/leader relationship can be created. Servants that are chosen to be leaders are greatly supported by their employees, because they have committed themselves and are trusted (Greenleaf, 1999, p. 12). The greatness of the servant-leader lies in the fact that servant-leaders are considered servants of employees, customers and society. This makes servant-leadership



unique; the servant-leader focuses on people, whereas leaders in other leadership approaches largely focus on the organisation (Patterson, 2003).

Our full model is depicted in Figure 1 and will be explained in the paragraphs below. The different elements in the model are not necessarily new in and of themselves. They are based on a mixture of existing leadership approaches combined with recent insights derived from exploring optimal individual psychological states within organisations (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The model articulates a specific combination of these elements, unique for servant-leadership. The model focuses on the motivational aspects of the servant-leader, on what it takes to become a servant-leader (i.e., personal resources), and on the behavior that characterises a servant-leader.

Figure 1: A *research model of servant-leadership*



MOTIVATIONAL ASPECTS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Intrinsic motivation is the inborn tendency to seek innovation and challenges, to improve and practice one's capabilities, to discover and learn



(Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is the interest in or the pleasure of an activity for the activity itself (Elliot, Faler, McGregor, Campbell, Sedikides, & Harakiewicz, 2000). A servant-leader seeks joy, interest, satisfaction, curiosity, self-expression and/or personal challenge in the tasks he performs (Amabile, 1997). A high intrinsic motivation results in self-determination. Self-determination is a true feeling of choice, being free to do what you have chosen to do (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000).

From self-determination theory the idea can be derived that the fulfilment of one's own fundamental psychological basic needs is essential to become a servant-leader. These needs include competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Competence refers to the experience of being able to effectively act on and have an impact within one's environment (Ryan & Brown, 2003). There are two independent dimensions to it (Elliot et al., 2000). The first dimension is perceived competence, the degree to which a person is convinced of performing or having performed an activity adequately. The second dimension is competence valuation, the degree to which a person cares about doing well at an activity. It should be noted that a servant-leader finds the latter highly important, but is also aware of his or her own shortcomings (Greenleaf, 1999).

Autonomy is the experience of one's will and initiative in one's own behaviour (Ryan & Brown, 2003). With autonomy, a person's activities correspond with what the person wants to do (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Achievements are best and satisfaction highest when people believe in what they are doing and feel free in performing their tasks (Paloutzian, Emmons, & Keortge, 2003).

Relatedness comprises feelings of connection and belonging. It establishes itself at different levels: relatedness with oneself, with others, and with the universe as a whole (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Garssen, van Dierendonck, & Tromp, 2001). There are several activities that strengthen the feeling of relatedness: discussing meaningful topics, socialising, feeling



understood and appreciated, and carrying out pleasant and enjoyable activities (Reis et al., 2000).

The need for competence can be satisfied by offering optimum challenges and giving relevant feedback (Ryan & Brown, 2003). Autonomy is achieved through informal purposefulness by the leader so that others experience legitimate freedom of choice and feel capable of pursuit and completion of such choice. The need for relatedness is met when the individual experiences warmth, acceptance and care. Fulfilment of these needs can enhance an individual's intrinsic motivation and result in a sense of self-determination.

PERSONAL RESOURCES

Resources, and personal resources in particular, have been suggested as essential elements for actively creating a world that will provide pleasure and success (Hobfoll, 1989). Personal resources can be defined as personal characteristics that are valued by the individual, or that serve as a means for attainment of personally valued objects, characteristics and conditions. Examples of personal resources important for servant-leadership include inner strength, passion, and intuition.

One feature of a servant-leader is an awareness and expression of inner strength as well as the recognition of the inner strength of others. What is this inner strength? What does it consist of? Inner strength reflects the centre of one's existence, the core of the self. A servant can become a leader only after having become sufficiently aware of and choosing maturity in the "self." Inner resources are conceptualised as an individual's inner strength that results from spiritual well-being. It is the experience of being in harmony, the integration of the inner and the outer self (van Dierendonck, 2005).

