

# A review of servant leadership attributes: developing a practical model

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## Abstract

Servant leadership is an increasingly popular concept in the repertoire of leadership styles. While an intuitively attractive concept, it is systematically undefined and not yet supported by empirical research. Reviews the servant leadership literature with the intent to develop a preliminary theoretical framework. Builds a foundation for categorizing and appraising the functional and accompanying attributes of servant leaders. Once categorized, a formative, rational servant leadership attribute model is constructed. The authors call for further development of the model and empirical research to support it.

Various writers espouse servant leadership as a valid, modern theory for organizational leadership. For example, Greenleaf (1977) called for the application of servant leadership in business, education, churches, and foundations. Unfortunately, most of the servant leadership literature is philosophical. Northouse (1997, p.245) indicated one criticism of servant leadership is that it lacks support from “published, well-designed, empirical research”. Rather, the many examples used to advocate the theory are mostly “anecdotal in nature” (Northouse, 1997, p. 245). Consequently, the theory lacks sufficient scientific evidence to justify its widespread acceptance at this point in time.

## Purpose

The primary purpose of this article is to examine the existing literature that relates to the concept of servant leadership and thereby develop a researchable model of the theory. Based on the literature, the paper builds a foundation for categorizing and appraising the attributes of servant leaders. Thereafter, the article assimilates the servant leadership attributes into a rational model. The model of servant leadership provides a foundation for practical application, as well as for future research.

## Importance of this review

Greenleaf (1978, p. 77) described what he called “the leadership crisis”. He argued that colleges, universities, and seminaries have failed in the responsibility to prepare young people for leadership roles in society. According to Bennis and Nanus (1997, p. 2), “the need [for leadership] was never so great. A chronic crisis of governance – that is, the

pervasive incapacity of organizations to cope with the expectations of their constituents – is now an overwhelming factor worldwide”. Therefore, the subject of servant leadership is important to all types of organizations. It offers the potential to improve organizational leadership in many settings.

## Introduction to servant leadership theory

Optimally, the prime motivation for leadership should be a desire to serve (Baggett, 1997; Batten, 1997; Block, 1993; Briner and Pritchard, 1998; Covey, 1990; Fairholm, 1997; Gaston, 1987; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Manz, 1998; Oster, 1991; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998; Senge, 1995; Snyder *et al.*, 1994; Turner, 2000). Servant leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers. Self-interest should not motivate servant leadership; rather, it should ascend to a higher plane of motivation that focuses on the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977; Pollard, 1996; Wilkes, 1996). According to Nair (1994, p. 59):

As long as power dominates our thinking about leadership, we cannot move toward a higher standard of leadership. We must place service at the core; for even though power will always be associated with leadership, it has only one legitimate use: service.

## Servant leadership attributes

If servant leadership is different from other forms of leadership, then one should be able to observe characteristics and behaviors in such leaders that are distinctive. Unfortunately, the literature regarding servant leadership is rather indeterminate, somewhat ambiguous, and mostly anecdotal. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the existing



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servant leadership literature is a potpourri of different literature styles ranging from books to journals, popular press to research, there is enough consistency in the literature to make it possible to discern characteristics or attributes that should exist among such leaders.

Larry Spears (1998), CEO of the Greenleaf Center, concluded that Robert Greenleaf's writings incorporated ten major attributes of servant leadership. These included:

- 1 listening;
- 2 empathy;
- 3 healing;
- 4 awareness;
- 5 persuasion;
- 6 conceptualization;
- 7 foresight;
- 8 stewardship;
- 9 commitment to the growth of people; and
- 10 building community.

However, Spears (1998, p. 6) stated, "these ten characteristics of servant leadership are by no means exhaustive". Subsequent writers on the subject have specifically identified other attributes that are consistent with Greenleaf's writings and appropriately included in a review of servant leadership. The overall literature reveals at least 20 distinguishable attributes of servant leadership. The 20 attributes listed hereafter include all of the Greenleaf characteristics in some form or another. Listening, persuasion, and stewardship are specifically listed among the 20, while the rest are incorporated under broader categories. For example, conceptualization and foresight fall under the "vision" category.

Nine of the identified attributes are classified in this article as functional attributes. Their classification as functional attributes primarily results from their repetitive prominence in the literature. They are listed hereafter along with references to the primary writers who espouse the respective attribute in relationship to servant leadership:

- 1 *Vision* (Covey, 1996; De Pree, 1997; Fairholm, 1998; Ford, 1991; Greenleaf, 1977; Malphurs, 1996; Melrose, 1995; Miller, 1995; Neuschel, 1998).
- 2 *Honesty* (Covey, 1996; Fairholm, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Nair, 1994; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998; Winston, 1999).
- 3 *Integrity* (Covey, 1996; Fairholm, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Nair, 1994; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998; Winston, 1999).
- 4 *Trust* (Covey, 1990; De Pree, 1997; Fairholm, 1998; Ford, 1991; Greenleaf,

1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Melrose, 1995; Miller, 1995; Neuschel, 1998).

