Dialogue I

The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership

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Tucker et al. examine the relationship between leader visibility and servant-leadership and find that leader visibility determines the quality of servant-leadership.

*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the **Holy Bible: New International Version** (North American Edition), © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.*

Abstract

This paper explores the connection between leader visibility and servant-leadership. It describes servant-leadership, reviews leader visibility literature, and constructs a theoretical model that graphically illustrates the interrelationship of the two areas. The connection between servant-leadership and leader visibility involves both the leader's personal character and the leader's interaction with followers. Leadership visibility affects the process by which leaders transmit their personal values, beliefs, and principles to their organizations. Consequently, leader visibility is a moderating variable that affects the quality of servant-leadership.

The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership

Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (Matthew 20:26-27, KJV).

This article examines the prospect that leader servanthood and leader visibility are interrelated parts of the mosaic of leadership. The paper includes the following segments:

1. A description of the origins and tenets of servant-leadership.

2. A literature review that emphasizes the leader visibility attributes that relate to servant-leadership.

3. An analysis of the interrelationship between servant-leadership and leader visibility, including a graphical presentation of the structural relationship.

4. An explanation of the importance of leader visibility in the selected servant-leadership attributes of vision, empowerment, and trust.

5. A concluding discussion of the potential applications of the concepts.

The objective of this paper is to provide additional insights into the concept of servant-leadership by examining the significance of leadership visibility and the interaction between the two theoretical constructs. **The working definition of leader visibility for this review is the public presence, behavior, and interactions of a leader with followers, whether before a large organization or a small group**.

While leader visibility may affect most every managerial style, this paper focuses on the link between visibility and servant-leadership for several reasons. First, servant-leadership is a potentially "higher order" managerial style that requires ongoing long-term development and growth on the part of the leader. Secondly, it appears visibility is particularly important for servant-leaders. Finally, leader visibility further appears to directly impact some functional aspects of servant-leadership.

Servant-Leadership

Jesus initiated the concept of servant-leadership. "He was and is the master servant-leader" (Cedar, 1987, p. 22). Jesus said, "whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26-27, KJV). Sanders (1994, p. 21) said in reference to Jesus that servanthood is "*the Master's master principle*." Ultimately, Jesus demonstrated the utmost love of a servant by laying down His life so that "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Scriptural Foundations of Servant-Leadership

Among the important Scriptures that establish the servant-leadership concept are the parallel passages found in Matthew 20:25-28 and Mark 10:42-45. These Scriptures include three critical components that support the concept of servant-leadership. First, Jesus identifies the nature of worldly, human leadership. He states the "rulers of the Gentiles lord it over" and "their high officials exercise authority over" the populace (Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:42). The second major statement of Jesus is His specification of the prerequisite for greatness in the kingdom of God—"whoever wants to become great among you must be your *servant* and whoever wants to be first must be your *slave*" [emphases added] (Matthew 20:26-27; Mark 10:43). The third critical part of the passage is Jesus' identification of His own servant nature. He stated, "the *Son of Man* did not come to be *served*, but to *serve*" [emphasis added] (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).

The aforementioned passages directly address the issue of leadership. They clearly indicate that *Jesus saw Himself as a servant-leader*, one whose very incarnation had the purpose of serving humankind. Despite His inherent authority as the Messiah, Jesus did not seek an earthly kingship. Instead, Jesus advocated that those who want greatness in the kingdom of God should seek the role of servant. The passages indicate that Jesus, the person who is exalted above all creation, the leader of all leaders, willingly humbled Himself to serve humanity.

Modern Servant-Leadership Theorists

Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) inspired the servant-leadership concept among modern organizational theorists with his essays and books during the 1970s and 1980s (Spears, 1996). Greenleaf suggested that leaders strongly need to rethink how they relate to their workers. Leadership, according to Greenleaf, must first and foremost meet the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977).

An important distinction Greenleaf made is that servant-leadership is not a template of behavior alone. Genuine servant-leaders are servants at heart who also lead, not leaders who practice some measure of service (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 14). The leader must be genuinely interested in the welfare of employees and serve on that basis to realize the full benefits of servant-leadership. To Greenleaf,

this was a deeply spiritual matter (Spears & Lloyd, 1996, pp. 29-30).

