

The Leadership of Jesus in the Succession Process of the Disciples: A Dual Focus of Servanthood in Small Groups

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Organizational structure is experiencing an increase in the use of small groups and teams as solutions to strategic concerns. The issue of succession planning within a group or organization is vital to a successful strategy. In addition, servant leadership is experiencing a resurgence of interest in organizations and in leadership research. However, servant leadership in the succession process of small groups is meager in the literature. Fortunately, fascinating insights regarding the integration of these concepts are provided through the leadership of Jesus. This endeavor explored the servant leadership of Jesus during the succession process with his small group of disciples. The narrative found in John 13 of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples was used as a basis for exploration. It was established that Jesus served God's plan and mission while simultaneously serving his team of disciples as he prepared the team to assume their leadership roles in his subsequent absence. Therefore, it was concluded that Jesus operated in a dual-focus of servanthood. This type of servant leadership may prove beneficial to organizations in a period of leadership succession.

The Group Leadership of Jesus

John 13:1-5

Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto his Father, having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end. (2) And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, (3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all the things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and goeth unto God, (4) riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. (5) Then he poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded (ASV).

In this pericope, Jesus is about to terminate his present ministry and depart from his disciples. The departure of Jesus from his team is apparent in the natural sense as well as spiritually. In an apparent effort to ensure the continuance of the group's operation, Jesus scheduled a staff meeting with his disciples. At the meeting, Jesus did something that was very provocative to the disciples. Just before the Passover feast, as the evening meal is being served he takes off his outer garments, dons the garb of a servant, pours water in a basin and begins to wash the disciples' feet. Hence Jesus, the group leader, dresses like a servant and subsequently performs as a servant. Very often this act of washing the disciple's feet is viewed as an example of the servant leadership of Jesus (Thomas, 2000; Constable, 2005; Belsterling, 2007; Coloe, 2007). However, this act and the discourse surrounding it reveals more than a solely gesture focused on the disciples, but also includes Jesus simultaneously fulfilling the purpose of God's plan.

The dual-focus of servanthood comprises both the mode of serving the group and also concerns the mode of serving the greater vision of the organization. One might say that in serving the organization, a leader will in turn be serving the people of the organization. However, this may not always be the case as leaders are required to undergo a transformation process as the use of groups increases among organizations. Caminiti (cited in Invankevich, Konopaske, Matteson, 2005) posits that even the most capable leaders can have trouble transitioning from the "command and control" thinking and behaviors they were trained in. Leaders may question the necessity and relativity of developing the "soft skills" – communication, conflict resolution, coaching, etc. – in the pursuance of organizational goals. As a result, a leader's successful accomplishment of the organizational goals could come at the expense of the group and its members.

For this reason, we ascertain that the servant leadership of Jesus is a study of balance in intention and focus. Schneider (1981), comments that Jesus is performing in full awareness of his identity and mission. Jesus is operating as an agent of God, fulfilling his mission in the earth. Here is an example of the delicate interplay of vision vs. operation, plan vs. approach, and organization vs. individual members. In a micro fashion, the servant leadership of Jesus involves helping his team of disciples. At the same time in a macro fashion, Jesus is serving the purposes of God. Jesus is operating in the dichotomy of focus regarding his service to a) the disciples as the members of his group and b) the organizational mission and purposes sanctioned by God. Within this interplay there are shifts in service and changes in the leadership focus. Though it is subtle, the difference in the focus of service is significant.

The narrative in John 13 opens the farewell discourse, which according to Bersteling (2006), runs from John chapter 13 to chapter 17. This article will use the pericope of John 13 to examine the dual-focus of the servanthood of Jesus as he leads his team of disciples. We will explore the balance of servant leadership for a group in the context of preparing for and implementing succession.