- 5 *Service* (Covey, 1990; De Pree 1997; Fairholm, 1997; Ford, 1991; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Nair, 1994; Neuschel, 1998; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998).
- 6 *Modeling* (Covey, 1990; Briner and Pritchard, 1998; De Pree, 1992; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Malphurs, 1996; Miller, 1995; Pollard, 1996).
- 7 *Pioneering* (Covey, 1996; Greenleaf, 1980; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Melrose, 1997; Miller, 1995; Nair, 1994; Neuschel, 1998).
- 8 *Appreciation of others* (Autry, 2001; Covey, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Pollard, 1996; Winston, 1999).
- 9 *Empowerment* (Covey, 1990; De Pree 1989; Fairholm, 1998; Ford, 1991; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Melrose, 1997; Miller, 1995; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998).

Functional attributes are the operative qualities, characteristics, and distinctive features belonging to leaders and observed through specific leader behaviors in the workplace. The functional attributes are the effective characteristics of servant leadership. They are identifiable characteristics that actuate leadership responsibilities. Each functional attribute is distinct, yet they are all interrelated. In some cases, the attributes reciprocally influence one another.

In addition to the functional attributes, the literature identifies other characteristics that are classified herein as accompanying attributes of servant leadership. These include:

- *Communication* (Melrose, 1995; Neuschel, 1998; Nix, 1997).
- *Credibility* (Kouzes and Posner, 1993; McKenna, 1989; Neuschel, 1998).
- *Competence* (De Pree 1997; Fairholm, 1998; Greenleaf, 1977).
- *Stewardship* (De Pree 1997; Fairholm, 1998; Gaston, 1987; Nix, 1997; Spears, 1998).
- *Visibility* (Cedar, 1987; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Melrose, 1995).
- *Influence* (Covey, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Malphurs, 1996).
- *Persuasion* (Covey, 1990; De Pree, 1997; Greenleaf, 1980).
- *Listening* (Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Neuschel, 1998; Roberts, 1987).
- *Encouragement* (Nix, 1997; Pollard, 1996; Spears, 1998).
- *Teaching* (Fairholm, 1998; Ford, 1991; Neuschel, 1998; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998).

- *Delegation* (Covey, 1990; Fairholm, 1997; Melrose, 1997; Neuschel, 1998; Pollard, 1996).

The accompanying attributes appear to supplement and augment the functional attributes. They are not secondary in nature; rather, they are complementary and, in some cases, prerequisites to effective servant leadership.

Since servant leadership is nearly void of supporting empirical research, the aforementioned classification of attributes as functional or accompanying is clearly subject to debate. Furthermore, future research may reveal additional attributes that are not yet prominent in the literature stream. These are simply unavoidable problems inherent in a theory that is in its formative years. Nonetheless, until empirical research verifies the attributes of servant leadership, the classifications included herein are useful for structuring analytical study. The functional attributes and their corresponding accompanying attributes appear in Table I. The review that follows defines and examines each of the attributes more closely.

### Vision

From a leadership perspective, vision is “an ideal and unique image of the future” (Kouzes and Posner, 1995, p. 95). Greenleaf (1977, pp. 21-2) used the terms foresight and conceptualizing to describe vision. He said the servant leader “needs to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable”. Consequently, a central role of the servant leader is establishing a strategic vision for the organization (Batten, 1997; Bennis, 1989a, b, 1997; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Block, 1987; Burns, 1978; Covey, 1996; De Pree, 1997; Fairholm, 1997, 1998; Farling *et al.*, 1999; Ford, 1991; Greenleaf, 1977, 1980; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Lopez, 1995; Malphurs, 1996; Manz, 1998; Maxwell,

**Table I**

Servant leadership attributes – according to the existing literature

Functional attributes	Accompanying attributes
1. Vision	1. Communication
2. Honesty	2. Credibility
3. Integrity	3. Competence
4. Trust	4. Stewardship
5. Service	5. Visibility
6. Modeling	6. Influence
7. Pioneering	7. Persuasion
8. Appreciation of others	8. Listening
9. Empowerment	9. Encouragement
	10. Teaching
	11. Delegation

1998; McKenna, 1989; Melrose, 1995, 1997; Miller, 1995; Nanus, 1989, 1992; Neuschel, 1998; Oster, 1991; Roberts, 1987; Senge, 1990; Snyder *et al.*, 1994; Turner, 2000; Wenderlich, 1997).

One of the important ways leadership differs from management is leaders establish a vision for the future (Kotter, 1990a). The vision must be compelling, inspiring, and empowering (Bennis, 1997). Vision unites organizational members and inspires greatness (Miller, 1995). Developing a vision for the future helps facilitate organizational change and transformation (Miles, 1997). A good vision is not based on “egocentric ambition” (many tyrants possess a vision), rather it incorporates a value system that protects and promotes organizational integrity, while encouraging “learning and adaptation” (Rowell and Berry, 1993, p. 22). Senge (1990) stipulated that a shared vision is vital for establishing and maintaining a “learning organization.”

