

# Servant Leadership Theory

## Literature Review Sample

### Abstract

Limited research has been conducted on servant leadership theory, as evidenced by the few articles on the topic found from numerous academic databases. Although leadership field has mostly ignored this theory, evidence has shown that the organizational environment in various countries is ready for the servant leadership approach. This study presents a literature review of quantitative and qualitative literature on servant leadership theory, including cross-cultural/country studies on the application of servant leadership in management. A further study on the specific constructs of servant leadership has been recommended by the review.

### Introduction

Leadership has been widely researched in various behavioral sciences. The broad research here is because the success of political, economic, and organizational systems usually depends on the general efficiency and effectiveness of the guidance that leaders provide. Although Robert Greenleaf first introduced the servant leadership theory in 1970, the concept has remained inadequately studied despite being practiced in many organizations and boardrooms. Servant leadership has received great attention within the popular press and renowned authors on organizational management have discussed its benefits on organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Greenleaf conceptualized servant leadership as a way of life and not as a management technique. Perhaps this has slowed the overall acceptance of this leadership theory in academia.

This paper presents a literature review of quantitative and qualitative literature that explores servant leadership theory. Little research has been conducted on servant leadership theory, as evidenced in most study articles used in the present review. Most scholarly works on servant leadership consist of generating theoretical frameworks and coming up with measurement tools with the aim that future scholars will apply the tools to explore servant leadership in practice as a tenable theory (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

To contribute to the literature on servant leadership theory, this paper reviews the studies on servant leadership theory (Parris & Peachey, 2013). No comprehensive summary of the literature on servant leadership theory within organizations exists. By exploring the studies on the theory of servant leadership, this paper offers evidence that servant leadership is a tenable theory (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013).

The researcher searched for peer-reviewed articles from various databases, including Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and Academic OneFile. Various keywords were used in the search. Words like "Servant" and "Leadership" were separately entered into the databases to retrieve relevant articles. Additional searches with for "servant leadership theory" was later used to produce more relevant results. Searches on "Servant" alone produced many irrelevant articles while searches for "Servant Leadership Theory" generated more than 100 results.

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Most of the results generated from the databases discussed leadership without mentioning servant leadership. Only 28 articles had part or all of their content discuss servant leadership theory. Out of the 28 articles, 8 articles were excluded from the study because they contained information that was older than ten years from the time of publication.

### Constructs of Servant Leadership

Three foundational essays of Greenleaf—(1) the trustees as servants, (2) the institution as a servant, and (3) the leadership as a servant—officially introduced the concept of servant leadership. Peterlin, Pearse and Dimovski (2015) described servant leadership as not only a technique used in management but also a way of life. Peterlin et al. (2015) clarified that servant leadership characteristics begin with one's desire to serve other people first before serving oneself. Parris and Peachey (2013) pointed out that leaders must be a servant in their own true nature, irrespective of the position they hold.

Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) outlined the common standards expected in servant leadership: (1) serving the people one is leading, (2) having a holistic approach towards work, (3) sharing the individual decision making authority with others, and (4) promoting the wellbeing of the organization and community. Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) believe that “servant leaders must always offer the purpose of the organizational vision, share the vision with other employees and leaders and start individualized vision statements for the various leaders” (p. 5). Peterson, Galvin and Lange (2012) pointed out that servant leaders have the following characteristics: (1) attentive, (2) sympathetic, (3) watchful, (5) persuasive, (6) futuristic approach, (7) wisdom, (8) selflessness, (9) assisting other people, and (10) socially responsible.

In servant leadership, “the main motivational forces rely on the desire to treat members of an organization with the greatest dignity they deserve” (Peterson, Galvin and Lange, 2012 p. 23). Reed, Vidaver-Cohen and Colwell (2011) stated that most companies in the US practice servant leadership at all times. Servant leadership is based on “giving supportive support and being involved with the people” (p. 2). Hence, most managers use servant leadership to effectively impact the wellbeing of their employees. Choudhary, Akhtar and Zaheer (2013) define leadership culture of an organization as “necessary for the successful development and growth of a modern institution” (p. 2). They describe the four main constructs associated with servant leadership in an organization: (1) persuasive mapping, (2) emotional healing, (3) altruistic calling, and (4) transparency.

