

Servant Leadership: A Royal Trait in VUCA Era

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Abstract

The term 'servant leadership' is a combination of the words 'servant' and 'leader,' and it describes a style of leadership in which the leader places a high priority on serving the needs of the organization's staff through role equality (equal opportunity irrespective of post) resulting in organisational productivity. This leadership management style chooses inspiration over instruction, by treating all members of the organisation well. The objective of the study through available qualitative data on the topic, is to experiment servant leadership to the best possible, in order to deliver numerous and diverse organisational goals harmoniously in the VUCA World. The emphasis here, is the manner in which goals are accomplished i.e. with humility and equal credibility to each member. That is precisely why it is a royal trait, as true royalty is nothing but simplicity and staying rooted at all times especially in glory, while giving credit even at the thought level, against taking credit. Also royal because; just as a king is praised for his act of forever giving attitude, a servant leader too belongs to the giver=gainer mindset. Giving team members in organisation trust, hope, care, support, appreciation, acknowledgment, time, kindness, cooperation, understanding, equal opportunity, constructive feedback, freedom to express, open mindedness, growth, fairness, guidance, etc. Servant Leader deeply understands, that success is a result of team contribution and universal guiding force elements. It is rightly said, that the journey matters more than the destination. The findings of the study discovered that servant leadership is not only a good principle, but is also effective in the modern workplace due to the rapid advancement of both technology and market demands, making it extremely challenging for employees to lead a balanced life. Servant leadership believes that human resource factor is a capital too, which fosters organisational prosperity. This is why individual growth and values also becomes essential, according to an analysis of its ideas, characteristics, and strengths. The outcomes of servant leadership (SL) include high performance, staff well being, growth in profits and employer branding.

Keywords: Human capital, giver=gainer mindset, staff well being and organisational growth, employer branding, role equality, sense of ownership, inspirational management style

Introduction:

Due to demanding work environments in VUCA world, capacity building of each team member need to be given attention by the leader and team members themselves. Servant leadership is a leadership style and philosophy whereby an individual influences his/her fellow employee to emerge the ocean of potential within, leading to self-empowerment. Self-empowerment need not be only by monetary reward, but by nominating for development programs, public appreciation and award, etc. When the team is treated well genuinely, it automatically results in word by mouth publicity and supports employer branding immensely, a prerequisite for organisational growth. This keeps a check on staff turnover and also attracts seasoned resources, due to the organisational work culture and value based leadership.

The theory of servant leadership is created by Robert Greenleaf, a twentieth-century researcher who considered that the leader should put the emphasis on their team members, so that with free-thinking they possess a sense of ownership. The work environment operates at high vibration when it is synergistic. This means each team member whether support staff or absolutely anyone is encouraged to freely offer their talent / views / suggestions and is not criticised. And even if they are at fault, are sensitized for realisation to occur and not punished or criticised ending up lowering self esteem. SL is a leadership philosophy first supported by Greenleaf in his 1970 essay, "The Servant as Leader." In the serving mind-set, giver is the gainer and believes that in the growth of each team member, lies the growth of the organisation.

Thus, servant leadership is a mind-set that reflects a servant-first mentality rather than a leader-first mentality. In this context, Greenleaf considered that a leader-first mentality was "often large, complex, powerful, impersonal; not always competent; sometimes corrupt." He claims that servant leaders put the needs of others above their own. People like this, naturally want to serve and in turn 'earn' not simply 'get' leadership position. This stands in contrast to traditional leaders who as a result, seek the position of leadership in order to appease an odd power urge or to amass worldly belongings or gain instant gratification on their every act or opinion. (Nayab 2011). This self-centredness, gives rise to organisational sustenance issues.

What is servant leadership?

Employees are more likely to feel heard in an environment of servant leadership. They are more inclined to perform to the best of their ability as a result. What, therefore, is servant leadership?

Robert K. Greenleaf originally used the phrase "servant leader" in his 1970 article "The Servant as Leader." The fundamental tenet of the servant leadership approach is that leaders should put the common good first. This type of leader puts their team and company first. They let go their own point of view or opinion and operate on a growthmind-set. They do not fully go with what they think is right. This gives rise to concept of 'talking to the person, instead of talking about the person.'

The goal of servant leadership is to realize a vision harmoniously, by empowering the workforce to face challenges. Employees can then develop and learn while contributing their own knowledge and perspective. Instead of being biased and choosing destructive leadership techniques, this utilises open door policy with equal opportunity irrespective of designation, age, gender, caste, qualification, etc.

