Servant Leadership Theory Development & Measurement

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Abstract

A servant leadership has been raised up in recent years since Robert Greenleaf publish his personal journal about his own experience journey. Years by years, academia becoming interested about this leadership style. With the uniqueness of different term of leader and servant, servant leadership still tried to find out the empirical and theoretical research in theory building. Servant leadership theory development talks about the concept and the model of this leadership style, however servant leadership measurement tried to find empirical research to measure servant leadership concept. Both of this stream are important to strengthen the servant leadership theory building in academic perspective. However, there are some critics of servant leadership theory and measurement development both in methodology and theory building.

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1. Introduction

The origin of servant leadership concept was constructed by the first conceptualized of servant leadership by Robert Greenleaf and the historical figures of Jesus Christ. Robert Greenleaf put the “phenomenal” definition of leadership by servant leadership through serves first, not lead. Furthermore, servant leaders seek to transform their followers to & quo;grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants (Greenleaf, 1977:13-14). By this explanation, Robert Greenleaf has not been developing the set of characteristic of servant leadership, however He pointed out the most important term of servant leadership: serve first, then aspire to lead.

Robert Greenleaf is not the one and only man who invent the servant leadership concept, in 1978 Burn asserted about servant leadership: “(Transforming) leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality...But transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral (italics in original) in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, thus it has a transforming effect on both” (Burns, 1978: 20)

From the early of servant leadership concept being introduced in practice and academia, there some development of the theory itself. Some papers tried to understanding the differentiation the concept of servant leadership and the other leadership concept, the others researcher tried to examining how to measure servant leadership characteristic. This paper aims to review and examining the origins and development of the concept of servant leadership. Then follows a review of the differentiation between servant leadership concept and the other leadership style concept. Next, the paper will show various measures and assessment instrument that has been developed to better understanding how servant leadership manifested and how it developed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Origins of Servant Leadership Theory

The term of “servant leadership” was coined by Robert Greenleaf (1904-1990) in his seminar work “The Servant Leader”, first published in 1970:

“The servant leader is servant first... it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings on to aspire to lead..the best test and difficult to administer is this: Do those serve grow as person? Do they, while being served, become servants? And, what is the effect on the least previllage in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (1977:7)

Servant leadership was constructed by two term: leader and servant, both of this term are “oxymoron” because plays two different role in one time, serve and lead. Its maybe difficult to accept that as the leader, they serve too. Serve and lead at the same time- the leaders who serves, and the servant who lead. However the dynamic conceptual relationship and complementary roles between servanthood and leadership have recently attracted the attention of leadership scholars and practices ((Bass,1999; Bowman, 1997; Buchen, 1998; Chappel, 2000; Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; De Pree, 1989; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Graham, 1991; Pollard, 1997; Russel, 2000; Senge, 1990, 1995; Spears, 1995).

The most important when we explain about theory is what the origin of its theory itself. It can provide what the root of the theory and give the “big picture” through its development. Servant leadership has a philosophical basis of the theory:

1. The motivation of servant leadership is to serve first, not to lead. Its breaking up our paradigm before that leaders always come to activate their power, manage something and direct the followers.
2. Servant leaders is who later serves out of prompting of conscience or in conformity with normative expectations (Greenleaf, 1977: 14)
3. The self concept of servant leaders: view themselves as stewards- its derived from Greek “aikonomia” which mean house of manager.
Jesus Christ- Prophet Isa in Islamic term was practiced servant leadership behaviour almost two thousand years ago. Jesus or Prophet Isa used the term of servant as a synonym of greatness. Contrary to the popular opinion of the day, Jesus taught that a leader’s greatness is measured by a total commitment to serve fellow human beings. Jesus give us an practice of leaders as servant when he called by his disciples as teacher and Lord but in the same time He washed his disciples feet while said “You called me teacher and Lord, then that I am. Now I am as your teacher and Lord washed your feet, so you have to washed another’s feet. This is an example for you as a teacher and Lord”. From this experience, we concluded the principle of servant leaders is leadership power from ’power over’ to ’power to’, that is power as an enabling factor to choose to serve others.

2.2 The Distinguish of Servant Leadership and The Others Style – Focus on Follower’s Well Being

A person who has strong characteristic, expertise, and power to legitimate, manage and lead the others has identified and related closely with the term of leadership for a long time ago. That “old” paradigm was breaking up by Greenleaf who provide the new strong paradigm of leadership by servant leadership concept, rather than exhibit their power and expertise, the servant leaders going to be selflessly and beyond one’s self interest. The servant-leader is governed by creating within the organization opportunities to help followers grows (Luthans&Avolio, 2003). Compared with the other leadership style which focus on organization objective, servant leadership is genuinely concerned with serving followers and make sure that the followers grow and achieving their personal well-being.