#### Altruistic Calling

Beck (2014) defined altruism as “a leadership behaviour targeted at benefiting another individual within the organization” (p. 4). Reed et al. (2011) identified several attributes associated with servant leadership, with service to employees being one of the essential components. This literature supports that leaders must always understand that their main function in an organization or office is to serve other people.

Further literature shows that altruistic behavior can be enhanced by an empathic desire to help another person. In their study on cross-cultural servant leadership differences, Merino (2016) reported that “leaders from the West are more willing to benefit the people they are leading than leaders from Africa” (p. 12). The literature shows that leaders from the US are more willing to sacrifice their self-interest for the sake of the citizens they are leading, unlike leaders from countries like South Africa, who put their interests before the interests of the people they are leading.

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Reed et al. (2011) described altruism as not only having good intentions or meaning well, but also being concerned about the welfare of other people. The authors concurred with the cultural view of altruism as having unselfish concern for other people, usually involving some personal sacrifice. Reed et al. (2011) believed that personal pleasure that is generated from assisting other people needs to be included in the understanding of altruism as a construct: "Altruism seek the accomplishment of other people with behaviour specifically directed towards the benefits of the people being led" (p. 6).

Merino (2016) provided examples of altruistic people, including Mother Teresa, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and Princess Diana. He argued that servant leaders usually seek radical equality in attending to all people, which is generally an altruistic approach. According to the author, servant leaders usually look for modesty and humility, along with altruism and selflessness, "an approach which seeks for the best for others instead of the self-interest of the leader" (p. 6). An altruistic approach is imperative to the mentality of servant leadership. Hence, altruism has been recognized as a link which is there between good behavior and good motive, yielding a general perception of helping others just for the sake of having to help them. Merino (2016) believed that altruism could be the main reason for the success of most organizational leaders in the Westernized world. He argued that leaders who sacrifice their own personal interests are more likely to be successful servant leaders in the contemporary society.

### Emotional Healing

Altruistic calling seems to lead to emotional healing. Peterlin, Pearse, and Dimovski (2015) described servant leaders as people who are highly empathetic with strong listening skills, making them the most appropriate people to initiate the healing process within an organization. As argued by Orazi, Turrini, and Valotti (2013), the essential part in developing an organization that has a successful legacy is the people in that organization, which includes both the employees and the volunteers. According to Peterlin et al. (2015), "Leaders who are rated high in emotional healing are the one's employees will always turn to when they are facing personal challenges because such leaders have created an environment in which the individual employees are capable of voicing their personal issues" (p. 12). They add that "Emotional healing is characterized by taking the opportunity to understand other people's problems and attending to such problems while they are at the place of work" (p. 7). Servant leaders are expected to place a high priority on the concerns of other people working under them.

Sousa and Van Dierendonck (2016) pointed out that servant leaders (1) can identify the individual aspirations and needs of the people they are leading and (2) are willing to share in both the pain and frustration the people they are leading are facing: "A leader must have a deeper understanding of his or her followers for him to offer best services" (p. 3). The literature has also shown that effective listening is a critical skill required of all servant leaders. Van Dierendonck (2011) argued that listening is critical for those who desire to be servant leaders, for servant leaders are nurtured by listening. The ability to experience and understand other people's feelings is a key characteristic of servant leadership. Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and Colwell (2011) argued further that emotional intelligence is an essential construct in leadership.

### Persuasive Mapping

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Beck (2014) argued that persuasive mapping “is an essential construct of servant leadership” (p. 3) and that “it is the ability to influence other people” (p. 6). Parris and Peachey (2013) reported that leaders who use persuasive mapping effectively influence other people with mental frameworks and sound reasoning. The literature emphasizes that servant leaders have the ability to conceptualize their main responsibilities and encourage the people they are leading to dream of a greater future. Peterlin, Parse, and Dimovski (2015) added that leaders who use persuasion can influence other people without using any formal authority.

### Transparency

Eid et al. (2012) described servant leaders as transparent: “They must be honest while communicating with each individual”. The literature defines authenticity as a general adherence to identifiable morals. It is essential for the servant leaders to practice openness with their individual employees (Reed et al., 2011). Servant leaders have to approach transparency in the same way it was approached by great leaders like Martin Luther King. Greenleaf (1970) believed that servant leadership is a kind of lifelong journey that is inwardly generated. Eid et al. (2012) suggested that honesty from a servant leader can never be optional but is something which must be portrayed by all great leaders of the world: “Servant leaders must be honest all times of their services and actions” (p. 5). They should lead by example, showing the people they are leading the importance of being honest in life.

