Exploring the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Team Effectiveness:

Findings from the Nonprofit Sector

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While Greenleaf’s (1977) seminal work on servant leadership has led to a growing body of literature surrounding the construct, up to this point, very little has been done to investigate what effect servant leadership behaviors have on the effectiveness of teams. In light of this void in the literature, the present study sought to answer the research question: “Is there a relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness?” by conducting an empirical study in a U.S. division of an international nonprofit organization. A statistically significant and positive correlation was found for each of the variables associated with servant leadership when analyzed in reference to team effectiveness. Additional findings related to job satisfaction are presented as well.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams. While Greenleaf’s (1977) seminal work on servant leadership has led to a growing body of literature surrounding the construct, up to this point, very little has been done to investigate what effect servant leadership behaviors have on the effectiveness of teams. In light of the contemporary interest in teams by researchers and practitioners—an interest evidenced by works such as LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) research with 6,000 team members and leaders—exploring the effect of servant leadership on the effectiveness of teams takes on special and timely significance. Specifically, if servant leadership behaviors are associated with the effectiveness of teams, the research focus of this study, then it becomes essential that organizational leaders not ignore the positive effect that their servant leadership behaviors or, conversely, the negative effect that the absence of these behaviors will have on the effectiveness of teams in the attainment of common objectives or goals.

Greenleaf’s (1977) initial work brought the concept of servant leadership to public discourse in the mid 1970s. Since that time, a number of works have emerged: Graham (1991); Spears (1995); Quay (1997); Spears (1998a); Blanchard (1998); Buchen (1998); Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999); Laub (1999); Russell (2001a, 2001b); Russell and Stone (2002); Sendjaya and Sarros (2002); Spears and Lawrence (2002); Dennis and Winston (2003); Jennings and Stahl-Wert (2003); Laub (2003); Ledbetter (2003); Patterson (2003); Rude (2003); Russell (2003); Sendjaya (2003); Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2003); Winston (2003); Wong and Page (2003); Cerff (2004); Dennis (2004); Drury (2004); Hale (2004); Helland (2004); Hebert (2003, 2004); Irving (2004); Laub (2004); Norgia (2004); Nwogu (2004); Page (2004); Parolini (2004); Patterson and Stone (2004); Wolford-Ulrich (2004); Winston and Hartsfield (2004); Smith, Montagno, and Kuzmenko (2004); Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004); Winston (2004); and Irving (2005b).
Of these works, a majority are theoretical in nature: Blanchard (1998); Buchen (1998); Cerff (2004); Farling et al. (1999); Graham (1991); Hale (2004); Jennings and Stahl-Wert (2003); Laub (2004); Ndoria (2004); Nwogu (2004); Page (2004); Parolini (2004); Patterson (2003); Patterson and Stone (2004); Quay (1997); Rude (2003); Russell (2001a, 2003); Russell and Stone (2002); Sendjaya and Sarros (2002); Smith et al. (2004); Spears (1995, 1998a); Spears and Lawrence (2002); Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2003, 2004); Wolford-Ulrich (2004); Winston (2003); Winston and Hartsfield (2004); and Wong and Page (2003). Several empirical studies such as Dennis (2004), Dennis and Winston (2003), Drury (2004), Hebert (2004), Helland (2004), Irving (2004, 2005b), Laub (1999, 2003), Ledbetter (2003), Sendjaya (2003), and Winston (2004) have emerged as well.

The work surrounding servant leadership from the early 1990s through 2003 focused on identifying themes that could help to operationalize the concept of servant leadership. Graham (1991) stressed the inspirational and moral dimensions. Buchen (1998) argued that self-identity, capacity for reciprocity, relationship building, and preoccupation with the future were essential themes. Spears (1998a) emphasized the dimensions of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and community building. Farling et al. (1999) argued for the importance of vision, influence credibility, trust, and service. Laub (1999) put forward valuing people, developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership. Russell (2001a) argued for vision, credibility, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciating others, and empowerment. Patterson (2003) presented the dimensions of agapáo love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service as the essential dimensions of servant leadership. Table 1 provides an overview of these servant leadership themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Servant Leadership Emphases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graham (1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspirational, Moral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buchen (1998)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Identity, Capacity for Recipocity, Relationship Builders, Preoccupation with the Future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spears (1998a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment, Community Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farling et al. (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision, Influence, Credibility, Trust, Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laub (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuing People, Developing People, Building Community, Displaying Authenticity, Provides Leadership, Shares Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell (2001a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision, Credibility, Trust, Service, Modeling, Pioneering, Appreciation of Others, Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterson (2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agapáo Love, Humility, Altruism, Vision, Trust, Empowerment, Service</td>
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</table>