### Communication

Leaders must articulate and communicate their vision (Bennis, 1989b, 1997; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Block, 1987; Kotter, 1990a, b; Melrose, 1997; Neuschel, 1998; Ulrich, 1996). Some researchers argue that overall leadership effectiveness depends upon developing sufficient communication skills (Bass, 1990; Hackman and Johnson, 1996; Nix, 1997). The effective leader must articulate the mission of the organization in a convincing and inspiring fashion (Block, 1987; Melrose, 1997; Neuschel, 1998; Roberts, 1987).

The most important commitment a leader makes in relation to a vision is “the commitment to model the vision through one’s own behavior in a visible and consistent manner” (Snyder *et al.*, 1994, p. 100). Consequently, the leader’s values demonstrated through behavior give life to the vision (Melrose, 1997). Nanus (1992, p. 138) called this process “personifying the vision”. He noted the vision process is not complete until all the stakeholders “viscerally understand where the organization is headed and have a high degree of shared commitment to the vision” (Nanus, 1992, p. 140). People must also buy into the leader before they will accept the leader’s vision (Maxwell, 1998).

### Honesty and integrity

Whether or not followers “buy into” a leader largely depends on the leader’s character. In fact, Bennis and Nanus (1997, p. ix) argue that “leadership is about character”. The one character attribute that is most important in establishing credibility is honesty (Kouzes

and Posner, 1993). Honesty is the most admired quality of leaders, followed by their forward-looking nature, ability to inspire, and competence (Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Posner and Schmidt, 1992).

Both honesty and integrity are integral parts of good leadership (Batten, 1997; Covey, 1996; Fairholm, 1998; Manz, 1998; Nix, 1997; Northouse, 1997; Rinehart, 1998; Sanders, 1994; Wenderlich, 1997; Winston, 1999).

Honesty and integrity are nearly synonymous, but honesty relates more to truthfulness, whereas integrity reflects adherence to an overall moral code (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992). Northouse (1997) says that integrity incorporates honesty and trustworthiness. Integrity is also closely related to ethics (Kerr, 1988). Servant leadership holds much promise as a means for improving the ethical cultures of organizations (Giampetro-Meyer *et al.*, 1998).

Bennis (1989b, p. 117) stated the best qualities of real leaders are integrity, dedication, magnanimity, humility, openness, and creativity. He conjectured that our failure to tap into these qualities explains our leadership shortage. Clawson (1999, pp. 46-9) maintained that the moral foundation of effective leadership incorporates integrity resulting from four essential values:

- 1 truth-telling;
- 2 promise-keeping;
- 3 fairness; and
- 4 respect for the individual.

In essence, what people want and what organizations need are leaders with integrity who also have the courage to be honest in the face of challenging and potentially self-damaging circumstances.

### **Credibility**

Honesty and integrity facilitate interpersonal credibility. Credibility is “the quality, capability, or power to elicit belief” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992). McKenna (1989) argued leaders should have three essential attributes:

- 1 confidence;
- 2 credibility; and
- 3 competence.

Credibility is the essential ingredient in good leadership; it is “how leaders earn the trust and confidence of their constituents” (Kouzes and Posner, 1993, p. xvii). “Credible leaders have the personal habits, values, traits, and competencies to engender trust and commitment from those who take their direction” (Ulrich, 1996, p. 215).

Having credibility as an influence source establishes leader legitimacy (Hollander, 1978). Bass (1990, p. 301) maintained, “legitimation involves gaining credibility as being trustworthy and informative”. Leaders build or earn credibility over time (Behr, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 1993). Hackman and Johnson (1996) identified competence, trustworthiness (character); and dynamism as the most significant elements of credibility. In addition, “demonstrating relevant expertise and keeping informed about technical matters and relevant developments” enhances leadership credibility (Yukl, 1998, p. 199).

### **Trust**

“Trust is the root of all great leadership” (Martin, 1998, p. 41). It is “firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992). Trust is the “willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer *et al.*, 1995, p. 712). It is “only through direct interaction that we can develop a deep conviction in others of our basic trustworthiness” (Fairholm, 1994, p. 111).

Establishing trust is one of the most essential parts of good leadership, especially servant leadership (Bennis, 1989a, 1997; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Covey, 1990; De Pree, 1989, 1997; Fairholm, 1994, 1997, 1998; Ford, 1991; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, 1995; Martin, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Melrose, 1995, 1997; Nanus, 1989; Neuschel, 1998; Ryan and Oestreich, 1998; Shaw, 1997). “Trust in organizations is functional” (De Pree, 1997, p. 124). It is one of the most significant factors influencing leader-member relations, leader effectiveness, and productivity (Bennis, 1997; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Covey, 1990; De Pree, 1997; Fairholm, 1994, 1997, 1998; Martin, 1998; Ryan and Oestreich, 1998). A reputation of trustworthiness affects follower reliance and confidence in any given decision-making situation (Fairholm, 1997; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Yukl, 1998). Trust is also important in interpersonal communications (Giffin and Patton, 1971).

