WHO WILL BE A SERVANT LEADER? THOSE WITH HIGH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLEASE STEP FORWARD!

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INTRODUCTION

Defining the characteristics of successful leaders has long fascinated management researchers. Many posited that if they could just determine which traits successful leaders had in common, that would serve as the perfect hiring profile for future organizational leaders. However, empirical evidence indicates that the traits and behaviors of successful leaders vary, often depending upon the situation. Servant leadership theory moves beyond traditional trait, behavioral and situational theories and changes the focus of the leader. Rather than seeing a leadership position as a way to fulfill his or her own needs, the servant-leader uses the position to focus on meeting the needs of his or her employees. This unique and selfless leadership style requires an individual who is willing to place the focus of his or her efforts on promoting others. This paper theorizes that employees with high Emotional Intelligence (EI) are more likely to adopt the servant leadership style. Those identified as having high levels of EI are effective at managing their own emotions and their relationships with others. This emotional competence may predispose them to adopt a relationship-oriented leadership style as illustrated in servant leadership theory. This paper develops a model that suggests a link between emotional intelligence and servant leadership and proposes that with the adoption of an effective reward system, organizations can reinforce both high emotional intelligence and servant leadership behaviors.

AN OVERVIEW OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

In 1977 Robert Greenleaf introduced the concept of servant leadership. According to Greenleaf (1977) servant-leaders are driven to serve first, rather than to lead first, always striving to meet the highest priority needs of others. Greenleaf identified the principal motive of the

traditional leader as being the desire to lead followers to achieve organizational objectives. On the other hand, the driving motivation of a servant-leader is to serve others to be all that they are capable of becoming. De Pree (1989) defines the nature of servant leadership as serving -- not leading. By serving others, leaders lead other people to the point of self-actualization.

While most traditional leadership theories are behaviorally based, servant leadership emerges from a leader's principles, values, and beliefs (Walker, 2003, p. 25). Before publishing his seminal work on servant leadership, Greenleaf spent 40 years in the business world as an executive at AT&T (Spears, 1996). His leadership model combined theoretical as well as practical principles regarding the most effective methods of influencing and developing followers. However, Greenleaf was certainly not the first to introduce the concept of servant leadership. Its origins are clearly traced back to the bible and stories of Jesus Christ. Service to followers is demonstrated in many of the acts Christ performed, most famously by his washing the feet of his disciples.

In defining his servant leadership theory, Spears explains that Greenleaf was also influenced by a short novel, *Journey to the East*, written by Herman Hesse.

> "…Hesse's book is the story of a mythical journey by a group of people on a spiritual quest. The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies the party as their servant, and who sustains them with his caring spirit. All goes well with the journey until one day Leo disappears. The group quickly falls apart, and the journey is abandoned. They discover that they cannot make it without the servant, Leo. After many years of searching, the narrator of the story stumbles on Leo and is taken into the religious order that had sponsored the original journey. There, he discovers that Leo, whom he had first

> known as a servant, was in fact the head of the order, its guiding spirit, and a great and noble leader" (Spears, 1996, p. 33).

Spears reports that Greenleaf concluded that the great leader is first experienced as a servant to others, and he believed that true leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others.

Greenleaf (1977) asserted that servant-leaders put the needs and interests of others above their own. They make a deliberate choice to serve others, although this should not be associated with a low self-concept or low self-esteem. A strong self-image, moral conviction, and emotional stability are factors that drive leaders to make this choice (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The servant-leader seeks to make sure that other people's highest-priority needs are being served. Servant-leaders seek to transform their followers to "…grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14).

Characteristics of Servant-Leaders

After reviewing the literature, Russell and Stone (2002, p. 146) described 20 characteristics that researchers in this field have consistently identified as being associated with servant-leaders. The first list comprises what they termed functional attributes due to their repetitive prominence in the literature. These functional attributes are the characteristics and distinctive features belonging to servant-leaders and can be observed through specific leader behaviors in the workplace:

1. Vision
2. Honesty
3. Integrity
4. Trust
5. Service
6. Modeling
7. Pioneering
8. Appreciation of others
9. Empowerment

The remaining characteristics are identified as accompanying attributes of servant leadership:

1. Communication
2. Credibility
3. Competence
4. Stewardship
5. Visibility
6. Influence
7. Listening
8. Encouragement
9. Teaching
10. Delegation

Russell and Stone assert that these accompanying attributes are not secondary in importance; instead they are complementary and may even be prerequisites to effective servant leadership. Pollard concludes (1997, pp. 49-50) that a real leader is not the "…person with the most distinguished title, the highest pay, or the longest tenure…but the role model, the risk taker, the servant; not the person who promotes himself or herself, but the promoter of others".