### Virtuous Constructs

Patterson’s (2003) model is grounded in the viewpoint of servant leadership as a virtuous theory. According to Patterson (2003), “a virtue is a characteristic which is qualitative in nature and is almost spiritual,” (p. 2). Patterson places more emphasis on having leaders who are more focused on their followers interests than their own. Winston (2002) argued that the leader places love at the center of relationship with followers and this is advanced through the services offered by the leader: “his desires to learn the talents and gifting of his servants” (p. 33) and this leads to servant leaders who “inspire courage and hope” (p. 4).

According to Patterson (2003), servant leadership is about focusing on the followers. This argument contradicts the idea put forward by other authors that servant leadership is a subset of transformation leadership, in which the focus of the leader is on the organizational objectives. Reed et al. (2011) suggested that the main difference between a servant leader and a transformational leader is intent. While transformational leaders focus on organizations, servant leaders focus on making a difference in other people’s lives. Reed et al. (2011) affirmed that servant leadership is about ensuring that the interests of other people are properly served.

Patterson (2003) described virtue as a qualitative characteristic that forms an individual’s character, something that comes from within the person: “it is a characteristic that tends to exemplify the general human excellence” (p. 3). Patterson clarified that virtue characteristics consist of (1) good habits, (2) the middle ground between the existing extremes of too little and too much, and (3) a settled habit and a firm disposition towards doing good. Virtue addresses the simple idea of acting appropriately with a general focus on moral character.

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A virtuous leader never intends to answer all the questions, but rather to do the right thing in a given circumstance. Patterson (2003) added that servant leadership contains numerous virtues: (1) empowerment, (2) humility, (3) agapao love, (4) altruism, and (5) trust, among others. All these constructs are virtuous in nature and are evidenced in servant leadership.

### **Agapao love**

The literature points out that love is the greatest foundation of servant leadership, especially agapao love. According to Winston (2002), agapao love means moral love of doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons: "It is a love in a moral and social sense and comprises of embracing the deliberate assent of the will as a phenomenon of standard, property and duty," (p. 5). The literature acknowledges that this kind of love applies to present leaders, in that they have to consider the individual needs of their followers. This love is demonstrated by leaders who take each and every person as a whole person, with desires, wants, and needs.

Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) demonstrated that agapao love is implemented in the today's organizations and is the foundation of the common biblical phrase "doing unto others what you would wish them to do unto you". Agapao love is consistent with servant leadership to the extent that all servant leaders must possess such great love for their individual followers that they are committed to learning the talents and gifts of each one. The literature reported that organizations with the culture of agapao love always focus on the employees first, then the individual talents of those employees, and lastly how the talents will benefit the company.

Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) advocated love as a duty of any leader, in which case leaders must be spiritually, physically, and emotionally present for their followers. They affirmed that servant leaders will always care for their followers. Winston (2002) also advocated for this kind of approach by stating that the "call of agapao love within an organization is to move beyond seeing people as only hired labourers but rather hired hearts" (p. 9). Servant leaders in various cultures usually exhibit love by having a feeling while leading, this builds gratitude, understanding, forgiveness, kindness, and compassion. This type of love results in serving the interests of other people and freeing the leader from individually imposed limitations, criticism, and doubt. Servant leaders are expected to show unconditional and genuine love for the people they are leading. Such a life is likely to inspire courage and hope among their employees.

Furthermore, Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) argued that servant leaders are those who seek to honour and esteem people. According to Patterson (2003), servant leaders show love in several ways. They care more for the people they are leading than the organization itself, show appreciation, are real people with no signs of pretense, are active listeners, are sympathetic, are empathetic, communicate and listen actively, and celebrate milestones.

### **Humility**

Peterson, Galvin, and Lange (2012) described humility as not overestimating individual merits, which is important for leaders, who might think that they are superior. While some cultures, especially in African countries, considers humility a sign of weakness in a leader, Peterson et al. (2012) argued that "humility is a virtue that shows that one does not value himself so much" (p. 4).