In addition to Greenleaf, various other writers espouse servant-leadership as a valid, modern theory for organizational leadership (see Akuchie, 1993; Block, 1993; Briner & Pritchard, 1998; DePree 1989, 1997; Fairholm, 1997, 1998; Ford, 1991; Gaston, 1987; McKenna, 1989; Oster, 1991; Pollard, 1996a; Rinehart, 1998; Stone & Winston, 1998; Winston, 1999). DePree (1992, p. 220) said, "above all, leadership is a position of servanthood." Servant-leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers. "Servant-leadership is the desire to see those you work with become all they can be" (Winston, 1999, p. 76).

Servant-leaders assert the important place of values, beliefs, and principles in leadership (Covey, 1990; Ford, 1991; Stone & Winston, 1998). According to many writers, values are the core elements of servant-leadership; they are the independent variables that actuate servant-leader behavior (Batten, 1997; Covey, 1990; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Ford, 1991; Kouzes &

Posner, 1993; Malphurs, 1996; Melrose, 1997; Nair, 1994; Rinehart, 1998; Stone & Winston, 1998). Consequently, the internal values of servant-leaders yield functional leadership attributes.

Servant-Leadership Characteristics

The literature regarding servant-leadership reveals many distinguishable attributes of such leaders. These include eight functional attributes: 1) vision, 2) credibility, 3) trust, 4) service, 5) modeling, 6) pioneering, 7) appreciation of others, and 8) empowerment (Russell & Stone, 2000). The functional attributes are the operative characteristics of servant-leadership. They are identifiable

> *At the organizational level, the servant leader establishes vision, empowers employees, and builds trust.*

characteristics that actuate leadership responsibilities. Each functional attribute is distinct, yet they are all interrelated. In some cases, the attributes reciprocally influence one another. The functional attributes are those that must be present to truly qualify an

individual as both a servant and a leader. While all of the attributes of servant-leadership are important, this study focuses on the role of leader visibility in only three of the functional attributes: 1) **vision**, 2) **empowerment**, and 3) **trust**. At the organizational level, the servant-leader establishes vision, empowers employees, and builds trust.

For a servant to be a leader, he or she must have a vision— a goal and/or a direction for the future. According to McKenna (1989), Jesus clearly stipulated His primary vision: "**the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost**" (Luke 19:10). In reflecting upon the idea of vision, Robert Greenleaf (1980, p. 24) quoted the well-known Scripture from Proverbs: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (29:18, KJV). Kotter (1990) stated that one of the important ways leadership differs from management is that leaders establish a vision for the future.

Servant-leaders empower their employees by providing opportunities for them to do their best. In essence, servant-leadership involves turning the traditional organizational pyramid upside down (Blanchard, 1997). "Servant-leaders multiply their

leadership by empowering others to lead" (Wilkes, 1996, p. 25). They coach and mentor followers to increase their skills and help them achieve their full potential. An essential part of Jesus' ministry was training His disciples and empowering them for service (Wilkes, 1996). Initially, He gave them instructions to preach and heal among the Jews (Matthew 10:5-8), but later Jesus empowered the disciples with the Great Commission to reach the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

Servant-leaders express trust in various ways, including valuing followers, accepting personal accountability, and having a willingness to be vulnerable (Stone & Winston, 1998). According to Martin (1998, p. 41), "Trust is the root of all great leadership." Jesus sought to establish trust between Himself and those who followed Him. He said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). Ultimately, Jesus calls people to trust His leadership by placing their faith in Him.

Leadership Visibility

Jesus not only initiated the concept of servant-leadership, but He also confirmed the importance

of leader visibility. Jesus was a visible leader who taught by example (Hind, 1992; Sanders, 1994). He "modeled for all time what servant-leadership looks like" (Wilkes, 1996, p. 17). He visibly modeled the ideal of love in servant-leadership. At the Last Supper He "showed them [the disciples] the full extent of His love" by washing their feet (John 13:1). Furthermore, He explicitly instructed them to follow His example [emphases added]:

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.** *I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than His master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent Him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them* (John 13:14-17).

Modern leaders have the opportunity to emulate the servant-leadership characteristics of Jesus. Maintaining a visible leadership presence is an important part of this process.

