



Servant-leadership traits of educational administrators: Emerging profiles and predictors

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Abstract

Servant-leadership in education has remarkably paved the way towards crafting more responsible and humane schools. This study examined the servant-leadership profiles of school leaders based on Greenleaf and Spears ten traits, namely: Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the Growth of People, and Building Community. Results showed that the most common servant leadership traits manifested and practiced by school leaders are: Empathy, Commitment to Growth of People, Building Community, Listening, Persuasion, Stewardship, Conceptualization and Awareness. The salient profiles of servant leaders in school are anchored on service and humility, democratic leadership, caring and loving relationships, listening skills, leading by example, development of people, team-building, collaboration, honesty and transparency, respect for others, open communication, and empowerment of subordinates. The predictors of servant-leadership traits were also examined.

Keywords: servant-leadership, school leaders, leadership, service

Introduction

The 21st century leadership is a call towards servant-leadership (Strock, J., 2016) ^[17]. Amid the challenges of today's changing world, servant-leadership gets into the heart of what leadership is all about because it brings people to a higher level by leading at a higher level (Blanchard, 2002) ^[2]. In-depth discussions on leadership have focused on service-centered and character-centered leadership models (Wilkes, G., 1998). According to Robert Greenleaf, the servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead (Spears, L., 2005) ^[15]. Being a servant leader, or being of service to others, means you are enabling and empowering others to achieve their goals.

There is real need for leaders who are servant first because they value service over personal interests. Being a servant would necessarily involve looking for others' needs and trying to help meet them (Manz, 1998) ^[10]. Being a leader is more than influencing, guiding, and controlling the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others towards the realization of shared goals. There is a moral-ethical-spiritual dimension of leadership anchored on loving service and quality caring (Bhindi, 1997) ^[4]. Servant-leadership makes a substantial difference in any organization or institution. The school, for instance, is primarily a service-oriented institution that would become highly responsive and caring when the school head is a servant-leader.

Servant-leadership in education has remarkably paved the way towards crafting responsible and humane schools. For the past three years, program development and academic research have focused on servant-leadership in educational institutions (Beggs, 2001) ^[3]. Considering the *loco parentis* role of the school and its unique and transitional position in the minds and hearts of the students, the administrators and teachers care

and try to do what is best for the people they serve; this resembles a shared stewardship with heavy moral overtones and civic responsibility (Sergiovanni, 1995) ^[12]. A leadership practice with moral dimension built around purpose, values, and beliefs, certainly inspire commitment and service that can make our schools great (Sergiovanni, 1996) ^[13]. Servant leadership is gaining momentum in the educational setting (Kasun, R., 2009) ^[8]. Bass (2000) ^[1] found that "servant leadership has a place in educational organizations in the new millennium because servant leadership is based on teamwork and community".

What does it take to be a servant-leader? Spears and Lawrence (2002) ^[16] posit that servant-leadership is a form of leadership based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and one that is attempting to enhance the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of our many institutions. Greenleaf (1977) ^[7] propounded a unique yet universal perspective of leadership traits. Accordingly, a servant-leader initiates, provides the ideas and structures, holds a prophetic voice of great clarity, has great vision and quality insight equal to that of any age, always searching and listening, has deep awareness and perception, readily empathizes with and accepts the person, persuades gently and non-coercively, makes himself and others whole by healing and serving, builds community with love and accountability, confident to face the unknown and takes the risk of failure along with the chance of success.

Based on the writings of Greenleaf, Larry Spears (2004) ^[14] extracted ten characteristics of servant-leadership: Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the growth of people, and Building community. To assess the servant-leadership traits

of school leaders would be most interesting and relevant. The servant school leaders can bring more success because they choose to serve rather than self-serving (Robinsons, J., 2011) [11].

Considering the continuing search for educational administrators and school leaders who can craft a humane and service-oriented campus milieu, and make a difference in school, it is interesting to examine the servant-leadership traits of school leaders. Apparently, the servant-leadership profiles of school leaders and the predictors of servant-leadership can provide relevant knowledge on a service-oriented model of educational leadership. Consequently, this would contribute towards more effective school administration and leadership policy and practice.