Leadership and Small Groups

As we enter this new century, organizations find the environments in which they operate to be ever changing and unpredictable. For example, one area that organizations must adapt to is globalization. Success, and/or even survival, in every industry and sector will depend largely upon an organization's ability to compete globally (Marquardt and Engel, 1993). According to Irving & Longbotham (2007), leaders will need to ascertain how to lead organizations in the increasingly decentralized and team-based structures that are the mark of systems in the 21st century. Small groups or teams are means by which organizations can be flexible and adaptive in what Vaill (1996) calls a "white water" or volatile environment. Neal McBride comments about Jesus as a small group leader,

"Jesus was actively involved in both large and small group ministry contexts. Large group and small group ministries were not pitted against one another. Nor was it the case of one or the other exclusively. He proclaimed His Kingdom to large crowds and was well received (Mark 12:37). Likewise, he met with small groups in homes (Matthew 26:6) and spent considerable time with His special group, the Twelve...we see that Jesus' ministry to large groups was preceded by and proceeded out of His small group context" (McBride, 1990)

For the purposes of this endeavor, the disciples will be described as a small group or team. A team is defined as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves accountable (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). The small group is similar to the team in that they are comprised of two or more people with a common purpose. Alderfer (1977) defines groups as a collection of individuals who a) have significantly interdependent relationships, b) perceive themselves as a group, c) are recognized by non-group members as a group, d) have differentiated roles and, e) have interdependent relations with other groups. The aspect of relationship is a key factor in this definition. However, according to Irving and Longbotham (2007), groups are distinguishable from teams because teams maintain stronger coordinated activity to attain goals. In other words, team members integrate their efforts in a strategic effort to obtain a stated goal. A team is more synergistic than a group. In this article the terms will be used interchangeable since the disciples showed evidence of working as both a group and a team. The small group has been extensively studied by Bennis (1997) who asserts that the genius of *great groups* is that they get remarkable people – strong individual achievers – to work together to get results. However, Bennis (1997) also points out that *great groups* serve a second and equally important function - these groups provide support and personal fellowship. Accordingly, groups are based on relationships. It is often the occurrence that relationships are spark and developed within groups.

This notion of supportive relationships in groups is an important factor found in John 13 and throughout the farewell discourse. In the chapter, Jesus acknowledges his relationship with his team as seen from the opening the narrative. In verse 1, the narrative declares that Jesus "has loved his own which in the world, he loved them unto the end. In the response to Peter's objections of having his leader serve him in such a way in verse 8, Jesus implies that the significance of the footwashing is

relational as he states “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.” Another confirmation of the relationship amongst the group of disciples is the fact that in verses 34-35 Jesus makes their relationship to each other an identifying mark that they are disciples of Jesus. Thus, the ability of the team to serve each other identifies the group with their leader Jesus.

Leadership is essential to the success of a small group. Leadership is the influence that moves a group to collectively accomplish stated goals. Northouse (2004) proffers that for the near future, teams seem to be ensconced firmly in organizational design, and it is important to understand what is needed for teams to be effective. Leadership of teams and small groups is an essential catalyst of team effectiveness. Work team management or supervision is often identified as a primary reason why self-managing teams fail to properly develop or yield improvements in productivity, quality, and quality of life (Northouse, 2004). Jesus provides insights on leadership in the process of interacting with his team.

The basis of Jesus’ interactions with his team was founded upon relationships. It is within a framework of interpersonal relationships that he ministered to his disciples and others. Wheatley (1999) asserts that relationships, and not lone individuals, are the basic organizing unit of life. Accordingly, participation and cooperation are essential for survival in this world of interconnected and networked organizations. Hence, we can surmise in a comparable manner that small group leadership is premised on relationships. The 12 disciples were members of the inner group of Jesus and thus they were present at a significant time - the farewell discourse of Jesus. Considering that the disciples are the group closest to Jesus, and they are the team that will be continuing the vision, it stands to reason that they were present to witness these important interactions and activities that are transpiring.

The transition period apparent in John 13 demonstrates the need for leadership style matching. Matching leadership style with the individual’s abilities and the task is fundamental to group success. Grow (1991) developed the Stage Self-Directed Learning Model (SSDL) which is linear model that shows progressive learner autonomy and self direction. According to Grow the instructor begins with directive teaching style and moves to a coaching position with the learner. The learner and the student move through the sequence together with the curriculum also progressing through the subject matter. The instructor must be able to recognize and adjust to the stages that the learner is experiencing and adjust teaching style and the curriculum accordingly. In a similar way, group leadership must recognize and adjust leadership style to the development of the group and its members. Kay (2004) posits that leadership is effective when leadership style, team participant preference and situation conditions are aligned. Consequently, the leadership must match the maturity of the team as it moves through the growth cycle of the group. Kay (2004) developed the group maturity continuum (Figure 1) that includes how the corresponding leadership style matches up.