The strategic focus of the servant leader is on:

- Establishing the company's strategic goal and communicating it to the team, with clarity and consistency.
- Fostering team ownership and supported trust.
- Ensuring that the team has the necessary tools, funding, resources and the focus to deliver.
- Bottom-up empowerment, which entails developing their team members' self-confidence, decision-making skills, and collaboration abilities, as opposed to giving them detailed instructions on how to perform each of their jobs. However, considers it necessary to regularly check and sensitize, in order to avoid damage control.

In leadership philosophy, the concept of servant leadership is no longer novel. Currently, the most crucial role is to foster and create leaders who are mindful, people-centred, adaptable, and ethical (Avolio et al., 2009). The phrase "servant leadership" was purposely coined by Robert Greenleaf in 1977 after reading Hermet Hesse's "Journey to the East" and is paradoxical (Block, 1993). Greenleaf gave leadership scholars a pause by inverting their perception of leadership (McClellan 2010).

To further define Greenleaf's paradigm shift, Spears (2004) identified ten characteristics of a servant-leader:

Listening: Servant leaders must pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues in order to understand what others are saying. For this, it is highly essential for Servant leader to silence the mind and five senses to get a holistic picture for long term organisational benefits. The servant leader must also interpret their innermost ideas and feelings (Spears, 2004:2). Successful people recognise the enormous importance of non-judgmental listening because they help leaders learn new information and correctly interpret what is being said. However, in times of crisis, it might be necessary to forgo

listening and consultation in favour of giving specific instructions as the situation requires, however gracefully.

Empathy: Each employee is intimately known by a servant leader, and they in turn recognise that everyone has something useful to contribute. The most effective servant-leaders are those who have honed their therapeutic listening skills, according to Spears (2004: 3). However, because of competition and the need to advance within the organisation, it is very challenging to assume the good will of co-workers and colleagues. The servant leader would first assume himself in a given situation and act accordingly.

Healing: "Servant-leaders recognise that they have the opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact" (Spears2004:3). Helping others overcome challenges and develop them into effective members of the organisation is the best method to build relationships. Hence thoughts, words and actions to the best possible, should be such that it is a healing experience for organisational members and if not, refrain from sarcasm, personal attacks using jokes,etc at any point.

Awareness:Leaders who are serving others should "view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position."Awareness is both an awakener and a disturber. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed" (Spears 2004:3). Leaders are better able to identify conflicts of interest and offer help to all employees when they are aware of the organisational climate, particularly the moral and ethical challenges.While exercising their powers, most Servant leaders operate out of the awareness thatagainst each choice they make,there are consequences and hence, make conscious choices at every step and donot allow their mind, people or situations to overpower their true self. They are emotionally stable and view life as a detached observer, instead of constantly absorbing energies of every person they interact. With this, they come across as self aware leaders.

Persuasion: The servant leader should depend on"on persuasion, rather than on one's positional authority, in making decisions within an organisation"Spears (2004):3.Instead of compulsion and imposition, persuading strategy can be used. The "authoritarian model" of leadership is in opposition to this. "The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups". Spears (2004):3.In a fast-paced work environment, a servant leader would frequently need to set aside their main competency of persuasion and advocate corrective or appropriate discipline instead. The ability to lead is limited and individual performance is undermined by leaders who disobey the persuasive and teamwork principles (Brewer 2010).

Conceptualization: "The ability to view a problem or an organisation from a conceptualising perspective means that one must think beyond daily realities," claims Spears (2004). The servant leader is innately capable of developing, preparing for, and managing future challenges due to his keen foresight. However, in this circumstance, unanticipated change poses a threat (Kim, Kim, & Choi 2014).

Foresight: "A characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future" (Spears 2004: 3). The servant leader should establish vision and direction and delegate decisions on how to reach the goals. The attributes of conceptualisation and foresight may evoke resistance in employees more especially when ad hoc changes are introduced frequently in tandem with a changing business environment (Kim, Kim, & Choi 2014).

Stewardship: "A commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion, rather than control" (Spears, 2004:4). Most of the time, a servant leader will have to give up the trait of transparency in order to protect people, maintain confidentiality, and uphold the organization's basic values and ideals.