Purpose and statement of the problem

This study is aimed delineate the servant-leadership profiles of school leaders based on the ten traits of the servant-leader, and to determine the significant predictors of the servant-leadership traits.

Specifically, the study will investigate on the following:

1. What are the significant servant-leadership traits of school leaders?
2. Is there any significant correlation between and among the servant-leadership traits?
3. What are the servant leadership profiles of the school leaders?
4. What are the significant predictors of the servant-leadership traits?

Methodology

Premised on the ten traits of servant-leadership conceptualized by Robert Greenleaf and Larry Spears, this is a descriptive and analytical study of the servant-leadership qualities and practices of educational administrators. A Servant Leadership Inventory was floated to a random sample of 192 educational administrators at St. Paul University Philippines and its partner schools in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Taiwan. The data gathered were tallied and subjected to factor analysis, Pearson product moment correlation, and multiple regression. To validate and enrich the data analysis, the respondents were also interviewed through face-to face, skype, and email.

Results and Discussion

The factor analysis evolved ten core factors, namely: Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the growth of people, and Building community. This is evidenced by the significant loadings of the items for every factor trait which reached the set criterion of 0.3 level of significance. Based on the highest number of items and loading, the most common servant leadership traits manifested and practiced by school leaders are: Empathy, Commitment to Growth of People, Building Community, Listening, Persuasion, Stewardship, Conceptualization and Awareness.

Reliability was established through the internal consistency of the items using Cronbach Alpha which generated a cumulative reliability coefficient of 0.817. Table 1 shows the communality estimates per factor. The cumulative estimate of the ten factors in terms of eigenvalue is 61.628%. So, at least 62% of the servant-leadership construct was measured.

Table 1: Communality estimates per factor

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.629	29.258	29.258	14.629	29.258	29.258
2	4.009	8.017	37.275	4.009	8.017	37.275
3	2.090	4.179	41.454	2.090	4.179	41.454
4	1.862	3.725	45.179	1.862	3.725	45.179
5	1.724	3.448	48.627	1.724	3.448	48.627
6	1.398	2.796	51.423	1.398	2.796	51.423
7	1.348	2.697	54.120	1.348	2.697	54.120
8	1.297	2.594	56.715	1.297	2.594	56.715
9	1.250	2.500	59.215	1.250	2.500	59.215
10	1.206	2.413	61.628	1.206	2.413	61.628

The correlations of the servant-leadership traits were determined using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at .05 level of significance. As shown in Table 2, the servant-leadership traits are inter-correlated. Accordingly, community building is highly correlated with listening, empathy, commitment to growth of people, healing, and foresight. It is moderately correlated with conceptualization and awareness. Listening is highly correlated with community building, empathy, commitment to growth of people, awareness, healing, and foresight. Empathy is highly correlated with community building, listening, commitment to growth of people, healing, foresight, and awareness; there is moderate correlation with stewardship and conceptualization.

Commitment to growth of people is highly correlated with community building, listening, empathy, healing, foresight, and conceptualization. Persuasion is highly correlated with awareness, stewardship, and conceptualization. Awareness is highly correlated with listening, empathy, persuasion, and healing; there is moderate correlation with community building and conceptualization. Stewardship is highly correlated with persuasion and conceptualization; it is moderately correlated with empathy. Healing is highly correlated with community building, listening, empathy, commitment to growth of people, awareness, conceptualization and foresight. Conceptualization is highly correlated with community building, commitment to growth

of people, persuasion, and stewardship; it is moderately correlated with empathy, awareness, and healing. Foresight is highly correlated with community building, listening,

empathy, commitment to growth of people, and healing; there is moderate correlation with conceptualization.

