

The Cosmopolitan Servant Leader

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This paper introduces a need for a cosmopolitan servant leader to successfully engage and deal with today's changing cross-cultural emerging world. Among others, the works of Winston and Patterson, Spears, and Marquardt and Berger, provide a platform to synthesize the characteristics of a servant leader and a cosmopolitan leader. From the synthesis, the research provides four core competencies for the cosmopolitan servant leader relative to the follower: valuing, preparing, focusing, and activating followers. The cosmopolitan leader is like a gardener who has the big picture of the completed garden and knows each and every plant. Anything the gardener does not know becomes a point of intentional and applicable discovery and understanding. The cosmopolitan servant leader is fully a leader who does leadership activities, fully a servant who is concerned for the welfare of the follower, and fully a cosmopolitan who comfortably lives out values and responsibilities in a cross-cultural and complex world.

Imagine yourself on a cross-cultural and global business team made up of you an American, a Dutch, and an Australian, all from individualistic cultures. Imagine yourself, raised in a small American community surrounded by a large interdependent family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Your family discussed everything. They even discussed where you should go to college and what you were to study. They lived what they believed—that each person is responsible to and for everyone else and that it is unwise to step into uncertainty without hours of contemplation and group discussion.

Your leader assigned your team the task to create a strategy to start a new project in Chennai, India, with a due date in only one week. The only way to achieve the task is to break the assignment into individual pieces with each team member taking one of the sub-assignments. Your part of the task is to determine the specific location of the work. You have only 4 days to fly to India, examine several locations, select the best one, contract with the owner to lease the property, and report to the team.

You have been on similar teams in the past, but it was always the team that made the final decision. The thought of going solo on this assignment terrifies you. You could be wrong and embarrass the team. You need more time to prepare choices and to consider each carefully. You need to be able to take your findings back to the team for their review and decision. The risk of being wrong overwhelms you. You feel trapped. You could quit the team and protect yourself, but that would let the team down. How could your leader put you in this predicament?

You wish one of the leaders had taken the time to know you as a follower, to learn a little about you and how you think and feel. They would have understood you are different from the accepted dominant American cultural norm—that of being an independent leader, able to decide issues alone even amid major areas of uncertainty. What you needed was a team leader who understood that you are like you, a unique person with unique dreams, hopes, and fears.

Our story shows the need to develop relationally effective global and cross-cultural cosmopolitan leaders; leaders committed to understanding each follower as a unique life, rather than basing their judgment on broad research of cultural norms. Based on the research of Winston and

Patterson, the writings of Spears, and the work of Marquardt and Berger, this paper introduces the *cosmopolitan servant leader*, one who knows and understands dominant cultural norms and yet moves past those norms to focus on and serve the cross-cultural follower, honoring his or her uniqueness. Cross-cultural leadership must move beyond a start-and-stop learning experience based on cultural averages. We need leaders—continuously learning cosmopolitan servant leaders—committed to learning about each follower as a unique life. We need leaders who are like gardeners with the big picture of the completed garden, yet who know every plant in the garden and anything they do not know becomes a point of intentional discovery.

Who is the Follower Today?

A follower today is a unique human being with intrinsic value because of his or her humanness, not a statistic. In business, people often refer to employees as “input factors” or “human resources.” In contrast, Harris, Moran, and Moran argue that individuals are an organization’s most essential asset. If a leader values employees as individual human beings, the employees should provide the future competitiveness the organization needs.¹

Winston and Patterson define a follower, in part, as someone with “diverse gifts, abilities, and skills;” who has “beliefs,” “values,” and “opinions;” and who needs “personal development . . . as well as emotional and physical healing.”² Followers have personal responses to “risk, failure, and success” and have a sense of “self worth.”³ Drawing from the Beatitudes (Matt. 5), Winston and Patterson imply a follower is one whose well-being is protected by their leader,⁴ implying the leader must value the follower.