While empirical measures of servant leadership such as Dennis (2004), Sendjaya (2003), Page and Wong (2003) have emerged, Laub’s (1999) Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) has been the dominate instrument used for measuring servant leadership at the organizational level in recent years as evidenced by works such as Drury (2004), Hebert (2004), Irving (2004), Laub (1999, 2003), and Ledbetter.
([2003]). Drury researched the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment and found, contrary to the theoretical literature, an inverse relationship that was statistically significant. Hebert examined the relationship of perceived servant leadership and job satisfaction from the follower’s perspective and found that there was a significant relationship between perceptions of servant leadership and overall and intrinsic job satisfaction. Laub (1999) developed the OLA through a Delphi investigation and then subsequently put the instrument through a broader field test for reliability and found a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .98. In the Delphi process, 60 characteristics of servant leaders were identified and eventually clustered into six key areas: (a) valuing people, (b) developing people, (c) building community, (d) displaying authenticity, (e) providing leadership, and (f) sharing leadership. Ledbetter (2003) confirmed the reliability of the OLA among law enforcement agencies and found a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .9814. Irving’s (2004) study found a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .9807 for the OLA and further explored the relationship between the servant leadership characteristics of the OLA and the characteristics of effective teams in Larson and LaFasto’s (2001) Team Effectiveness Questionnaire (TEQ). In Irving’s (2004) study the correlation coefficient was .592 (two-tailed Pearson r correlation) with a significance value of .000, indicating that the relationship between the two constructs was both substantial and highly significant.

Statement of the Problem

While Irving’s (2004) study broke new ground in that it was the first study to empirically examine the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness, several considerations of this study point to the need for further research. First, while the significant and substantially positive relationship was found in multiple sectors—nonprofit, church, and business—the findings indicated different degrees of the relationship when analyzed by sector. Among the nonprofit sector, the correlation coefficient was .547 (p = .008). Among the church sector, the correlation coefficient was .563 (p = .000). Among the business sector, the correlation coefficient was .758 (p = .001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Sample</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>.592</td>
<td>.000</td>
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As illustrated by Table 2, the sample was not equally representative of the three sectors. While the N for the entire sample was 202, the n values for the sectors were as follows: nonprofit (n = 22), church (n = 165), and business (n = 15). These values represented the following percentages of the total sample size: nonprofit (10.89%), church (81.68%), and business (7.43%). Though Irving’s (2004) findings provided a credible basis for future studies, the low n values in the business and nonprofit sectors provided both an implicit and explicit call for future research on the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness among these sectors. Finally, while Irving’s (2004) study analyzed the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness at the organizational level, the OLA is not suited for analyzing servant leadership at the individual leader level.

In light of these implications and limitations of Irving’s (2004) research, the problem explored in this research project became even more focused and significant. Specifically, in light of the substantial and statistically significant findings among the nonprofit sector (r = .547, p = .008, n = 22) in Irving’s (2004) study, the present research sought to confirm these findings with a larger sample size and in a different nonprofit organization. Furthermore, the proposed study sought to address servant leadership not only on the organizational level with the OLA, but also at the individual leader level. Utilizing two servant leadership instruments provided a means for analyzing the relationship between the two constructs at both the organizational and the individual leader level.
Research Question and Hypotheses

Defining hypotheses as conjectural statements about the relation between two or more variables, Kerlinger and Lee (2000) argued that there are two primary criteria for good hypotheses: (a) hypotheses are statements about the relations between variables, and (b) hypotheses carry clear implications for testing the stated relations. Kerlinger and Lee further noted the important and indispensable nature of hypotheses in research arguing that hypotheses (a) are the working instruments of theory, (b) can be tested and shown to be probably true or probably false, and (c) are powerful tools for the advancement of knowledge. In order to provide the theoretical basis for the proposed research question and hypotheses, a discussion of the theoretical support found in the literature is presented in the following section.

Theoretical Support from the Literature

In addressing the theoretical support from the literature, it is appropriate to begin with Greenleaf’s (1977) seminal work. Addressing the topic of large business as a servant and the need for servant-led organizations, Greenleaf noted that in light of the revolution of expectation among young people which has forced companies to try to make work more significant for their employees, one who presides over a successful business “will need to evolve from being the chief into the builder of the team” (p. 85). In Greenleaf’s conceptualization of leadership in this late-modern era, in the face of generational and cultural shifts and pressures, the servant leader must be a team-builder over chief. In so arguing, Greenleaf provided an initial basis for looking at the relationship between the constructs of servant leadership and team effectiveness.

In addressing why one should be a servant leader, Tarr (1995) provided several considerations about servant leadership: (a) it works; (b) it reinforces the nature of one’s profession and calls upon its more noble instincts; (c) it is action-oriented; and (d) servant leadership is a commitment to the celebration of people and their potential. Addressing the first consideration, Tarr noted that the hands-on nature of servant leadership “can encourage the team spirit that leads to increased productivity with commensurate rewards all around” (p. 82). In so doing, it provides further support for the relationship proposed for research in the present study.

Arguing for the concept of team-building through servant leadership, Chamberlain (1995) wrote, “Organizations should operate to upgrade their standard community-based operations with team-building promoted by servant-leadership” (p. 171). For Chamberlain, when team members profess servant leadership, they are able to emerge as trustworthy professional co-leaders, an essential factor in building teams. Furthermore, noting that servant leadership is now in its third decade as a specific leadership and management concept, Spears (1998b) noted that this shift toward servant leadership has been accompanied by a shift from traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical modes of leadership to a new model that is, “based on teamwork and community” (p. 1). These cultural shifts felt in organizations have created an environment in which servant leadership, which may have been optional in the industrial age, is becoming vital as the value of community and teams is raised.