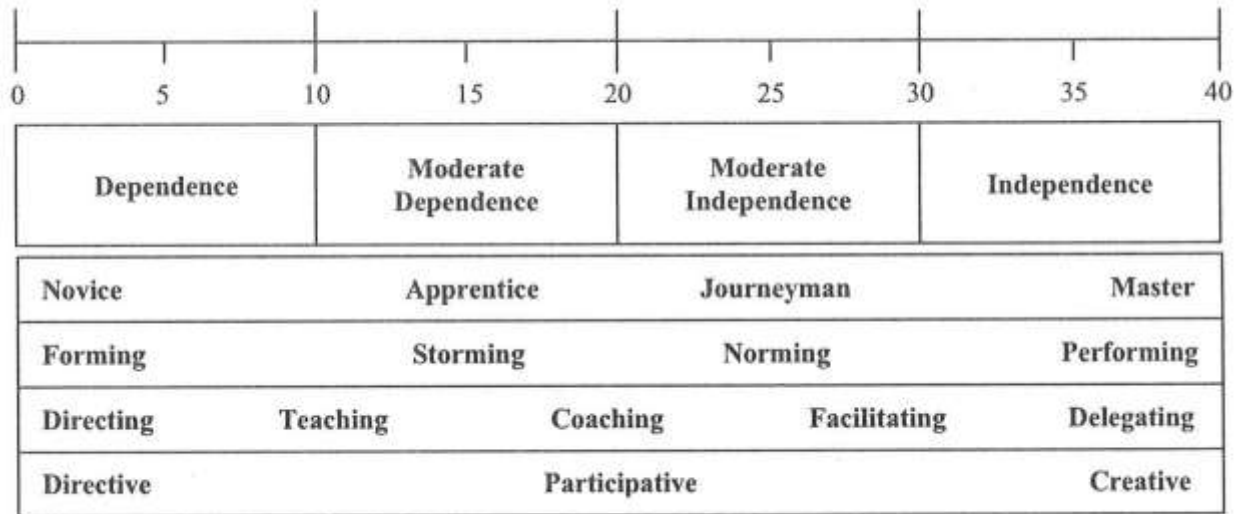


Figure 1. Group development with matching leadership styles are depicted in this continuum. The first two sections show the stage of maturity of the team members and the corresponding skill level. The third line shows Tuckman's stages of group development. The fourth and fifth sections show the leadership styles that match the stages of group development.

From "Matching leadership style to team maturity." by H. Kay, 2004. Quality Congress ASQ's... Annual Quality Congress Proceedings. 58, p97

Jesus has the ability to adjust his leadership to the people and the situations he was directly involved with at the time. Throughout the gospels, Jesus demonstrated an adaptive flow along the continuum leadership styles. The group has been closely related to their leader for the past few years and at times showed immaturity as well as the ability to assume responsibility. To match competency of his followers in various situations, Jesus would be directive and authoritarian in his interactions with the team, while at other times Jesus was participatory and delegating in his leadership style. Yet, at this particular moment, the team of disciples is ignorant regarding the pending events and the imminent shift in their responsibilities. There is a need for the team to be informed and prepared for what is ahead. As the group leader, Jesus is assured of the fulfillment of his mission—all things having been given into his hands and that his hour had come (John 13:2-4). It is from this position that Jesus enacts the role of a servant and washes the feet of the disciples in a demonstration of servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

As previously mentioned, the leadership style of Jesus in the text of John 13 is that of a servant leader. Greenleaf coined the term "servant leader" in a 1970 essay where he defines the servant leader as one who is a servant first, as opposed to leader first, out of which the desire to lead evolves (Spears, 2004; Irving & Longbotham, 2007). Care is taken by the servant leader to make sure the highest priority needs of other people are being served. Greenleaf (1977) asserts the best test of a servant leader lies within the answers to the following questions, a) do those served grow as persons,

b) while being served, do they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, c) are they more likely themselves to become servant leaders and d) what is the effect on the least privileged in society—are they benefiting or at least not being deprived. Stone, Russell, & Patterson (2004) propose that in comparing servant leadership with transformational leadership, the key distinction is leader focus. The transformational leader is focused on the organizational vision while servant leadership is primarily focused on what is best for the followers. Buhler (2007) asserts that great leaders inspire the impossible – in organizations, in themselves, and in other people. According to Blanchard & Miller (2007) great leadership doesn't start with what you know but it begins with a fundamental belief – a different motivation. The implication is that the very best leaders are driven, or feel a sense of calling, to serve.