Leaders must demonstrate concern for people and practice integrity in order to build trust (Shaw, 1997). Honesty and integrity are also essential to building interpersonal and organizational trust (Bennis, 1989a; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; De Pree, 1997; Fairholm, 1994; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Nanus, 1989;

Neuschel, 1998; Shaw, 1997; Yukl, 1998). According to De Pree (1997, p. 127), “trust grows when people see leaders translate their personal integrity into organizational fidelity”. In the absence of trust, fear dominates organizations and inhibits productivity (Ryan and Oestreich, 1998).

### Competence

Leader competence is essential to establishing trust. “For trust to be maintained over time, leaders must demonstrate competence in their jobs – just like everyone else” (De Pree, 1997, p. 321). Competence is the state of being well qualified or a specific range of knowledge and ability (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992). Today’s leaders must possess new skills, knowledge, and abilities that give them task competence among their followers (Bass, 1990; Fairholm, 1997, 1998). Bennis (1997, p. 196) identified the following as the “tripod of leadership”:

- competence;
- drive; and
- integrity.

Greenleaf (1977, p. 16) said, “one who states the goal [vision] must elicit trust . . . leaders do not elicit trust unless one has confidence in their values and competence”. Likewise, Maxwell (1998, p. 58) said, “to build trust, a leader must exemplify competence, connection, character”. Expertise, reliability, and other competence factors also affect interpersonal trust (Bennis, 1997).

### Service

“First and foremost, a good leader serves others” (Baggett, 1997, p. 21). The fundamental motivation for leadership should be a desire to serve (Baggett, 1997; Batten, 1997; Block, 1993; Covey, 1990; Fairholm, 1997; Gaston, 1987; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Manz, 1998; Oster, 1991; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998; Senge, 1995; Snyder *et al.*, 1994; Winston, 1999). “It is not the lot of the leader to be served but rather his/her privilege to serve” (Neuschel, 1998, p. 135).

Service is the core of servant leadership (Block, 1993; De Pree 1997; Fairholm, 1997, 1998; Ford, 1991; Gaston, 1987; Greenleaf, 1977; McKenna, 1989; Oster, 1991; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998). Service in leadership has a “moral imperative” (Nair, 1994, p. 71). “Ultimately the choice we make is between service and self-interest;” unfortunately, “it seems the choice [for service] is rarely made” (Block, 1993, pp. 9, 15). The leader who does choose a service role sets about providing the

resources others need to achieve success (Fairholm, 1997). “They serve by making available to followers information, time, attention, material and other resources and the higher corporate purposes that give meaning to the work” (Fairholm, 1998, p. 140). Leaders prepare others to embrace a service orientation when they model service through their own actions (Fairholm, 1997).

### Stewardship

A fundamental part of service is stewardship (Nix, 1997). Stewardship involves managing the property or affairs of another person (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992). It is a position of trust and service. Leaders and their followers are generally stewards or agents of the organizations they lead. Servant leaders should incorporate stewardship (Gaston, 1987). Spears (1995, 1998) cited stewardship among the ten critical characteristics of servant leadership.

Stewardship encompasses empowerment in that it recognizes that both leaders and followers must be stewards (Block, 1993; Fairholm, 1997, 1998). It involves “choosing partnership over patriarchy” and “distributing ownership and responsibility” (Block, 1993, pp. 23, 25). Block (1993) called for a paradigm shift in leadership toward stewardship based on service. Stewardship of this type involves honesty and accountability; it is not merely entitlement (Block, 1993; De Pree, 1997).

### Modeling

Modeling, in the form of a visible personal example, is an important part of servant leadership (Batten, 1997; Behr, 1998; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Covey, 1990; De Pree, 1992; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, 1995; Malphurs, 1996; Miller, 1995; Pollard, 1996; Schein, 1992). Covey (1990) believed modeling is the foundation for leader influence. “Leaders model the way through personal example and dedicated execution” (Kouzes and Posner, 1995, p. 13). Servant leaders attract “followers into commitment, into dedication, into discipline, and into excellence” (Briner and Pritchard, 1998).

Modeling has many potential effects upon an organization. It is an important way to focus upon and establish a leader’s organizational vision (Nanus, 1992; Snyder *et al.*, 1994). Leaders embed attributes in their organizational cultures by their actions and reactions (Schein, 1992). The behaviors of senior leaders also establish the ethical tone in their organizations (Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Kouzes and Posner, 1993). The leader is responsible for the environment and one way

to influence it “is to demonstrate by their own behavior their commitment to the set of ethics they are trying to institutionalize” (Bennis and Nanus, 1997, p. 173). Effective leaders instill values through deeds as much as or more than through words (Malphurs, 1996).