One characteristic that continues to receive considerable attention in the leadership literature in general and in servant leadership in particular, is empowerment. Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly and Konopaske (2006, p. 500) define empowerment as granting individuals the permission to utilize their talents, skills and resources, and experience to make decisions to complete their workloads in a timely manner. In many cases this means employees are making decisions about their work that were previously the domain of management. Managers must relinquish the traditional means of power and delegate some decision-making responsibilities to employees (Pollard, 1996). This involves entrusting workers with authority and responsibility (Costigan, Ilteer, & Berman, 1998). Empowerment is a key concept in servant leadership (see Russell & Stone, 2002, p. 152 for an extensive list of authors supporting this premise). Bass (2000) stresses that servant leadership encourages follower learning, growth, and autonomy, which are all nurtured through empowerment.

Servant-leaders respect the capabilities of their followers and enable them to exercise their abilities, share power, and perform at their best (Oster, 1991; Russsell, 2001; Winston, 1999). The servant-leader is prepared to share power through empowerment, thereby involving followers in planning and decision making (Bass, 1990). Manz (1998, p. 99) stated that, "Wise leaders lead others to lead themselves," which ultimately leads to a decentralized organizational structure that focuses on information and power sharing. Many managers struggle with the processes of empowerment and delegation (Argyris, 1998; Sanders, 1994), but these are essential behaviors of the servant-leader. Covey (2006, p. 5) quotes Greenleaf as saying: "The only authority deserving our allegiance is that which is freely granted by the led to the leader in proportion to the servant stature of the leader." Thus the leader gains power by exercising his or her servant qualities such as empowerment and service, rather than the traditional view that power sharing will diminish a leader's ability to influence followers.

Transformational versus Servant Leadership

Parallels have been drawn between transformational leadership and servant leadership. Stone, Russell and Patterson (2004, p. 354) identify numerous analogous characteristics between the two theories including: influence, vision, trust, respect/credibility, risk-sharing/delegation, integrity, and modeling. They posit that this is because both transformational and servant leadership are attempts to define and explain people-oriented leadership styles. However, they identify one essential element that differentiates the two theories. Stone et al. state that, "While transformational leaders and servant-leaders both show concern for their followers, the overriding focus of the servant-leader is upon service to followers. The transformational leader has a greater concern for getting followers to engage in and support organizational objectives" (p. 354). Thus the focus of the transformational leader is directed toward the organization and

building commitment to organizational objectives through empowering followers, while the servant-leader focuses on the service itself.

That is not to say that the servant-leader ignores performance standards. Ferch (2004, p. 235) quotes Greenleaf as stating, "The servant as leader always empathizes, always accepts the person, but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person's effort or performance as good enough." Greenleaf makes this important distinction between accepting the person and not accepting the effort or performance, thus indicating that quality performance is still important, and when the servant-leader builds an environment of trust, he or she is better able to bring about change to enhance effort or boost performance (Kolp & Rea, 2006). Organizations are only sustainable when they serve human needs (Covey, 2006). Servant-leaders are people-oriented and focused on the needs of those around them. They value human equality and seek to enhance the personal development and professional contributions of all organizational members (Russell, 2001). Ultimately, this formula should be effective in most types of organizations.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In 1990 Salovey and Mayer coined the term "emotional intelligence." They defined emotional intelligence (EI) as:

> …the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10).

In 1995, Goleman began researching and writing on the topic of EI with a focus on the role EI plays in the workplace. Through his research, he identified five components that comprise emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill

(Goleman, 1998a). The following table defines each component and its associated traits and behaviors.