Servant-leadership is a growing philosophy among leaders and organizations. Servant leadership, according to Buchannan (2007), is enjoying renewed currency given the tight labor markets and widespread mistrust of chief executives. Increasingly, the concept of servant-leadership as a guiding principle can be found in major corporations such as Toro, the Men's Warehouse, and Southwest Airlines (Spears, 2004). Yet, servant-leadership is not without controversy. Its difficulty is in identifying and operationalizing the constructs that indicate servant-leadership. Hence, there is ambiguity and consequently a lack of empirical research to support this leadership theory. Regarding the lack of empirical research in servant leadership, Sendjaya & Sarros, (2002) assert

The primary intent and self-concept of servant leaders are singled out as the distinctive features of servant leadership. While empirical research studies are critically needed to develop the concepts underlying the servant leadership movement into sound theory, an accurate understanding of the conceptual roots of servant leadership is essential in the process. The construct of servant leadership is implied and indirectly referred to in the works of theorist and writers such as Senge, Depree, Kouzes & Posner, Burns, Covey, Schein and others. Despite problems related to operational definition and recognition organizations have embraced servant leadership and adopted its principles in their organizational values and mission (pg. 57).

Jesus taught and modeled servant leadership throughout his life. Irving (2004) reports that the gospels are filled with lessons on leading through service as seen in Matt 20:28; Mark 8:6; Luke 22:27; and John 12:6. It is profoundly evident in the narrative found in John 13 as Jesus performs an act of service as a living lesson. The act of washing feet before a meal was a task reserved for servants or more likely slaves. According to Buchannan (2007), servant leaders often do things that may seem less than “leaderish”. In other words, servant leaders, at times, act in ways that are out of the norm. This is probably why Peter had such a hard time with the idea that Jesus was performing as his slave (Belsterling, 2007). Yet, Jesus washed the disciples being fully aware of his authority (Thomas, 2000; Constable, 2005; Belsterling, 2007; Coloe, 2007). There are times when it is appropriate for the leader to step back from the leadership position. The astute leader recognizes when to step up to the plate in this leadership role and when to move into a follower position (Buhler,

2007). The passage discloses that it was from a position of power and authority that Jesus humbled himself. The paradox of this event is in the fact that at the moment that Jesus was confirmed by the Father (table 1) was also the time that he literally and symbolically took off the garments and did the service of the slave. Jesus charges the team to follow his example and wash the feet of one another.

Table 1

The Awareness of Jesus as He Takes the Position of a Slave

John 13	Jesus knew
vs. 1	His hour was come to depart and he loved his own
vs. 2	the plot to betray him by one sitting at the table
vs. 3	God had given all things into his hands- he had all authority
vs. 3	He came from God and was returning to God or where he came from and where he's going

In the Johannine sense, the footwashing is a revelation of Jesus as well as a revelation of God. Thomas (2007) asserts that a Johannine theme evident throughout the book is the importance of abiding in Jesus and His word. Continuing in Johannine fashion, (Belsterling, 2007; Coloe, 2003), it is recognized that the main teaching point of John 13 is that Jesus loved the disciples, so shall they love one another. Hence, Belsterling (2007) maintains, Jesus cast his vision of how the disciples are to live when He is no longer with them. The foundational purpose of the discourse and narrative is that of closure and new beginnings.