### **Visibility**

If servant leaders want to model appropriate behavior, then visibility is essential.

Visibility is the public presence, behavior, and interactions of leaders with their followers. “The effective servant leader is highly visible in his leading and caring and comforting” (Cedar, 1987, p. 109). One means for leaders to exercise influence on group members is by their visible example (Bass, 1990, pp. 13-14). Followers must witness leaders “do what they say they will do” (Kouzes and Posner, 1993, p. 47).

Servant leaders establish appropriate power by visibly interacting with followers. Referent power, as defined in French and Raven’s (1959) power taxonomy, comes from strong interpersonal relations. It is one of the more befitting types of power for servant leaders to wield. Yukl (1998, p. 199) argues that the “obvious way to exercise referent power is through role modeling”. For example, Melrose (1995, p. 150), CEO of the Toro Corporation, states that he tries to be a visible role model of servant leadership by incorporating “some practices in my daily work regimen that illustrate what I’m asking others to do”.

### **Pioneering**

Pioneering means “to open up or prepare [a way]” or “to initiate or participate in the development of” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992). Leaders need to be “pioneers who take risks, create new paths, shape new approaches to old problems, and have strong values and beliefs that drive their actions” (Ulrich, 1996, p. 214). Leaders must be initiators (Bennis, 1997; Ford, 1991; Sanders, 1994). Bennis (1997, p. 95) declared, “leadership is all about innovating and initiating”. Leaders have a unique causal role in organizational and social change (Burns, 1978).

Servant leaders must be pioneers. They must be extraordinary agents for change (Melrose, 1997; Neuschel, 1998). In addition, servant leaders must be good decision makers (Miller, 1995). Servant leaders venture out, take risks, undertake challenges, and demonstrate courage (Greenleaf, 1980; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, 1995; Nair, 1994; Wenderlich, 1997). According to Kouzes and Posner (1995, pp. 9-10), “all

leaders challenge the process. Leaders are pioneers – people who are willing to step out into the unknown. They’re willing to take risks, to innovate and experiment in order to find new and better ways of doing things”. One way to kill creative leadership is to “emphasize managing instead of pioneering” (Bennis, 1997, p. 99). “Since the function of leadership is to produce change, setting the direction of that change is fundamental to leadership” (Kotter, 1990b, p. 42).

Pioneering may be costly because it involves change; consequently, it may involve conflict (Ford, 1991). People naturally resist leaving the security of the known to embark into the unknown (Yukl, 1998). Consequently, “leaders require courage of the highest order” (Sanders, 1994, p. 59). In addition, servant leaders must develop the influence to persuade people to follow them in new directions.

### **Influence**

Influence is a primary ingredient in effective leadership (Covey, 1990; Malphurs, 1996; Maxwell, 1998; Yukl, 1998). Maxwell (1998, p. 11) said, “the true measure of leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less”. French and Raven (1959, p. 150) defined “power in terms of influence, and influence in terms of psychological change”. Consequently, an ongoing, reciprocal relationship exists in which influence produces power and power produces influence (Willer *et al.*, 1997). Bass (1990, p. 13) provided a related perspective:

The concept of influence recognizes the fact that individuals differ in the extent to which their behaviors affect the activities of a group. It implies a reciprocal relationship between the leader and the followers, but one that is not necessarily characterized by domination, control, or induction of compliance by the leader. It merely states that leadership exercises a determining effect on the behaviors of group members and on activities of the group.

There are several categories of influence tactics, including persuasion, inspiration, consultation, ingratiation, personal appeals, exchange (bargaining), coalition-building, legitimization, and pressure (Yukl, 1998). In a field study, Yukl and Tracey (1992) found rational persuasion, inspirational appeal, and consultation the most effective influence tactics. These types of non-manipulative methods are most appropriate for pioneering servant leaders. Such leaders are influential, but they gain influence in ways that differ from traditional models (Block, 1993; Covey, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1995). Greenleaf (1977, p. 10) asserted:

A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader.

### **Persuasion**

Persuasive communication is an important element of influence in the leadership process (Bass, 1990; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Burns, 1978; De Pree, 1997; Greenleaf 1977, 1978, 1980; Yukl, 1998). Spears (1995, 1998) identified persuasion among the ten critical attributes of servant leadership. According to Greenleaf (1978, 1980), there are three primary alternatives for leaders to wield power:

- 1 coercion;
- 2 manipulation; and
- 3 persuasion.

He argued that persuasion is:

... the critical skill of servant leadership.

Such a leader is one who ventures and takes the risks of going out ahead to show the way and whom others follow, voluntarily, because they are persuaded that the leader's path is the right one – for them, probably better than they could devise for themselves (Greenleaf, 1980, p. 44).