While servant leadership at the individual leader level is an important consideration and an important point addressed in this study, Covey (1998) warned that, “If you really want to get servant-leadership, then you’ve got to have institutionalization of the principles at the organizational level” (p. xvii). Of the servant leadership instruments, the OLA is the best suited for addressing servant leadership at this level of analysis. Laub (1999) defined the essence of servant leadership in this manner: “Servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (p. 81).

At this point, it is helpful to examine the theoretical points of connection between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams from those who have done research with the OLA. First, Ledbetter (2003) argued that servant leaders who value people are those who (a) encourage, (b) are loyal, (c) build teamwork, (d) are committed, and (e) respect the dignity and worth of others. Second, as noted previously, Irving (2004) found a highly significant and positive correlation ($p = .000, r = .592$) between the OLA and the TEQ. Third, Laub (2003) argued that higher OLA scores are indicative of higher levels of team function. For example, teams with low OLA scores are characterized by (a) members being out for themselves, (b) members being manipulated and pitted against each other, and (c) members being punished for nonperformance. Conversely,
teams with high OLA scores are characterized by (a) an extremely high level of community, (b) members working together well, and (c) members choosing collaboration over competition against one another.

While, as Covey (1998) has noted, the institutionalization of the servant leadership principles at the organizational level is vital, examining servant leadership at the individual leader level provides the opportunity to evaluate key individual dimensions of servant leadership. Dennis (2004) highlighted five essential characteristics of servant leadership: (a) love, (b) empowerment, (c) vision, (d) humility, and (e) trust. These are five of the seven theoretical dimensions put forward in Patterson’s (2003) dissertation. Dennis’ work of conceptualizing the items and scales of the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (SLAI) has provided a theoretical basis for anticipating that these variables will be positively related to team effectiveness. First, Dennis’ love variable is based on Winston’s (2002) conceptualization of agapáo love. Winston (2002) noted that, “This Greek word refers to a moral love, doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons” (p. 5) and that “agapáo means to love in a social or moral sense, embracing the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety” (p. 5). Dennis noted that the love of servant leadership includes truly caring about team members as people, making them feel important and being genuinely interested in their lives. Such care for team members is one of the dimensions that should theoretically foster greater team collaboration and effectiveness.

Second, Dennis (2004) embraced a definition of empowerment that places an emphasis on teamwork: “Empowerment is entrusting power to others, and for the servant leader it involves effective listening, making people feel significant, putting an emphasis on teamwork, and the valuing of love and equality (Russell & Stone, 2002)” (p. 7). Third, describing the variable of vision, Dennis drew on Bennett’s (2001) statement that explicitly links the constructs of servant leadership and team effectiveness: “By linking servant leadership—characterized by openness, stewardship, and vision—to personal values, we can enhance individual, team, and organizational performance” (p. 46). In other words, when personal values are linked with servant leadership that is characterized by vision, team performance can be enhanced.

Fourth, in describing the variable of humility, Dennis (2004) drew from Crom’s (1998) assertion that effective leaders are those that maintain their humility by showing respect for employees and acknowledging their contribution to the team. This dimension of humility encourages the supportiveness that LaFasto and Larson (2001) identified as a key teamwork factor. Finally, Dennis’ conceptualization of trust embraced confidence in or reliance on other team members, a definition of trust put forward by Hauser and House (2000). Since, according to LaFasto and Larson, openness is also a key teamwork factor, trust becomes essential for creating the type of environment in which teams may effectively attain their objectives and goals. In light of the theoretical support for these variables and their interrelationship with the effectiveness of teams, the following section will address more specifically which instruments were utilized to measure these variables.

Instrumentation

Turning now to the research question and associated hypotheses, it is helpful to provide a summary of the instruments and associated variables that were a part of the research. The first instrument is the OLA which is a measure of servant leadership at the organizational level. Laub (2003) clearly noted that, “the overall OLA score is recommended for research purposes” (p. 4). The OLA also provides a scale for the measurement of job satisfaction at the individual research participant level. The second instrument is the SLAI which measures the servant leadership variables of: (a) love, (b) empowerment, (c) vision, (d) humility, and (e) trust at the individual leader level. The third instrument is the TEQ which provides a collective measure of team effectiveness. In light of this, the following variables were included in the present research: (a) servant leadership at the organizational level (OLA); (b) job satisfaction at the individual participant level (OLA); (c) love (SLAI), (d) empowerment (SLAI), (e) vision (SLAI), (f) humility (SLAI), and (g) trust (SLAI) at the individual leader level; and (h) team effectiveness (TEQ) at the team level.

Because Dennis’ (2004) SLAI instrument is relatively new in the field of servant leadership studies, it would be helpful to introduce the instrument’s basic properties. The following Cronbach alphas were found for the scales in the SLAI: (a) love = .94, (b) empowerment = .94, (c) vision = .89, and (d) humility = .92. Because the trust scale only has two items, a Cronbach alpha could not be calculated. Dennis included the trust scale in the SLAI, because the two items loaded together in two independent data collections. Table 3 provides an
overview of the SLAI scales, their associated alpha coefficients, and the associated items that loaded together in the factor analyses.