The second personal resource is passion. Passion makes a person experience a feeling of new energy while performing a task, which stimulates continued desire to complete the task at hand. An individual who shows passion in work can inspire and motivate others (Schuijt, 1999). Passionate



leaders will try to touch the heart of others in a positive way by addressing the others' own motivation. Passionate leaders are a source of inspiration to others, because such leaders have a clear-cut vision. They set a target that not only goes beyond everyday tasks, but makes the job a challenge as well (Goleman, Boyatis, & McKee, 2002). In Greenleaf's words, "At present it is not attainable, it is something to strive for, to approach, to become. This ideal is outlined in such a way that it stirs the imagination and challenges people to work on something even though they do not yet know, something to be proud of while still under way" (Greenleaf, 1999, p. 20).

Intuition is the third personal resource essential for a servant-leader. The key to better personal decision-making (formulating and embracing a particular vision) is acting on feeling leadership. Usually there is a wide gap between the hard facts available and the information someone actually needs. The art of leadership is partly in the ability to bridge that gap through intuition (Greenleaf, 1999; Khatri & Ng, 2000).

Intuitive processes are the result of learning processes and consist of the mass of facts, patterns, concepts, techniques, abstractions and anything else that can be traced back to formal knowledge, derived from our thoughts. Intuition is a feeling for patterns, the ability to distil a general pattern from previous experiences (Greenleaf, 1999). It is the conceptualisation of one's own thoughts. Intuitive patterns arise from chunking. Chunking is a more efficient way of using one's memory by combining in one's memory matters that at first appear unrelated (Gray, 1999). Intuition means being able in a particular situation to use anything you have seen, felt, tasted or experienced before in similar situations (Khatri & Ng, 2000).

To conclude, the intrapersonal basis of servant-leadership lies in satisfying our needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Fulfilling these needs results in self-awareness, a passionate attitude in work and trusting one's intuition. Combined with inner resources, this leads toward a high degree of self-determination to become a servant-leader.



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

The next step is describing how we can recognise servant-leadership behaviour. The ten characteristics most commonly associated with servant-leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, conviction, conceptualisation, anticipation, stewardship, stimulating personal growth, and building community (Celik, 2002; Russel & Stone, 2002; Spears, 1998). Unfortunately, however, although we intuitively understand these characteristics, they have not been systematically or nominally defined, making a valid and reliable study based on them nearly impossible. They seem to become fuzzy when we attempt to operationalise them for quantitative research. This presents the possibility of operationalising in a different way in order to describe servant-leadership behaviour.

Various authors have, therefore, introduced variations to these characteristics. Based on an extensive literature search, Laub (1999) developed six clusters of servant-leadership characteristics. The personal appreciation cluster comprises the following three categories: believing in people, helping others first, and listening. The personal development cluster includes the following three categories: offering learning possibilities, setting good examples, and encouragement. The team building cluster consists of these categories: relation improvement, cooperation, and appreciating individual differences. The sharing leadership cluster includes the categories of power sharing and status sharing. The leadership cluster comprises the categories of vision, initiative, and clarifying targets. The authenticity cluster includes the categories of being open and available, being a teacher, and preserving integrity.

Russel and Stone (2002) distinguished between nine functional characteristics and eleven additional characteristics of servant-leadership. The functional characteristics include vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modelling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. The additional characteristics are closely related to these aspects: communication, dignity, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, conviction, listen-



ing, encouragement, teaching and delegating. Many of the latter are similar to the characteristics described by Spears (1998).