The passage of John 13 is filled with transitions of various types and magnitudes, indicating the visionary purpose and future of Jesus' ministry. Shifts can be observed in the symbolic act of Jesus removing his garments and taking them up again which is also symbolic of him laying down his life and taking it up again. The passage includes the shift between camaraderie and deception amongst the group. The two transitions of note are seen in the master becoming a servant, and the shift in the team of disciples into children of God. Coloe (2007) posits that in performing this act of footwashing, in the tradition of the times, Jesus was welcoming the disciples to a new position in the family of God. The washing of the disciples' feet is not only an act of service, but it is a baptism of sorts or an initiation into the family of God and consequently into the purposes of God (Constable, 2005; Belsterling, 2006). Jesus explains, as he reflects on the experience to Peter and the team, you will not understand my actions now but you will in the future (John 13:6-7). Jesus continues to further inform the disciples that you will be known and recognized for such acts that are being modeled before you (John 13:12-20). The farewell discourse and following chapters marks a culmination and termination of the present ministry of Jesus. This time also includes preparation of the disciples for the immediate events and future task. The summation of the pericope implies that we are witnessing succession in

operation. In the transition stage, preparation for the future is incorporated and serves as a guide to the disciples once their leader is gone.

Succession

Successful succession planning is not mere leader replacement but a comprehensive blend of identifying competencies that are needed, identifying and developing members, and developing teams. Human resource development (HRD) would be the component of organizations that are best positioned for this task. However, the concept of succession is one that should permeate the entire workings of an organization. Muna and Mansour (2005) conclude their article on group leadership by asking questions to include the following,

Is power sharing in your organization widespread, and is it manifested in real delegation and true empowerment? Are your employees using their talent to the fullest extent? If not, then consider a thorough revision of your delegation of authority processes; train your employees before you empower them; improve, and stay actively involved in, the recruitment and selection processes of future managers; link compensation and bonuses to demonstrated performance and achievement of measurable work objectives (both individual and team targets); and finally, install career development programs and succession planning (pg 325)

Leadership development must revamp its target and means of accomplishment to a more comprehensive vision. According to Kur and Bunning (2002), there needs to be a shift in focal point in organizations from the development of individual leaders to the development of the leadership function, which is not limited to individual performance but includes the performance of the team and organization. Kur and Bunning (2002) suggest that the development process should actually take place in teams. As discussed earlier, today's organizations are moving to a more team-oriented structure. Hence, leadership development should be structured around collaboration and teams.

Leaders should develop their skills and experience not only in leading teams, but also in being a good team member. The *superleadership* or empowering leader model desires to systematically develop the followers in the team to lead themselves (Stewart, Manz, & Simms, 1999). For this reason, leadership is "super" as it is based on the synergy of many followers. According to Stewart et al. (1999), superleadership facilitates follower initiative, self-responsibility, self-confidence, self-goal setting, problem solving, and positive opportunity thinking. The metaphor of the flight of geese demonstrates the power of teamwork and leadership transition (Muna & Mansour, 2005). The geese fly in V formation with the lead goose taking the brunt of the resistance and the followers drafting behind with the last goose in the formation having the least resistance. As the lead goose gets tired it will drop back and let another take over the lead position. Due to the sharing of leadership, along with its burdens, and the cooperation amongst the flock, together they can go further and accomplish more.

This notion of serving the group and developing the group to lead is found in the servant leadership of Jesus. The elements of Jesus' service to his team of disciples and His commitment to their development are apparent in our examination of John 13. Earlier in the Johannine text (1:12),

there is the promise of being empowered, to become the children of God. Using the metaphor of the flight of geese, Jesus is about to transition out of the point position and allows the disciples the opportunity to lead themselves. Gansdossy and Verma (2006) assert that a carefully designed succession management strategy can fail because of a flawed execution of a plan or no plan at all. This is not the case in John 13. The placement of all things or all authority into the hands of Jesus, along with the anticipated return of Jesus back to the Father's side, substantiates the approval of the Father regarding this plan -

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God...” John 13:3 (NASB77)

Even as Jesus has his Father's approval, he now turns to his disciples. Jesus ministers to them intimately and enlightens them about the pending events which he prophetically lays out before them. Later in the farewell discourse (John 17) Jesus gives a report that he has finished the work assigned to him. Continuing with the prayer to his father in chapter 17, Jesus also reports that he has essentially passed on the vision to the disciples and asks that his disciples or team would continue in the graces of the Father into the future even as Jesus had experienced. Jesus has executed the succession management strategy of the God-head to perfection.