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Humility, therefore, a virtue that enables a leader to respect the general worth of all people. The uniqueness of humility as a virtue is that those who are humble cannot esteem themselves. The literature describes humility as the ability to keep one's talents and accomplishments in perspective, not being self-focused, having self-acceptance, and focusing on other people. Peterson et al. (2012) argued that humility is a peaceful virtue that hinders self-glorification. The literature has linked servant leadership with being humble. Humility is necessary for all leaders across cultures, whether it is a church leader, a company's chief executive officer, or a political leader. The construct of humility enables one to be moderate, listen to other people's advice, and believe that the most appropriate use of power is rejecting any form of dictatorship. Servant leaders are expected to be humble and fair.

Sipe and Frick (2015) argued that one great feature of a servant leader is having the ability to be humble and vulnerable. Servant leaders do not center attention on their accomplishments, but on the people they are leading. Sipe and Frick (2015) pointed out that a servant leader shows humility when they listen willingly, feel accountable to those they serve, and see advice and criticism as a good opportunity for improving their services to their people. The literature affirms that such humble behavior builds a strong consensus with followers.

Servant leaders should not be arrogant but should always look at things from other perspectives and show respect and appreciation for the people they lead. Choudhary, Akhtar, and Zaheer (2013) stated that servant leaders not interested in being praised or exalted, but are more concerned with being held accountable for whatever they undertake. Such leaders, therefore, serve from the genuine desire of helping other people and look for ways in which they can serve and remain in touch with the people they lead.

### **Trust**

Trust is another important virtue of servant leadership highlighted by many scholars. Reed et al. (2011) found that trust is essential in an organizational arena. The literature link trust to integrity and showing deep concern for people in a trusting relationship. Eid et al. (2012) linked trust to respect for others and service within an organization.

Trust is an important element in the leader/servant relationship. Eid et al. (2012) affirmed that it is an essential element of organizational culture. They found that a successful servant leadership style must be based on trust. Reed et al. (2011) argued that trust is an important building block for servant leaders. Patterson (2003 p. 3) described trust as a virtue "which is essential for servant leadership". He clarified that servant leaders who trust other people will generate a standard of high excellence for the whole company.

Goodwill and respect are the basic building blocks from which trust is established. Without trust, disharmony and discord are more likely to proliferate. Reed et al. (2011) argued that servant leaders should always aim at helping people feel more comfortable, creating an environment in which each and every person has a voice and everyone works collectively and collaboratively while applying truth-telling skills. Patterson (2003) concurred with this argument, illustrating that trust is important for servant leaders and that the value of honesty and integrity builds organizational and interpersonal trust and results into a higher level of credibility. Patterson (2003) added that trust is an essential building block in servant leadership. It is "more of seeing the unseen ability of the followers, having strong believes that they are capable of realizing the company goals" (p. 5).

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### Common Definitions

Scholars who write on the subject of servant leadership theory agree on a number of constructs used to describe the elements of servant leadership. Patterson and Winston (2003) described these elements as:

- (a) Agapao love
- (b) Humility
- (c) Characteristics of altruism
- (d) Vision
- (e) Trusting and being trusted
- (f) Empowering
- (g) Offering service to the followers

As illustrated in the table below, various studies related to servant leadership differed with regards to constructs mentioned regarding servant leadership within an organization.

**Table 1: Constructs associated with servant leadership**

Characteristic	Patterson and Winston	Savage-Austin and Honeycutt	Van Dierendonck	Beck	Reed et al.	Peterlin et al.
Persuasive mapping	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emotional healing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Altruistic calling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transparent	X	X	X	X	X	X
Effective communication	X	X	X	X	X	X
Inclusive decision making	X	X	X	X	X	X
Influence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Motivation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Individual goal setting		X	X	X	X	X
Showing agapao love	X					

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Humility	X	X	X	X	X	X
Altruism	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vision	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trusting and trusted	X	X	X	X	X	X
Empowering	X	X	X	X	X	X
Offering service to followers	X	X		X	X	X
Concern for people	X				X	X
Job-based control		X	X	X	X	
Employee based control		X	X			
Interaction–influence process	X	X	X		X	X

The authors agreed that persuasive mapping, emotional healing, altruistic calling, transparency, effective communication, inclusive decision making, influence, motivation, individual goal setting, humility, altruism, vision, trusting and trusted, and empowering are characteristics of servant leadership. All authors, except Van Dierendonck (2011), agreed that offering service to followers is an essential construct in servant leadership. The remaining characteristics were a matter of preference depending on the individual authors.

