



## SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

### *A Review of the Literature*

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Servant-leadership is too soft, too touchy-feely, too abstract! How can you measure its effects? Does it really make a difference in the life of the leader or the follower? What about productivity and profitability? What is the impact of servant-leadership on organizational objectives? After all, organizations exist to make money and they cannot meet the needs of people unless they do? So, does this philosophy of leadership really make a difference?

These are the questions that critics and potential advocates alike lobby against the philosophy and practice of servant-leadership. To those who vehemently practice and defend the concept, these questions may seem irrelevant and even unnecessary. However, to those struggling with its validity, they represent significant stumbling blocks. Consequently, this article examines the status of the literature on servant-leadership in relation to empirical research on organizational outcomes. To begin with, impediments regarding servant-leadership are explored and discussed. This is followed by a review of the literature related to servant-leadership and specific organizational outcomes.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES-BASED RESEARCH RELATED TO SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

While it has widely been claimed that limited empirical research has been conducted regarding servant-leadership (Farling et al., 1999; Northouse, 2004), the reality is a number of studies have been conducted both to clarify the construct and develop measures, as well as to verify the impact of servant-leadership on outcomes. At the same time, the research is still limited in that most of the studies have been exploratory in nature and most of the instruments have proved inconsistent in factor analysis across multiple studies (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2009). Significant research in



the past couple of years appears to be closing the gap on measuring servant-leadership based on the work of Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) and Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2009), who both developed and validated multidimensional measures of servant-leadership. Another reason for the exploratory nature of these studies is the embryonic state of the servant-leadership research arena.

A third impediment to growth of empirical research in relation to servant-leadership, and which may account for the differing outcomes among researchers, is the paradoxical nature of the subject. As discussed previously, while the notion of servant-leadership proves consistent in claiming that such leaders should be driven by the desire to serve in order to accomplish the objectives of the “best test,” it is apparent that such a motivation may call for different, even conflicting, styles and behaviors within varying leadership contexts (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 262). As Spears explained (2006) “There is no single way that companies have sought to implement servant-leadership. Servant-leadership is taught and practiced in different ways in different organizations” (in Tey, 2006, p. 46). Therefore, unlike many of his colleagues, then and now, Greenleaf (1977) did not feel the need to try to solve all of these paradoxes or develop simplistic means of addressing them (p. 27). Instead, he realized that the power of servant-leadership lay in engaging the very complexity leaders are forced to embrace in often paradoxical ways.

As a result, whereas some strong conceptual models have been developed to measure servant-leadership, in the development of such constructs, much of the paradoxical nature of servant-leadership may be lost or oversimplified, which, given the relationship between balancing chaotic paradox and anxiety, may account for the failure of the research models to consistently measure servant-leadership. As a result of this potential oversimplification, even Laub (2005), who has developed one of the better instruments for assessing servant-leadership, has argued,

[S]ervant 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. 174)

Consequently, some have questioned whether or not such instruments can or even should be used to measure servant-leadership (Frick, 1998). Nonetheless, the instrument developed by Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2009) probably comes closest to addressing this paradox issue in that these



authors strove to measure both the servant and the leader components of the concept in their survey instrument.

Finally, a fourth barrier to empirical research, and specifically outcomes-based research, that would increase the credibility of servant-leadership among scholars and practitioners is the bias against encouraging leaders to serve primarily for reasons other than the growth of people. This is because servant-leadership argues that the unique motivation and the integrated actions of servant-leaders, suggests a different set of outcomes or purposes of leadership. As Greenleaf (1977) explained,

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged of society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27)

Against this standard, not the standards of productivity, profitability, nor return on investment, is the leader measured. In fact, Greenleaf argued that rather than being the ends of leadership, these traditional standards should be considered the means whereby a company is able to serve its employees and society (p. 155). To invert these ends and means may actually do more damage than good. This is evident in Greenleaf’s discussion of gimmicks in institutions (Greenleaf, 1996b, p. 32). Thus, some servant-leadership experts, including this researcher, question whether or not a concern for traditional outcomes-centered research focused on paradox-resolving construction is a worthwhile goal (Frick, 1998).