Component	Definition	Hallmarks
Self-Awareness	the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effects on others	self-confidence realistic self-assessment self-deprecating sense of humor
Self –Regulation	the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods the propensity to suspend judgment- to think before acting	trustworthiness and integrity comfort with ambiguity openness to change
Motivation	a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence	strong drive to achieve optimism, even in the face of failure organizational commitment
Empathy	the ability to understand the emotional make up of other people skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions	expertise in building and retaining talent cross-cultural sensitivity service to clients and customers
Social Skill	proficiency in managing relationships and building networks an ability to find common ground and build rapport	effectiveness in leading change persuasiveness expertise in building and leading teams

(From Goleman, 1998a, p. 95)

The first three components focus on self-management skills while the last two components focus on managing one's relationships with other people. Goleman believed both of these skills were essential elements in emotional intelligence. Goleman (1998a) states that emotional intelligence will increase with age and accompanying maturity, but he also indicates that targeted training

programs can be effective at developing an individual's level of emotional intelligence. While Goleman (1998a) does not dismiss the role of IQ and technical ability as important factors in strong leadership, he indicates that they are not the whole package. Emotional intelligence is increasingly viewed as a necessary element for success. Goleman (1998a) states that "It was once thought that the components of emotional intelligence were 'nice to have' in business leaders. But now we know that, for the sake of performance, these are ingredients that leaders 'need to have'" (p. 102).

The Role of EI in Workplace Success

As previously described, much of the research on EI has focused on its contribution to employee success in the workplace, particularly success in leadership roles. Goleman's own research (1998b) of over 200 companies and organizations around the world indicates that almost one-third of the difference in employee performance is due to technical and cognitive ability, while two-thirds is due to the components of emotional intelligence. While IQ does account for more variance in performance at the entry level, Goleman's research indicates that EI plays an even more important role at the top levels of organizations where differences in technical skills are negligible. In fact he found that in top leadership positions as much as 80% of the difference in performance is due to EI (Goleman, 1998a, 1998b).

In his meta analysis of EI, Webb (2009) identified numerous studies beyond those conducted by Goleman himself that support the role of EI in successful performance in the workplace (please see Bachman, 1988; Boyatzis, 1999; Feist and Barron, 1996; Hunter and Hunter, 1984; Lusch and Serpkenci, 1990; Sternberg, 1996). While a "threshold competence" exists for any given position in which a minimal IQ is required to get and keep a job, once past

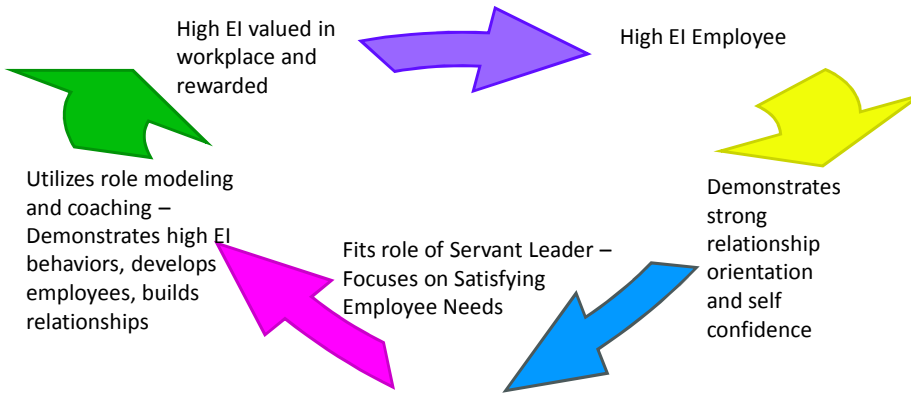
this threshold IQ has little to do with a person's ability to surpass his or her peers. While EI cannot replace this threshold IQ, qualities such as the ability to get along with others (social skill) and the ability to persist in the face of difficulty (motivation) appear to be more important than a higher IQ to succeed in the workplace (Webb, 2009).

Those employees who demonstrate high emotional intelligence are self-confident, can manage their emotions, are trustworthy, are committed to the organization, are optimistic, act as coaches, are service-oriented, and have a propensity to be leaders in the workplace.