Table 3  
Servant Leadership Factors From Dennis’ (2004) SLAI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Alpha Coefficient</th>
<th>Items</th>
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</table>
| Love    | .94               | • My leader is genuinely interested in me as a person  
• My leader creates a culture that fosters high standards of ethics  
• My leader has shown his or her care for me by encouraging me  
• My leader has shown compassion in his or her actions toward me  
• My leader shows concern for me |
| Empowerment | .94       | • My leader lets me make decisions with increasing responsibility  
• My leader gives me the authority I need to do my job  
• My leader turns over some control to me so that I may accept more responsibility  
• My leader empowers me with opportunities so that I develop skills  
• My leader entrusts me to make decisions |
| Vision  | .89               | • My leader has sought my vision regarding the organization’s vision  
• My leader and I have written a clear and concise vision statement for our company  
• My leader has asked me what I think the future direction of our company should be  
• My leader has shown that he or she wants to include employees’ vision into the firm’s goals and objectives  
• My leader seeks my commitment concerning the shared vision of our company |
| Humility| .92               | • My leader does not overestimate his or her merits  
• My leader is not interested in self-glorification  
• My leader is humble enough to consult others in the organization when he or she may not have all the answers  
• My leader does not center attention on his or her own accomplishments  
• My leader’s demeanor is one of humility |
| Trust   | N/A               | • My leader trusts me to keep a secret  
• My leader knows I am above corruption |

* The alpha coefficient cannot be calculated with less than three items. Dennis included these two items as a factor because they loaded together in a factor-analysis on two separate data collections.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Based on the above-noted theoretical foundation and instrumentation, the following research question guided the present study: “Is there a relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness?” The following hypotheses and null hypotheses were used to empirically investigate this research question:

\[ H_1: \] There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between servant leadership at the organizational level (OLA) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

\[ H_{1 o}: \] There is no correlation between servant leadership at the organizational level (OLA) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.
H2: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the servant leadership variable of love at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H2o: There is no correlation between the servant leadership variable of love at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H3: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the servant leadership variable of empowerment at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H3o: There is no correlation between the servant leadership variable of empowerment at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H4: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the servant leadership variable of vision at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H4o: There is no correlation between the servant leadership variable of vision at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H5: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the servant leadership variable of humility at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H5o: There is no correlation between the servant leadership variable of humility at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H6: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the servant leadership variable of trust at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H6o: There is no correlation between the servant leadership variable of trust at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H7: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between job satisfaction at the individual participant level (OLA) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

H7o: There is no correlation between job satisfaction at the individual participant level (OLA) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) within the nonprofit research sample.

Sample Characteristics and Data Collection

Sample Characteristics

The research sample was collected within a US division of an international nonprofit organization. This division includes 1,800 members and was an appropriate organization among which to conduct the research due to the team-based systems that permeate their operational structures. The research sample was drawn from this sample frame utilizing an open invitation to participate sent by e-mail. This method helped to insure a random sampling from the sample frame. The number of participants in the study was 740. Of the 740 participants, 729 participants provided data that could be included in the analyses; this number represented a response rate of 40.5%. Based on Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) sample size recommendation for an organization unit with 1,800 members, this research sample provided a statistically representative sample. The participants: (a) were 47% female and 52.2% male, with .8% not reporting their gender; (b) were 6.9% top leadership, 23% management, and 69.2% workforce, with .9% not reporting their position; and (c) 1.2% had completed high school, 86.1% had completed bachelors studies, 11.6% had completed masters studies, and .7% had completed doctoral studies, with .4% not reporting the highest level of education completed. Participation in the study was both voluntary and anonymous for these participants.

Data Collection

The data were collected by inviting members of the sample frame to a URL containing a web-based instrument. This web-based instrument housed (a) basic demographic questions (participant position level, gender, and education level), (b) the OLA (servant leadership at the organizational level and job satisfaction at the individual level), (c) the SLAI (servant leadership characteristics of love, empowerment, vision, humility, and trust at the individual leader level), and (d) the TEQ (team effectiveness at the team level). Utilizing this web-
based format allowed for an electronically-mediated collection of the research data. Due to the geographically dispersed nature of the organizational division throughout the U.S., members of the sample frame were accustomed to using web-based resources. The instrument was available to the sample frame for a period of 2 weeks. Within this 2-week period, the minimum sample size was obtained.

**Findings Associated with Servant Leadership at the Organizational Level**

The first set of hypotheses—$H_1$ and $H_1^o$—focused on the examination of servant leadership at the organizational level and this variable’s relationship to team effectiveness at the team level.

**Data and Data Analysis**

In order to determine whether these hypotheses would be accepted or rejected, interval data were collected on (a) servant leadership at the organizational level and (b) team effectiveness at the team level, utilizing the OLA and the TEQ. These interval level data were collected in order to analyze the corollary relationship between these variables by means of the Pearson product-moment coefficient. In light of the guidelines offered by Guilford (1956) and Kerlinger and Lee (2000), an $r$ value of $< .20$ was set for accepting $H_1$ is accepted. A $p$ value of $\leq .05$ (one-tailed) was set for determining the statistical significance of the data.