On the other hand, the future of servant-leadership studies may well depend on the ability to clearly define the concept of servant-leadership and to conduct more empirical outcomes-based research (J. Laub, 2004). Such research will likely contribute to the advancement of the practice of servant-leadership and further understanding of this important leadership theory (Sendjaya, 2003). As Laub (2005) explained,

It is important that we continue to seek a strong research base for the concept and application of servant-leadership. This kind of process will never give us the complete picture, but it can provide significant insights that are not available through other means. (p. 174)



Even Greenleaf would, perhaps, support such notions given his focus on serving practitioners and his recognition of the importance of responding gradually to the needs of constituencies as a result of where they are in their development toward servanthood (1977; Greenleaf, 1996a, 1996b). Furthermore, the frequently discussed reality that “Several of the top twenty companies ranked in the 2001 issue of *Fortune* magazine’s 100 Best [Companies to Work for] were servant-led organizations” (Ruschman, 2002, p. 123) has already begun to make some mild, though careful, connections between servant-leadership and traditional outcomes. Given the potential need for more work in this direction, it is important to recognize and review the studies that have been conducted in relation to such objectives.

Although research related to servant-leadership and outcomes is limited and largely exploratory in nature, numerous studies have been done that suggest that elements of servant-leadership contribute to the accomplishment of organizational objectives, the effectiveness of organizational teams, commitment, trust, leader satisfaction, and follower satisfaction.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

In addition to the work of Barbuto JR and Wheeler (2006), who found a connection between servant-leadership and “motivation to perform extra work, employee satisfaction, and perceptions of organizational effectiveness” (p. 314), there exists significant theoretical and important empirical support for the claim that servant-leadership contributes to the achievement of organizational objectives. Robert Greenleaf (1996b) described himself as a “a student of organization—how things get done” (p. 51). The concept of servant-leadership, therefore, represents the culmination of his observation and study of how to achieve success within an organizational context. And, while he argued that the accomplishment of organizational goals should not be considered the primary objective of organizing, he strongly respected and recognized the importance of achieving such objectives in order to serve. As Greenleaf (1977) declared,

The work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work. Put another way, the business exists as much to provide meaningful work to the person as it exists to provide a product or service to the customer.... At first, the new ethic may put these two on par. But as the economy becomes even more productive and people get more sensible and settle for fewer “things” in the new ethic service to those who produce may





rise in priority above service to those who use, and the significance of the work will be more the joy of the doing rather than the goods and services produced. (p. 155)

As a result, Greenleaf believed organizations will come to see their purpose as that of serving and nurturing the development of people, both within and outside the organization, through the process of providing products and services. Once this change of perspective has occurred, the pursuit of organizational objectives will have been placed in its proper perspective and will allow the organization to strive to accomplish its goals in accordance with this primary principle of service. Arguably, this will actually facilitate the achievement of organizational goals as opposed to deterring the same.

The argument that a shift toward servant-based organizing will actually contribute to the achievement of organizational goals has received extensive theoretical support and significant anecdotal confirmation. Spears (2002), in his discussion of the impact of servant-leadership, explained that “Some businesses have begun to view servant-leadership as an important framework that is helpful (and necessary) for ensuring the long-term effects of related management and leadership approaches” (p. 10). He further argued that servant-leadership contributes to effective change initiatives. As a result of these benefits, he explained how the concept of servant-leadership is being utilized in training trustees, furthering community leadership, service-learning programs, leadership education, and personal transformation. Additional authors expanded upon this argument that servant-leadership contributes to achieving organizational goals by pointing to the prevalence of servant-leadership-based organizations included on *Fortune* magazine’s “100 best companies to work for in America” (Ruschman, 2002) and through reference to the examples of other successful organizations that espouse servant-leadership (Bogle, 2002; Lore, 1998; Melrose, 1998). Showkeir (2002) argued that servant-leadership contributes to the accomplishment of traditional organizational objectives by restructuring power in a way that nurtures autonomy and accountability.

In order to test the relationship between servant-leadership and the achievement of organizational goals within institutions of secondary education, Herbst (2003) conducted a study utilizing high schools in Broward County, Florida. In this study, he distributed and collected measures of organizational servant-leadership within each of these schools and then correlated these results with outcomes from each school in “writing scores, reading scores, mathematics scores and annual learning gains on the Florida



Comprehensive assessment test” (p. 18). Correlations were also tested for contextual variables such as “socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and principal tenure...to determine whether these factors had a mitigating relationship to school effectiveness” (p. 18).