Table 2: Inter-correlations of servant-leadership traits

	Community Building	Listening	Empathy	Commitment to growth of people	Persuasion	Awareness	Stewardship	Healing	Conceptualization	Foresight
Factor1	1.000									
Factor2	.790**	1.000								
Factor3	.667**	.671**	1.000							
Factor4	.684**	.688**	.593**	1.000						
Factor5	.024	-.010	.136	.136	1.000					
Factor6	.177*	.263**	.199**	.128	-.399**	1.000				
Factor7	-.085	-.098	-.153*	-.106	-.286**	.131	1.000			
Factor8	.698**	.682**	.557**	.606**	.026	.219**	-.125	1.000		
Factor9	.227**	.130	.160*	.208**	.375**	-.176*	-.498**	.192*	1.000	
Factor10	.584**	.516**	.470**	.461**	-.012	.125	-.105	.493**	.170*	1.000

** High
* Moderate

The significant loadings of the items in one, two or more servant-leadership traits had evolved interesting profiles and categories of the school leaders. The group loadings and inter-loading of items were consequently analyzed and enriched with the descriptions of servant-leaders in the interview of respondents.

The salient profiles of servant leaders in school are anchored on service and humility, democratic leadership, caring and loving relationships, listening skills, leading by example, development of people, team-building, collaboration, honesty and transparency, respect for others, open communication, and empowerment of subordinates. Accordingly, based on the results of the assessment and interview, four (4) servant-leadership categories and profiles emerged, to wit: Servant-first Orientation, Receptive-responsive Caring, Other-centered Service, and Instructive-transformative Relating.

Servant-first orientation

The respondents mainly equated servant-leadership with a servant-first orientation as expressed in the inter-loading of items under stewardship, community building, listening, healing, and awareness. The school leaders under this category are humble, simple, task-oriented, hardworking, God-fearing, and believe that the purpose of being a leader is primarily to serve and not to wield power and control or to reap material rewards and recognition. Being a leader and a servant as well is the predominant indicator of a servant-leader. The kind of service of a servant-leader is commonly described to be like that of Jesus Christ in the washing of the feet of the disciples.

Receptive-responsive caring

The school leaders who demonstrate receptive-responsive caring are considered as servant leaders. This profile is a combination of the servant-leadership traits of empathy, listening, healing, and awareness. The common indicator is the leader’s ability to give quality care by being receptive and responsive to the needs and concerns of people. This involves basic awareness of inputs and feedback coming from both internal and external sources, listening to the minds and hearts

of people and empathizing with their feelings and experiences, and healing of hurtful and personal brokenness. The school leaders are kind, understanding, forgiving, considerate, strong in empathy, good listener, charitable, loving and caring in relationships.

Other-centered service

The third profile highlights other-centered service. It is a combination of the servant-leadership traits of listening, stewardship, empathy, commitment to growth of people, and conceptualization. The school leaders take good care of the school and the needs of the people. They are democratic, altruistic, collaborative, responsible, good facilitators and negotiators, open to feedback, team builder, respectful of others, empower subordinates, train and develop people, see the best in people and enable them to become their best, manage well the resources of the school, open to cultural diversity and beliefs, work for the holistic growth of people and organization, and entrepreneurial.

Instructive-transformative relating

The indicator of the fourth servant-leadership profile of school leaders is instructive-transformative relating and the focus is on the leader’s relating with people and dealing with issues. This is a combination of the servant-leadership traits of listening, community-building, persuasion, conceptualization, and foresight. The school leaders are good in human relations founded on values and virtues that are taught by example and intended to create a transforming effect on people. Likewise, this indicates the leader’s ability to communicate a vision of what the school can do, and what the people in school can contribute towards the fulfillment of goals and objectives. Good governance is practiced through honesty, integrity, transparency, leadership by example, discipline, responsible citizenship, creativity and innovation, system and organization, and positive change.

The personal and work-related data gathered about the respondents were utilized as predictors of the servant-leadership traits, namely: age, years of service, gender, type of school, position, educational attainment, nationality, and

religion. Regression analysis evolved the significant predictors. As shown in Table 3, empathy can be predicted by age and nationality. So, the respondents within the age range of 41-50 years old are highly empathic. The Filipino respondents are very high in empathy. In Table 4, the significant predictor of persuasion is educational attainment. Such that, the respondents with graduate degree are highly

persuasive. Table 5 shows that the significant predictor of awareness is gender. Women are high in awareness than men. As shown in Table 7, the significant predictor of stewardship is educational attainment. The respondents with graduate degree are high in stewardship. The other factors like the years of service, type of school, position, and religion are not significant predictors of servant-leadership.

