

Servant- Leadership as an Effective Model for Educational Leadership and Management: *first to serve, then to lead*

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In order to transform ourselves as leaders, we must recognize and shift the paradigm through which we view leadership itself. (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997)

Introduction

The following paper briefly details the introduction of the concept of servant-leadership to Manitoba's educational

community. The concept of servant-leadership is explained and the ten characteristics related to this form of leadership are described. Each of the educational stakeholders is identified and the particular approach taken for the concept's introduction and development is examined in each circumstance. Reference is also made to future directions for servant-leadership as a paradigm for educational leadership and management in Manitoba. Last, recommendations are suggested to promote awareness, integration and development of the

- concept in the academy and other education forums.

Leadership Theory

A paradigm is a framework, a construct, a contextual perspective through which we view our experience (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). The old leadership paradigm of the 19th and early 20th centuries suggested three particular beliefs: (1) that leaders were born and not made (your lineage or pedigree class endowed you with the look and personality of a leader – an hierarchical position); (2) good management made successful organizations (the 19th century model is still present that suggests that with good management we will get short term results, be successful and streamline our systems); and (3) avoid failure at all costs (this belief promoted risk avoidance and fear) (Bennis and Goldsmith, 1997; Block, 1996; Hickman, 1998). Leadership was defined in the literature as being hierarchical, patriarchal, coercive, and related to wealth and influence (Bennis, 1997; Block, 1993; Elstain, 1990; French, 1992; Hickman, 1998; Matusak, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1992; Weiss, 2002).

The paradoxical term servant-leadership is inclusive of personal service to society regardless of position (Block, 1996). This premise of a leadership-service combination was in direct opposition to the hierarchical model of leadership. In hierarchical leadership the power of the leader was visible and obeyed by those lower in the organization (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard, & Schubert, 1998; Senge, 1990); whereas, in servant-leadership, it was through strategies of service and stewardship, that a leader was identified by the people to be a leader among equals or “primus inter pares” (Greenleaf, 1976; DePree, 1989; DePree, 1992).

Servant-Leadership

The term “servant-leadership”, a new leadership paradigm, was introduced by Robert Kiefner Greenleaf (1904-1990) in his first essay entitled, *The Servant as Leader*, which he wrote in 1970 at the age of 66. Greenleaf worked first as a lineman and eventually moved into organizational management at AT&T between the mid 1920s and 1960s. He lectured at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), Dartmouth, and the Harvard Business School. Greenleaf (Spears, 1998a) tells the story of how he discovered the concept of servant-leadership through reading a small book called, *Journey to the East*, by Herman

Hesse (1956). The book tells the story of a band of men who set out on a long journey. Accompanying the men was a fellow named Leo; his job was to care for the band of men by doing all of the menial chores and providing for their comfort. The journey progressed well until Leo disappeared. At this point, the journey was aborted by the travellers or band of men, when they fell into disarray without Leo.

Many years later, the narrator of the story encountered Leo. It was at this point that the narrator realized Leo was the titular head of the order that sponsored the journey. He was the leader, but his nature was that of a servant. His leadership was bestowed upon him and could be taken away by the band of men. His desire to serve the group of men came from his heart and was the real person. Leo wanted to be of service to the band of men. Leo was a servant first by taking care of their basic needs each day while on the journey. Greenleaf believed the message of the story was that one has to first serve society and through one’s service a person will be recognized as a leader. Leadership must be about service (Spears, 1998). Greenleaf (1991b) states in the first essay he wrote,

“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. 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 is: 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 in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?”

Greenleaf (Frick & Spears, 1996) was a Quaker by faith and practice and as such believed strongly in the equality of all human beings. Although Greenleaf worked with educational, business and industrial organizations, he often worked with religious orders of nuns and also with women in the healthcare profession (Spears, 1998a). His goal was for the development of strong, effective, caring communities in all segments of our society (Greenleaf, 1976; Greenleaf, 1978; Spears, 1998b).

An important realization is identified by Greenleaf (2002). He tells of the subtleness of the servant-leader in action and how they are

viewed by others: "They do not see the servant-leadership in action as you saw it. And that may be the fundamental key. Effective servant-leaders can be so subtle about it that all anybody is likely to see is the result. They don't see the cause (Greenleaf, 2002)."

Ten Characteristics

Autry (2001) states that the transition to a culture of servant-leadership requires time for the development of necessary features or qualities for a servant-leader. Spears, the Executive Director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in Indianapolis, Indiana and a disciple of Greenleaf's teachings (1998b) identify ten characteristics of servant-leadership. They are:

- Listening
- Empathy
- Healing
- Awareness
- Persuasion
- Conceptualization
- Foresight
- Stewardship
- Commitment to the growth of others
- Building communities.