The results of Herbst’s (2003) study revealed a statistically significant relationship between organizational servant-leadership and ninth and tenth grade math scores, annual learning gains in reading and math, and annual learning gains among the lowest twenty-fifth percentile of the student body. The results did not demonstrate significance in correlational comparisons between writing scores, critical incidents, and dropout rates. Although support for improvement in relation to all variables was not proven, and in spite of the exploratory nature of this study, Herbst concluded that “[p]rincipals who embed the characteristics of servant-leadership throughout the organization may expect higher levels of student achievement particularly in math and reading” (p. 109).

In her dissertation, Lambert (2004) sought to validate and extend the work of Herbst by conducting a correlation analysis of the relationship between principals’ servant-leadership within their schools and organizational climate, organizational success as measured by student achievement on standardized tests, and improvement in test scores over a three-year period of time. All of these tests were run both with and without controlling the variable of socioeconomic status (SES), given the significant impact of SES on these important outcomes—as demonstrated in other studies. In order to address these questions, Lambert (2004) collected data from principals and faculty members at eight schools in four school districts in Florida. The OLA (J. A. Laub, 1998) was used to assess organizational perceptions of servant-leadership and climate. Additional data, such as test scores and SES status, were collected from the Florida Department of Education.

The results of Lambert’s (2004) study identified a strong and significant relationship ( $r = .712$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between a positive organizational climate and servant-leadership. This relationship proved even stronger ( $r = .794$ ,  $p < .05$ ) within high SES schools when controlling for SES. Contrariwise, in low SES schools, the relationship was less pronounced, but still strong and significant ( $r = .664$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The relationship between student performance and servant-leadership also proved significant ( $p < .05$ ); however, the strength of the relationship was less pronounced ( $r = .348$ ). However, when controlling for SES, the relationship between



both high ( $r = .610$ ) and low SES ( $r = .660$ ) schools and servant-leadership proved even stronger. While these results suggest that servant-leadership does contribute to improved outcomes in public education, the analysis of the impact of servant-leadership over time was not as supportive of this claim. In fact, Lambert suggested that “There were no clear patterns evident to enable this researcher to link servant-leadership to improved student achievement over the previous three years of the principals tenure” (p. 74). This may result from the fact that more factors influence outcomes in education than principal leadership alone; however, it is also likely that limitations within the study may account for this failure. Whatever the contributing factors, this study further supports the assertion that servant-leadership and some desired outcomes in education are related.

Given the support for the role of servant-leadership in positively contributing to organizational objectives in education, it is reasonable to expect similar results in other contexts. Ming (2005) verified this assumption by testing the relationship between servant-leadership and the following five outcomes of church organizations: feeling of oneness among congregants, sense of direction among congregants, empowerment of congregants, spirituality of congregants, involvement of congregants.

Using a survey methodology, Ming (2005) drew a sample of 1,061 Seventh Day Adventist congregants in Jamaica from a population of two hundred thousand within 71 of 646 congregations. The congregations were carefully selected by size and location to ensure adequate diversity and representation. The researcher distributed leadership questionnaires that addressed the variables of servant-leadership, based on Spears’s (Larry C Spears, 1998b, 2002) model of ten characteristics, three intermediate variables identified by the researcher, three measures of pastoral leadership style, and the previously mentioned outcomes. The results were validated using cronbach-alpha testing and demonstrated strong reliability.

Having ascertained the validity of the instrument, Ming (2005) conducted regression analysis to test for relationships between the ten attributes of servant-leadership, the intermediate variables of servant-leadership, and the congregant outcomes. The results revealed that while not all of the outcomes were significantly related to all of the servant-leadership variables, many of the latter were significantly related to the former in every case. Thus, the outcomes support the conclusion that servant-leadership within the context of pastoral leadership positively contributes to organizational outcomes within religious institutions.



