

# Chapter 5

## The Servant Leadership Movement: How Might Universal Leadership Behaviors Serve Millennials in Asia?

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Uncommon to other well-known leadership models, servant leadership explicitly states that the leader serves as steward by focusing the needs of the follower, whilst growing the followers' autonomy. Consequentially, followers increase in capabilities and collaboration, strengthen the leader-follower relationships through partnership, generating decisions that can withstand challenges and sustain organizational success. The purpose of this chapter is to convey the applicability of this universal leadership model, illustrating how it would support culturally diverse case studies. Research has already stated that servant leadership is beneficial to Millennials. Little literature has focused on how to operationalize it for the younger generation. Barbuto Jr. and Gottfredson mentioned the vital necessity to train Millennials in servant leadership behaviors. This chapter highlights how servant leadership might be applied based on Van Dierendonck's and Van Dierendonck and Nuijten's research on Millennials in Asia.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Asian business is often depicted by speed, adaptability, or adoption of useful Western concepts, and transformation of those concepts into new innovations to ameliorate what locally is needed. It is possible to detect this happening in large MNCs, stemming from the U.S. and the European Union with subsidiaries or regional headquarters in Asia, relocating headquarters' functional leadership roles and budgets of entire business units to Asia. The region is gaining an unprecedented attention on business, as well as a rising commitment on developing employees. This engrossment of consideration is, in great part, centered in meeting the weakness in lack of highly skilled personnel. As the younger labor-pool begins to outweigh the workplace, business leaders are all the more aware and responding to attain leadership skills that echo desired behaviors to attract and retain their teams.

For over a decade, this question endures in organizations: What do we do to stay competitive with our workforce, and how do we attract and retain talent, especially from the younger generation?

It is in the spirit of riding on the current Asian momentum that this chapter attempts to generate a compelling analysis of a very pertinent universal leadership model, broadly researched and evidently practiced today, much advocated by an important critical mass – servant leadership. This chapter will briefly discuss the comparison of leadership models with servant leadership, emphasize the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce trajectory, explain the trending environment of servant leadership and its relevance to the Millennials' workforce needs. Finally, the chapter will present concrete case studies about Millennial-leaders, working in Asia.

## **A BRIEF DISCUSSION: LEADERSHIP THEORIES COMPARED**

Robert Greenleaf (1977) is the father of servant leadership concept. Greenleaf's original thesis on servant leadership was focused on the mindset that the leader's core motive is to serve to achieve others' betterment, answering to their needs, help others succeed in their aspirations, grow more autonomous, and eventually be servant leaders themselves. The motivation of this leadership style was essentially to focus on serving, rather than leading, placing the needs of others before own, which is quite the opposite of what organizational management are selected to do, as they are chosen for their capability to give orders. Greenleaf's servant leadership motivation describes an ultraistic and pioneering model for those the leader serves to follow. Scholars have criticized some modern day examples of servant leadership in organizations on its sincerity vs. tactic to manipulate and encourage reciprocity geared to organizational benefit. Nevertheless, multiple scholars have deeply

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