

One of the first questions I ask my students in my undergraduate leadership class is, “What first comes to your mind when you hear the word leadership?” As this occurs every semester, I think I have heard every possible answer students could give, reaching a saturation point. In one occasion following a typical interaction on that subject, a rather assertive student caught me off-guard not with his answer but with his reply, “What about you? Having done the run-of-the-mill on leadership, what now comes to your mind when you hear that word?” There was silence for a few seconds. I reflected a bit and came up with the following reply: “Leadership is ubiquitous and elusive!”

Why? Because leadership is almost an omnipresent theme that occurs in many different fields of human study – anthropology, social psychology, human relations, sociology, education, political science, theology, or business. As such, if a sociologist, a politician, and a theologian sit together to discuss leadership, chances are they will end up with big disagreements with each other.

A comprehensive listing of leadership research includes more than 8,000 leadership studies ranging from the great man theory in the early 1900s to contingency theory in the 1970s, and excellence theory in 1980s (Bass 1990). Yet the multidisciplinary nature of leadership contributed to the failure of leadership research to produce a systematic, coherent, and integrated understanding of leadership (Bass 1990). So much for the hype in leadership research that leadership researchers like Barnard (1948, p. 80) lamented in frustration over six decades ago and concluded that “leadership is the subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense.” It is therefore importance to examine more closely the theoretical underpinning of and empirical support for servant leadership.

2.1 Origin of Servant Leadership

Dubbed as the father of the servant leadership movement, Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) constructed the notion of servant leadership following his long career at AT&T. The process however was unconventional in that he did not base his theorizing on key corporate leaders or high profile individuals, but on his personal reading of Herman Hesse's (1956) story about a spiritual pilgrimage, *The Journey to the East*:

In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey . . . The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering, finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader. (Greenleaf 1977, p. 7)

It was in Hesse's character of Leo that Greenleaf (1977) saw an interesting juxtaposition between servanthood and leadership. Specifically, Leo's leadership is evident through his capability to facilitate a group of pilgrims to achieve a shared objective, and his servanthood through his meeting their needs. The moral of the story lies in the fact that leadership and servanthood are not mutually exclusive.

The idea that leaders must serve their constituents has been around much longer. To show this point, Nair (1994, p. 59) points to ancient monarchs who for over a thousand years had at least professed the importance of service to leadership:

Ancient monarchs acknowledged that they were in the service of their country and their people – even if their actions were not consistent with this. Modern coronation ceremonies and inaugurations of heads of state all involve the acknowledgement of service to God, country, and the people. Politicians define their role in terms of public service.

Attributing the notion of servant leadership entirely to Greenleaf (1977) however would constitute an intellectual sloppiness. Granted it was Greenleaf (1977) who first introduced and disseminated it to the education and business arena. But the principle of servant leadership has been taught and embodied by Jesus Christ and his disciples over 2,000 years ago, much earlier than the works of Greenleaf or Hesse. While the exact terminology was non-existent anywhere in the Bible, a cursory reading of both the Old Testament and New Testament shows that the idea of leaders serving their people is deeply embedded in numerous passages that speak about leadership.

Surveying the biblical accounts of servant leadership is simply beyond the scope of this book, it is nevertheless instructive to look at two particular instances in the Bible where Jesus Christ taught and demonstrated servant leadership as recorded in the Gospel of Mark Chapter 10 and Gospel of John Chapter 13, respectively.

Jesus' life and ministry occurred primarily in Galilee, a large rural province in the northwestern part of Palestine ruled under the Roman Empire. The ruling regime in his days was the Roman political government who recruited local Jewish religious leaders who were recognized and respected by the native populations but were loyal to Rome in exchange for positions and prestige. They worked well together to maintain stability in the region, and had been known to suppress any movement that might endanger the delicate balance of power. In the beginning of Jesus' ministry of teaching, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and casting out evil spirits, he was careful not to undermine their respective authorities, dismissing the crowd and withdrawing from them when his growing followers asked him to be their king. However towards the end of his short three-and-a-half-year ministry, he started to reveal his identity to the public as the expected Messiah the Jewish prophets of old had foretold. The Jewish leaders were quickly disturbed to see an increasing number of people following him as he made his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to make a final sacrifice for the people he served.

During that journey that took a few days by foot, Jesus foretold his imminent death to his inner circle of twelve disciples at the hands of corrupt religious leaders three times. However they seemed to fall on deaf ears. The talk of Jesus' death was repeatedly brushed aside as the disciples were preoccupied with a different subject in their minds. They were anxious about the succession plan in what they thought would be the ultimate empire of the Messianic kingdom in the world. Who among them would be a worthy successor of this supremely authoritative and much sought-after man?

In a self-aggrandizing mode, they were intensely arguing against each other to claim superiority. The constant bickering and jockeying for power must have destroyed the harmony among the disciples. From that point onwards they would have been suspicious of each other's motives. Against this background, Jesus taught his disciples the principle of servant leadership:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve . . . (Mark 10:42–45, ESV)

In this example, Jesus used the term 'servant' as a synonym for greatness. Contrary to the popular opinion of the day, Jesus taught that a leader's greatness is measured by a radical commitment to serve fellow human beings.

Shortly following that incident, Jesus demonstrated in a most practical way what it means to serve others through the symbolic act foot-washing common to Palestinian Jews of his day. In the Gospel of John chapter 13 we had the account of the first-century foot-washing ritual. To appreciate its significance, a few cultural nuances need to be properly understood (Ford 1991). First, the ritual was regularly performed for practical rather than ceremonial reasons. As people wore sandals everyday and walked through dusty, muddy, and manure-filled streets, one cannot avoid having dirty and smelly feet. And they need to be washed. Needless to say,

washing someone else's feet was regarded as one of the most demeaning tasks anyone could perform. Second, it was customary at the time that whenever someone invites people over for a meal, the host would provide a servant to wash the guests' feet before they came to the table. In poor families where no servant was employed, it was common for the lowest-ranking guest to wash the feet of the others (Ford 1991).