Page and Wong (2000) developed a model that shows many similarities to Laub's (1999). Their model consists of four clusters: personality, relations, tasks, and processes. Each cluster includes three characteristics: under personality we find integrity, humbleness, and helpfulness; relations includes care for others, empowerment, and development of others; under tasks come having and expressing vision, and setting targets; and leadership processes includes modelling (exemplary behaviour), team building, and shared decision-making

Like Laub (1999), Sendjaya (2003) carried out an extensive literature search, also resulting in six clusters. The first cluster is voluntary subordination and consists of being a servant and serving. The second cluster is authenticity itself and is composed of helpfulness, security, integrity, vulnerability, and liability. The third cluster is conventional relations and it includes acceptance, equality, availability, and cooperation. In the fourth cluster, morality, we find moral reasoning and moral actions. The fifth cluster is spirituality and consists of religion, feeling of mission, inner awareness, and a holistic mindset. The sixth and last dimension is referred to as transforming impact and comprises vision, trust, setting an example, empowerment, and mentorship. It is interesting to note that Sendjaya is the only author to have included in his model a cluster on the inner life of the individual.

After studying both the servant-leadership literature and the models described above, we strived for dimensions or clusters that both reflect the core of servant-leadership and show a certain level of independence (discriminating and converging validity). The model addresses servant-leadership behaviour at different levels. The first level is the personal strength level. It includes those characteristics that reflect the inner strength of the servant-leader. This is the level where the servant-leader differs most from other leaders. The second level is the interpersonal level, that is, the behaviour of and the relation between the leader and others. The third level is



the organisational level, indicating how a servant-leader can contribute to general well-being and sustainable development.

PERSONAL STRENGTHS

The personal strength level comprises five dimensions. The first one is integrity. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), fulfilment of the three basic needs will not only increase the intrinsic motivation, but will also result in a feeling of integrity and well-being. Integrity is defined as the adherence to a generally perceived moral code (Russel & Stone, 2002). This morality enhances the level of behaviour and ethical aspirations of both the leader and the employee (Sendjaya, 2003). Thus, integrity is interrelated with ethical behaviour (Russel & Stone, 2002). A servant-leader's integrity manifests itself in various aspects: visibility within the organisation, honesty (Russel & Stone, 2002), and vulnerability (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Patterson, 2003).

The second dimension is authenticity. Being authentic means identifying who we really are (Sendjaya, 2003). For this we need to know ourselves and be ourselves. Authenticity revolves around openness about one's feelings, convictions and actions. Servant-leaders live their lives in accordance with the values they adhere to (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Argyris (1976) makes a distinction between *theories-in-use* and *theories-in-action*. Theories-in-use are implicit assumptions that govern behaviour and indicate how a person observes, thinks and feels about certain topics. They are similar to a person's motives. Theories-in-action are ideas that serve to explain or anticipate behaviour. When trying to determine how you will act in a given situation, you will draw on theories-in-action. Your actual behaviour depends on the theories-in-use. In many people we find a discrepancy between the theories-in-use and the theories-in-action. In servant-leaders we find theories-in-action to be congruous with theories-in-use (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). It is this aspect that we call authenticity.

The third personal strength is courage. Greenleaf (1999) states that a leader distinguishes himself from others through courage. Servant-leader-



ship is a process in which employees follow without being pressured or manipulated. Courage is pro-active behaviour and reveals itself, for instance, in the form of pioneering (preparing the way). Pioneering is creating new ways, new approaches to old problems, and strong values and convictions that govern a person's actions (Russel & Stone, 2002), rather than waiting for what is to come (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). A servant-leader takes risks by showing initiative (Greenleaf, 1999). He is the first to take the risk: *walking the talk* (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Courage is also found in anticipation. Anticipation, or foresight, is a more accurate than average prediction of what is going to happen at a future date (Greenleaf, 1999). It takes courage to anticipate and to make decisions based on that anticipation. Anticipation stems from an individual's intuition.

The fourth dimension is objectivity. It means a servant-leader must be able to maintain an overview. Here, awareness is highly important: "Awareness provides the ability to distance oneself and to see oneself in the context of one's own experience amid omnipresent dangers, threats and panic situations. Then one looks at one's own special assortment of obligations and responsibilities in such a way to be able to distinguish between what is urgent and what is important, and maybe deal with what is important" (Greenleaf, 1999, p. 35).

