

**UNRAVELLING SERVANT LEADERSHIP: ANTECEDENTS AND UNDERLYING  
FACTORS**

A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

It is observed that research in leadership has been skewed towards the needs, relevance and challenges of the leader with little attention paid to the follower's perspectives (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Hence, new leadership theories, which focus more on follower aspects, have recently gained traction (Shamir, 2007). One such theory is that of Servant Leadership.

The idea of Servant Leadership was propounded by Robert K. Greenleaf. In the 1970's, he wrote three essays and propounded the concept of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1972a; Greenleaf, 1972b). Greenleaf's (1970) work emphasizes more on the requirements and needs of the followers than of the needs of the organisation or leader. This seminal work forms the foundation for other researchers to take the research further. Greenleaf (1970 pg 22) defines Servant Leadership as "the natural feeling one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first."

Even though the notion of servant leadership was proposed in the 1970's, research on the topic has been limited. It is only recently that researchers (Sendjaya&Sarros, 2002) have started to conceptualise servant leadership, building on the premises laid down by Greenleaf. Consequently, different researchers (Spears, 1998; Laub,1999; Farling, Stone, Winston, 1999; Russell & Stone, 2002; Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2003; Barbuto& Wheeler, 2006 etc.) have provided different conceptualisations of servant leadership. A thorough literature review shows

that different conceptualisations of the construct lack integration (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, Dierendonck, Liden, 2019).

The first study in the dissertation is an endeavour to address this literature gap by creating a dictionary and vocabulary-based conceptualisation of Servant Leadership. From an academic perspective, this research contributes to the literature of Servant Leadership by integrating the construct and by removing the ambiguities around it by developing a language-based construction of servant leadership. The study also contributes from a methodological perspective since, to the best of the author's knowledge is the first study of its kind that attempts to integrate "Servant Leadership" using the described methodology. Servant Leadership can be integrated through 17 dimensions, which can also be represented by four factors namely: Communitarian Gracefulness, Investment in Followers' Well-being, Persuasive Steward, and Compassionate Nurturer.

Empirical research on the subject has mainly emphasised on its consequences, paying less attention to its antecedents or determinants (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The second study in the dissertation attempts to address this literature gap by exploring the antecedents of servant leadership. The objective of study II is to investigate the determinants/antecedents of Servant Leadership, which have not yet been explored. The study proposes Agreeableness (Hunter, Neubert, Perry, Witt, Penney & Weinberger, 2013), Workplace Spirituality (Herman, 2010), Motivation-to-Lead (Amah, 2018), and Motivation-to-Serve (Amah, 2018) as antecedents to Servant Leadership. Empathy and Perceived Altruism are proposed to act as mediators between the direct causal link of Agreeableness to Servant Leadership, and Workplace Spirituality to

Servant Leadership. The analysis finds a positive association between Workplace Spirituality and Servant Leadership, as hypothesised. However, Agreeableness and Motivation-to-Serve are found to be negatively linked with Servant Leadership.

Post-survey interviews were conducted with ten supervisors to understand the inconsistencies between the proposed hypothesis and the results of the study. The analysis of the interviews provides some insights to understand the reasons behind the rejected hypothesis. This study will help managers and practitioners to design specific interventions for servant leaders once the determinants of servant leadership are ascertained. The study also helps by extending the literature around the antecedents of Servant Leadership.

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