Greenleaf (1977, p. 30) further argues that “leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by conviction rather than coercion”. Power that comes from character and persuasion is “principle-centered power” (Covey, 1990, p. 102).

Servant leaders do not attempt to control others; rather, they share their wisdom and seek to develop understanding (Lopez, 1995). Servant leaders are “consensus builders” (Crom, 1998, p. 6). Bennis (1997, p. 169) stated leaders who are “change agents” most often use “value power” – they represent and transmit admirable values. Servant leaders use power unselfishly to enhance the organization rather than themselves (Neuschel, 1998, p. 175). It is an ethical use of power (Lopez, 1995).

### **Appreciation of others**

Servant leaders visibly appreciate, value, encourage, and care for their constituents (Autry, 2001; Batten, 1997; Covey, 1990; Crom, 1998; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, 1995; Pollard, 1996; Wenderlich, 1997; Winston, 1999). “Servant leaders cherish the joy of seeing others succeed” (Baggett, 1997, p. 31). They inspire hope and courage in others by living out their convictions, facilitating positive images, and by giving love and encouragement (Kouzes and Posner, 1993). Such actions reflect appropriate,

unconditional love in the workplace and they build relationships (Batten, 1997; Covey, 1990; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Manz, 1998).

Kouzes and Posner (1993) identified a shift in focus from self to others among important trends in managerial values. According to Autry (2001, p. 20), “leadership is not about controlling people; it's about caring for people and being a useful resource for people”. Showing concern for others and making their needs and interests a priority demonstrates empathy and elicits trust (Bennis, 1997; Block, 1993; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993). Batten (1997) delineated 37 values of real leaders and included among them:

- warmth;
- caring;
- giving;
- involvement; and
- enrichment of others.

Likewise, Spears (1995, 1998) identified healing, empathy, and listening among the ten essential ingredients of servant leadership.

### **Listening**

Listening is a critical way leaders demonstrate respect and appreciation of others (Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Miller 1995; Nix, 1997; Roberts, 1987; Sanders, 1994; Turner, 2000). Servant leaders associate with and listen to those they serve (Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Neuschel, 1998; Roberts, 1987). Batten (1997, p. 53) said servant leaders “ask, listen, and hear”. The openness of leaders to receive input from others influences leader-follower trust (Bennis, 1997; Fairholm, 1998; Nanus, 1992).

“Great communicators are great listeners” (Baggett, 1997, p. 111). Some researchers argue that leaders should practice active listening, a process of participatory listening that enhances communication clarity (Fairholm, 1998; Kuczarski and Kuczarski, 1995). Leaders benefit from listening because they learn as they listen (Bennis, 1997; Maxwell, 1998; Miller, 1995; Roberts, 1987). In addition, listening is a critical aspect of delegating and empowering (Miller, 1995; Roberts, 1987).

### **Encouragement**

In addition to appreciating followers, servant leaders believe in and encourage the people they lead (Pollard, 1996). “Servant leaders are encouragers, communicators, and cheerleaders” (Turner, 2000, p. 151). Nix (1997, p. 28) suggested people should practice “intentional encouragement” in the

workplace. Commitment to the growth of people is one of the critical characteristics of servant leadership (Spears, 1995, 1998; Turner, 2000). One of the keys to empowering people is making them feel significant (Miller, 1995). Bennis and Goldsmith (1997) assert that recognition of contributors is one of the five primary values shared by effective leaders; the other four include:

- 1 clear communication;
- 2 ethical practices;
- 3 diversity in the work force; and
- 4 participatory empowerment.

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment involves the process of entrusting others – it is to invest with power or to authorize (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992).

Empowerment is a central element in excellent leadership, especially servant leadership (Bennis, 1997; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Block, 1993; Clawson, 1999; Covey, 1990, 1996; De Pree, 1989; Fairholm, 1998; Ford, 1991; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, 1995; Manz, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Melrose, 1997; Miller, 1995; Oster, 1991; Pollard, 1996; Rinehart, 1998; Snyder *et al.*, 1994; Winston, 1999). “Servant leaders multiply their leadership by empowering others to lead” (Wilkes, 1996, p. 25). Empowerment emphasizes teamwork and reflects the values of love and equality. In order to achieve empowerment, a leader’s behavior must pull rather than push people along; “a pull style of influence works by attracting and energizing people ... it motivates by identification” (Bennis and Nanus, 1997, p. 74).

The goal of empowerment is to create many leaders at all levels of the organization (Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Kotter, 1990b). “Wise leaders lead others to lead themselves” (Manz, 1998, p. 99). In essence, servant leadership involves turning the traditional organizational pyramid upside down (Blanchard, 1997; Turner, 2000). Miller (1995) suggests that servant leaders should establish vision and direction, but delegate decisions about how to reach the goals. He cautions, however, that delegation is not abdication; rather, it involves both trust and accountability.