Dual-focus of Servanthood

The body of knowledge regarding the service of Jesus to his team of disciples has been well documented (Thomas, 2000; Constable, 2005; Belsterling, 2007; Coloe, 2007). However, that service is overlaid on the purposes and plans of God and the service of Jesus to His Father. In the examination of John 13, the narrative clearly contains the components of service to the group and its members as well as service to the plan of God within it's theme of leadership succession.

Jesus demonstrates the balance of service between the group and the vision. Jesus dons the garments of a servant and washes the feet of his team. As Peter questions the act (John 13:6), Jesus does not reprimand him but takes time to explain why he should participate and allow this deed to go on. Nevertheless, this hour or season has been referred to from the beginning of the Johannine text. This “hour” is in the plan of God for it is for God's will (vs.13) and his purpose (vs. 29-30) in operation from the beginning (vs.1). Thus, it is apparent that God's purposes were served by Jesus even as he served the members of his team. The manifestation of the text is the duality of system/purpose and people.

This duality emerges from the backdrop of the ongoing comparison of management and leadership. There should not be competition but cooperation between management and leadership in the making of successful groups. Management provides structure and a framework that leadership can use in providing direction and purpose for the group. For example when an innovative way of providing a service is discovered by an organization, it will need the complimentary structure of engineering and administration to successfully implement the innovation. Miles and Snow (1978) call this an effective adaptive cycle. The vision and values of leadership move forward in the vehicle of

managerial structure. As seen in table 2, the task of group management and group leadership are distinguishable yet complimentary.

Table 2.

Functions of management versus leadership

Management	Leadership
Produces order and consistency	Produces change and movement
Planning/budgeting	Establishing direction
Establish agendas	Create a vision
Set timetables	Clarify big picture
Allocate resources	Set strategies
Organizing/staffing	Aligning people
Provide structure	Communicate goals
Make job placements	Seek commitment
Establish rules and procedures	Build teams and coalitions
Controlling/problem solving	Motivating and inspiring
Develop incentives	Inspire and energize
Generate creative solution	Empower subordinates
Take corrective action	Satisfy unmet needs

Adapted by Northouse (2004), from Kotter, J.P. (1990), *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*, Wiley, New York, NY.

Huusko (2006) asserts that management is interested in getting systems to work and leadership is interested in getting people to work. In the process of succession management of an organization or team, these two issues – systems and people – should be addressed. Routinely, problems in executing a successful succession strategy are found in a combination of a) system or process issues and b) people issues. Some of the typical problems in these two areas are reported by Gansdossy and Verma (2006) in table 3.

Table 3.

Common problems in succession management.

Process-based problems	use of a vague and ad-hoc succession management strategy; complex; bureaucratic, complex and difficult to manage succession tools and templates; unclear roles and responsibilities of different
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People issues	<p>stakeholders; frequent changes to the original process.</p> <p>resistance from managers and employees; reluctance of managers and employees to commit resources and time; manager's personal insecurities and prejudices in selecting top talent.</p>
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As a leader is implementing the process of succession he or she must be attentive to the continuity of the organizational vision as it transitions leadership. As inferred, the stability of vision and purpose are found in the development of people and the establishment of systems or process. In his farewell discourse, Jesus not only prepared his people but he established process for the post-transition future.

It is proposed that the servant leadership of Jesus has a dual-focus. The leadership of Jesus had a follower focus towards his team of disciples, and a simultaneous focus towards the plans and processes of God. Greenleaf's (1977) definition of servant-leadership is leadership that is focused on the follower becoming all that he or she can be, in this case. However, service must expand to include the leadership of Jesus as a *follower* of His Father. Jesus is attentive to the development of the individual members of the team of disciples, and he is also preparing that same team to become the leaders of the vision of God in the near future. Jesus is in the position bridging the team and the CEO. Similar to most middle managers, Jesus serves his boss (God the Father) and is servant leader to his team. Is there a contradiction? No. The purpose and plans of God include the development of the shared leadership of the disciples to further the gospel. In other words, the dual-focused servanthood of Jesus is feasible since the areas of focus are complimentary. The Johannine text opens with some insight into the background of the connection.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1 (NASB77)

John 1:1 identifies the connection of Word and God being equal and later in the passage Jesus is identified as the Word. In the same sense, the management of the process and the leadership of the people are closely related. They are so close that as Jesus serves in the leadership of the team, he is simultaneously serving the fulfillment of God's plan (John 13: 1-3). Hence, the dual-focus of servanthood is manifested.