Over the last several decades, employees have become an increasingly researched statistic. Many organizations becoming global or cross-cultural look to researcher Geert Hofstede’s norms for guidance.⁵ Hofstede spent years discovering, quantifying, and publishing cultural norms divided into five cultural dimensions by country⁶ as a means to understand the characteristics of culturally diverse employees. The *power distance index* provides a picture of how the average person in a subject country reacts to unequal power in their environment. The *individualism index* measures to what degree an average person acts individualistically or independently in contrast to a collectivistic or group orientation. The *masculinity index*, rather than measuring male versus female, measures the level an average person in a culture is assertive and materialistic contrasted to caring for others. The *uncertainty avoidance index* quantifies the average citizen’s tolerance with uncertainty or ambiguity. The *long-term orientation index* compares the time orientation of an average person in a society; it contrasts a long-term versus a short-term mindset. In every case, Hofstede’s cultural norms describe a hypothetical average person within a national culture.⁷

Leaders skew their view of a follower when they rely on a hypothetical average person. For example, according to Hofstede,⁸ the average person living in the United States has a power distance index below the world norms and therefore has a slightly stronger sense of equality between societal levels. He or she is highly individualistic and self-reliant with a low need for strong relational bonds (individualism index) and is higher than the world norm for assertiveness and materialism (masculinity index). The average person in the U.S. is lower than the world norm in their need for certainty, which is indicative of a person who wants few rules and does not need to control the future (uncertainty avoidance index). Finally, he or she thinks in the short-term (long-term orientation index). While these norms are helpful to compare the United States with another culture, the difficulties come in applying those norms. With few exceptions,

every individual living in the United States has characteristics that vary from Hofstede's hypothetical average person.

Hofstede's norms do not apply in most leadership situations. The norms work well when making macro-organizational plans or discussing differences between cultures; however, the value of the norms dwindles when a leader deals with a follower's individual life. Any conclusions a leader makes about one specific person based on norms will generally be inaccurate, and therefore not produce the intended outcome. A leader cannot escape the hard work of learning about each person under his or her direct supervision. A leader cannot forget that each follower is a unique individual—a product of their experiences, education, natural abilities, and personality.⁹

According to Klein and Harrison, it is not in an organization's best interest to base its relationships with employees on "coarse identity classifications" because doing so "over-lumps" people. People are complex and vary from one another.¹⁰ Appelbaum, Shapiro, and Elbaz argue that because people are unique they interpret from their unique perspective whatever their leader says or does; implying that for maximum communication, a leader must get to know each individual follower one at a time.¹¹

In the opening example, the team leader incorrectly assumed that the imagined follower was identical with Hofstede's cultural norm for citizens of the United States. The impact of that assumption was a painful and frightening experience because the individual did not fit the assumption, especially in the dimensions of individualism and tolerance with uncertainty. The leader failed to honor the uniqueness of the follower and to build a strategy to structure the assigned task around that individuality and perhaps the diversities of other members of the team.

This paper argues that leaders need to perceive each follower as a unique individual and redefines the meaning of *diversity*. Diversity is more than a mix of people with different ethnic backgrounds, gender, sexual preferences, physical abilities, socio-economic situations, or ages. These more often used diversity characteristics are generally easily recognized from a short time with a person. Diversity based on Hofstede's dimensions is also easy to decide once we know the person's nationality.¹² While there is some value in these groupings for leadership planning or other high-level thinking, leaders often overuse the groupings, especially as discussion moves to the individual level.¹³ Besides the variance from Hofstede's cultural dimensional norms, people vary in individual personalities and preferences. Some people are quiet, some talkative. Some are primarily auditory learners; others are visual or kinesthetic learners. Some people focus on tasks, while others focus on relationships. Some people judge based on facts, while others perceive based on feelings. Trying to lead people using any group averages results in a misleading picture of an individual; people are just too complex.