One of the more comprehensive studies was that of Ostrem (2006). In her dissertation, she sought to “identify individual and group outcomes that result from the presence of servant-leadership behaviors using quantitative methods” (p. 10). The specific outcomes she examined included “individual levels of hope, sense of coherence, engagement, tedium, trust in organization, trust in manager, and wellness” (p. 11). In order to examine the relationship between these variables and servant-leadership, Ostrem surveyed 517 employees of a large university ( $n = 182$ ), a hospital ( $n = 231$ ), and a “company providing *healthcare management services* by contract to health-care facilities” ( $n = 65$ ) (p. 63). Two hundred sixty-four responded with 86 coming from the university, 113 from the hospital, and 65 from the health care management company. Ostrem used Barbuto and Wheeler’s (2006) SLQ to measure servant-leadership.

Using both correlation and regression analysis as part of a multi-level analysis, significant small and moderate relationships were identified between the servant-leadership variables and eight of the eleven variables. These included the following:

Significant positive correlations were identified between altruistic calling and comprehensibility, meaningfulness, trust in supervisor, and engagement, and a significant negative correlation with mental exhaustion. Higher persuasive mapping was significantly related to enhanced trust in organization, trust in supervisor, and manageability. Greater organizational stewardship was linked to increased engagement and trust in organization. Enhanced emotional healing resulted in greater trust in supervisor. Wisdom explained increased hope and trust in supervisor to a significant degree. (pp. 136–137)

The results did not demonstrate significant variance between the elements of servant-leadership and physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and wellness. Nonetheless, the significance of this study is in its comprehensive and multisector approach to examining servant-leadership and its potential impact on organizational outcomes.

In addition to these more general studies of servant-leadership and organizational outcomes, some additional studies have been conducted to examine servant-leadership’s impact on specific organizational outcomes including team effectiveness, follower satisfaction, trust, and commitment, spirituality, leader satisfaction, and organizational performance and profitability.



## TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

One of the characteristics of servant-leadership, according to Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 1977, 2003) and other servant-leadership theorists, is the ability to foster community (Bausch, 1998; Block, 2002; Spears, 1998b). Given this emphasis, Chamberlain (1995) drew a connection between the community-building behaviors of servant-leaders and the construction of effective teams. He argued that through effective structuring, ensuring of mutual responsibility, communicating effectively, the application of competency, and effective problem resolution strong servant-leaders could contribute to the development and leadership of effective teams. Based on this potential connection Irving (2004) set out to test the correlation between servant-leadership and team effectiveness.

Using Laub's (1998) OLA instrument and the Team Effectiveness Questionnaire, Irving surveyed 202 individuals in business, church, and nonprofit organizations. The results of his study indicated a significant relationship between servant-leadership at the organizational level and team effectiveness. The correlations ranged from .547 in nonprofits, .563 within churches, and .757 in businesses. The overall correlation power was .592. Given that other variables, beyond leadership alone, contribute to the effectiveness of teams (Swenson, 2000), these correlations may be considered strong. Thus, a strong argument could be made that servant-leadership contributes to team effectiveness based on this initial study. At the same time, the limited number of respondents in the nonprofit and business arenas (22 and 15 respectively) signaled a need for additional research in these areas.

In response to this need, Irving (2005) conducted a similar study of 740 employees representing all levels of an international nonprofit organization. In this study Irving used the same instruments to assess organization level servant-leadership and team effectiveness; however, he added a second assessment of servant-leadership that focused on the individual level. In this study, Irving confirmed his initial findings. The results revealed a significant relationship between team effectiveness and servant-leadership at both the organizational and individual levels. In this study, the correlation strength at the individual level was .436 and, at the organizational level, .522. Similar results were found for the subcategorical characteristics of love, empowerment, humility, vision, and trust in relationship to team effectiveness. Once again, the results confirmed that servant-leadership contributes to the effectiveness of teams.



In a later study, Irving and Longbotham (2006) focused on identifying the critical servant-leadership themes that predicted leadership effectiveness. The model they identified as most valid, suggested that the servant-leadership themes most predictive of team effectiveness were, “(a) Providing Accountability, (b) Supporting and Resourcing, (c) Engaging in Honest Self-Evaluation, (d) Fostering Collaboration, (e) Communicating with Clarity, and (f) Valuing and Appreciating” (p. 6). This model was found to explain 39 percent of the variance (p. 10).