### **Teaching**

Leaders who want to empower must be teachers (Ford, 1991). Leaders are those who bring forth and develop the talents of others (Baggett, 1997; Batten, 1997; Snyder *et al.*, 1994). Leaders shape and alter the “motives and values and goals of followers through the vital teaching role of leadership” (Burns, 1978, p. 425). Part of the leader’s role in

maintaining a learning organization is serving as a teacher (Bennis, 1997; Fairholm, 1997, 1998; Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski, 1995; Pollard, 1996). “The leader’s role is one of learning and then teaching principles and values so followers can lead themselves” (Fairholm, 1998, p. 64).

“Servant leaders equip and develop people in ways that empower and release them” (Rinehart, 1998, p. 39). Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski (1995, p. 13) maintain that leaders should be “Socratic teachers, asking questions to elicit understanding”. Leaders teach followers about trust by providing an appropriate example (Neuschel, 1998). Also, coaching is an important form of teaching (Block, 1987; Crom, 1998; Fairholm, 1998).

### **Delegation**

Servant leadership involves “delegating responsibility and nurturing participatory leadership” (Neuschel, 1998, p. 151). It involves offering choices and encouraging followers to take ownership of responsibilities (Fairholm, 1997; Kouzes and Posner, 1993). “Servant leaders share their responsibility and authority with others to meet a greater need” (Wilkes, 1996, p. 24). Such leaders empower their employees by providing opportunities for them to do their best (Oster, 1991). Leaders can also influence and empower people by structuring their organizational or work environments in ways that make workers feel more effective and motivated (Miles, 1997; Pollard, 1996).

Delegation offers the advantages of:

- improved decision quality;
- greater subordinate commitment to decisions;
- job enrichment; and
- improved time management for leaders (Yukl, 1998).

According to Sanders (1994, p. 138), “the degree to which a leader is able to delegate work is a measure of his success. Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away (Fairholm, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Melrose, 1997). Unfortunately, Argyris (1998) argues that delegation and empowerment are still mostly illusions because executives tend to undermine genuine empowerment.

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## **Summary and model of servant leadership attributes**

In summary, the literature reveals nine functional attributes and 11 accompanying attributes of servant leadership. These attributes constitute the foundation for a rudimentary model of servant leadership



theory. Since little empirical research currently supports the servant leadership concept, any model that attempts to portray the theory is clearly subject to legitimate criticism. Therefore, the model that follows is simply a hypothetical construct put forth for the purpose of generating discussion and analysis. The “working model” is valuable because it serves as a foundation for understanding, applying, researching, and developing the servant leadership concept.

The cognitive characteristics of leaders constitute the starting point for a servant leadership model. Many writers argue that the attributes of servant leadership grow out of the values and core beliefs of the individual leaders (Batten, 1997; Covey, 1990; Farling *et al.*, 1999; Ford, 1991; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Malphurs, 1996; Melrose, 1997; Nair, 1994; Rinehart, 1998; Russell, 2001). According to Neuschel (1998, p. 47), “the image of the leader is not his superficial self but rather the sum total of a system of values demonstrated over time”. Consequently, since values are the core beliefs that determine an individual’s principles, they are the independent variables in a model of servant leadership. The dependent variable is manifest servant leadership.

The values of leaders incarnate through the functional attributes of servant leaders. Consequently, the functional attributes identified in the previous literature review are subsets or descriptors of the dependent variable. They determine the form and effectiveness of servant leadership. In addition, the previously identified accompanying attributes impact on the translation of values into functional attributes. Therefore, the accompanying attributes are moderating variables; they affect the level and intensity of the functional attributes. The model for servant leadership is shown in Figure 1.

Model 1 looks only at the relationship between leader attributes and manifest servant leadership. Additionally, servant leadership is a controllable variable that affects organizations. Consequently, servant leadership itself ultimately becomes an independent variable that affects the subsequent dependent variable – organizational performance. However, mediating or intervening variables, such as organizational culture and employee attitudes, may influence the effectiveness of servant leadership and have a governing effect upon organizational performance. For example, an organization’s established communication systems might intervene by facilitating or inhibiting the servant process. Likewise, preexisting organizational values

might promote or limit servant leadership. There may also be powerful persons or groups in organizations that mediate servant leadership. Consequently, Model 2 is a more encompassing model for servant leadership (see Figure 2).

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### **Implications of the models for future application and research**

The servant leadership models provide practitioners and researchers many opportunities for application and study in the servant leadership arena. For practitioners the models establish characteristics that constitute servant leadership. In addition, the models point to leadership behaviors that can be adapted to facilitate the servant leadership process. From a research perspective, it would be useful to define and examine what personal values are commonplace among servant leaders. In addition, worthwhile research might determine if the values of servant leaders correlate with excellent organizational performance.