**Findings**

The Pearson $r$ for the relationship between servant leadership at the organizational level (OLA) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .522. The $p$ value for this Pearson $r$ finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally; when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were similar ($r = .527$, $p = .000$). Based on the Pearson $r$, $H_1^o$ was rejected. Conversely, $H_1$ was accepted. Table 4 provides a matrix of intercorrelations for the correlations between each of the research variables.
Table 4

Matrix of Intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OLA</th>
<th>JS</th>
<th>TEQ</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Emp.</th>
<th>Hum.</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Trust</th>
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Findings Associated with Servant Leadership at the Individual Leader Level

The second set of hypotheses—H<sub>2</sub> through H<sub>6</sub> and H<sub>2</sub><sub>0</sub> through H<sub>6</sub><sub>0</sub>—focused on the examination of servant leadership at the individual leader level and the relationship between team effectiveness at the team level and these variables: (a) love, (b) empowerment, (c) vision, (d) humility, and (e) trust.

Data and Data Analysis

In order to determine whether these hypotheses would be accepted or rejected, interval data were collected on (a) servant leadership at the individual leader level and (b) team effectiveness at the team level, utilizing the SLAI and the TEQ. These interval level data were collected in order to analyze the corollary relationship between these variables by means of the Pearson product-moment coefficient. The previously noted guidelines offered by Guilford (1956) and Kerlinger and Lee (2000) were used for accepting and rejecting the associated hypotheses and null hypotheses.

Findings

Love. The Pearson r for the relationship between the servant leadership variable of love at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .491. The p value for this Pearson r finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally; when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were identical (r = .491, p = .000). Based on the Pearson r, H<sub>2</sub><sub>0</sub> was therefore rejected. Conversely, H<sub>2</sub> was accepted.
**Empowerment.** The Pearson $r$ for the relationship between the servant leadership variable of empowerment at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .493. The $p$ value for this Pearson $r$ finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally, when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were similar ($r = .504, p = .000$). Based on the Pearson $r$, $H_3^o$ was therefore rejected. Conversely, $H_3$ was accepted.

**Vision.** The Pearson $r$ for the relationship between the servant leadership variable of vision at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .464. The $p$ value for this Pearson $r$ finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally, when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were similar ($r = .470, p = .000$). Based on the Pearson $r$, $H_4^o$ was therefore rejected. Conversely, $H_4$ was accepted.

**Humility.** The Pearson $r$ for the relationship between the servant leadership variable of humility at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .440. The $p$ value for this Pearson $r$ finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally, when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were similar ($r = .451, p = .000$). Based on the Pearson $r$, $H_5^o$ was therefore rejected. Conversely, $H_5$ was accepted.

**Trust.** The Pearson $r$ for the relationship between the servant leadership variable of trust at the individual leader level (SLAI) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .325. The $p$ value for this Pearson $r$ finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally, when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were similar ($r = .323, p = .000$). Based on the Pearson $r$, $H_6^o$ was therefore rejected. Conversely, $H_6$ was accepted. Table 5 provides the findings associated with servant leadership at the organizational level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLAI Scales</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>$r = .491$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>$r = .493$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>$r = .440$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>$r = .446$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>$r = .325$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings Associated with Job Satisfaction at the Individual Participant Level

The final set of hypotheses—$H_7$ and $H_7^o$—focused on the examination of job satisfaction at the individual participant level and the relationship of this variable to team effectiveness at the team level.

**Data and Data Analysis**

In order to determine whether these hypotheses would be accepted or rejected, interval data were collected on (a) job satisfaction at the individual participant level and (b) team effectiveness at the team level, utilizing the OLA and the TEQ. These interval level data were collected in order to analyze the corollary relationship between these variables by means of the Pearson product-moment coefficient. The previously noted guidelines offered by Guilford (1956) and Kerlinger and Lee (2000) were used for accepting and rejecting the associated hypotheses and null hypotheses.
Findings

The Pearson $r$ for the relationship between job satisfaction at the individual participant level (OLA) and team effectiveness at the team level (TEQ) was .436. The $p$ value for this Pearson $r$ finding was .000, indicating that the finding was statistically significant. Additionally, when controlling for the effects of position, gender, and level of education; the findings were similar ($r = .456$, $p = .000$). Based on the Pearson $r$, $H_0$ was therefore rejected. Conversely, $H_1$ was accepted.

Alpha Coefficients for Research Scales

In the present study, the alpha coefficients for each of the research scales were calculated in order to confirm the internal reliability of the scales utilized in the study. The following alpha coefficients were found: (a) .9713 for the OLA servant leadership scale, measuring servant leadership at the organizational level; (b) .8230 for the OLA job satisfaction scale, measuring job satisfaction at the individual participant level; (c) .8126 for the TEQ, measuring team effectiveness at the team level; (d) .9214 for the SLAI love scale, measuring servant leadership at the individual leader level; (e) .9200 for the SLAI empowerment scale, measuring servant leadership at the individual leader level; (f) .8637 for the SLAI vision scale, measuring servant leadership at the individual leader level; and (g) .9202 for the SLAI humility scale, measuring servant leadership at the individual leader level. A Cronbach alpha coefficient could not be calculated for the SLAI trust scale because it only has two items in the scale. Table 6 provides an overview of the alpha coefficients for each of the scales.