Neither Jesus nor his disciples had their feet washed when they entered a house to have a meal together. They sat at the table with dirty feet, as there was no household servant present and none of the disciples took the initiative to do it. Shortly after the evening meal was served, Jesus abruptly got up. The Bible recorded that he "laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him (John 13:4–5 ESV).

This socially unacceptable gesture must have come as a shock to his disciples, and at the same time served as an unambiguous example of servant leadership for us. Jesus concluded the lesson in memorable words: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you (John 13:14–15 ESV).

It was not so much the actual foot-washing that he stipulated. Rather it was the readiness of leaders to set aside their ego to be able to serve others wholeheartedly. As such, the unusual twist of Jesus' leadership through the foot-washing example redefined the meaning and function of leadership power from 'power over' to 'power to'; that is, the strength to choose to serve others.

More broadly, many passages in the Bible either explicitly or implicitly teach about servant leadership. While there are only six occurrences of the term 'leader' in the King James Bible because individuals called to be spiritual leaders are designated as 'servants'. When Moses in the Old Testament was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into Canaan, he was not referred to as "Moses, my leader", but "Moses, my servant."

Unfortunately a persistent neglect of the etymology of the word 'servant' in the New Testament today continues to cause a gross misunderstanding of the idea of servant leadership. The negative connotations associated with 'leaders as servant' may not persist if one considers the amount of scholarly work in the field of biblical exegesis around the word 'servant'. *Merriam-Webster Online* dictionary might give a clue to the richness of this biblical word picture when it defines 'servant' as 'one that serves others' or 'one that performs duties about the person or home of a master or personal employer.'

As the most ancient yet richest text that explicitly presents the concept of 'servant' in depth, the New Testament uses seven Greek words interchangeably which unfortunately are simplified into one word in the English bible, i.e., 'servant'. These Greek words are *diakonos*, *doulos*, *pais*, *sundoulos*, *oiketes*, *therapon*, and *huperetes* (Vine 1985). Altogether these words occur over 300 times in the New Testament (Getz 1984). Each of these words has its own association with the cultural settings of the biblical times. A close scrutiny of these words using bible

dictionaries and Greek lexicon indicates that the concept of ‘servant’ is pregnant with meaning.

For example, the word *diakonos* literally means ‘someone who waits at the table’, referring to the person who renders service during a meal (Bennett 1998) as depicted in Jesus’ parable in the Gospel of Luke (17:8). Implicit in the usage of the word are lessons for disciples to wait at the table and serve others instead of sitting at the head-table and seeking to be served. The English word ‘deacon’ is derived from *diakonos*, which is commonly used to describe a church leader. *Diakonos* is also significant because it is used to describe Jesus’ lessons about servant leadership. Embedded within the use of the word *diakonos* is the emphasis on humility and selfless service. Hence, in Jesus’ terms, leadership is not about power and personal aggrandizement, but about offering oneself in service to others.

Doulos is the most frequently used word for ‘servant’ in the New Testament both in literal and figurative sense (Getz 1984). Literally speaking, the word simply denotes the natural condition of those who live as slaves to their masters (Vine 1985). However, contrary to the common understanding, the use of *doulos* in the Bible refers to the notion of subjection without the idea of bondage. The same emphasis is also found in the figurative use of the word *doulos* in the New Testament (Vine 1985). The word *doulos* was frequently used metaphorically to describe positive spiritual, moral and ethical conditions (i.e. in bondage of God) as well as negative connotations (e.g. in bondage of sin or corruption). On the whole, while the word *doulos* was often taken in its strongest sense to mean a slave who gives himself up to another’s will in disregard of his own interests, it signifies a voluntary act of subordination performed in the context of Christian love for God and others. This voluntary subordination is manifested in the willingness to assume the lowliest of positions and endure hardship and suffering on behalf of other people.

Pais signifies an attendant, particularly the king’s attendant (Vine 1985).

Sundoulos means fellow servant, which corresponds to the notion of an associate or colleague who is subject to the same authority (Thayer 1996).

Oiketes, which is the root of the English word ‘economy’, refers to a household servant who lives in the same house as the householder (Locyker 1986).

Therapon denotes an attendant or servant of God and spoken with dignity of Moses who faithfully carried out the duties assigned to him by God (Thayer 1996).

Huperetes literally means an under-rower or subordinate rower, which signifies “those who row in the lower tier of a trireme (an ancient Greek three-tiered warship), and then came to mean those who do anything under another, and hence simply ‘underlings’” (Robertson and Plummer 1914, p. 74). In the contemporary sense, it could well be translated as ‘subordinate’. In short, these words denote a servant who submits to the authority of and is accountable to his superior.

Taken together, the seven Greek words for servant suggest a willingness and readiness to be subservient before others in obedient gratitude, so that others’ needs and interests are served. None of these words insinuate a lack of self-respect or low self-image. While some words may indicate that the subordination is imposed on someone because of his or her lowly status, the humble position is voluntarily assumed and an act of service is wholeheartedly performed for the sake of others.

2.2 Servant Leadership and Other Theories

Given the elusive nature of leadership and ubiquity of leadership studies, the extent to which servant leadership, relative to other leadership approaches, affects key organizational outcomes is critical. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that there is little empirical evidence that suggests leadership style X provides higher levels of outcome Z than leadership style Y (Peterson et al. 2012). To that end, servant leadership is often contrasted to charismatic, transformational, authentic, and spiritual leadership. The following sections briefly examine the theoretical and empirical distinctions among these leadership approaches.

2.2.1 Charismatic and Transformational Leadership

Among the early research on charisma, probably the single most important work was written by the sociologist Max Weber (1947) whose primary interest was in the dynamic forces of authority in society. Weber argues that charismatic leadership is essentially a perception by followers that a leader possesses a divinely inspired gift which makes him or her larger than life. Weber's most frequently cited definition of the Greek word charisma is "a quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities" (Weber 1947, p. 48). This form of influence is based not on a traditional view that authority is inherited, or on a rational-legal view that authority is derived from appointment to certain positions, but rather on followers' perceptions and beliefs that leaders are gifted with extraordinary and exemplary qualities which set them apart from ordinary people. In addition to that, Weber maintains that charismatic leaders are grass-roots leaders emerging from marginalized society during times of great social crisis. Often times, they arise as the result of a revolution against traditional or legal-rational authority systems.