"The effective servant-leader is highly visible in his leading and caring and comforting"

(Cedar, 1987, p. 109). Manz (1998, pp. 49-50) said, "the visibility of leadership is a tremendous opportunity." One means for leaders to exercise influence on group members is by their visible example (Bass, 1990, pp. 13-14). Kouzes and Posner (1993, p. 47) argue that followers must witness leaders "do what they say they will do."

The causal relationship between servant-leadership and leader visibility involves two primary components: 1) the leader's personal character, and 2) the leader's interaction with followers. These two areas include the subcategories of personality, style, trust, and motivation, which can be used to assess the quality of servant-leadership in a leader's public example.

Leader Character

An effective leader exhibits unique personal characteristics in the organization (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Weber, 1968). Such visible characteristics display the leader's servanthood. Visible variables to assess character influences are personality effects and visible style.

Personality influences convey a leader's attitude. Some strong

characteristic, even if not physical, accompanies a leader (Atwater, Penn, & Rucker, 1991; Gardner, 1995; Hunt, 1991). Becker's research (1998) emphasized that integrity and character produce higher levels of productivity in leaders. The opposite effect happens for narcissistic leaders who take advantage of their followers (Sankowsky, 1995).

An effective leader's visible, personal style adapts to the situation (Hollander, 1978; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). The important factor is to read and adapt to the situation for the good of the group (Green & Nebeker, 1977). The entire concept of situational leadership emphasizes the importance of leader adaptation; the key point in this theory is that the leader must apply the appropriate combinations of directive and supportive behaviors (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996).

Leader Interactions with Followers

Effective leaders establish appropriate power by visibly interacting with followers. Referent power, as defined in French and Raven's (1959) power taxonomy, comes from strong interpersonal relations. Roberts

(1987) called this "relational power" and indicated its base is mutual influence and reciprocal interchange. It is one of the more befitting types of power for servant-leaders to wield. Yukl (1998, p. 199) argues that the "obvious way to exercise referent power is through role modeling." Toro CEO Ken Melrose states that he tries to be a *visible* role model by incorporating "some practices in my daily work regimen that illustrate what I'm asking others to do" (1995, p. 150).

The visible behaviors that affect leadership interactions are variables of trust and motivation. Trust is the "most looked for" value in superiors (Frost & Moussavi, 1992). Expressions of trust are the basis for effective work relationships and productivity (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Fairholm, 1994; Heckscher, Eisenstat, & Rice, 1994; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The trust factor establishes positive relationships for effective productivity. In the context of trust, authority recognizes people's gifts and guides them to effective discipline and work (Helgeson, 1996).

Visible and effective motivation leads to a person's personal growth and a sense of

autonomy in determining one's destiny (Greenleaf, 1996; Markovich, 1997; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Sullivan, 1988). Motivating leaders see communication as a tool for organizational growth and encouraging the well-being of workers (Clampitt, 1991; Hackman & Johnson, 1996; Napolitano & Henderson, 1998). Finally, effective rewards stimulate motivation by producing a sense of accomplishment and development (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995; Klein, 1994; Thorlakson & Murray, 1996).

A leader's conspicuous actions powerfully attract the loyalty and commitment of followers. Martin Chemers (1993, p. 311) showed that a leader's actions solicit the attention of the followers and fulfill their expectations of a good leader. He stated, "When the leader is seen as fulfilling expectations about goal-related activities, he or she is seen as an effective leader: 'That's a good leader.' When the leader satisfies the follower's personal, emotional needs, follower loyalty and commitment are elicited: 'That's my leader!'" The attitudes and behaviors of followers reveal the power of visible leadership.

The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership

As mentioned heretofore, various theorists maintain that the core, personal components of servant-leadership are values, beliefs, and principles. These ideals translate into functional attributes of servant-leadership through the visible attitudes, actions, and behaviors of leaders. **Consequently, the primary argument of this paper is that leader visibility affects the transmission or dissemination process that takes place between the intrapersonal level of values, beliefs, and principles and the functional level of servant-leadership, which includes vision, empowerment, and trust. Consequently, leader visibility is a *moderating variable* that affects the quality of servant-leadership.**

If this argument is true, then visible leaders should be more effective servant-leaders, while non-visible (*not invisible*) leaders are likely to be less effective servant-leaders. The following graphic (Figure 1) portrays the causal relationship between visibility and servant-leadership:

PERSONAL LEVEL   **FUNCTIONAL LEVEL**
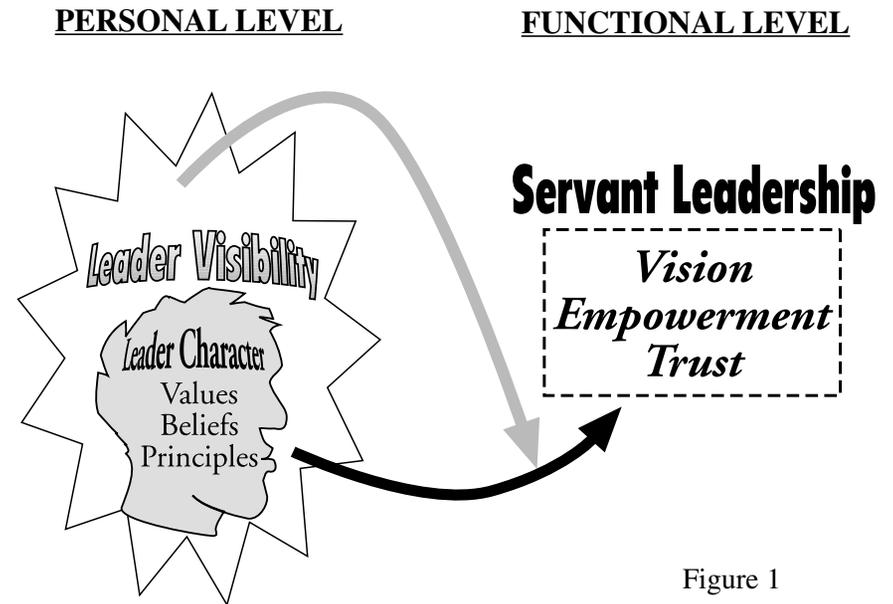
Figure 1

Explanation of the Impact of Leader Visibility on Vision, Empowerment, and Trust

As portrayed in the previous diagram, leader visibility moderates the transmission of personal values into servant-leadership at the functional level. Leaders may possess the intellectual concepts associated with servanthood, but they must undertake behaviors that effectively implement the concepts. Leader visibility moderates servant-leadership in organizations by affecting the establishment of vision, empowerment, and trust.

The Impact of Leader Visibility on Vision

A leader's visible behavior gives power to his or her vision. Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton (1994, p. 100) noted that the most important commitment a leader makes in relation to a vision is "the commitment to model the vision through one's own behavior in a visible and consistent manner." Consequently, the leader's behavior gives life to the vision. Burt Nanus (1992, pp. 138, 140) called this process "personifying the vision." He noted that the vision process is not complete until all the stakeholders

"viscerally understand where the organization is headed and have a high degree of shared commitment to the vision."

Sashkin (1995) describes five particular kinds of visible behavior that model the vision:

1. focusing other people's attention on the key issues of the vision;

2. developing communication skills, such as listening skills, that draw others in;

3. maintaining consistent behaviors that reflect the vision;

4. communicating respect for oneself and others; and

5. making risky decisions and remaining committed to those decisions.

Sashkin states that the purpose of a leader's visible behavior in relation to the vision is to "attempt to create cultures that will guide their organizations into the future" (1995, p. 407). The model for the new culture is the leader.

Likewise, Barna (1996) emphasized that visionary living creates types of behavior that are different from non-visionary behaviors. Barna describes some of the visionary behaviors as personal interactions in which the vision is the central focus of learning and growing. The visionary leader causes growth by modeling new behaviors. This necessitates that leaders move out from closed environments and interact in accountable relationships.

The Impact of Leader Visibility on Empowerment

Empowerment requires visible leaders. Bennis and Nanus (1997) declare that to achieve empowerment, a leader's behavior must pull rather than push people along. "A pull style of influence works by attracting and energizing people … it motivates by identification" (Bennis & Nanus, 1997, p. 74). Max DePree (1989, p. 42) argues for empowerment by calling for "roving leadership." According to DePree, "roving leadership is a key element in the day-to-day expression of a participative process" (1989, p. 42).