PROPOSED MODEL OF EI AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Many of the traits that Russell and Stone (2002) identify as being associated with servant-leaders are similar to those identified by Goleman (1998a) as characterizing individuals with high EI. Servant-leaders demonstrate honesty and trust, while high EI employees are described as trustworthy. Both indentify integrity as an important trait. Servant-leaders are service oriented and through their empathetic behaviors high EI individuals provide high levels of service to both clients and customers. Servant-leaders demonstrate an appreciation of others while those with high EI are described as having expertise in building and retaining talent, possessing cross-cultural sensitivity and being service-oriented. These areas of overlap seem to indicate that there are many similarities between individuals characterized as having high EI and those characteristics that describe servant-leaders. A model that demonstrates a proposed connection between these concepts follows:

Figure 1
The Relationship between EI and Servant Leadership



The high EI employee has both strong self-management skills and strong skills in managing relationships with others. He or she demonstrates both self-confidence and a strong relationship orientation. The high EI leader has already achieved a level of self-validation and is therefore more likely to focus on employee needs and employee development, which is consistent with the role of the servant-leader. This individual demonstrates strong self-control and emotional management which manifests as patience, encouragement and effective teaching skills, which are all qualities of servant-leaders. Because the high EI individual is sensitive to the emotional needs of others, he or she is more likely to be aware of what others are seeking and is able to try to provide it for them. This demonstrated empathy leads to a development orientation when dealing with other employees. Those with high EI and accompanying strong social skills are effective at rapport building and finding commonalities among employees, thus enabling them to better build and manage relationships in the workplace. These characteristics all indicate that the

high EI employee is a good fit with the servant leadership style and is most likely to naturally adopt behaviors consistent with the servant-leader model.

The servant-leader focuses on satisfying employee needs and building employees' skills and competencies through development activities. At the same time, the high EI servant-leader is acting as a role model and demonstrating a strong relationship orientation in the workplace. Employees see all of the qualities of high EI and are likely to begin to emulate those behaviors. The leader coaches the employee with a focus on recognizing and rewarding high EI behaviors. This should result in more employees who demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. It is extremely important that employees are not only rewarded for these high EI behaviors, but that employees see that high EI servant-leaders are also rewarded for their behaviors. Employees must recognize that these are organizationally-valued behaviors and traits. If those who do not consistently demonstrate a strong relationship and development orientation are promoted and rewarded above those who do, employees will not believe that high EI or servant leadership are culturally and/or organizationally-valued regardless of what is preached from the top of the organization. If the reward system is in place, however, high EI and servant leadership should, over time, become integral parts of the organization's culture.

CONCLUSION

Historically organizational success was most likely the result of material assets rather than human assets. Organizations that had easy access to raw materials, transportation lines, capital or technology gained a competitive advantage over others. Today most of these factors are equal among competitors, and organizations must look elsewhere to gain a competitive

advantage. Maximizing employee performance through effective leadership is one option that organizations can investigate to foster organizational success. This paper theorizes that employees with high EI are more likely to become servant-leaders. With its focus on employee development and growth, servant leadership builds a workplace that satisfies employee needs and builds organizational commitment. However servant leadership by its nature requires leaders to subjugate their needs to the needs of those they supervise. For many this is neither a natural nor a comfortable state. While training makes employees more aware of the behaviors utilized by servant-leaders, leaders are unlikely to adopt these behaviors if they do not see a self-serving benefit from doing so. Perhaps rather than training all employees to become servant-leaders, the process should start much earlier during the recruitment and selection process. If, as the model described above proposes, those individuals who demonstrate high EI are more likely to naturally adopt the behaviors consistent with the servant leadership style, organizations that desire to embrace servant leadership would be better served by selecting employees with high EI for leadership positions, rather than spending time and money training employees to become servant-leaders. If a priority is placed on EI in selection, orientation, training, rewards, and recognition, the organization may begin to experience a perceptual shift, resulting in a culture where relationships and development become the priority. Servant leadership could emerge as the dominant leadership style precipitating a multi-skilled, committed, engaged and stable workforce – which is a competitive advantage for any organization at any time.

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