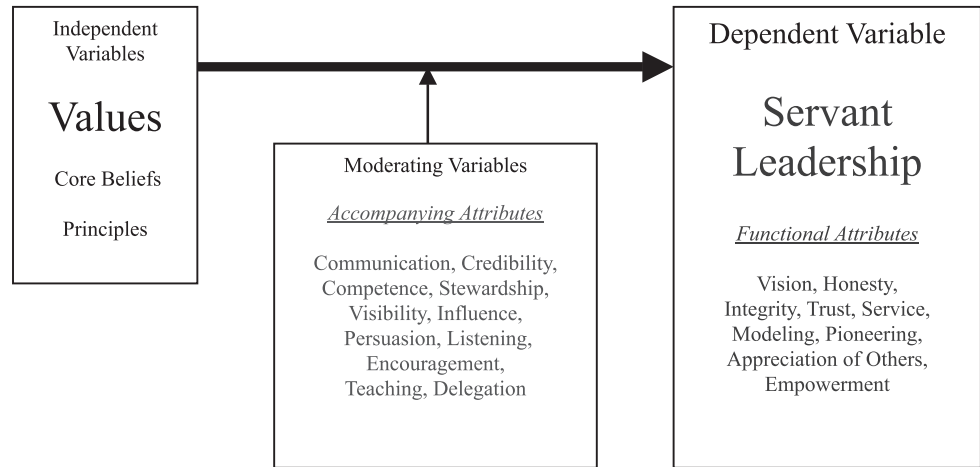
The attributes of the dependent variable, servant leadership, as well as those of the moderating variables need extensive examination. Researchers need to establish the traits, characteristics, and behaviors of genuine servant leaders through empirical study. Each attribute of servant leadership needs research to clarify the character and importance of the attribute. Valid research might also alter the list of functional and accompanying attributes of servant leadership. Researchers should not only refine the characteristics of genuine servant leadership, but also take the next step of analyzing the impact of servant leadership on organizations.

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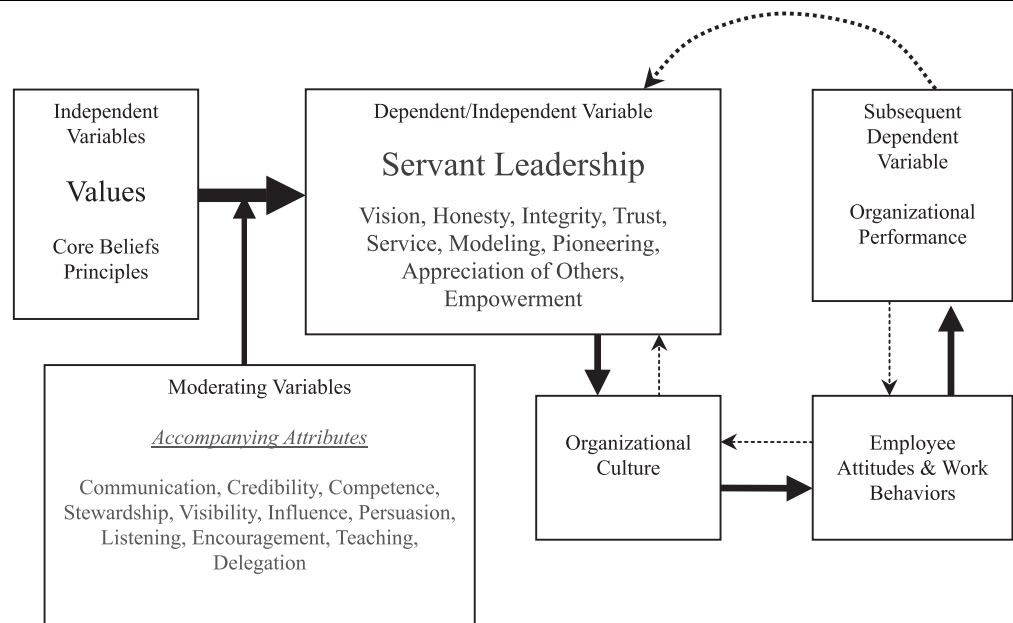
### **Conclusions**

Many theorists and researchers espouse servant leadership as a valid model for modern organizational leadership. However, servant leadership theory is somewhat undefined and not yet supported by sufficient empirical research. The existing literature identifies nine functional and 11 accompanying attributes of servant leadership. The attributes identified herein provide the basis for a model of servant leadership, which in turn provides the structural foundation for research regarding the theory, as well as direction for practical implementation. Now the task is to take the literature and theoretical constructs into field research and real-world application.

**Figure 1**  
Servant leadership model 1



**Figure 2**  
Servant leadership model 2



Servant leadership is a concept that can potentially change organizations and societies because it stimulates both personal and organizational metamorphoses. “Becoming servant leaders engages us in personal, internal self-change and changes our outward behavior” (Fairholm, 1997, p. 149). If countless individuals transform into servant leaders, infinitely more people would benefit. Servant leadership offers the potential to positively revolutionize interpersonal work relations and organizational life. It is a concept that longs for widespread implementation.

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