#### FOLLOWER SATISFACTION, TRUST, AND COMMITMENT

In the previously discussed study by Irving (2005), a sub-element of his work included a correlation analysis of servant-leadership with job satisfaction as measured using the OLA (J. A. Laub, 1998). In his work, he identified a strong relationship between servant-leadership and job satisfaction. Additional work has also been conducted to more directly assess the relationship between servant-leadership, satisfaction, trust, and commitment.

In order to test the relationship between job satisfaction and servant-leadership, Thompson (2002) distributed the Organizational Leadership Assessment (J. A. Laub, 1998) and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire to 170 employees of a theological, conservative denominational school. The sample included 116 respondents from both the student and academic affairs divisions across three organizational levels, the technical, managerial, and institutional. The resulting data were analyzed and the findings revealed that (1) the institution did not receive a score sufficiently high to classify it as a servant-led organization, (2) no statistically significant differences in perception of the institution existed across institutional levels, (3) statistical differences did exist between perception of participants across divisional boundaries—specifically “between student services technical employees and both academic affairs management and faculty” (p. 76). The final conclusion identified a statistically significant positive correlation “between participants’ perception of servant leadership characteristics and their level of job satisfaction” (p. 76).

Hebert (2003) further contributed to the literature on servant-leadership and job satisfaction by examining the relationship between perceived servant-leadership and general as well as intrinsic job satisfaction. Her study utilized convenience sampling to identify working adults within



service-oriented industries, government, high-technology, etc. (pp. 59–60). A total of 136 participants completed the OLA (J. A. Laub, 1998) and the Mohrman-Cooke-Mohrman Job Satisfaction Scale (MCMJSS). The results were analyzed using multiple statistical methods using both the MCMJSS and the internal satisfaction scale of the OLA to measure satisfaction and select elements of these scales to assess intrinsic satisfaction. In both cases, perceived servant-leadership correlated at significant levels above the researchers' hypothesized .30 correlation level, which Herbst suggested as demonstrating "a moderate effect size" that is sufficient to describe "a relationship that is strong enough to be accessible, perceptible, and meaningful to a sensitive observer" (p. 61).

Drury's (2004) research also revealed a statistically significant, positive relationship between job satisfaction and servant-leadership. However, unlike previous studies, Drury's revealed a small, negative correlation between servant-leadership and the follower's organizational commitment. This contrary outcome may result from the nurturance of autonomy in the follower resulting in an awareness of and desire to use one's skills in a new arena (Drury). However, it may also represent a factor of the context of the study. Drury's study evaluated servant-leadership and commitment across four institutional levels, Top leaders, management, faculty, and hourly employees, within a nontraditional college in the Midwest. Thus, other factors unique to this setting may have impacted the statistical relationship between the variables of servant-leadership and commitment: such as restructuring, pay, education level and opportunity, culture, time at the job, etc. (Drury).

Anderson (2005) also identified "a significant correlation between employee perceptions of servant-leadership and individual job satisfaction among full-time teachers and administrators of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (p. 97). No other variables were tested for a relationship in this study wherein Anderson surveyed 550 individuals using Laub's (1998) organizational servant-leadership assessment instrument, and followed up with qualitative interviews of participants, which supported the relationship.

Although the primary purpose of his study was to test the relationship between servant-leadership and emotional exhaustion and cynicism in followers, Rude (2004) also sought to assess the relationship between servant-leadership and follower job satisfaction on both an individual and organizational level. Using Page and Wong's self-report (Page & Wong,



2004) and 360 degree evaluation (Page et al., 2004) instruments and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, Rude conducted his research by surveying 145 participants within three organizations, two of which openly espoused servant-leadership. The resulting correlations were significant for all of the characteristics of servant-leadership identified by Page and Wong's instrument and intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction, although the actual strength of these correlations varied from .41 to .70. Thus, as Rude explained,

The results suggest that if subordinates perceive their supervisor or leader as having high levels of the positive characteristics of leadership and low levels of Power and Pride (SLP—360), they will also report higher levels of Intrinsic Job Satisfaction (MSQ), but if they perceive their supervisor as having high levels of Power and Pride (SLP—360) and low levels of the positive characteristics of servant leadership, they will report lower levels of Intrinsic Job Satisfaction (MSQ). (p. 52)

Rude's study also identified a significant relationship between an organization's explicit espousal of servant-leadership and job satisfaction (p. 55).