Possibly these qualities are in a hierarchy that begins with the internal action of listening. Descriptions of each of the ten characteristics follows:

1. *Listening*- This refers to a deep commitment to listening to others. Autry (2001); Frick & Spears, (1996); Greenleaf, (1991b); Bennis and Goldsmith (1997) emphasize the need for silence, reflection, meditation and active listening and actually "hearing" what is said and unsaid. The best communication forces you to listen (DePree, 1989). Effective leaders are great communicators and must be good listeners, to themselves (through their inner voice), as well as to others.
2. *Empathy*- A good servant-leader strives to understand and empathizes with others. But this understanding should be supportive as opposed to patronizing. "It is a misuse of our power (as leaders) to take responsibility for solving problems that belong to others" (Block, 1996). Greenleaf (Spears, 1998) wrote that trust could be developed through the use of empathy when he stated: "Individuals grow taller when those who lead them empathize and when they are accepted for what they are, even though their performance may be judged

critically in terms of what they are capable of doing. Leaders who empathize and who fully accept those who go with them on this basis are more likely to be trusted."

3. *Healing*- The servant-leader has the potential to heal themselves and others. Sturnick (1998) writes extensively about six stages of healing leadership. One must first have an understanding about personal and/or institutional health. She describes the six stages as: (1) consciousness of health or being honestly aware of one's state of health which is often triggered by an event e.g., a heart attack; (2) willingness to change and realizing that one must do certain things to achieve improved health; (3) a teachable moment or a time when one seeks information or advice; (4) healthy support systems are needed to change behaviour and may include one person, a group or an organization; (5) immersion in the duality of our inner lives and the realization of the good and bad or the strengths and weaknesses we each have; and (6) eventually the return to service in leadership through seeking honest answers from friends and colleagues. Sturnick (1998) warns that it is not always possible as a healthy leader to find followers and she believes that, "sick organizations really do contaminate". Gardiner (1998) suggests that healing can come through just quietly being and that a "quiet presence is an act of renewal", and Greenleaf, a lifelong meditator, tells that he views the action of meditation as a service because one is taking time to think about things, to reflect and he writes in Gardiner (1998) "I prefer to meditate; I have come to view my meditating as serving."
4. *Awareness*- The servant-leader has a general awareness, especially self-awareness. One develops awareness through self reflection, through listening to what others tell us about ourselves, through being continually open to learning, and by making the connection from what we know and believe to what we say or do. This is called in the vernacular, "walking your talk" (Bennis and Goldsmith, 1997).
5. *Persuasion*- The servant-leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. Greenleaf speaks in

➤ Frick and Spears (1996) about persuasion:

“One is persuaded upon arriving at a feeling of rightness about a belief or action through one’s own intuitive sense, persuasion is usually too undramatic to be newsworthy...Significant instances of persuasion may be known to only one or a few, and they are rarely noted in history. Simply put, consensus is a method of using persuasion in a group.”

6. *Conceptualization*- The servant-leader seeks to nurture their own abilities to dream great dreams. Greenleaf describes conceptual talent in Frick and Spears (1998) as:

“The ability to see the whole in the perspective of history- past and future- to state and adjust goals, to evaluate, to analyze, and to foresee contingencies a long way ahead. Leadership, in the sense of going out ahead to show the way, is more conceptual than operating. The conceptualizer, at his or her best, is a persuader and a relation builder.”

7. *Foresight*- This is the ability to foresee or know the likely outcome of a situation. Greenleaf (1991b) says it is a better than average guess about “what” is going to happen “when” in the future. He says it is “the lead that a leader has” (Greenleaf (1991b)) and goes on to state:

“Foresight is seen as a wholly rational process, the product of a constantly running internal computer that deals with intersecting series and random inputs and is vastly more complicated than anything technology has yet produced. Foresight means regarding the events of the instant moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events- with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future .”

8. *Stewardship*- Greenleaf believed all members of an institution or organization play significant roles in holding their institutions in trust (caring for the well being of the institution and serving the needs of others in the institution) for the greater good of society. Peter Block (1996) suggests that stewardship is “accountability without control or compliance”. One has the desire to serve without any pressure and not in response to someone’s request or

demand, but because they are internally motivated to do so. DePree (1989), an American businessman, also emphasizes the need for us to make a contribution to society. “The art of leadership requires us to think about the leader-as-steward in terms of relationships: of assets and legacy, of momentum and effectiveness, of civility and values.” Service is the rent we pay for living. Sergiovanni (1992) explains that stewardship, “involves the leader’s personal responsibility to manage her or his life and affairs with proper regard for the rights of other people and for the common welfare.”