The tendency to stereotype people into categories based on averages is like evaluating a particular horse. A comprehensive study of horses reveals the average horse is for riding. The Clydesdale horse, however, is for pulling heavy loads. Using only the average norm for horses could result in a Clydesdale running in a horse race. To avoid the same mistake with people, we need to "resist the urge to generalize."¹⁴

The Cosmopolitan Servant Leader

This paper introduces the cosmopolitan servant leader as a person with the characteristics necessary to lead in a global organization. It presents a researched and synthesized definition of a

leader and then discusses what it means to be a servant leader and a cosmopolitan leader. It concludes by synthesizing these characteristics into a cosmopolitan servant leader.

What is a Leader?

Winston and Patterson define a *leader* as:

one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives.

Winston and Patterson produced their definition of a leader based on a study of 160 sources containing leadership definitions. Thus, their study provides a synthesis of various views and the most meaningful definition for this paper.¹⁵ From their definition, this paper infers the leader is not someone who views the follower as merely a statistic or cultural norm; the leader engages the follower as one who has unique and diverse characteristics.

When selecting followers, a leader needs to look beyond the obvious or known group norms. Selecting followers requires the leader to know and understand the applicant and his or her uniquely diverse characteristics. Selecting qualified followers means resisting the temptation to rely on stereotypes.

Fully knowing the individual allows the leader to improve his or her capacity to equip and train the follower. The leader will notice the competency gaps and plan a better developmental regime to prepare the follower for complementing the organization. The properly equipped follower contributes his or her unique and diverse characteristics to strengthen the overall organization.

A well-informed follower selection coupled with appropriate development simplifies the leader's task of influencing the follower.¹⁶ Through "interaction and feedback"¹⁷ and conveying a vision for the future,¹⁸ the necessary leader-follower trust relationship will grow, instilling in the follower a willingness to share in organizational risks.¹⁹

What is a Servant Leader?

The word *servant* adds a distinctive and important factor for describing a cosmopolitan servant leader. Drawing from Greenleaf, Spears defines a servant leader as "one who is a servant first."²⁰ He argues that a person who has the gifted tendency to be a servant leader, first has a core motivation to serve, then chooses to accept leadership.²¹ Continuing to draw from Greenleaf, Spears lists ten characteristics of servant-leaders: (a) they listen with all of their minds, (b) they empathize with people in difficulty, and (c) they make the people around them feel stronger. Servant leaders (d) are aware of their surroundings, (e) they use persuasion, (f) they have big dreams, and (g) they are intuitive; they see the outcomes of the present action. They also (h) consider themselves in a stewardship role, (i) they value people, hoping to see them grow, and (j) they serve the community around them.²²

The Bible provides a picture of Jesus as a servant leader in John 13 when He washed the feet of His disciples.²³ Jesus knew His time to leave the earth was rapidly approaching. He knew the Father had put everything under His power, that He had come from God, and that He was soon going home to God. Jesus was fully aware that He was (and is) Lord of all. As He washed their feet, Jesus knew He was in the position as Leader washing their feet.²⁴ Knowing His supreme

place in the universe as King of kings and without giving up His place as Lord of lords, Jesus stepped into the role as the lowest of servants, the Servant of servants, the foot washer. Then Jesus told them to do as He did.²⁵

According to the text, Jesus remained leader while serving the disciples by washing their feet. When Jesus displayed servant-leader behavior, He did not set aside His role as leader. As a leader, He served by performing the lowest responsibility in the 1st-century society. When Jesus modeled servant leadership, He did not put boundaries on the actions or behaviors specific to servant leadership. Jesus left the “service” of the servant leader open to unlimited possibilities for serving others in any era and any place in the world, whether a 1st-century disciple or 21st century leader.

What is a Cosmopolitan Leader?