Weber's conceptualization of charismatic authority systems has attracted a number of comments from historians, political scientists, and sociologists. Since the publication of Weber's seminal book *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* where the notion of charisma is conceived, research into charismatic leadership has focused around the locus of charismatic leadership. The focal question is whether charisma is the result of the leader's divine supernatural gift, the strong cohesion between charismatic leaders and followers, social context the leader faces, or merely an attribution-based phenomenon (Weber 1947; House 1977; Bass 1985; Bennis and Nanus 1985; Tichy and Devanna 1986; Conger and Kanungo 1987).

Among those who are considered as charismatic leaders are mostly those in the political domain: Alexander the Great, Adolf Hitler, John F. Kennedy, and Winston Churchill; social-religious figures: Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend Jim Jones, Mother Teresa, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Martin Luther King, Jr., and

Nelson Mandela; those in the military domain: Norman Schwarzkopf, Napoleon Bonaparte, Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein, and Colin Powell; and those in business: Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch, and Mary Kay Ash (Kets de Vries 1989; Yukl 1990). A common thread among these political, social, religious, military and business leaders is their alleged possession of personal magnetism and heroic qualities which have strong effects on followers, societies, countries, or organizations.

Despite increasing empirical evidence on the validity of charismatic leadership in positive organizational and social changes reported by its proponents, some critical questions have been raised. Major objections to the research on charismatic leadership concern the rather dark and often subtle aspects of charisma, especially toward those whom the leader's influence is being exerted upon (Bass 1985; Howell 1988; Kets de Vries 1995; Graham 1991; Gronn 1995). Kets De Vries (1993, 1995) contends that there are charismatic leaders who are psychologically "unhealthy." From a clinical paradigm, he argued that these leaders are capable of making their internal illusions of power and control into social and physical reality, which makes them particularly dangerous people. Another important comment that concerns the negative side of charisma maintains that there are two types of charismatic leaders, socialized and personalized (Howell 1988). Socialized charismatic leaders are oriented toward the development of their followers, whereas personalized charismatic leaders create within their followers feelings of obedience, dependency, and submission to the goals and desires of leaders.

Negative charismatic leaders are self-centered, whereas positive charismatic leaders are oriented toward others. Conger (1991) contended that three particular leadership skills might contribute to disastrous outcomes for both organizations and followers, namely leaders' strategic visions, their communication and impression-management skills, and their general management skills. The distinction between positive and negative charismatic leaders is critical to take into consideration (Howell 1988; Yukl 1989; Conger 1991) since:

History is full of accounts of charismatic leaders who cause untold death, destruction, and misery in the process of building an empire, leading a revolution, or founding a new religion. Many entrepreneurs who founded prosperous companies were tyrants and egomaniacs. Negative charismatics are likely to have a narcissistic personality and a personalized power orientation. They emphasize devotion of followers to themselves rather than to ideological goals, which are used only as a means to manipulate followers. (Yukl 1990, p. 231)

Bass (1985) expanded further the concept of charismatic leadership into what he calls 'transformational leadership' based on Burns' (1978) notion of 'transforming leadership'. Although there are substantial similarities between charismatic and transformational leadership, and are therefore often regarded as equivalent, the latter is generally defined more specifically than the former. There is a disagreement, however, as to whether the two terms can be used interchangeably or distinguished (Yukl 1990). Yukl (1999) concludes that it is best to differentiate the two types of leadership regardless their overlapping processes. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that, as Bass argues, charisma is the most important ingredient of transformational leadership although not the only one (Bass 1985).

Apart from charisma, there are two other ingredients necessary to turn the transformation process into reality, namely intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass and Avolio 1994). Proponents of transformational leadership argue that transformational leaders will cause followers to perform beyond expected levels of performance as a consequence of the leader's influence. Followers are willing to go the extra mile because of their commitment to the leader, their intrinsic work motivation, or the sense of purpose and mission that drives them to excel beyond the standard limit. Since charisma is a key construct underlying transformational leadership behavior, attaining charisma in the eyes of one's employees is central to succeeding as a transformational leader. As listed by House (1977), this charisma often times results in, among other things, the followers' unquestioning acceptance of the leader, strong identification with the leader, trust in the correctness of the leader's belief, and willing obedience.

Graham (1991) gave credit to the addition of the two developmental behaviors in transformational leadership. These behaviors acknowledge the followers' inherent capabilities of constructive creativity and give room for followers to question the leader's espoused views. On the other hand, she critically pointed out its lack of concern about the moral development of the followers. In fact, she noticed two flaws in Bass' (1985) model of transformational leadership, namely its manipulative leadership style and the incompatibility of the model with the original model on which it was based on, i.e., Burns' (1978) transforming leadership.

Bass (1985) argued that transformational leaders seek to empower and elevate followers rather than keep followers weak and dependent. However the effects of that increased motivation and commitment will not necessarily benefit followers, as 'there is nothing in the transformational leadership model that says leaders should serve followers for the good of followers' (Graham 1991, p. 110). On the other hand, servant leadership requires that leaders lead followers for the followers' own ultimate good.

Stone et al. (2004) suggested that while both servant leadership and transformational leadership are people-oriented leadership approaches which value individualized consideration and appreciation of followers, the concerns that transformational leaders show are merely a means to achieving a larger purpose, namely the organizational objectives. On the other hand, the focus of servant leaders is primarily on the followers (i.e. their needs and development) rather than the organization. In fact, servant leadership is more likely than transformational leadership to put an emphasis on employee emotional well-being (Smith et al. 2004).

Unlike transformational leadership whose primary concern is 'performance beyond expectations, the *sine qua non* of servant leadership is followers' holistic moral and ethical development. In fact, from its earliest conceptualization, servant leadership has been considered a leadership approach that elevates leaders and followers both morally and ethically (Greenleaf 1977).