A more recent study of satisfaction, as well as team commitment and trust, was conducted by Dannhauser and Boshoff (2006). In the study, the researchers surveyed 417 salespersons working for an automobile retail organization in South Africa. The variables correlated included servant-leadership, trust in organization and management, trust in co-workers, a trust total score, emotional team commitment, and a team commitment total score. The data analysis revealed strong correlations between servant-leadership, trust in management, and the trust total score. Moderately strong correlational outcomes were recorded in relation to servant-leadership and trust in co-workers and the team commitment variables.

Following up on the cross-cultural work of Dannhauser and Boshoff (2006), West and Bocarnea (2008) conducted a comparative analysis of the linear relationships between servant-leadership and organizational satisfaction and commitment at a university in the Philippines ( $n = 37$ ) and one in the United States ( $n = 43$ ). In so doing, they used an instrument developed by Hale and Fields (2007) that measures servant-leadership using three component variables: service to followers, vision, and humility. No significant relationships were identified between these components of servant-leadership and satisfaction or commitment within the U.S. university. Significant relationships were found in the Filipino context between service





and satisfaction and commitment and between humility and satisfaction. It is unclear why the discrepancy; however, the small sample size likely limited the validity of the results. Nonetheless, as study results are mixed in relation to these variables across different contexts, as demonstrated in the different studies that have been discussed, the relationship between servant-leadership and these organizational outcomes requires more extensive study.

Finally, in a multisample study designed to confirm the validity of their multidimensional measure of servant-leadership, the Servant Leadership Survey, Dierendonck & Nuijten (2009) surveyed 668, 263, and 236 persons in three separate samples, which they analyzed both individually and as a composite sample, regarding servant-leadership, other leadership approaches and styles, and additional follower-related variables such as job satisfaction, vitality, engagement, in role behavior, civic virtue, altruism, and taking charge. In addition to demonstrating the construct and content validity, the results revealed significant low to moderate correlations with follower vitality, engagement, and job satisfaction relative to five of the eight component parts of their model (empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, and authenticity). In relation to the remaining elements, courage was significantly correlated with engagement and satisfaction, but not vitality; forgiveness was significantly correlated with satisfaction; and stewardship demonstrated a significant correlation with vitality (sample data did not allow for correlation with the other two variables). Additionally, empowerment was found to be significantly related to in-role behavior, civic virtue, and taking charge; accountability related to civic virtue; and humility was significantly correlated with civic virtue, altruism, and taking charge. Forgiveness was also found to be negatively related to civic virtue, which may simply explain why forgiveness was needed.

The results of this study were similar to those of Liden et al. (2008), who also developed and validated a multidimensional measure of servant-leadership using two samples with 298 and 164 participants. They likewise demonstrated the validity of the instrument and the relationship between servant-leadership community citizenship behavior, in role performance, organizational commitment, in role performance. Significant though small relationships were revealed between elements of their model and all of these outcomes except in-role performance. Significant between supervisor variance was also found in relation to all of the outcomes except in-role performance.

The results of these studies suggest a need for additional research to confirm these findings, reconcile discrepancies, and better assess the relational and, even, predictive role of servant-leadership with regard to follower



outcomes. Nonetheless, these studies provide ample evidence to suggest that the positive context created by servant-leaders likely contributes to positive personal and organizational outcomes for followers.

#### LEADER SATISFACTION, MEANING, AND WORK COMMITMENT

While there is plenty of research to suggest the potential for a positive impact on follower commitment, trust, and satisfaction when leaders embody the principles of servant-leadership, it is questionable as to whether engaging in servant-leadership contributes to the satisfaction of the leader. Only two studies appear to have been conducted that address this issue. The first study is that of Bivins (2005), who sought to determine whether or not a correlational relationship existed between a values orientation indicative of servant-leadership, as measured by the *Hal-Tonna Inventory of Values*, and ministry satisfaction, which involved the use of a self-constructed measure. The results failed to reveal a significant correlation, though a positive correlation of .38 was found (p. 120). Unfortunately, these results are difficult to generalize beyond the specific context of the study because of its insular focus on ministers in Alaska and because of the small sample size, particularly in light of a dearth of similar studies within other context. It is also limited in that it did not use an instrument designed to measure servant-leadership.