The cosmopolitan leader feels at home as a global citizen and at ease with individuals around the world, even those holding widely divergent values and beliefs from the leader.²⁶ The cosmopolitan leader easily engages and interacts with diverse people, being insightfully aware of others, and creative in all relationships.²⁷ These leaders leverage diversity as they uphold a learning approach in all relational encounters, especially during times of change. Cosmopolitan leaders deal flexibly with situations and people, adapting to meet the need. Cosmopolitan leaders can keep a balance of owning and understanding their own culture while accepting the diversity of other cultures, because they keep their orientation centered on the unique individuality of people. Cosmopolitan leaders are “person centered.”²⁸ Gudykunst and Kim suggest a summary of a cosmopolitan perspective: “respect for all cultures; understanding of what individuals in other cultures think, feel, and believe; and appreciation for differences among cultures.”²⁹

Marquardt and Berger provide a list of eight forces changing the workplace for leaders and a list of the competencies necessary for a cosmopolitan or global leader to deal successfully with those forces.³⁰ The first “transforming force” is *globalization*. To be successful, the cosmopolitan leader needs to be able to see the whole work environment from the micro-workplace perspective while also viewing it from a macro-global perspective.³¹ The second force, *the change to the knowledge era*, requires the leader to experience and model continuous learning while teaching diverse employees from his or her knowledge base, coaching from experience, and mentoring from awareness of employees’ needs.³²

Because of the third force, *a continual changing nature of the workplace*, a cosmopolitan leader serves those he or she supervises by engaging the worker from a holistic view. The leader provides a secure team environment which helps the follower grow into greater participation in leadership. The leader realizes that he or she stewards the worker’s life for someone or something else, such as the organization. In other words, the leader is not the worker’s owner; the cosmopolitan leader is a servant and a steward.³³ Because of the fourth force, *rapid changes in organizational structure*, cosmopolitan leaders need competency in systems thinking and doing many projects at one time. The cosmopolitan leader needs to go beyond looking at symptoms to discover real causes. This leader must grasp complexity as it develops over time, seeing a process rather than just a picture.³⁴

As a result of the fifth force, *environmental needs and growing awareness of our responsibilities*, cosmopolitan leaders engage the workplace at a higher level, addressing issues of life and work meaning, core values, and personal and organizational responsibilities. They work to increase a sense of ethics in their own lives as well as in the workers’ and the organizations’.³⁵ The sixth

force, *the current trend in technology*, requires leaders with the ability to leverage technology. They need to know the positive and damaging influences and power inherent in our new technology. Simultaneously, cosmopolitan leaders understand the confines of technology—what it will not do.³⁶

Given the seventh force, *the rapid change in what the market wants*, cosmopolitan leaders think in the future, look for new products and services, and display a strong comfort with uncertainty. Cosmopolitan leaders must be creative and opportunistic, leveraging the greater intelligence of a diversified team. They regularly ask the question of a 5-year-old child, “Why can’t we do that?”³⁷ Finally, the eighth force, *because of the increasing speed of change*, the leader envisions the future, motivating and inspiring followers with that vision. The cosmopolitan leader thinks above the day-to-day planning and reacting. He or she pulls people together to both evaluate today and set direction for the emerging (and yet to emerge) tomorrow.³⁸

Marquardt and Berger argue that organizations will find the true cosmopolitan leader out of those people “whose primary motivation is a desire to help others . . . [it] must be a leader’s number one priority.”³⁹ This number one competency is a servant’s heart. This and other leadership characteristics are shared by the leaders described by Winston and Patterson and Spears.

What is a Cosmopolitan Servant Leader?

A definition and description of a cosmopolitan servant leader emerges out of a synthesis of the results of the previous discussion under the headings “Winston and Patterson—leader,” “Spears/Greenleaf—servant,” and “Marquardt and Berger—cosmopolitan” (see Table 1). The synthesis of the various characteristics or competencies from the research surface four core competencies. The cosmopolitan servant leader (a) values followers, (b) prepares followers, (c) focuses followers, and (d) activates followers. These core competencies center on the follower and embody the life of the cosmopolitan servant leader.

The Cosmopolitan Servant Leader Values Followers

The cosmopolitan leader described by Marquardt and Berger displays valuing people by living responsibly and showing a lifestyle of caring for people. Spears and Greenleaf show the servant leader valuing followers through his or her self-perception as a steward and in service to the community. Winston and Patterson’s definition of a leader implies that a leader values followers. When leaders value followers, leaders see them as individuals with unique and diverse characteristics.