In summary, servant leaders have a greater likelihood than transformational leaders to set the following priorities in their leadership focus: followers first, organizations second, their own last. Rather than inspiring followers to achieve organizational goals, they empower, coach, train, and develop followers into what they

Table 2.1 Graham's comparison of four models of charismatic leadership (Graham 1991)

	Weberian charismatic	Personal celebrity charisma	Transformational leadership	Servant leadership
Source of charisma	Divine gift	Personality; Social distance	Leader training & skills	Humility; spirituality insight
Situational context	Socio-economic distress of followers	Ennui; low self esteem of followers	Unilateral (hierarchical power)	Relational (mutual power)
Nature of charismatic gift	Visionary solution of Distress	Daring; dramatic; flair; forcefulness; vision	Vision for organizational adept at HRM	Vision and practice of a way of life focused
Response of followers	Recognition of genuinely Devine gift	Adulation of the identification with leader	Heightened motivation; extra effort	Emulation of leader's service orientation
Consequences of charisma	Followers' material well-being improved	Co-dependent relationship with leader perpetuated	Leader and/or organizational goals met; personal development of followers	Autonomy and moral development of followers; enhancement of common good
Applicability to work organizations	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Representative authors and concepts	Tucker; Weber	Conger & Kanungo; Howell's 'personalized charisma'; Schiffer	Bass & assoc; Bradford & Cohen; Howell's 'socialized charisma'	Burns' "transforming leadership"; Greenleaf

are capable of becoming. The rationale behind this deliberate focus on followers is well summarized by Stone et al. (2004, p. 355) who asserted that "organizational goals will be achieved on a long-term basis only by first facilitating the growth, development, and general well-being of the individuals who comprise the organization". The focus therefore is on 'people-building' rather than 'people-using'.

Graham (1991) regarded servant leadership as one of the charismatic leadership models with some characteristics that distinguish it from other previous three models (see Table 2.1). The model is represented by two main authors' concepts: Burn's (1978) transforming leadership and Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership. Graham also argues that the servant leadership concept exceeds Bass' (1985) transformational leadership at least in two ways; in its recognition of the leaders' social responsibilities to serve those people who are marginalized by a system and its dedication to followers' needs and interests, as opposed to those of their own or their organization (Graham 1991).

2.2.2 Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership refers to a leadership approach that nurtures and fosters a sense of self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency (Walumbwa et al. 2008, p. 94). As such, authentic leaders are those who operate out of a deep clarity of their own values and conviction. This propensity to be self-aware and self-regulating is well aligned with the authenticity dimension of servant leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005). Both authentic and servant leaders use positive modeling to develop others. However, the authenticity of servant leaders stems out of a spiritual and moral source of motivation tempered with an altruistic desire to serve others. These spirituality, morality, and altruistic dimensions are largely absent from the authentic leadership framework. Servant leaders are authentic not the sake of being authentic but because they know that they are driven by a sense of higher calling to make morally positive difference in the lives of others.

A recent empirical study found that leaders who possess superior moral reasoning does not necessarily exhibit moral action despite how authentic they perceive themselves to be or other people think they are (Sendjaya et al. 2014). In fact, the same study found that one could score high on both authenticity and Machiavellianism, and that the two are not mutually exclusive. This counterintuitive finding can be explained by the need for authentic leaders to maintain a sense of self-concordance, that is they act in alignment with their beliefs regardless of the cost or the consequences, or else they stop being morally authentic. However, their self-concordance is entirely based on their internal choices rather than externally imposed standards (Hannah et al. 2011). Since authenticity is bound by one's subjective view of ethics and morality, it is plausible for unethical leaders to claim themselves to be authentic as long as their behaviors align with their beliefs. In a stark contrast, servant leaders rely on objective moral values external to themselves to derive their judgment about what is right and wrong. Fully aware of their susceptibility to moral errors as human beings, they would not base their decisions and actions solely on their preconceived notion of morality. In summary, in the realm of ethics, being morally accountable to some objective standards takes priority over being congruous to one's subjective morality. Further discussion on the morality of servant leaders is provided in Chap. 6.

2.2.3 Spiritual Leadership

While the notion of spiritual leadership is abound in the popular press, empirical studies on the subject were scarce. A notable exception is Fry (2003) whose spiritual leadership model has a few points of convergence with the servant leadership framework outlined in this book. Specifically both seek to cultivate in the workplace a sense of meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness in the workplace. Spiritual leaders engage individuals in meaningful and intrinsically motivating work, through

vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith (Fry 2003). These three variables are also embedded in the construct of servant leadership but there is more to servant leadership than what is captured by the spiritual leadership theory.

Further in Fry's (2003) model, the notion of calling and membership are the outcomes of followers' spiritual survival. They are however inherent in servant leadership as evident in the sense of inner calling servant leaders have which fuels their service, and their aspiration to foster leader–follower relationships characterized by shared values and mutual trust.

The key difference between the two theories is as follows. Spirituality is only one of the many dimensions of servant leadership (i.e., *Transcendental Spirituality*). Specifically, spiritual insights are motivational basis for servant leaders to engage others in authentic and profound ways that transform them to be what they are capable of becoming. There other leadership dimensions within the servant leadership framework such as servanthood and morality which are absent in the spiritual leadership model.

2.3 Positive Effects of Servant Leadership

Critics argue that given its focus on followers' need and development, servant leadership will not positively contribute to the bottom line, at least not directly. Recent studies however have reported evidences in support of the positive impacts of servant leadership on various soft and hard measures of corporate performance.

In fact, in addition to the conceptual differences in its focus and scope relative to other leadership approaches, these evidences unequivocally suggest that servant leadership is a better predictor than transformational leadership in relation to a few key outcome variables. More specifically, as mentioned in Chap. 1, in comparison to transformational leadership, servant leadership explains additional variance on a number of key outcomes including team performance, employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to stay (Schaubroeck et al. 2011; Schneider and George 2011; Liden et al. 2008; Peterson et al. 2012).