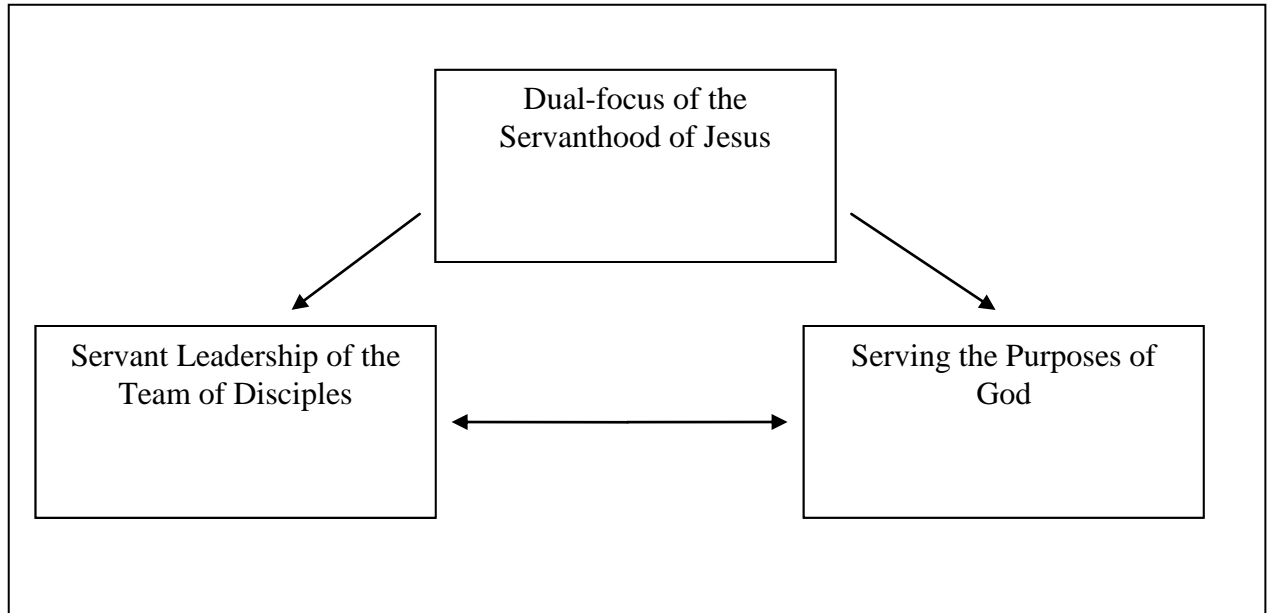


Figure 2. Dual-focus of Servanthood- shows the relationships between the targets of service. The targets are complimentary.

Summary

The farewell discourse of Jesus begins in John 13 with a narrative about a significant meeting that includes a meal and the act of foot washing. The examination of the foot washing performed by Jesus in John 13 was the background for study of the dual-focused servant leadership of the team of disciples. This farewell discourse was an intimate time between a leader and his group. He personally took time washing and drying the feet of each member of the group. Subsequently, they ate the meal and fellowshiped together. Additionally, the foot washing served as the group leader's model of love and service. It provided an example of how they should live in the physical absence of their leader. Finally, the foot washing signaled the succession of leadership-its authority and responsibility- to the group of disciples. Evident in this model of leadership, Jesus demonstrates the ability to have a dual focus. In exercising this model of dual-focused servanthood there is a "win-win" proposition for both the members of the group and the overall organization.

The implications for organizational teams are in structuring processes and systems that are complimentary to the organization as a whole and have at the core a doctrine of service to its members. As a result, in these cases servant leadership is expanded beyond the followers to a more comprehensive service objective. For in serving a system that is complimentary in the components of systems and people, a leader is also serving his or her followers. Within such a framework, leaders will have optimum facility to operate in the dual-focus of servanthood – simultaneously serving the mission and serving the members of the team.

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