Table 6
Alpha Coefficients for the Research Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OLA—Servant Leadership</td>
<td>.9713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLA—Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>.8230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEQ—Team Effectiveness</td>
<td>.8126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAI—Love</td>
<td>.9214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAI—Empowerment</td>
<td>.9200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAI—Humility</td>
<td>.9202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAI—Vision</td>
<td>.8637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAI—Trust</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications of the Findings

The findings of the present study provide an important addition to the field of leadership studies and help to address the limited research related to the relationship between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams. In light of the growing focus on teams at the early part of the 21st century (see Edmondson et al., 2003; Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Irving, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Naquin & Tynan, 2003; van der Vegt et al., 2003; West et al., 2003), confirming the positive effect of servant leadership on the effectiveness of teams is difficult to overestimate. On the one hand, the high degree of statistical significance in the findings provides both a high degree of confidence in the findings and a strong basis for future investigation into this relationship. On the other hand, particularly for organizational leaders utilizing team-based structures, the findings of this study provide a veritable mandate for leaders to attend to the servant-oriented nature of the leadership within their organization. Some implications of the findings will now be discussed based on the following three categories: (a) servant leadership at the organizational level; (b) servant leadership at the individual leader level; and (c) job satisfaction at the individual team member level.

Implications of $H_1$: Servant Leadership at the Organizational Level

The priority of servant leadership. As noted in the findings, the correlation between servant leadership at the organizational level and team effectiveness at the team level in this study was both highly significant.
(p = .000) and substantial (r = .522). This positive and significant finding is indicative of a strong relationship between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams and is important for researchers and practitioners alike. For researchers, especially those studying teams and the dimensions of servant leadership, the significant findings open up new doors for research and provide confidence in the positive relationship of the two constructs. For leadership practitioners, especially those interested in the practice of teams, servant leadership takes on a fiduciary status due to its high correlation with the effectiveness of teams. As Irving (2005a) noted, “if leadership practitioners want the teams in their organization to be effective, then servant leadership is vital for increasing the effectiveness of teams” (p. 843). However, servant leadership cannot merely be focused on institutional leaders. Rather, organizations must heed Covey’s (1998) warning that “If you really want to get servant-leadership, then you’ve got to have institutionalization of the principles at the organizational level” (p. xvii).

Sociocultural considerations. Why is it that servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams are so connected in this late-modern era? While further qualitative research is necessary to provide a more robust answer to this question, Greenleaf’s (1977) theoretical observations may provide some cues in answering this important question. Addressing the topic of large business as servant and the need for servant-led organizations, Greenleaf noted that in light of the revolution of expectation among young people, one who presides over a successful business, “will need to evolve from being the chief into the builder of the team” (p. 85). In Greenleaf’s conceptualization of leadership in this late-modern era, the servant leader, in the face of generational and cultural shifts and pressures, must be team-builder over chief.

What is it about the late-modern era that would make team-oriented structures timely and relevant? Authors such as Wheatley (1999) and Capra (1996) have attributed such late-modern shifts to the onset of a quantum approach to organizations and the world in general. While quantum realities at the subatomic level are embedded in our history, organizational theorists have only recently begun to apply quantum mechanics to the ways human resources are managed and led organizationally. Addressing quantum theory from a biological perspective, Capra identified the tension between mechanism and holism in the rise of systems thinking and placed particular focus on open systems thinking. Scott (2003) defined open systems as those “systems capable of self-maintenance based on a throughput of resources from their environment, such as a living cell” (p. 84). This focus on cybernetics, or self-regulation, is a central concept within systems thinking and is compatible with a quantum approach to organizing.

Addressing quantum theory with more specificity, Wheatley (1999) noted that “relationship is the key determiner of everything” (p. 11). As an illustration of this reality, Wheatley wrote that “subatomic particles come into form and are observed only as they are in relationship to something else. They do not exist as independent “things”” (p. 11). Based on such thinking, Wheatley argued that relationships, not lone individuals, are the basic organizing unit of life; therefore, participation and cooperation are essential to our survival in the world of interconnected and networked organizations.

Consistent with Wheatley’s (1999) observations, the shift toward the quantum world of thinking and organizing not only places an emphasis on relationships as the basic organizing unit, but also emphasizes (a) the whole over the part, (b) dynamic processes over static processes, (c) organizational networks over organizational hierarchies, and (d) systemic interconnectedness over linear progression and thought. Such a holistic focus on interconnectedness, relationship, and dynamic process in networked organizations naturally lends itself to the use of relationally-oriented organizational structures such as teams. In this shift toward quantum-relational approaches to organizing, it is not surprising that new forms of leadership are needed to excel within these changing dynamics. The findings of this study provide a robust answer to what kind of leadership is effective for these relationally-based team structures. It is servant-oriented leadership that is able to lead people and human networks effectively within the interconnected world of teams.

Implications of H2 through H6: Servant Leadership at the Individual Leader Level

The priority of servant leadership at the individual leader level. Having addressed the priority and importance of servant leadership at the organizational level, the discussion of research implications will now be focused on servant leadership at the individual leader level. While, as Covey (1998) has noted, the institutionalization of servant leadership principles at the organizational level is vital, this study provided
complementary data supporting the priority and importance of servant leadership at the individual leader level. Of the five essential characteristics of servant leadership that are a part of the SLAI (love, empowerment, vision, humility, and trust), all were positively (with a Pearson r ranging from .325-.493) and significantly (p = .000) correlated with the effectiveness of teams. While the correlation of Dennis’ (2004) trust scale (r = .325) was sufficiently above the .20 mark necessary for rejecting the associated null hypothesis, according to Guilford (1956), it is to be interpreted as a low correlation that is definite but small. Of the other four scales in the SLAI (love, empowerment, vision, and humility), all of the associated Pearson r correlations are indicative of possessing a significant and substantial relationship (Guilford) with the effectiveness of teams.