In addition to the above studies, the studies that my colleagues and I have conducted help corroborate the evidence for positive effects of servant leadership on key organizational outcomes such as creativity and innovation, trust, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. These studies are particularly of interest as they employed the multidimensional measure of Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS). The following section provides a brief summary of the studies, demonstrating that servant leaders do make a difference in real-world settings.

2.3.1 Creativity and Innovation

In a multi-level study employing a two-nation East Asian sample of 154 teams, my colleagues and I examine the mediating social psychological processes by which servant leaders stimulate individual creativity and team innovation (Yoshida et al.

2014). The findings suggest that under a strong climate of support for innovation, servant leadership stimulates followers' relational identification which in turn, foster employee creativity.

Since servant leaders voluntarily subordinate their aspirations for the greater good of the team and organization, they exemplify many of the team characteristics. On the basis of relational identification theory, we argue that team members' affect-based trust in the servant leader encourage them to define themselves in terms of their relationship with the leader. As the servant leader is seen as a prototypical leader, team members heighten their intrinsic motivation to perform creatively. Broadly speaking servant leaders' primary objectives are not specifically linked to creativity, particularly when it does not directly benefit followers. However, the strong association of followers' identity with the leader-follower relationship creates a powerful and personal motivation for followers to embark in creative endeavors. Team members who derive their identity from a close-knit leader-follower relationship are also more willing to experiment with new ideas because there is a strong sense of psychological safety embedded in such relationship.

Practically speaking, the study findings highlight the need for servant leaders to intentionally build psychological connections with team members to foster employee creativity and team innovation. Generating followers' trust, identification, and perceptions that the leaders represent the team's beliefs, norms and attitudes becomes more critical when creativity and innovation is a priority organizational goal. Secondly, servant leaders need to build a team climate which encourages creative endeavors and innovative ideas at the individual and team level.

2.3.2 Trust in Leaders

In another study which examines the impact of servant leadership on followers' trust in their leaders using data from 555 employees of two educational institutions, Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010) found that followers who perceived high servant leadership behavior in their leaders had significantly higher trust in them compared with those who perceived low servant leadership behavior in their leaders. Employees may decide to trust the organization on the basis of the trust they have in the leader. When such generalization of trust does not occur, employees are likely to trust only their leader but not the organization.

The results contribute to extant leadership literature by demonstrating that servant leadership is a significant predictor of trust. Three out of six dimensions of servant leadership (Covenantal relationship, Responsible morality and Transforming influence) were found to correlate positively and significantly to trust. Organizations should therefore encourage their leaders to exhibit trust-building servant leadership behaviors, such as articulation of a shared vision, role modeling, demonstration of concern and respect for followers, and integrity-infused decisions and actions.

2.3.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Another study utilized 123 leader-follower dyads in eight high-performing companies in Indonesia to examine the relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (e.g., does not take extra break, obeys company rules) (Butarbutar et al. 2012). The study found that psychological ethical climate served as an important mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and individual-directed citizenship behavior (OCBI) as well as organization-directed citizenship behavior (OCBO). Specifically, the link between servant leadership to OCBI is stronger than servant leadership to OCBO.

This finding implies that servant leaders may stimulate followers to demonstrate assistance in regard to other co-workers' needs (OCBI-type behavior) more than the followers' intention to read and keep up with organization announcements or memos (OCBO-type behavior). More practically, managers need to be aware of what they pay attention to, where their passions and priorities are, what they handsomely reward or severely punish, how they spontaneously react to crisis situations, all of which will help foster an ethical culture in the organizations which will guide the employees' perceptions and actions accordingly.

2.3.4 Job Satisfaction

In their study, Eva and Sendjaya (2013a) examine extent to which organizational structure (formalization and centralization) and leaders' decision making process (involvement and dominance) moderate the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction in small to medium enterprises. On the basis of two independent studies, vignette experiment ($n = 1,569$) and cross-sectional survey ($n = 336$), the impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction is contrasted with narcissistic leadership in the vignette experiment, and with transformational leadership controlled for in the survey.

The underlying assumption of the study is that leaders do not operate in a vacuum but interact with the boundary constraints found in the organizational setting. The study found that leader's decision making process and organisational structure acts as boundary conditions for servant leadership to impact employee job satisfaction. Specifically, when servant leaders are highly involved in the decision making process and operate under a formalised structure, their effects on job satisfaction are augmented. On the contrary, when they are dominant and operate under a centralised structure, servant leaders have less impact on the followers' job satisfaction.

2.3.5 Employee Work Engagement

Finally, another study by Robin and Sendjaya (2012) on the relationship between positive leadership behaviors, psychological capital, employee work engagement,

as well as destructive workplace deviant behavior in Australian firms. Data were collected from Australian organizations across different industries ($N = 441$). The study found that psychological capital is the mechanism through which servant leadership influences employee engagement and workplace deviant behaviors. It is therefore important for servant leaders to cultivate employees' psychological capital through positive feedback, psychological arousal, and vicarious modeling, and mastery of experience as these means are key in enhancing employee engagement and minimizing workplace deviant behavior.

2.4 Development of the Servant Leadership Behavior Scale

This section briefly outlines the development and validation of the Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS). The psychometric measure went through a number of sequential stages, namely scale design (domain identification and item development), scale development (content validation and pretest), and scale validation (construct validation).

2.4.1 Scale Design

The main purpose of this first stage was to generate a pool of items for a multidimensional rating scale of servant leadership (i.e., the SLBS). The current study employed a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to item development with both the literature review and interviews carefully conducted to generate items. Although development of items is the most important element of establishing sound measures, an overwhelming majority of leadership measures demonstrate a lack of content validity. As such, the generation of items was meticulously done to ensure that the SLBS sufficiently captures the specific domain of interest and excludes irrelevant items.