### Studies on Servant Leadership

Various studies have emphasized cultural differences among countries and how leaders develop their personality traits in leading other people. Merino (2016) argued that servant leadership is growing fast in various parts of the world, hence, generating greater interest for the leaders around the world to adopt it. In Latin America, Asia, and Africa, however, leaders are still struggling to employ servant leadership in their groups.

Beck (2014) indicated that servant leadership is applied more regularly today, since it creates a special relationship between the followers and the leaders. The literature shows that servant leadership creates more trusting and honest relationship among people within a given society.



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These studies support the fact that servant leaders connect on a deep level with the people they are leading (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). That is why cultural knowledge always arises as an important aspect among leaders.

Choudhary et al. (2013) argued that an essential factor in understanding the success of an organization is to review its leaders. They stated that servant leadership is “a type of skill applied to influence the followers within an organization to work hard towards realizing the mission and vision of the organization” (p. 12). They further affirmed that great servant leaders initiate a “vision and a goal for the organization” (Choudhary et al., 2013, p. 8). The leaders then articulate visions and goals to the people working under them, develop shared vision and goals, come up with a path to achieve the vision and lead the organization in the new direction (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010).

Proponents of servant leadership theory have always tried to organize and explain the nature of complexity in leadership and the overall consequences associated with it. Some leadership scholars have called attention to the implicit connection between leadership and ethics (Irving, 2011). A growing new area of study, where leadership theory has been linked to virtues, ethics and morality, is servant leadership. Servant leadership theory emphasizes providing service to other people. The theory recognizes that the function of organizational leadership is to develop people who are capable of building a better tomorrow (Irving, 2011). This statement on servant leadership resonates with practitioners and scholars who are presently addressing the growing perceptions that organizational leaders have become selfish and who are seeking the most appropriate leadership theory to assist in addressing today’s challenges.

Merino (2016) carried out a cross-cultural comparison of servant leadership in the United States and Latin America to compare the acceptance and practice of servant leadership between the Latin America and the United States. He found that leadership varies across cultures and the manner in which people perceive servant leadership differs based on their cultural background. He emphasized that cultural conflicts with an organization and how it is easy to create misunderstandings among people of different cultural backgrounds.

Merino (2016) reported that a growing number of institutions in the US have adopted servant leadership in their day to day operations. The political leaders in the country were also reported to have developed servant leadership in their management techniques. For instance, Merino (2016) reported that a growing number of companies in the United States, including Synovus Financial, TDIndustries, and Southwest Airlines, have adopted servant leadership techniques in their overall leadership styles. The same literature has demonstrated that the US authorities are currently empowering their people to develop what they call global servant leadership.

However, Merino (2016) reported a different situation for Latin Americans. For instance, the results showed that leaders from Latin America are self-oriented, creating a troublesome environment for the people they are leading. The results demonstrated that servant leadership is rarely found in Latin America. Corruption, violence, lack of confidence, fear, uncertainty, and leaders taking advantage of their people are the main reasons why servant leadership is not common in this region.

Merino (2016) recommends a change of status quo if the people in these regions are to realize continued development. Several studies showed that there is increased interest in servant leadership in Latin America. However, this has never been realized due to differences in social class and the tribal orientation of most leaders in the region. Mittal and Dorfman (2012) affirmed this statement by pointing out that the past leaders in most developing countries, like African and Latin

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American countries, initiated the culture of corruption and abuse of power, which made it difficult for such countries to have new servant leaders. Wallace (2007) reported that lack of knowledge among most African, Asian, and Latin American leaders regarding servant leadership is the main reason why most institutions and organizations in these countries are not practising the culture of servant leadership. The literature points out that while most people in the developing countries perceive servant leadership as appealing, there are many barriers that prevent the implementation of servant leadership in these countries.

Mumley (2010) investigated the relevance of servant leadership among the black leaders in South Africa and white leaders in the US. He conducted interviews using the factors of servant leadership and found out that most leaders were aware of what constitutes servant leadership. However, he found that the black leaders were least likely to practice servant leadership compared to the white leaders from the US. He concluded that the culture of corruption and misuse of power was strong among the black leaders in South Africa, while the white leaders showed the strong desire to attend to the problems of the people they lead.