9. *Commitment to the growth of people*- The servant-leader is committed to the individual growth of human beings and will do everything they can to nurture others. “The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving?” (DePree, 1989)

10. *Building community*- The servant-leader seeks to identify some means for building community. There are several approaches to building community outlined in the literature; three approaches mentioned include giving back through service to the community, investing financially into the community, and caring about one’s community. When Pinchot (in Hesselbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard & Schubert (1998)) considers the concept of community he suggests that the person who gives or contributes or invests the most to a community has the highest status; in other words, “giving it away, rather than keeping it, earns status.” Sergiovanni (1994) states that caring is an integral part of shared community. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (in Hesselbein et al (1998)) emphasize the sense of belonging defined by a shared sense of purpose that does not eliminate one’s uniqueness but focuses all energies into a resilient community.

Connecting with Educational Partners

The concept of servant-leadership was introduced to key educational institutions and organizations in Manitoba over the past five years. During two Summer Leadership Institutes sponsored by the Manitoba Council for Leadership in Education (MCLE) 200

educators from across the province learned about the concept and its application into their schools. The Manitoba Teachers Society (MTS) sponsored a half-day session to introduce servant-leadership to 65 teachers aspiring to school administration. The Manitoba School Improvement Project which works predominantly with secondary schools had the topic of Invitational Education-Servant Leadership presented at their May Retreat in Gimli, Manitoba.

The Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) brought servant-leadership to the attention of over 400 trustees at their annual conference in the keynote address. The following year many school divisions were forced to amalgamate by the provincial government. Tension, frustration and anger were prevalent. A full day session was held with the trustees to analyze servant-leadership, heal wounds, and provide a unity of purpose to their role. Last summer, the annual Canadian School Board Association Congress was held in Winnipeg and two sessions were presented on Servant-Leadership to sixty trustees and superintendents from across Canada.

Several schools provided staff professional development opportunities to learn about servant-leadership and to integrate the concept into their school improvement plans. In addition, three University of Manitoba Faculty of Education courses required three different books by Robert K. Greenleaf to form part of the required reading, reflection, and analysis. Two courses were Leadership and the other was directed toward inclusionary education and the role of special education resource teachers. These courses have been repeated several times and have included over 250 people. Networks of teachers and administrators are now pondering the prospect of Greenleaf study groups; several will attend the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in Indianapolis, Indiana for their yearly conferences held in May and June. Several already have.

Response from Educators

Three hundred educators have responded to three incomplete sentences after lengthy study of Greenleaf. The incomplete sentences and their most common perceptions/responses are recorded below:

1. A servant-leader is:
 - A true humanitarian
 - Puts others before self
 - Caring and compassionate
 - Balanced
 - One who empowers others

- A servant first, then a leader
 - Transformational
2. In my school (work environment) I will introduce servant-leadership by:
 - Modeling/ my actions/ example
 - Serving my colleagues and students
 - Providing in-service/ acting as a speaker
 - Interpersonal group activities
 - E-mailing Greenleaf quotes
 - Discussion at staff meetings
 3. The most difficult concept of servant-leadership is:
 - Consistency
 - Living it and living in the now
 - Trust
 - Sacrifice and patience
 - Persuasion
 - Helping myself and others to grow
 - Teaching others that it is a privilege and honour to serve

The Ripple Effect

In 1997 the concept of servant-leadership was introduced to a group of administrators in central Manitoba at the Parkland Leadership Academy. Since then, several have attended the annual conference at the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in Indianapolis, Indiana. They have returned to spread the word about their learning. Over the past seven years well over 1200 people in Manitoba have been exposed to the writings of Greenleaf and the philosophy of servant-leadership. Many have read and studied Greenleaf's works. Interesting comments from Greenleaf (1986) in his book, *On Becoming a Servant-Leader*, seem relevant to the cause of educational leadership and management:

"The difference between organizations is how people relate and how they actually function, which may not bear a whole lot of relationship to how the thing is sketched out on paper and this is not a bandwagon idea; it is not a best-seller kind of thing; but nevertheless, these people (servant-leaders) do exist, and some of them have become very important to me."

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to programmes of educational leadership:

1. Servant-leadership requires further investigation as a viable model for schools and institutions of higher education.
2. There is a need for research into educational institutions for evidence of

- existing servant-leadership practices.
3. Faculties of Educational Leadership need to include the model of servant-leadership in their courses of study.

Next Steps

Servant-leadership provides the promise of an effective educational leadership and management model. There is a need for a pilot project using this model. More importantly, there is the need for a 3-5 year study of institutions that embark upon the integration of such a model. Critical to the data gathering in the study would be the utilization of pre- and post- tests of perception of the educational stakeholders involved. Significant to any report of findings and conclusions to the study would be the importance of the possibility of transferability of the servant-leader concept to other educational institutions. The author suggests that one viable leadership credo for a present day educational institution is; “First to serve, then to lead.”

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