A comprehensive literature review of more than 350 leadership journal articles and books on was conducted to identify themes and dimensions pertinent to servant leadership. In-depth interviews with 15 executives at Australian for-profit and not-for-profit organizations were subsequently conducted to generate further insights into servant leadership. Content analyses of the interview data were subsequently conducted, and an initial coding template was developed as a theoretical framework used to categorize interview data (see 'Interview Method' in the Appendix for further details). Only servant leadership values that were supported by the literature review were included in the subsequent stages. Interrater reliability was established by an independent rater and a satisfactory agreement was reached.

Twenty-two values were identified as a result and were grouped into the six resulting domains, each defined accordingly consistent with the literature. On the basis of these findings from qualitative data, 101 items for the SLBS were generated with a clear theoretical underpinning.

2.4.2 Scale Development

The initial 101 items of the SLBS were subjected to content expert validation in order to establish its content validity. Content experts made up of leadership researchers were asked to select and sort out items that operationalize its nominated domain and those which are theoretically incoherent. They were also asked to evaluate the comprehensiveness of the measure and clarity of item construction and wording to ensure that there were no ambiguous and poorly expressed items. A quasi-quantitative approach called the Content Validity Ratio was utilized to facilitate the rejection or retention of specific items (see Sendjaya et al. 2008 for details). This process facilitated the decisions to reject or retain items, accounting for the deletion of 28 items. There were 73 remaining items with a high level of agreement (87 %) among content experts, suggesting that these items were parsimonious, theoretically essential, and conceptually meaningful.

The factor structure of the 73 items was then examined in a pretest involving post-graduate students with work experience ($n = 277$). The main purposes of the pretest were to examine the factor structure of the scale and establish the unidimensionality of the scale through specification, assessment of fit, and respecification of the one-factor congeneric measurement models. The internal consistency reliabilities of and the correlations among the six factors were well within the accepted range. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses using structural equation modeling were performed to examine the one-factor congeneric measurement models of the SLBS. The modeling established the unidimensionality of the SLBS with a total of 35 items retained in the process.

2.4.3 Scale Validation

The 35-item six-factor model of the SLBS was further tested using an independent survey of management and non-management staff at four Australian organizations ($n = 192$). All of the six models yielded Cronbach's coefficient alphas beyond the recommended level which demonstrated the reliability of the scale. The correlations among the six factors were consistent with those from the pretest data, which suggest that servant leadership is a holistic construct (e.g., an individual who scored high on *Responsible Morality* would be likely to score high on *Authentic Self* and vice versa). In order to establish discriminant validity of the six factors, analyses of competing models were performed to examine whether the six factors were empirically distinguishable from each other. Analysis of fit indices revealed that the six-factor model was a good-fitting model to both data sets. To provide further evidence of construct validity, the convergent and discriminant validity of the SLBS were established in relation to two other measures, namely the Character Assessment Rating Scale or CARS (convergent validity) and the Machiavellianism scale or MACH-IV (discriminant validity). The problem of common method

variance was addressed using the latent variable approach to marker variables. These results suggested that the six-factor model was a robust model.

In summary, the use of multiple qualitative and quantitative methods comprising interview respondents from various organizations, external and independent expert panels, and survey respondents from the student sample and organizational sample satisfied the criteria of triangulated data. Through successive stages of scale development, the study identified a list of operational indicators (i.e., the 35-item 6-factor SLBS) that satisfied important validity criteria, namely content validity, internal consistency reliability, and unidimensionality (for details, see Sendjaya et al. 2008), as well as construct, discriminant, and convergent validity (for details, see Sendjaya and Cooper 2011). Other studies using the SLBS have continued to demonstrate its predictive validity (Pekerti and Sendjaya 2010; Sendjaya and Pekerti 2010; Yoshida et al. 2014) and practical usefulness (Eva and Sendjaya 2013a, b).

2.5 Objections to Servant Leadership

Over the past 10 years or so, I have received comments from journal editors and reviewers as well as research study and executive workshop participants on perceived theoretical problems with servant leadership. While these inputs clarified my own understanding, some of them were derived logically from a flawed interpretation of the concept. An earlier version of these objections has appeared elsewhere (Sendjaya 2011), but I have expanded the discussion to include other key objections.

2.5.1 “Servant Leaders? I Don’t Want to Be Slaves!”

The above sentiment reflects the most pervasive misunderstanding of servant leadership that stops many from even considering the idea. The phrase ‘servant leadership’ conjures up in their minds negative images associated with the dark ages such as slavery and bondage. The unpleasant and embarrassing memory of slavery that dwells in many parts of the English-speaking world make the language of slavery offensive to them. In my experience I have been asked in a number of occasions by corporate clients who are interested to undertake the servant leadership training program to alter the word ‘servant’ into something that is more politically correct. Invariably I nodded in agreement with them and said, “Okay, let’s not use *servant leadership*. Instead let’s roll with *slave leadership*!”

This widespread misconception is unfortunate because if a close scrutiny of the Bible, one of the oldest literatures that includes the concept and practice of slavery, reveals that there is a huge difference between the nature of slavery in the first century Greco-Roman world and sixteenth century New World. In his fine work explicating the nature of slavery in the Bible by comparing Jewish, Greek,

Roman, and ancient slavery in the first century BC, Harris (1999, p. 44) reached the following conclusion:

In the first century, slaves were not distinguishable from free persons by race, by speech or by clothing; they were sometimes more highly educated than their owners and held responsible professional positions; some persons sold themselves into slavery for economic or social advantage; they could reasonably hope to be emancipated after ten to twenty years of service or by thirties at the latest; they were not denied the right of public assembly and were not socially segregated (at least in the cities); they could accumulate savings to buy their freedom; they natural inferiority was not assumed.

It is estimated that during that the end of the first century BC in Italy there were two million slaves out of a total population of six million. They worked in various occupations from farm laborers to city clerks, from cooks to shop managers, from cleaners to salaried executives of the state or a business (Harris 1999). Since the institution of slavery as part of a way of life, however, no doubt there were malpractices and abuses that occurred. But broadly speaking it was in a stark contrast to the coercion-based and morally reprehensible sixteenth century institution of slavery which led to its abolition in the second half of the eighteen century.