Table 3: Predictor of Empathy

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.013	.545		7.364	.000
age_range	.126	.055	.340	2.290	.025
yrs_service_range	-.045	.050	-.125	-.898	.372
gender	-.092	.104	-.100	-.884	.380
type	-.017	.118	-.019	-.140	.889
pos_cat	.072	.107	.099	.680	.499
educ_cat	.000	.089	.000	-.002	.998
nationality	-.369	.136	-.324	-2.725	.008
religion	-.217	.128	-.196	-1.690	.095

Table 4: Predictor of Persuasion

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.357	.737		1.842	.070
age_range	.013	.075	.026	.177	.860
yrs_service_range	-.027	.068	-.054	-.402	.689
gender	-.045	.139	-.035	-.321	.749
type	-.088	.161	-.071	-.545	.587
pos_cat	.177	.145	.171	1.223	.225
educ_cat	.254	.120	.288	2.107	.039
nationality	-.184	.184	-.114	-.999	.321
religion	.182	.174	.116	1.045	.299

Table 5: Predictor of Awareness

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.856	1.071		3.602	.001
age_range	.163	.107	.233	1.528	.131
yrs_service_range	-.007	.098	-.011	-.073	.942
gender	.403	.199	.232	2.026	.047
type	-.324	.234	-.196	-1.384	.171
pos_cat	-.044	.213	-.030	-.204	.839
educ_cat	-.130	.174	-.108	-.748	.457
nationality	.282	.264	.127	1.067	.290
religion	-.374	.251	-.174	-1.489	.141

Table 6: Predictor of Stewardship

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.057	.607		6.688	.000
age_range	-.077	.062	-.188	-1.258	.212
yrs_service_range	.060	.056	.149	1.072	.287
gender	.078	.115	.076	.679	.500
type	-.141	.132	-.143	-1.067	.290
pos_cat	-.166	.119	-.202	-1.392	.168
educ_cat	-.254	.099	-.362	-2.561	.013
nationality	.196	.152	.153	1.294	.200
religion	-.012	.143	-.010	-.084	.934

In this study, the middle-aged respondents are high in empathy. The findings align with three studies of over 75,000 American adults aged 18 to 90, wherein “the youngest and the oldest adults had the lowest empathy, while middle-aged adults had the highest empathy” (Konrath, S., 2013) ^[9]. Moreover, there is growing evidence that older adults may have poorer cognitive empathy than younger adults but their emotional empathy (Davis, 1980) ^[6] may not differ as a function of age” (Beadle *et al.*, 2012) ^[2]. In terms of nationality, the Filipinos are observed worldwide as highly empathic and sociable in relating with people. Since persuasive ability and stewardship can be influenced by knowledge, self-confidence, and experiences, then it is understandable that those with higher educational attainment and graduate degree are high in persuasion and stewardship. Women are usually high in social awareness and good at processing and understanding emotions and experiences of other people.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The educational managers who are considered as servant-leaders possess and practice the following traits: empathy, commitment to growth of people, stewardship, listening, community building, awareness, conceptualization, awareness, persuasion, healing and foresight. These identified traits are inter-correlated. This study has evolved four categories and profiles of the kind of servant-leadership practiced by educational managers, as follows: servant-first orientation, other-centered service, receptive-responsive caring, and instructive-transformative relating. The servant-leadership traits can be predicted significantly. Such that, age and nationality can predict empathy. Educational attainment is a predictor of stewardship and persuasion. Gender can predict awareness. On the other hand, the years of service, type of school, position, and religion are not significant predictors of servant-leadership.

Servant-leadership in education is a relevant leadership model that can be studied further. The emerging profiles of educational managers who are considered as servant leaders can be examined and validated with a bigger sample and in more varied school setting. Other factors can be considered as probable predictors of the servant leadership traits of educational managers. This study can be a springboard for research on effective school administration such as the assessment of impact and implications of the servant-leadership model in educational administration.

The findings of the study can be used to enhance policy and training of school administrators. The emerging profiles can be interesting subject for case study and can lead to related research on educational administration and leadership which can improve the school policies, systems and structures.

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