Servant-leadership implies knowing how to distinguish between matters of greater and of lesser importance and how to focus on the former, which enables the servant-leader to exercise influence (Russel & Stone, 2002). Both awareness and conceptualisation are essential in maintaining an overview. Conceptualisation is important in acting on intuition. Here, however, it has a different meaning than in intuitive processes. Conceptualisation as a personal strength is the ability to address a problem beyond the borders of everyday reality (Fousert, 2003). It is the insight into employees, the organisation and the environment, rather than the conceptualisation of one's own thoughts. It is an umbrella of conceptual insight offering a clearer framework for decisions (Greenleaf, 1999). In this context a servant-leader uses the concept of meaningfulness. He wants to be clear about his



humanity. To a servant-leader life is not only about reaching goals, but also experiencing meaningfulness through expressing ideas (Frame, 1996). In the past people used to seek meaningfulness in the church and in religion. With the decline in traditional types of religious participation, people have started to look for meaningfulness in other places, such as in organisations (Bell & Taylor, 2001). A servant-leader uses meaningfulness to question his actions. Is he on the right track? Can he really make others grow? Do others truly feel freer and more autonomous? Such a moment of reflection enables a servant-leader to refocus on the most important issues.

The fifth and last personal strength is humility. Humility is the ability to look at one's own accomplishments and talents in their proper perspective (Patterson, 2003). Servant-leaders dare admit they are not omniscient and can learn from others. One of the aspects of humility is serving, the first and foremost priority of a servant-leader. Serving is not the leader's fate, but his privilege (Russel & Stone, 2002). Serving is offering time, energy, care and compassion to employees (Patterson, 2003). A second aspect of humility is modesty. A servant-leader retreats into the background when a task has been successfully accomplished and gives his employees credit when due. However, when employees' performance is less satisfactory, he comes to the fore and assumes responsibility when appropriate for system failure (i.e., failure in helping lead the community toward greater wholeness or efficiency).

INTERPERSONAL LEVEL

The second level of servant-leadership has two dimensions. The first one is empowerment. Empowerment is the process of gaining an influence over events and results that are important to a group (Foster-Fishman, Salem, Chibnall, Legler, & Yapchai, 1998). Empowerment implies the individual knows what is expected of him, what the targets are, and what the individual's responsibilities are (Blanchard & Miller, 2004; Patterson, 2003). A feeling of empowerment is also experienced by people when the following conditions are met: good education, availability of essential infor-



mation, trust in the leader, help from the leader whenever necessary, making a valuable contribution, and lastly, learning and growing (Russel & Stone, 2002; Blanchard & Miller, 2004). In this context empowerment is synonymous with learning, and with generating and developing the talents of others (Russel & Stone, 2002). Servant-leaders share responsibility and authority with others in order to create a community that is competent, autonomous, and connected.

Empowerment implies that employees are given freedom in deciding which direction they want to steer, and are allowed to make mistakes. A servant-leader must be able to understand the imperfections of his employees (Greenleaf, 1999). A servant-leader believes in the intrinsic value of each individual; servant-leadership is all about recognition, acknowledgement, and realisation of each person's abilities and what each person can still learn (Fousert, 2003). In addition, the servant-leader has confidence in the invisible potential of each employee. The servant-leader feels employees can achieve certain goals, making his confidence an appreciative self-fulfilling prophecy (Patterson, 2003).

The second interpersonal dimension is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is "the ability to process emotion-laden information completely and to use it to guide cognitive activities like problem solving and to focus energy on the required behaviours" (George, 2000; Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002). Emotional intelligence comprises five main themes (Goleman, 2004). The first one is knowing one's own emotions: recognising a feeling when it arises, also referred to as self-consciousness. The second is regulating one's emotions: the ability to steer the emotions in the right direction. The third theme is self-motivation: using emotions for a particular purpose. The fourth is recognising the emotions of others, also referred to as empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and experience the feelings of others (George, 2000). Empathetic people have an eye for subtle social signals that indicate what other people need or want, enabling the felt but unspoken emotions in a person or group to be recognised



(Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The last theme is relation management.