Mumley (2010) argued that the high score in power distance explains the inequality in most developing countries and the manner in which the society in most of these countries, like South Africa and Latin American countries, accepts power being in the hand of a few people. This is strongly linked with a high score of uncertainty avoidance in most African countries and the extent to which people in such countries seem to accept unforeseen political, social, and economic issues. The authoritarian styles of leadership in most developing countries have resulted in problems like violence, inequality, and corruption.

Savage-Austin and Honeycutt's (2011) study on American companies also explored the application of the main servant leadership constructs (persuasive mapping, emotional healing, and altruistic calling) by the top leadership of various US companies. Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) explained that the leadership styles that people use in their companies depends on their preferences, values, and beliefs, together with the norms and culture of the organization. The overall study results showed that most leaders in US companies has emotional healing and altruistic calling qualities, even as they manage their people. However, the results from this study affirmed that emotional healing and altruistic calling were only applicable to non-profit organizations, like churches.

Reed et al. (2011) conducted a study to establish whether there is a direct relationship between leadership, employee development, personnel interaction, and the overall performance of an organization. They measured seven dimensions of servant leadership that would impact employees' satisfaction and the overall performance of the organization: motivation, communication, goal setting, decision, coaching, interaction-influence, and persuasiveness. The results showed that dimensions such as involvement of employees in decision making, motivation, coaching, and effective communication greatly enhanced employees' satisfaction and the general performance of the organization. The study also demonstrated that servant leadership styles go hand in hand with effective management of human resource and confirmed that proper leadership styles always increase commitment and motivation of the individual employees. This results in a positive performance of the organization. Reed et al. (2011) recommended that organizations change their decision-makings to "participative decision making and informed decision making" (p. 8).

Hu and Liden (2011) pointed out that servant leader "must always be willing to offer their services to others" (p. 23). Servant leaders must use their gifts to serve others in the most appropriate manner.

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In his study to understand the content in which servant leadership is applicable, Van Dierendonck (2011) pointed out that servant leadership “is not only limited to church services but also applicable at the business organizations as well government institutions” (p. 4). Van Dierendonck (2011) clarified that servant leadership is not about talking but services to the people. Servant leadership should provide the people with hope and faith that there is a better tomorrow. Moreover, it is the work of servant leaders to ensure that all the people they lead are happy, without any form of discrimination and favoritism.

Schneider and George (2011) pointed out that servant leaders are self-dedicated and committed to serving the people they lead at the community level. They believed that it takes a huge sacrifice to offer servant leadership to promote the good of others. From this perspective, Van Dierendonck (2011) believed that having personal interactions with the individuals a leader serves proves that the leader is dedicated and committed to their needs and well-being. Even though it takes a lot of time away from family, the literature argues that the people one is serving should always come first (Choudhary et al., 2013).

Van Dierendonck (2011) reported that the lives of leaders in developing countries are consumed by money, status, and seeking praise from other people instead of creating a good relationship and showing love to their fellow humans. Such leadership is self-centered, with disregard for other people (Choudhary et al., 2013). Van Dierendonck (2011) posited that Western culture creates visionary and wise leaders who are ready to service the people they lead.

According to Reed et al. (2011), servant leadership should be natural and not assumed, bestowed, or taken away regardless of circumstance. They added that servant leaders must be clearly distinguished both by their individual self-construct and their main motivation to offer services and have a conscious aspiration to lead. Beck (2014) believed that servant leadership is a lifelong journey that is inwardly generated. He argued that even though the current literature on servant leadership theory evolved from Greenleaf’s perspectives, the application of servant leadership as a theory is not a new concept, but has roots dating back from the early Christian teachings and other great thinkers and leaders.

Choudhary et al. (2013) outlined that servant leadership concepts have always been applied in various cultural settings. They pointed out that servant leadership as a concept was first present at the time of Eve and Adam. God offered services to Eve and Adam while they were at the Garden of Eden. This same servant leadership behavior was passed on to other great people in the Bible, such as John the Baptist, Joseph, Moses, and Abraham. While the other theories in leadership are defined by the leaders who happened to have used them, Choudhary et al. (2013) pointed out that servant leaders are defined by their individual characters and by them demonstrating their full commitment to serve other people: “The concept of servant leadership theory does not only operate on the surface level but also deep within the person practising the leadership skills” (p. 13).

