


Chapter 3

The Importance of Building Communities as the 10th Characteristic of Servant Leadership and Organizational Performance

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ABSTRACT

Notwithstanding the proliferation of articles that have been written on servant leadership, the majority of these articles have been on developing and/or testing measurements. Very little research has been done on the 10 characteristics of servant leadership and no research has been done on the tenth characteristic which is building communities, especially within organizations. Also, no single definition of building organizational communities can be found in the literature. This chapter reviews what literature exists on building organizational communities and establishes that building organizational communities as servant leaders does have an impact on organizational performance. A definition of building organizational communities is proffered. Future research proposed includes the testing of the applicability of the definition of building organizational communities across various types of organizations. Future research should also explore other characteristics of servant leadership and how they relate to organizational performance.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Greenleaf in his seminal 1977 essay introduced the concept of Servant leadership as an alternative to traditional leadership models. The Servant Leadership theory puts the follower at the center of the leadership narrative and stresses the importance of the leader being first and foremost a servant before

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implementing their desire to lead (Greenleaf, 2002; Grobler et al., 2020; Mcquade et al., 2021; Najam et al., 2020; Sims & Morris, 2018).

After studying Greenleaf's work for many years, Spears (2004) developed ten characteristics of servant leadership including building communities as the tenth one (Blanchard, 2018; Spears, 2004). The other nine characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship and commitment to the growth of people.

Quantitative research conducted using multiple regression analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement and between servant leadership style and the dimensions of organizational performance (Muller et al., 2019).

The building community's characteristic speaks to the way in which the servant leader cares about the welfare of their employees and followers, ensuring that they work collectively and collaboratively in order to achieve not only the organizations objectives but more importantly the personal growth and development of these employees (Qiu & Dooley, 2019; Tanno & Banner, 2018).

Although Spears (2004) listed building communities as the tenth and last characteristic of servant leadership, he goes on to state that it is one of the most important ones (Spears, 2019). An insightful examination of Greenleaf's work also selects building communities as a key and vital component specifically emphasized by Greenleaf, that supported improved employee engagement leading to improved organizational performance (Jones, 2018). Scholars have established the critical role that building communities has to play in developing a shared work commitment and advancing the objectives of organizations (Frémeaux & Pavageau, 2022) thus having a positive impact on organizational performance. The building of organizational communities is especially critical in the face of the many challenges like global pandemics and environmental pollution faced by employees in the 21st century organizational setting (Adero & Odiyo, 2020). Some of these challenges have forced employees into a virtual work setting, making it even more crucial to be able to build organizational communities and support each other as they work towards the common goals of the organization (Hoch et al., 2018).

It is therefore intriguing to note that no specific research has been done on building communities as a characteristic of servant leadership and there is no known and accepted definition of building communities in an organizational setting. This study aims to commence research into the building communities characteristic and also recommends a definition for this characteristic of servant leadership.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Servant leadership as a general concept has received increased attention from academics and scholars especially over the past decade (Canavesi et al, 2021; Eva et al, 2019; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2019). Research up till 2023 has extracted a combination of over four hundred peer-reviewed articles written from various perspectives (Mcquade et al., 2021; Najam & Mustamil, 2020). The majority of these articles have been on developing and/or testing measurements of servant leadership (Liden et al, 2015, 2008; van Dierendonck et al, 2017; van Dierendonck and Nuijten, 2011; Sendjaya et al, 2018) and most have been of a quantitative nature (Zubairu, 2020).

The general problem is that very little qualitative research has been done from the perspective of the ten characteristics of servant leadership. The specific problem is that no research has been done on the building communities characteristic of servant leadership in relation to organizational performance. This includes there being no universally accepted definition of building communities in the literature, espe-

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