Commitment to the growth of people: One who practises servant leadership is "deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her organisation." As stated in Spears (2004), "taking personal interest in the ideas and suggestions from everyone, encouraging worker

involvement in decision making" is one example. This quality promotes communication and idea sharing while also fostering a trusting relationship.

Building community: Servant leader must "seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution" (Spears, 2004: 4). The focus is on empowerment to encourage collaboration and show corporate cohesion. It also involves accountability and trust.

Literature Review:

Servant leadership is an all-inclusive leadership approach that engages followers on a variety of levels (such as relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual), allowing them the opportunity to grow into the individuals they were meant to be. According to the leaders' moral and altruistic beliefs, it places a higher priority on the growth of the followers (Greenleaf, 1977).

When followers' personal development and wellbeing are given attention they are more sorted, thereby more engaged and effective at work. Van Dierendonck (2011) asserts that servant leaders see themselves as stewards of the organisations who strive to make the most of the resources that have been given to them.

According to Yukl (2009), the major fundamental components of a servant leader's behaviour are integrity, selflessness, humility, empathy & healing, personal growth, fairness & justice, and empowerment. The ten main traits for the development of servant leadership were identified by Spears and Wagner-Marsh (1998) and are as follows: "listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, dedication to the growth of people and developing community." While the list of qualities above is not all-inclusive, it does offer hope and strength to individuals who not only want to follow servant leadership principles, but are also smart to pick up the business benefit out of this leadership style for employer branding.

Here, the term "servant leader" refers to a leader who finds satisfaction and fulfilment in "leading by serving," as opposed to a person who is obedient to others and follows commands. A servant leader acts as a noble leader and serves as a guiding force (Greenleaf, 1970).

Servant leadership encompasses both, a leadership ethos and a set of leadership techniques. Traditional, autocratic leadership usually entails the accumulating and use of power by one individual at the head of the institution. In contrast, a servant leader shares authority, prioritises the needs of others, and aids employees in growing and achieving their full potential in the service of the organisation. The democratic principle of servant leadership is founded on the idea that a leader's followers should believe in the worth and dignity of the human being (Spears 1995).

In dynamic businesses, servant leadership can result in good improvements (Brewer 2010: 7). They take down hurdles and impediments that would stop workers from developing personally and working effectively. They make sure that employees have easy access to opportunities for both professional and personal improvement. A servant leader upholds the organization's standards for worker performance and productivity while emphasising people-building and growth rather than people protection (Lisbijanto&Budyanto 2014).

Deming (Nayab 2011) asserts that an organization's most valuable asset is its individuals' initiative and inventiveness. Every leader has a sacred moral obligation to maximise these in each and every one of his followers. This is the leader's first priority. Exactly this is what servant leadership aims to encourage in organisations. Unfortunately, this style of leadership is frequently misinterpreted in modern managerial practises as being weak and unassailable and searching for spiritual values (Nayab 2011; Eicher-Catt 2005).

The empowerment that comes from teamwork and relationship-building is highly valued in the servant leadership concept (Russell & Stone 2002: 152). Rather than acting according to their position or title, each member of the team takes on different duties at various times depending on their area of expertise. We cannot advance to a higher quality of leadership, claims Nair (1996: 59), as long as power dominates our ideas about leadership.

Acknowledging every employee's role and contribution and communicating to them their worth, creates a contagious enthusiasm that aids organisations in achieving their objectives and missions, particularly during times of rapid change.

Although servant leadership prioritises the needs and aspirations of the individual and attempts to motivate staff to fulfil organisational requirements, it is not always successful in resolving conflicts relating to individual-organization fit. Due to the gentle approach of servant leadership, there are many incidents of unresolved disputes that hinder organisational effectiveness (Russell & Stone 2002; Drury 2004; Brewer 2010). Shared leadership utilising various leadership philosophies will be more suitable for effective performance in evolving businesses placed in dynamic changing contexts (Mason 2013). Organisational growth leads to more complicated management structures and a requirement to concentrate on a management matrix.

Servant leadership is promoted by a number of authors as an effective, contemporary theory for organisational development. The main benefit of the servant leadership style is its contribution to the all-around growth of the employee, according to a close examination of servant leadership theory attributes (Russell & Stone 2002; Brewer 2010; Guillaume et al. 2013).

Servant leaders do not make their employees follow them blindly, instead, they invest time and energy in assisting subordinates in understanding their own strengths, shortcomings, beliefs, and values as well as their capacity to improve organisational performance and job satisfaction (Jones, 2012). This style utilises emotional and consciousness quotient, enabling employee well-being, thereby accelerating organisational profits—two crucial factors in determining business sustainability.