Irving (2011) offers explanations and arguments of why the concept of servant leadership is so important for deans who aspire to be successful in their management of the faculty or the academic institutions they head. Irving’s arguments postulate that there is a strong connection between the servant leadership styles and the impact it has on the performance of the faculty members of an academic learning institution. Peterson et al. (2012) affirmed that servant leadership styles always play an essential role in creating loyalty from employees and improving their work. Peterson et al. (2012) argued that “The progress and loyalty of faculty members offer very strong indicators of overall performance of the whole faculty” (p. 5). Additionally, “A substantial loyalty and progress of

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the faculty members within the department can only be realized by having a positive relationship between the dean and the faculty members, something which can only be realized when the faculty has servant leadership” (Peterson et al., 2012, p. 17).

Proper leadership within a company that has the ability to improve the overall performance usually requires the use of properly-designed personnel surveys. Irving (2011) pointed out that a good leader within an organization must routinely seek the opinion of the employees on various issues pertaining to decision making. The opinions sought must be detailed and include numerous factors that can impact the general performance metrics of the organization (Irving, 2011). Such inclusion of the employees by the top organizational leadership makes the employees feel included and important within the organization, which is subsequently reflected in their dedicated and improved performance in the organization.

Various studies on the impact that servant leadership has on the general performance of the organization generated the understanding that proper leadership encourages teamwork between the management and the employees (Choudhary et al., 2013). For instance, it ensures workgroup engagement and managerial engagement that offers opportunity to gain an understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of the employees regarding the performance of the organization (Choudhary et al., 2013). By not having proper leadership connection or interaction of the top leadership with employees from various departments, it is impossible for the employees to continue performing positively.

Mittal and Dorfman (2012) performed a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to establish whether the culture clusters differed for several constructs of servant leadership. The clusters included leadership from various countries: Anglo, Confucian Asia, Eastern Europe, Germanic Europe, Latin America, Latin Europe, Middle East, Nordic Europe, Southern Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The constructs measured were integrity, humility, and empowerment. The findings indicated that servant leadership is considered important for effective leadership in all the societies mentioned. Even though various cultures differed in the extent in which they endorse the dimensions of servant leadership, the study found that moral integrity is equally endorsed and essential in all the cultures. It is important to note that the degree of endorsement of all the constructs differed, with empowerment and integrity being considered the most important across all the cultures and humility and empathy being assumed as least important, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. The fact that there were no significant differences among culture clusters in their endorsement of moral integrity as an essential construct of servant leadership points out the globalism of this dimension for practices of effective leadership.

The same study found a significant difference between Confucian Asia, which had the lowest score on empowerment and Nordic Europe, which had the highest score. The authors described empowerment within the context of servant leadership as “a commitment to the development and welfare of the followers”. The leader, in this case, focuses on the development and growth of the followers in a proactive fashion. The authors reported that the cultural history of countries in the Anglo cluster have strong cultural evolutions towards favoring team and participative leadership, which include encouragement, delegation, support, and trust.

In Australia, for example, a lower score on power distance combined with high-performance orientation results in a need and recognition of cooperative effort, a factor that is only possible if the followers and the subordinates are empowered. Likewise, a study in Sweden by Orazi et al. (2013) established that development of a welfare state prototype can be associated to a collectivist

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preference for a society that promotes interdependence, conformity, and growth of all the citizens. Within Confucian Asia, the important features and hierarchy would greatly lessen the need for leaders to empower their servants. According to Orazi et al. (2013), Confucian Asia, especially China and Japan, fall among the highest scorers for assertiveness. People in China and Japan were more assertive and therefore cannot consider empowerment as an essential dimension of their leadership styles. The results of Mittal and Dorfman (2012) showed endorsement of humility of an effective leader among the Southern Asia cluster, though this had a significant difference with Germanic Europe and Nordic Europe.

### Conclusion

Servant leadership has received significant attention in various cultures around the world. The findings of this review established that servant leadership is recognized across cultures as essential for the organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Various authors established constructs of servant leadership, which include persuasive mapping, emotional healing, altruistic calling, transparency, effective communication, inclusive decision making, influence, motivation, individual goal setting, humility, altruism, vision, trusting and being trusted, and empowerment. While the level of significance attached to each construct varies across cultures, there are a few that were found to be significant across most cultures. For instance, there were no significant differences among culture clusters in their extent of endorsement of moral integrity as an essential construct of servant leadership. A more focused study is suggested to determine how these constructs of servant leadership can impact organizational and employee performance.

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