Leadership is the art of getting people to work for a common goal. One of the ways to motivate people is by operating on the basis of emotional intelligence. Leaders who possess high emotional intelligence, such as servant-leaders, are better able to profit from positive moods and emotions (George, 2000). High emotional intelligence results in enthusiasm, excitement, optimism, cooperation, and trust on the part of the leader and employees owing to the developing interpersonal relation.

The measure of emotional intelligence can be determined by observing a person's behaviours. Emotionally intelligent people are good listeners, show empathy, and take care of others. Care offered from within the organisation may stimulate employees to use and develop their skills in the context of their needs and aspirations, and in the service of the community as a whole.

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

The third and last level of servant-leadership is the organisational level. Here the servant-leader focuses on the organisation as a whole. This level includes two dimensions, stewardship and conviction.

The first dimension is stewardship. Stewardship is creating opportunities for the personal, the professional, and finally the spiritual growth of others (Gooden, 2002) by making one's own resources, such as time, information, financial resources, and relationships, available to others (Russel & Stone, 2002). Being a steward, you are responsible for all things entrusted to you (Blanchard & Miller, 2004; Conley & Wagner-Marsh, 1998). The servant-leader is a servant to others and sustains this attitude, whatever the circumstances. This also includes a servant-leader's function as a role model. The servant-leader's major impact on the organisation requires the servant-leader to behave ethically and in accordance with the standards and values embedded in the organisational culture. The servant-leader's role model function is the foundation of the servant-leader's leadership (Russel



& Stone, 2002). The servant-leader tries to make stewardship manifest through team building.

The second dimension is conviction. This is about sharing wisdom and creating understanding (Russel & Stone, 2002). Understanding convinces people that the road followed by the servant-leader may be the right one (Greenleaf in Spears, 1998). This can be achieved first by presenting convincing arguments in order to impassion people. Second, people may be convinced through a sense of rightness, based on an intuitive feeling (Greenleaf, 1999). A servant-leader will try to convince employees and the organisation as a whole by showing a clear vision and commitment. Such a vision is based on aspects of the intra-personal and interpersonal levels, such as humility, empathy, and commitment to ethical behaviour. Servant-leadership reflects a push model rather than a pull model for realising that vision. Employees are not forced to support that vision, but strive to accomplish the vision voluntarily because they are committed and inspired. This is where a servant-leader differs from other leaders.

CONCLUSION

Thus far servant-leadership has not been widely researched, due to the lack of measuring instruments. The conceptualisation of servant-leadership presented in this article makes future research into this subject possible. Servant-leaders differ from other leaders in that the starting point of their leadership is their self-determined inner strength, working from a base grounded in fulfilled psychological needs, inner resources, intuition, and passion. This is reflected in various characteristics at various levels. On the personal strength level, a servant-leader is characterised by integrity, authenticity, courage, objectivity, and humility. On the interpersonal level, servant-leaders embrace empowerment and emotional intelligence. Characteristics on the organisational level are stewardship and conviction.

Based on this model, a questionnaire has recently been developed (Van Dierendonck & Heeren, 2005), which is being tested in a pilot study for validity and reliability. With a measuring instrument that meets the appro-



priate psychometric qualities, it can be established what the effects of servant-leadership are on individuals and organisations. This is essential in order to alert organisations to the necessity of fulfilling the most meaningful needs and wishes of their respective organisational communities. A high quality servant-leadership instrument provides organisations with insight into the positive effects of personal attention for employees.

In closing, servant-leadership is not a trick; it is a way of life that demands great commitment and discipline. We believe servant-leadership is a notion that will draw increasing attention over the years. We hope our model will prove a basis for the application of servant-leadership in science and in the business community.

Dirk van Dierendonck of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, serves as a member of the editorial board for *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. Both Imke Heeren and Dirk serve the Netherlands with timely and evocative research into the nature of servant-leadership and its implications for individuals, communities, and organisations throughout the world.

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