Servant-leaders notice their people and use their gifts. Bass (1990) notes that power sharing includes leaders involving followers in planning and decision-making. Leaders become conspicuous in welcoming people to join them in the important tasks of the organization. Shandler and Egan (1994) also note the need for leaders who help workers to personal empowerment and cooperative skills. They assert that a quality environment calls for leaders who conspicuously develop a personal empowerment initiative within the organization.

The Impact of Leader Visibility on Trust

Frost and Moussavi (1992) found that the only bases of power that are influential are those that foster trust through personal interaction, rather than through organizational reward or coercive systems. Visibility and personal interaction are important in building the relationships necessary for trust to develop. Sharing information with a sense of caring also builds trust. Heckscher, Eisenstat, and Rice (1994) note that growth stalls because new levels of trust are not established. They stress the need for face-to-face dialogue to facilitate trust.

Visible behaviors and communications form trust bonds that provide influential power. Gilbert Fairholm (1994, pp. 110-111) states, "trust is a range of observable behaviors and a cognitive state that encompasses predictability." He notes that it is "only through direct interaction that we can develop a deep conviction in others of our basic trustworthiness." Bennis and Nanus (1997, p. 173) also state that trust is the "emotional glue" that holds an organization together. They note that the leader is responsible for the environment, and one way to influence it "is to demonstrate by their own behavior their commitment to the set of ethics they are trying to institutionalize." Visibility is necessary for developing trust so that the servant-leader can influence the followers' lives.

Application and Conclusion

Leader visibility is a platform for servant-leaders to produce organizational growth. Several strengths of the connection between leader visibility and servant-leadership can be identified from this study:

1. Leader visibility and servant-leadership focus on productive relationships.

2. Visible personal and verbal interactions establish healthy organizational structures.

3. Visible behaviors influence vision, empowerment, and trust in leadership.

As indicated in the following model, *leader visibility moderates the process that creates servant-*

Figure 2
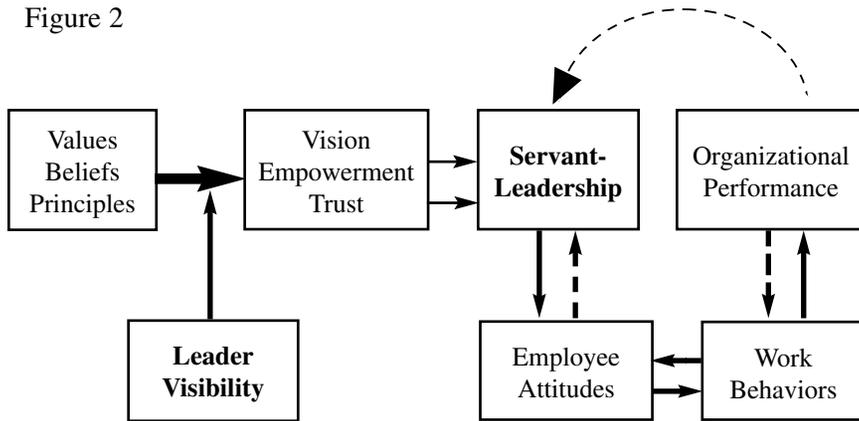
Figure 2

leadership in organizations. In turn, servant-leadership affects employee attitudes and work behaviors. Ultimately, all of the variables impact organizational performance. (Figure 2)

Clearly, the model needs further examination and empirical testing. Future research should focus on the effects of leader visibility on servant-leadership. Consequently, questions posited for future research include the following:

1. What attitudes and responses result when followers see the leader's servant influences?

2. What are the effects on followers when they see leaders adapt their style for the good of the group or when leaders are rigid and lack the ability to adapt?

3. What effects do leadership style and character have on followers when they are visible in the leader?

4. What level of visibility is necessary for the leader to produce a servant influence on followers?

Each leader is responsible for assessing his or her level of servanthood. Jesus set a subjective standard of leadership for his own trainees when he said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

C. William Pollard, CEO of the Fortune 500 corporation ServiceMaster, stated:

A servant-leader's results will be measured beyond the workplace, and the story will be told in the changed lives of others. There is no scarcity of feet to wash. The towels and the water are available. The limitation, if there is one, is our ability to get on our hands and knees and be prepared to do what we ask others to do (1996b, p. 249).

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