Winston and Patterson, Spears, and Marquardt and Berger all stress the need for leaders with a heart to serve. Winston and Patterson’s leader displays a concern for the individual follower. Spears’ servant leader has a core motive to serve, pouring out his or her life for the benefit of others. Marquardt and Berger argue that organizations will find the true cosmopolitan leader out of those people “whose primary motivation is a desire to help others.”⁴⁰ In the title, the cosmopolitan servant leader, *servant* provides the most important characteristic and the key for success as a cosmopolitan servant leader.

Table 1: Comparison and Synthesis of Core Competencies of the Cosmopolitan Servant Leader

	Winston & Patterson Leader	Spears/Greenleaf Servant	Marquardt & Berger Cosmopolitan
Values followers	Inferred concern for followers	Self perception as steward Value people Serves community	Lives and teaches values and responsibility Has primary motivation to help people
Prepares followers	Selects followers Equips and trains	Listens with total mind	Engages people holistically Uses coaching and training
Focuses followers	Focuses on objectives	Conscious of surrounding Have big dreams Is intuitive Sees ultimate outcomes	Complex systems thinker Sees micro and macro simultaneously Creative forward thinker Has vision and can communicate vision
Activates followers	Influences followers Motivates followers	Strengthen people Use persuasion Empathize with people	A continuous learner and developer Leverages resources

The Cosmopolitan Servant Leader Prepares Followers

The cosmopolitan leader prepares followers for the present challenges and the emerging future. To heighten the follower’s competency preparation, the cosmopolitan leader develops the follower holistically by modeling, coaching, training, and providing experiences. A servant leader prepares the follower by listening intently, hearing both verbal and non-verbal messages. Winston and Patterson’s leader first selects, then trains and equips followers. Thus, preparing followers is a necessary characteristic of the cosmopolitan servant leader.

The Cosmopolitan Servant Leader Focuses Followers

The cosmopolitan leader pulls together the complexity of the workplace for the follower, focusing the follower on the leader’s and the organization’s vision. This leader sees both the micro- and macro-perspectives, creatively looks forward, and communicates a vision to the follower. Through intuition, the servant leader focuses the follower by having and

communicating big dreams, the ultimate outcome, and an awareness of the surrounding environment. Winston and Patterson's leader aims the follower on the objectives. The ability of the cosmopolitan servant leader to focus the follower on the vision and the future is one of the defining characteristics of this leader.

The Cosmopolitan Servant Leader Activates Followers

The cosmopolitan leader moves followers to action by maintaining a continuous learning and follower development environment to leverage resources. The servant leader activates followers by strengthening, persuading, and empathizing with people. Winston and Patterson's definition argues that the leader demonstrates a responsibility to activate his or her organization's followers through leadership influence and motivation. Therefore, the fourth defining characteristic of the cosmopolitan servant leader is that he or she leads followers into every day action.

The cosmopolitan servant leader is fully a leader, doing recognized leadership activities, such as selecting, equipping, focusing, influencing, and motivating followers. The cosmopolitan servant leader is fully a servant, involved in real servant activities, such as putting people first, listening intently, providing dreams for the follower, and uplifting followers. The cosmopolitan servant leader is finally and fully a cosmopolitan, a global person, living out values and responsibilities while dealing with cross-cultural people holistically. This leader lives in the present and future with all its complexity. This leader is continuously growing and developing personally and spreading that learning influence to followers. The cosmopolitan servant leader is the leader for our emerging world.

Cosmopolitan servant leaders are like gardeners who envision the completed garden, know every plant in the garden according to each plant's need, and intentionally discover, learn, and understand every influence on the garden. Cosmopolitan servant leaders see their organizations in the world as their gardens. They know each follower under their supervision according to the follower's individual needs. They intentionally discover, learn, and understand any influence on their organization or followers. Cosmopolitan servant leaders provide the needed leadership for the emerging and yet-to-emerge world.

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