The second misconception of servant leadership stems from the failure to understand that the difference between the literal and metaphorical use of slavery in the New Testament books of the Bible. Again Harris (1999) is instructive when he argues that the Christian teaching primary focuses on the metaphorical or figurative language of slavery rather than literal or physical. Regarding the latter, following a comprehensive survey of extant literature, Harris (1999) concluded that Christianity did not endorse slavery as an absolute possession or inhuman use of one human being by another, yet at the same time the movement was not focused on social reform to abolish slavery as a social institution but on the transformation of character and conduct. While the biblical teaching of equality and freedom slowly led to the eventual destruction of physical slavery, the burden of the New Testament teaching rests on the metaphorical slavery to depict one's relation to God or Christ. Harris (1999, p. 86) summarizes it well as follows:

So, then, in true Christian liberty, freedom *from* is immediately succeeded by freedom *for*. We are set free from slavery to sin precisely in order to be free to choose slavery to Christ, a slavery of perfect freedom. . . Such a transfer of allegiance, such an exchange of masters, saves us from failing prey to the danger of using liberty as an opportunity or pretext for evil and the danger of becoming liberty's slave.

The Apostle Paul modeled this when he wrote to the Corinthian church, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (1 Corinthians 9:19, NIV Bible). Inspired partly by this verse, church father Martin Luther (1943, p. 5) penned these words which I think should be a building block for a healthy understanding of servant leadership (as this is written in the 1940s, do not let its gender-specific language deters its meaning): "A

Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Applied to servant leadership, it essentially means that in relation to their liberating God, servant leaders are subject to nobody with respect to liberty, subject to everyone with respect to service.

In summary, the association between servant leadership and the sixteenth century slavery stems from an ignorance of the nature of slavery. It will be a remiss to jettison altogether the construct of servant leadership on the basis of an unfounded fear that the practice of servant leadership will see the proliferation of modern day slavery. Indeed it will be a classic case of throwing the baby with the bathwater. The following comment of a director of not-for-profit organization in my interview sample best captures the sentiment:

I think you can do exactly the same thing with sex. I mean sex is fantastic, it's the perfect expression of love. But you can commercialize it, you can twist it, and you can make it a very ugly aspect. Just look at child prostitution for example. Similarly, work is an excellent concept through which one could express his or her talents to the full, but you can twist it too. Think about workaholism. The principle of servanthood is a wonderful concept, but you can turn it into slavery. It's taking something that is pure and good, and twisting it. And I think you can do that with anything.

2.5.2 “Are Servant Leaders Doormats?”

Given the altruistic motive with which servant leaders serve others, would they not be treated as doormats and their altruism misused or abused? The concept of accountability embedded in servant leadership sheds light on the above concern. Block (1993) argued that servant leaders view themselves as stewards who hold themselves accountable for the wellbeing and growth of the people they serve. It is however relatively easy these days to cite accountability merely as a compliance exercise. Marshall (1991, p. 72) distinguished between accepting accountability as a matter of reactive obligation and proactive or voluntary choice, and maintained that servant-first leaders choose the latter as “they are accustomed to being answerable to their performance.” As a natural expression of their true servanthood, servant leaders seek to be accountable not only to the people they serve but also to others (e.g, board of directors, other stakeholders of an organization, the leader’s personal core values and moral integrity). Hence, the accountability of servant leaders towards their followers is not absolute in that servant leaders will be subservient to followers’ demands. On the other hand, servant leaders’ accountability to their followers is tempered by other accountability structures and relationships they consciously put themselves in. The interplay between accountability and service in servant leadership relationships is perhaps best captured by the phrase “I am your servant, but you are not my master” as outlined in the following remark in the interview:

Call it ‘I am your servant, but you are not my master’. . . If you think servant leadership is just giving the people what they want . . . you are actually missing the generous nature of

true servant leadership. Your relative accountability is to the people you work with and who work for you. So you do have a relative accountability then, but it's not absolute.

2.5.3 “Servant Leadership Is for Religious People”

Is it true that servant leadership has such a heavy religious overtone that it leaves out people who do not associate themselves with certain religions or religious beliefs. A cursory review of extant literature reveals that servant leadership is typically linked to some religious teaching. The majority of servant leadership publications have both explicit and implicit links to the Judeo-Christian theology although many emerging publications also link servant leadership to other religious teachings. Robert Greenleaf, dubbed as the grandfather of servant leadership, was a Quaker but drew heavily on Hesse's *Journey to the East* steeped in ancient Eastern religious mysticism as well as Carl Jung's atheistic notion of self-consciousness. Greenleaf's conceptualization of servant leadership therefore reflects a syncretic view which merges two discrete theological presuppositions and traditions. It is important to note, however, that servant leadership has also found support from non-religious beliefs (see for example, Fry 2003; Hicks 2002).

Kurth (2003), for example, argued that the concept of service is taught by all major religions (e.g. Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism) and non-religious philosophies (e.g. moral philosophy, Siddha yoga, Taoism). To illustrate, one of Immanuel Kant's (1964, pp. 32–33) famous categorical imperatives, “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” strongly captures the most important tenet of servant leadership.

In summary, practicing servant leadership does not require one to subscribe to a particular religion or religious belief. For those of some religious persuasion, servant leadership emerges from an internal conviction that the servant leader is a servant of a higher being or power, and in obedient gratitude to that higher being or power, serves other people. Tyson Foods, one of world's largest processors and marketers of food products, have long flourished in a faith-friendly workplace culture (Rossi 2014). John Tyson, the company's Chairperson, created a workplace chaplaincy program in 2000 run by team members from a variety of religious faith backgrounds to serve the needs of the employees and their family members regardless of their religious affiliation or beliefs, include those who claim no affiliation at all. Its CEO Donnie Smith openly declared that his faith influences how he thinks think and what he does as he leads the multinational company by serving his employees.

For those with spiritual orientation but no religious attachment, the motivation to practice servant leadership comes from not a higher being, but a set of core values or ideals or causes that partly or wholly define their lives and give them meaning and significance.