Servant leaders as mention by Greenleaf above, go beyond self interest. They are not motivated by motivation of power, but motivation to serve others (Luthans&Avolio, 2003). The most important principle of Servant leadership by Greenleaf is “primus inter pares” (i.e first among equals), who does not use his power to getting this done for organization but who tries to persuade and convince staff. The identification of followers need becoming the key of persuade and convince since they did not use their power to force or legitimate something. They intended to serve what the followers need and lead them. Leading and serving becomes exchangeable. Being a servant allows a person to lead; being leaders implies a person serves.

Somehow servant leadership has many similarities with the transformational and charismatic leadership as well as studied by Graham (1991) stated that Weberian charismatic authority, personal celebrity charisma, transformational leadership and servant leadership is theoretical underpinning for each of these leadership models. She concluded that transformational and servant leadership are both inspirational and moral. However, the other study has found the uniqueness of servant leadership than others leadership style especially transformational leadership. Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004) has found that servant leadership has uniqueness in “spiritual generative culture” while transformational leadership will lead to an “empowered dynamic culture”. Its culture associated with leader’s motivation, which servant leaders motivated by arises of attitude of egalitarianism, in other word she or he is not better than those who are led. This motivation arise the culture of spiritual which member are focus on the personal growth of them and the organizational system will facilitate that growth.

In other way, transformational leadership emerges from different motivation base. The leaders motivated by a sense of mission to recreate the organization to survive in challenging external environment. Individual growth are not unimportant but must be related to the organization’s success in the external environment (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004)

Servant leadership focus on stability and evolutionary of the organization by the followers personal growth as the basic foundation. It will take a long time but it will be strong over the time to make the organization sustainability and stability. Time factor for servant leaders are not considered crucial because they stress collaboration and integrity in develop their organization. The most important in decision making process are mutually acceptable decision through good understanding and the maturity of followers. In order that, the development of organization through servant leadership styles just the impact goals, the ultimate goals are the growth and follower’s maturity.
Table 1. The Uniqueness of Servant Leadership – Compare with other Leadership Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation to serve</th>
<th>Motivation to recreate organization survive</th>
<th>Motivation to express the true self.</th>
<th>Motivation to do the things appropriate the norm in organization</th>
<th>Good to great = Doing extraordinary ways</th>
<th>Motivation to involved others in decision making</th>
<th>Motivation to find out meaning of work</th>
<th>Motivation to gain organization goals and no self-oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth of followers without necessarily being organization objective</td>
<td>Ownership of one’s personal experiences</td>
<td>Resulting appropriate behavior of followers in organizations</td>
<td>Organization success and long term performance</td>
<td>Shared leadership and responsibility of organization</td>
<td>Building organization values and culture by sense of calling</td>
<td>Focus on organization goals and performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Servant Leadership Theory Development

3.1 Characteristic and model of Servant Leadership

Since the concept of servant leadership was introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1977, there were some development on its concept – even though Robert Greenleaf not suggested the model or characteristic of servant leadership itself. Until 2010 there are some researcher who has succeeded to develop the model and characteristic of servant leadership. Spears (1995) distinguished 10 characteristic as the essential elements of servant leadership. (1) Listening: emphasizing the importance of communication and seeking to identify the will of the people; (2) empathy: understanding others and accepting how and what they are (3) Healing: the ability to help make whole; (4) Awareness: being awake; (5) Persuasion: seeking to influence others relying on arguments not on positional power; (6) Conceptualization: thinking beyond the present day need and stretching it into a possible future; (7) foresight: foreseeing outcomes of situations and working with intuitions; (8) Stewardship: holding something in trust and serving the needs of others; (9) commitment to the growth of people: nurturing the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of others; (10) Building community: emphasizing that local communities are essential in a person’s life.

Laub (1999) provided 6 clusters: (1) Develop people; (2) Shared Leadership; (3) Display Authenticity; (4) Values People; (5) Providing Leadership; (6) Builds Community. Russel and Stone (2002) developed two kinds attributes of servant leadership: Primary attributes consist of: (1) Vision; (2) Honesty; (3) Integrity; (4) Trust; (5) Service; (6) Modeling; (7) Pioneering; (8) Appreciation of others; (9) Empowerment. The others attributes, functional attributes (the effective characteristic of servant leadership) consist of: (1) Communication; (2) Credibility; (3) Competence; (4) Stewardship; (5) Visibility; (6) Influence; (7) Persuasion; (8) Listening; (9) encouragement; (10) Teaching; (11) Delegation.