According to Heidari, Ghasemi, and Heidari (2019), servant leadership is a method of management that places a focus on people, ideals, and the "big picture" (Wang, Xu, & Liu, 2018). As a result, servant leaders offer assistance rather than enforce their will (Al Hila & Al Shobaki, 2017). According to Aij and Rapsaniotis (2017), they empower rather than command. According to Ruiz-Palomino and Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara (2020), they view their work as a vocation rather than a job. Given that a leader can have an impact on their followers (Farrington & Lillah, 2019), the influence must be beneficial.

Servant leadership is heavily criticised for having a gentle approach that is inappropriate for a competitive setting. Additionally, the qualities of "serving" and "inspiring" are likely to create circumstances in which accountability, responsibility, and ownership are diluted.

Servant leadership maintains a firm moral and ethical foundation while gaining authority and fostering the development of value-based management. Servant leadership is a form of democratic leadership because the servant leader involves the team in decision-making and allows them the freedom to take action (Jones, 2012).

Findings

By reviewing above mentioned literature, it is found that Leadership is a state of being and one can BE a leader in anything one does. Servant leader operating out of the role of a facilitator leads out of sensitization than dictation / instruction. Servant leader follows Being-Doing-Having approach instead of Having-Doing-Being. Servant leaders do not hold assumptions, judgments and beliefs about those around them.

Best traits in most servant leaders:

- 1 Problem Flipping – Looks at eventualities / problems as opportunities to strengthen and grow.
- 2 Conscious choice of words – Being aware of the impact it would have on the team and whole environment, chooses words carefully (even in the mind), as every word is a vibration. Hence, chooses only high vibration words to keep the team self motivated, thereby contributing to green and sustainable work environment.

- 3 Chooses in-person meeting as the first way (as per case), then mailing – In mailing there is no energy exchange. It is more like one position talking to the other, making it a mechanical experience as it lacks will power.
- 4 Cognitive flexibility –Flexibility means to have a point of view, but also be extremely interested in understanding others point of view. This means despite having adequate knowledge and experience of the subject, they choose to listen non-judgmentally giving others a chance to express their thoughts and feelings, for business benefit. Servant Leader chooses growth mind-set over fixed mind-set. They do not believe their mind always and are open to a new line of thought.
- 5 Checking purpose while choosing people – Mapping talent and requirement, resulting in optimum utilization of human capital.
- 6 Transparent and authentic with whom they work – They believe in giving feedback constructively and not destructively. This means their feedback should bring about the desired shift in the team willingly and not by way of being imposed.
- 7 Coordination – Helps collect reliable data
- 8 Enabling uniform team conduct for common goals brings speedy success. Hence, exercises uniform treatment to one and all without getting carried away by own likes and dislikes
- 9 Balance of being tough minded and tender hearted, while tasking the team and also dealing with situations at work
- 10 Self-awareness of operating from the true self brings in resilience throughout all events in the day
- 11 Regards each role player in the organization with equality and fairness through emotional independence
- 12 Servant Leader neither feels superior nor inferior while meeting anyone as respects own uniqueness
- 13 Servant Leader is usually tireless, as tries less to control others
- 14 Servant Leaders do not believe everything they think and make decisions on values not their feelings.

Conclusion:

As per the analysis of some earlier studies, it is concluded that a serving mentality is necessary to be a servant leader. Non-judgmental listening, self-awareness, emotional stability, a dedication to fostering and developing people and mindful interpersonal communication skills are all traits that a servant leader must be able to regularly demonstrate. According to this study, organisations could utilise SL and could transcend VUCA to Visionary intentions, deeper Understanding, Creativity & Clarity and Agility in navigation. This would result in excellent performance and engaged workers, in turn being beneficial for organisational profitability fostering entrepreneurial spirit. To practice servant leadership at any level, one must pay attention to the things that multiply the happiness quotient of staff, as happiness is the new productivity tool, however keeping in mind overall factors in the benefit of the business. Job satisfaction is key to profitability and thereby sustainability as a result of consistent peak performance. Thus, by taking charge of projects, by helping team members, attending to their requirements, and offering resources and assistance, organizations can grow holistically i.e Purpose, People, Profit and Planet; as once the team is treated as one's own, the business performance is by default owned up by the team.

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