The second study was conducted by McClellan (2008). In his research on the relationship between servant-leadership, stress, and psychological hardiness, McClellan identified a positive, significant relationship, using correlation analysis, between servant-leadership and personal job satisfaction, meaning, and work commitment among servant-leaders. The relationships were, however, small to moderate. These relationships were not found to exist in the case of leaders with leadership styles or approaches of individuals not identified as servant-leaders. Servant-leaders also demonstrated significantly higher levels of satisfaction, meaning, and work commitment than did those who did not demonstrate servant-leadership.

#### SPIRITUALITY

Kyker (2003), using both quantitative and qualitative methods, analyzed the relationship between servant-leadership, spiritual development, and service learning. In order to do so, he assessed the spirituality of participants in the SERVE service learning program using the Psychomatrix Spirituality



Inventory. He then conducted servant-leadership workshops and interviews with self-selected students to assess the extent to which their participation in the program and the workshop contributed to their spiritual growth. The results revealed that student spirituality was perceived to have increased through the experience, particularly through participation in community (p. 76). An additional finding, of particular relevance to this study, was the demonstrated indication of a close relationship between spirituality and servant-leadership (p. 77). Finally, on a personal level, the participants reported that spirituality positively impacted their “ability to overcome opposition” during their SERVE experience (p. 71).

#### PROFITABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

Perhaps the most significant question, and the one that remains to be answered, is does servant-leadership improve the profitability and performance of organizations in which it is practiced. As mentioned previously, the fact that a number of the one hundred best places to work for in America practice servant-leadership lends some support to this notion. Furthermore, that numerous highly successful organizations and their leaders, including Southwest Airlines, Men’s Warehouse, The Toro Company, Herman Miller, TD Industries, Johnsonville Sausage, etc., practice the approach is similarly helpful (Freiberg & Freiberg, 1996; Glashagel, 2009; Spears, 1998a; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). However, only one study appears to exist that was designed to address this question, and the details of the study are sketchy. The study to which I am referring is that of Sipe and Frick (2009). In their book, these two authors discuss a study they conducted using the same methodology as the *Good to Great* researchers (Collins, 2001). In so doing, they compared the performance of a group of servant-led companies to that of the “great” companies and the S & P 500. The results revealed that while the S & P 500 and the “great” companies outperformed the market by 10.8 percent and 17.5 percent respectively, the servant led organizations outperformed the market by 24.2 percent and, consequently, their “great” peers by nearly 7 percent. While these results are significant and represent strong evidence of the value of servant-leadership, significant questions remain regarding the extent to which espousing servant-leadership signifies practicing it and to what extent the servant-leadership espoused and/or practiced by each of these institutions represents a similar approach across this spectrum of organizational environments. Thus, the issue of conceptualization arises



again and remains unresolved. Until servant-leadership can be conceptually defined and measured, which is perhaps unlikely, firm evidence of the impact of servant-leadership on profitability and performance will likely remain somewhat elusive. Perhaps this is as it should be. At the same time, evidence, such as Sipe and Frick's, does suggest the value of espousing and attempting to practice servant-leadership in organizational contexts.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while ample evidence exists to support the contribution of servant-leadership to both performance outcomes and bottom line profitability, much of this work remains exploratory in nature and limited by issues of construct definition and measurement concerns related to servant-leadership. Nonetheless, the amount of work in this area suggests that the answer to the questions proffered at the beginning of this chapter is that servant-leadership can make a significant difference for the leader, the followers, and the organization itself. So while further research is needed to strengthen the evidence, it appears that servant-leadership really does make a difference. On the other hand, whether or not this is important in relation to becoming a servant-leader remains questionable. After all servant-leaders do not, and arguably should not, choose to lead because of the organizational outcomes they hope to achieve, but rather out of a will to serve others (Greenleaf, 1977).

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey McClellan lives with his wife and six children in Cumberland, MD. He holds a doctorate in leadership studies and is an assistant professor of management at Frostburg State University. Jeff is passionate about the study and practice of servant-leadership development, particularly among undergraduate students. He also spends considerable time on research and writing related to academic advising, administration and leadership, and strategic leadership. Jeffrey is striving to become both a servant and a leader and to maintain the paradoxical balance that conjoins the two. It is his sincere hope that this work will assist others in the same journey.



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