As with the discussion related to servant leadership at the organizational level, the positive and significant findings associated with the five SLAI variables are important for researchers and practitioners alike. For researchers, especially those studying teams and the dimensions of servant leadership, the significant findings confirm that servant leadership’s impact on team effectiveness is not only important at the organizational level, but also at the individual leader level. The lower (r = .325), though still significant, correlation with the SLAI trust scale and team effectiveness warrants additional future research, but may be due to the low number of items (only two) in the scale. As a whole, the findings associated with the relationship between servant leadership at the individual leader level and team effectiveness provide robust statistical support for affirming the positive correlation of the constructs and open up new pathways for investigating the relationship further.

For leadership practitioners, especially those interested in the practice of teams, servant leadership at the individual leader level takes on a fiduciary status, alongside servant leadership at the organizational level, due to its high correlation with the effectiveness of teams. While Covey’s (1998) reminder that the institutionalization of the principles servant leadership must be made at the organizational level, it is also vital that servant leadership be addressed at the individual leader level because the two levels are inextricably linked. To say this another way, while organizations must pay attention to the institutionalization of servant leadership at the organizational level, an institutionalizing of servant leadership cannot happen until a critical mass of individual leaders begin to practice servant leadership at the individual level. The implications of this research are that individual leaders must embody and develop the servant leadership characteristics of (a) love, (b) empowerment, (c) vision, (d) humility, and (e) trust if teams are to perform effectively.

Servant leadership antecedents. If servant leadership at the individual leader level is vital for teams, then it becomes important to raise the topic of how one becomes a servant leader or what the antecedents of servant leadership are for these leaders. Ndoria (2004) conceptually examined the literature around leadership studies in general and servant leadership studies in particular to address the question of whether servant leadership is a natural inclination or a learned behavior. While it may be argued from trait theory and great man theory that some leadership characteristics are associated with natural inclinations, Ndoria emphasized that servant leadership principles may be taught and developed. While the ongoing discussion of whether leadership is more genotypic or phenotypic is likely to continue for decades and perhaps centuries to come in both leadership and servant leadership studies, it is important to reflect on servant leadership antecedents.

Perhaps some cues related to servant leadership antecedents may be drawn from similar domains of leadership studies such as (a) sacrificial leadership, (b) level 5 leadership, and (c) the literature surrounding twice-born experiences and leader crucible moments. In a work seeking to lay the groundwork for sacrificial leadership, Walz (2001) identified the role of epiphany as essential in the development of leadership traits. Walz associated epiphanies with turning-point moments within a person’s life. The concept of epiphanies as turning points is similar to the concepts identified by Collins (2001a, 2001b), Zaleznik (1992), and Bennis and Thomas (2002). First, Zaleznik noted that leaders tend to be what William James described as twice-born people. While once-born people have had relatively straightforward and calm lives since birth, twice-born people “are marked by a continual struggle to attain some sense of order,” and therefore do not “take things for granted” (p. 132). Second, Bennis and Thomas addressed the concept of crucible moments. They defined a crucible as “a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity” (p. 40).

Third, Collins (2001b) addressed the concept of catalytic events in the formation of level 5 leaders; noting that events such as a battle with cancer, changed war orders, or religious conversion can catapult a
leader with the “level 5 seed” (p. 75) into a place of humility and fierce resolve in their leadership. This observation is particularly appropriate in a discussion of servant leadership antecedents since Collins (2001a) noted having considered the terms “selfless executive” and “servant leader” (p. 30) before settling on the level 5 label for leaders possessing the unique blend of personal humility and professional will. As a potential grouping of servant leadership antecedents, the broad conceptualization of epiphany is inclusive of each of the constructs noted in the work of Collins (2001a, 2001b), Zaleznik (1992), and Bennis and Thomas (2002): turning points, catalytic events, twice-born experience, and crucible moments.

Bringing Greenleaf’s (1977) important and central conceptualization of “The servant-leader [as] servant first” (p. 27) into the discussion, Collins’ (2001a, 2001b) concept of the level 5 seed may be used to lay a foundation for the concept of a servant-leadership seed that is brought to life through epiphany-type experiences (Walz, 2001) which, applying the concepts of Irving (2003); Irving, Howard, and Matteson (2004); and Irving and Klenke (2004), possess the capacity of unleashing the proposed benefits of metanarrative and meaning in the life of leaders and, arguably, for servant leaders in particular. Since Greenleaf argued that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first” (p. 27), it is logical to see how a person’s master-story or metanarrative may provide them with the teleological, historical-narrative, and interpretive perspective necessary for contextualizing their service in such a way that it is filled with purpose and meaning. Such a purpose-filled and meaning-rich approach to life and leadership may be just the antecedent needed for someone to walk down the servant-first pathway of leadership rather than the leader-first pathway which Greenleaf associated with a drive to power and the need to acquire material possessions.