Patterson (203) has developed 7 construct of servant leadership which are: (1) Agapao love: social or moral sense; (2) Act with humility: ability to keep one’s accomplishment and talent in perspective; (3) Altruistic: helping others selflessly just for sake of helping, which involve self-sacrifice, although there is no personal gain; (4) Visionary for followers: Mode of seeing or conceiving or unusual discernment or foresight; (5) Trusting: confidence or in reliance on another team members; (6) Serving; (7) Empowers followers: Entrusting powers to others involves effective listening, making people feel significant, putting emphasis on teamwork, valuing of love and humility.

Dierendonck (2010) suggested 6 factors in servant leadership: (1) Empowering ad developing people: fostering proactive, self-confident attitude among followers and gives them a sense of personal power; (2) Humility: ability to put one’s own accomplishment and talents in a proper perspective; (3) Authenticity: expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thought and feeling; (4) Interpersonal acceptance: the ability to understand and experience the feeling of others and where people are coming from; (5) Providing direction: to make work dynamic and “tailor made” (based on followers abilities, needs and input); (6) Stewardship: willingness to take responsibility for the larger institutions and to go for service instead of control and self-interest.

3.2 Servant Leadership Research Methodology Development
a. Laub (1999)

The first measure of servant leadership was developed by Laub (1999). He determined the essential characteristics of servant leadership from a comprehensive review of the available literature combined with a Delphi survey among experts that resulted in six clusters of servant leadership. Items were formulated in terms of organizational culture and leadership in general. Not surprisingly, a factor analysis showed that the instrument had only two underlying dimensions—one focusing on the organization and the other on leadership reflecting the following underlying perspectives: the organization as a whole, its top leaders, and the experience of the follower. Given the high correlations between the mean scores on the six clusters, the six dimensionality of the measure was questioned. Therefore, Laub concluded that the overall score be recommended for research purposes. Thus, despite conceptually covering all six servant leadership characteristics, its operationalization lost its concept multidimensional character. Laub’s model was an important contribution to the scientific servant leadership research in that it was and still is used in several PhD studies and has given the first push toward empirical research. It can still be useful to determine to what extent an organization has a servant leadership culture. Furthermore, it has helped shape the thinking in the theorizing about servant leadership (e.g., see Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004).

b. Dennis & Bocarnea (2005)

Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) Examines the construct theory of servant leadership by Patterson into instrument to measure the working theory as well as the construct. There are 7 construct of servant leadership by Patterson and would validate Using criterion-related validity and construct-related validity to construct the items. The 7 factors of Patterson concept are: agapao love, act with humility, altruistic, visionary for followers, trusting, serving, empowers followers. The researcher did gathered items, expert judgments, reliability and validity test, factor analysis steps and oblimin rotations.

The result are from 7 factors, there only 5 factor analysis which has sufficient loading value : Love, Humility, empowerment, vision. Service and altruism were not found because the items are still not concise enough to discriminate between individual items as a separates factors.. Recommendation for service: review other validation item more correctly and continue with Devalles method to measure as instrument.


Barbuto & Wheeler provided the conceptualization and measurement of servant leadership construct through several stages: internal reliability, convergent, divergent, and predictive validity. The different kinds of servant leadership concept and measurement from Barbuto and Wheeler are 11 characteristic back from the origin definition from Greenleaf. It provide a framework and geared the practitioner and lack of theoretical framework into operationalization level. They used some methodology following these steps:
1. Develop items form literature review as new contract. Reviewing from author and face validity
2. Face validity using expert judgment (11 leadership expert)
3. Using external sampling for get the data and doing exploratory factor analysis
4. Using varimax rotation than oblique rotation because it will relut strong and unique loading to component identified in the analysis and to guide potential reduction of factors
5. Internal realibility using SPSS
6. Using confirmatory factor analysis to test the factor loading structures of the subscales
7. Using Convergent and divergent validity
8. Assessing predictive validity of the subscales

The result are from literature review resulting items of 11 characteristic and continuing from expert judgement resulting 56 items, Using exploratory factor analysis resulting data reduction until 23 items into 5 factors, 23 items of 5 factor is calculated the intercorrelation by self (leaders) and raters (followers) version. From these data, factor analysis indicate 5 factor for 11 characteristic potential servant leadership, 5 factors include: Altruistic, emotional healing, wisdom, Persuasive mapping, Organizational Stewardship.

d. Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson (2008)

Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson develop a multidimensional and multilevel assessment of servant leadership instrument. They called multidimensional and multilevel assessment because of the methodology used multivariate
analysis (confirmatory and factor analysis) and distinguished from other leadership styles through Hierarchical Level Measurement. First, they identified 9 dimensions through literature review, using exploratory analysis resulting in 7 factor solutions. Verified by confirmatory factor analysis and using Hierarchical Linear model to distinguish the variance in subordinate level rather than transformational leadership and leader-member exchange theory. The hypothesis of this study are: Hypothesis 1: servant leadership as a construct, consists of distinguishable dimensions that define its domain. Hypothesis 2: at individual level, servant leadership is positively related to employee's community citizenship behaviour, in role performance and organizational commitment when controlling for transformational leadership and LMX. Hypothesis 3: SL aggregated to the group level is positively related to the individual-level employee’s community citizenship behaviour, in role performance and organizational outcomes.

The result are seven dimensions scaled consisted 28 items, incremental variance of individual level of Servant Leadership on organizational commitment, community citizenship behaviour, and in role performance. The result pertaining that organizational commitment highlights a noteworthy aspect of Servant Leadership construct, significant amount of significant variance in supervisor-rated, subordinate in role performance. behaving ethically was mostly high related to in role performance. The 7 dimensions are: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skill, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically.

e. Van Dierendonck (2010)

The latest addition to the fast-growing number of servant leadership measures was developed by Van Dierendonck and Nuijten. After an extensive literature review, 99 items were formulated representing eight dimensions. In three steps, a combined exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis approach resulted in an eight-dimensional measure of 30 items. The original development samples were in Dutch; confirmatory factor analysis for an English-language (U.K.) sample confirmed the factorial structure. It seems to be the only instrument with a good factorial structure that covers all six key characteristics of servant leadership.

In addition to these multidimensional instruments, at least two one-dimensional measures were developed. Reinke (2003, 2004) developed a short 7-item measure that encompasses items on openness, vision, and stewardship. Ehrhart (2004) developed a 14-item measure with items illustrating two aspects of servant leadership: ethical behaviour and prioritization of subordinates’ concerns. Although easy to apply, the great handicap of these one-dimensional measures is their inability, as the term implies, to distinguish between different servant leadership dimensions. This precludes insight into their underlying mechanisms.

Table 2. Measurement of Servant Leadership (Dierendonck, 2010)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development samples</strong></td>
<td>847 people from 41 organizations</td>
<td>24 leaders, self-evaluating; 1,157 people from diverse backgrounds</td>
<td>388 people rating in leadership training seminar</td>
<td>250, 406, 300 people diverse occupational backgrounds</td>
<td>298 undergraduates; 182 people in production and distribution company</td>
<td>277 graduate students</td>
<td>1,571 people in 8 samples from 2 country and diverse occupational backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
<td>Literature review, exploratory factor analysis</td>
<td>Literature review, face validity, exploratory factor analysis</td>
<td>Literature review, face validity, exploratory factor analysis</td>
<td>Literature review, exploratory factor analysis; confirmatory factor analysis</td>
<td>Literature review, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis</td>
<td>Literature review, content expert; validation; confirmatory factor analysis</td>
<td>Literature review interview with expert; exploratory factor analysis; confirmatory factor analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of items</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal consistency</strong></td>
<td>0.90 to 0.93</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>0.82 to 0.92</td>
<td>0.89 to 0.92; not reported for 3-items scales</td>
<td>0.76 to 0.86</td>
<td>0.72 to 0.93</td>
<td>0.69 to 0.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 3. Key Characteristic of Servant Leadership Relates to Measurement Dimensions (Dierendonck, 2010)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowering &amp; developing people</td>
<td>Develops people</td>
<td>Serves and developing others Consulting and involving others</td>
<td>Empowerment Trust</td>
<td>Empowering Helping</td>
<td>Transforming influence</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Share leadership</td>
<td>Humility and selfishness</td>
<td>Altruistic calling</td>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Putting subordinates first</td>
<td>Voluntary subordination</td>
<td>Humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Display authenticity</td>
<td>Modeling integrity and authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Acceptance</td>
<td>Values people</td>
<td>Emotional healing</td>
<td>Agape love</td>
<td>Emotional healing</td>
<td>Conventional relationship</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Direction</td>
<td>Providing leadership</td>
<td>Inspiring and influencing others</td>
<td>Persuasive mapping</td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Conceptual skills</td>
<td>Courage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>Builds community</td>
<td>Organizational stewardship Wisdom</td>
<td>Creating value for community</td>
<td>Behaving ethically</td>
<td>Responsible community</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