2.5.4 “Servant Leadership Is an Oxymoron”

One reason for the scarcity of research on servant leadership is that the oxymoronic notion of ‘servant as leader’ may deter potential research in the area. It may be difficult to think and act both as leader and servant at the same time – a leader who serves and a servant who leads. Paradox has been characterized as “the simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive elements (Cameron and Quinn 1988, p. 2). While the notion of paradox has received increasing attention from management and organizational scholars (see, for example Kets De Vries 1995), studies on paradox are severely hindered by the limitations associated with traditional research methods. Rooted in and relying on logic and rationality, traditional approaches are unfit for examining paradoxical tensions which are seemingly absurd and irrational (Lewis 2000). More contemporary approaches, however, consider paradox as a means to substantially enhance management theories by contributing insights into complex and ambiguous organizational interrelationships (Cameron and Quinn 1988; Poole and Van de Ven 1989).

Clegg et al. (2002) noted that sustaining juxtaposing opposites rather than resolving them often leads to syntheses that enhance the practice and understanding of management. Lewis (2000), for example, cites a study on the paradoxical nature of group dynamics which concludes that the strength of a group or team can best be achieved by managing the tension between collective affiliation and self-expression. Based on the finding that the extent to which the individuality of each team member is expressed is a key to team success, researchers unveil an important lever in maximizing team performance. A similar pattern emerges through careful examination of opposing perspectives such as stable structures and the dynamic processes of authority and empowerment (Westenholz 1993). Implied in the above examples of simultaneous occurrences of two seemingly conflicting phenomena is the need of a ‘both/and’ thinking approach, as opposed to ‘either/or’, to manage paradox (Lewis 2000).

Similarly, the seemingly absurd and irrational coexistence of servanthood and leadership contains a profound understanding of leadership. Plett (1997, p. 2) used the analogy of marriage to explain the paradox of servant leadership: “Servant and leader, like a married couple, stand in close proximity to each other and influence each other. Each is incomplete without the other; neither loses its independent identity.” Sharing a similar view, Greenleaf (1977) drew his notion of servant leadership from Herman Hesse’s (1956) *Journey to the East* paradoxical portrayal of the servant Leo whose servanthood comes through in his leadership. This metaphorical story of a pilgrimage inspired Greenleaf (1977, p. 8) to conceptualize the paradox of servant leadership embodied in Leo’s character: “Leadership was bestowed upon a man who was by nature a servant. It was something given, or assumed, that could be taken away. His servant nature was the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not taken away. He was servant first.”

2.5.5 “Which One Comes First: Influence or Service?”

One of the biggest conundrums in the servant leadership field is its underlying influence process. If the hallmark of servant leaders is their deliberate choice to serve others and desire to serve first, does that signify followership rather than leadership? If the primary focus of servant leaders is to serve, how does a servant exert influence over others with leadership authority expected of a leader? Does the *servant-first* step mean that someone began as servants who serve some leader and/or team members and rise to leadership in a unique way?

Servant leadership stems from a conviction of the heart to transform other people with moral courage and spiritual insights into what they are capable of becoming. In servant leadership relationships, the leaders act as stewards, that is they consider their followers as people who have been entrusted to them to be elevated to their better selves and to be what they are capable of becoming. Followers tend to respond well to servant leaders because they have proven themselves trustworthy as servants. And since leadership is more ‘caught’ than ‘taught’, followers themselves will be transformed into servant leaders. The transformational effects in followers is achieved through what is often perceived as a counterintuitive way, that is servant leaders willingly sacrificing their needs and wants in order to serve others, instead of serving their own selves by sacrificing other people. As an other-orientated rather than leader-centered leadership approach, the effectiveness of the servant leadership approach is therefore measured by the holistic development of both the leaders and followers.

The conviction to serve others does not preclude the responsibility on the part of the servant leader to exert influence. While servant leaders seek to transform others to be more servant-like, there is a higher purpose that both the leaders and servants mutually seek to accomplish. Servant leaders try to get others to achieve that higher purpose by way of service. Service therefore is a means to try to role model ideal behaviors and values that are aligned with this higher purpose. To put it differently, servant leaders seek to influence first, and choose the path of servanthood to accomplish that task.

The paradox therefore is not between leadership and service but lies on the ordering of service and influence. Does service or influence come first? I think servant leaders have an influence agenda that they try to apply on the followers. In this sense, servant leaders are visionary individuals who have a clear idea of the kind of leaders that they expect their followers to become. This vision will in the final analysis benefit the followers, and may or may not benefit the leaders. If servant leaders first serve other individuals, would their acts of service be driven mainly by the individual level needs and aspirations and marked by the absence of a greater purpose or unifying principle? In my view, servant leaders on the one hand accept others with unconditional acceptance and unqualified acceptance and on the other hand transform others to become the very people they are capable of becoming. Just like parents who love their children unconditionally but are committed to help them learn and grow to fully realize their full potentials, servant leaders accept

followers as they are but seek to transform them to be better servant leaders. It is therefore accurate to conclude that there is a higher purpose that servant leaders pursue namely to turn followers into servant leaders, and that they employ service to try to role-model these behaviors.

This is clearly shown in the example of Jesus Christ as outlined in the Bible. Jesus did have a higher purpose, that is to influence others to live their lives in loving obedience to his Father. Jesus' life was a reflection of that higher purpose, and his sole preoccupation was to try to get others to do the same (i.e., influence) by engaging in self-sacrifice service to them. In this light, Jesus was a leader seeking to influence first, and chose the path of servant leader to accomplish that task. Hence, servant leaders can choose to serve others in an attempt to model ideal behaviors, but the intent remains to influence someone to see the vision of the greater good, or at least that leader's interpretation of the greater good. It is therefore appropriate to view servant leadership as a dyadic theory where there is a unique one-on-one relationship between leader and follower.

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Personal and Organizational Excellence through
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Sendjaya, S.

2015, IX, 136 p. 1 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-16195-2