**Implication of H7: Job Satisfaction at the Individual Level**

While the positive relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction has been confirmed in multiple studies (Hebert, 2004; Irving, 2004; Laub, 1999; Thompson, 2002) and also was confirmed in this study ($r = .495, p = .000$), H7 was focused on measuring a relationship that has not sufficiently been dealt with in the literature. H7, which was focused on the relationship between job satisfaction at the individual level and team effectiveness at the team level, was confirmed. The relationship was both substantial ($r = .436$) and significant ($p = .000$). This finding provides implications for both researchers and practitioners.

First, the correlation between job satisfaction and team effectiveness provides another construct to consider in both the study and practice of teams within organizations. For organizational leaders desiring to increase the effectiveness of their teams, not only is it important to pay attention to servant leadership within the organization, it is also important to pay attention to the job satisfaction of team members. Second, the data support an explanation for the relationship of (a) job satisfaction at the individual leader level, (b) servant leadership at the organizational level, and (c) team effectiveness at the team level. While the Pearson $r$ for the correlation between servant leadership at the organizational level and team effectiveness at the team level was $.522 (p = .000)$, when analyzing the relationship of these constructs while controlling for job satisfaction, the partial correlation was $.390 (p = .000)$. In other words, team member job satisfaction serves as a substantial moderating variable for the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Moderating Effect of Job Satisfaction.](image-url)
effect of servant leadership at the organizational level and job satisfaction at the individual level, the findings were significant ($r = .537$, $p = .000$), though not as substantially different than the main finding of this study associated with $H_1$. Second, when analyzing the relationship between servant leadership at the organizational level and the interactive-variable effect of job satisfaction at the individual level and team effectiveness at the team level, the findings were significant ($r = .600$, $p = .000$) and noticeably different from the main findings of this study associated with $H_1$.

**Comments on the Research**

The scope of this research was limited by the nature of the design, the nature of the instruments, and the nature of the sample. First, at a design level, the scope of the research was limited to a quantitatively-oriented research question: “Is there a relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness?” Qualitatively-oriented considerations such as, “Why does a relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness exist?” were not within the scope of the research. Second, in terms of instrumentation, servant leadership was measured at the organizational level by the OLA and at the individual leader level by the SLAI. The research is strengthened by the fact that neither of these instruments are a self-assessment of servant leadership, thus removing the confounding variable of social desirability. Additionally, team effectiveness was limited to the TEQ scale, and this scale was not designed to measure the contextual dimensions of effectiveness. Finally, the sample was taken from one organization and, thus, limits generalizations of the study to this sample frame.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The present study provides a basis for several directions of future research. First, while the present study provided an analysis of the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness within a nonprofit organization, the findings would benefit from confirmation in other organizations and other sectors. Particularly, research along a similar path is needed in the following sectors: (a) business, (b) education, (c) military, and (d) government. While Irving (2004) included a small sampling from the business sector, each of the above noted sectors could use focused research around the relationship between servant leadership and teams. Second, while multiple measures for servant leadership were utilized in this study, and these measures provided data from multiple levels, the present line of research could benefit greatly from the inclusion of other servant leadership measures and team effectiveness and job satisfaction measures. Utilizing a range of instruments for these constructs would help to establish the findings from a diversity of perspectives on servant leadership, team effectiveness, and job satisfaction.

Third, the findings related to $H_7$ open up a pathway for further exploring moderating effects on the established relationship between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams. Future research is needed in order to confirm the findings of this study that individual team member job satisfaction moderates the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness. Additionally, that job satisfaction was found to moderate the relationship leads to the question of what additional variables might be important moderating influences on the relationship between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams.

Finally, while some reasons for why a positive relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness are suggested here, research is needed to help explore the qualitatively-oriented question of why the relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness is a positive relationship. Such qualitatively-oriented research could be better positioned to address the dynamics at work that make a servant leadership approach within organizations especially effective in team-based contexts. While these recommendations for future research do not provide an exhaustive list of suggestions, they do provide direction for those interested in following up in this research pathway.

**Summary**

This research project was designed to answer the research question, “Is there a relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness?” By administering the OLA, SLAI, and the TEQ to a nonprofit organization, data were gathered to provide a statistical answer to this research question. The findings supported the rejection of each of the null hypotheses. Both the hypotheses related to servant leadership at
the organizational level and the hypotheses related to servant leadership at the individual level were supported, and a substantial relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness was established at multiple levels. In addition to this, job satisfaction was found to be significantly and substantially related to team effectiveness as well as providing a moderating influence on the relationship between servant leadership and the effectiveness of teams.

In light of these significant findings, and in order to summarize the importance of servant leadership in today’s team-based organizations, I end with these quotes: “Servant-oriented leadership matters. The command and control styles of leadership which traditionally may have been associated with results in hierarchal organizations are giving way to more dispersed structures that enable and empower others to excel and perform” (Irving, 2004, p. 10). As Walz (2001) has stated, “We live in a world crying out for leadership that is not concerned with self-aggrandizement but with selfless sacrifice to witness dreams and visions fulfilled in the lives of those being led” (p. ii).
References


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