

# The Historical and Philosophical Influences on Greenleaf's Concept of Servant Leadership:

## Setting the Stage for Scientific Theory Building

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Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals have entered an era when ethics, morals, and spirituality in the workplace are a valuable asset, especially in regards to leadership. Servant leadership has the potential to offer organizations leadership approach grounded in values, ethics, morals, and empowerment of others.

Effective leadership is relational and interpersonal (Ferch & Mitchelle, 2001; Yukl, 2002). Ultimately, the quality of the relationship between leader and follower determines the quality of the leadership. “Two important aspects of leadership remain constant: leadership is a relational phenomenon that occurs between people, and the fundamental goal of leadership is to remain as effective as possible” (Ferch & Mitchell, 2001, p. 81). The core beliefs of HRD are grounded in the reality that organizations are made up of individuals to establish and achieve goals, and leadership, which occurs within these organizations, are maximized through HRD processes (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Consequently, leadership development is an integral part of what the HRD professional does.

One leadership philosophy that has increasingly been interpreted and referred to in the literature has been that of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Steven Covey (1991) popularized components of Greenleaf's philosophical concept as value based leadership and Ken Blanchard (Blanchard & O'Connor, 1997) as principle centered leadership. These approaches were offered during a historical time when the morals and values of corporate leaders were being scrutinized. Additionally the literature claims that a leader who is:

1. grounded in values (Behr, 1998; Berry, 1999; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Patterson, 2003),
2. manages by values (Blanchard & O'Connor, 1997; Covey, 1991)
3. and vision (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Farling et.al, 1998; Patterson, 2003; Senge, 1995; Vaill, 1998)

will enhance economic performance using service oriented leadership (Covey, 1989; Heskett, Sasser, & Hart, 1990; Newsom, 2000). With such variety and interpretation within the literature, one may be left asking the real servant leadership to stand up! Because HRD is an applied science, scholarly advancement of this concept in the literature is warranted to better inform practitioners and establish a foundation for sound scientific theory building research (Ruona & Lynaham, 2004; Swanson & Holton, 2001; Torraco, 1997).

This paper seeks to further the understanding of servant leadership in the scholarly literature by making explicit the philosophical framework in which this grounds this concept. This paper incorporates an extensive review of the literature to clarify the historical and conceptual influences on the philosophical components of servant leadership. There are four main divisions to this paper. First, a discussion of Robert Greenleaf offers insight into his own belief system from which grounds servant leadership. Second, an extensive review of the literature seeks to clarify the meaning of servant leader and servant leadership. Third, a review of the literature seeks to understand the historical influences on the conceptual framework of servant leadership which exposes the philosophical division of the original writings within the literature; and finally implications for HRD theory building research are offered.

Since history influences ones thinking, it is imperative that the historical influences of servant leadership at the time of its conception be discussed (Marius & Page, 2002). This paper contends that the personal nature and historical timing of Greenleaf's writing on servant leadership reflect a philosophical system with a clear ontology (way of being). Its philosophical principles mold and inform the act of servant leadership (Ruona & Lynham, 2004). It is further argued that any empirical or theory building research on servant leadership be aligned with Greenleaf's philosophical system rather than one component, and made explicit. The next section of this paper focuses on the individual who popularized the concept of servant leader and servant leadership, Robert Greenleaf. This biography was extracted from Greenleaf's personal writings and from others who interviewed him.

### **Who was Robert Greenleaf?**

Robert Greenleaf was born in 1904 in Terre Haute, Indiana. In the mid - 1920's during his senior year in college, Greenleaf began to ponder his vocational aim. A final course on the Sociology of Labor in college provoked thought regarding societal involvement and clarified for him the difference between scholarship and wisdom. He sought the latter as it appeared more useable in practice. He came to believe that business offered the greatest potential for growth and started as a lineman digging postholes for a division of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T). Within one year, he was trained for a supervisory position where he informally and often verbally trained others on the many facets of being a foreman. Each of his successive management training positions at AT&T was created for his appointment. His last position, in 1964, just prior to retirement was the Director of Management Research. This was an internally created group who were to be "concerned with values, attitudes, organization, and the growth of people, especially executives" within the organization (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 3).

After his retirement, he started a second career that focused on role of education. He worked as a consultant for businesses, educational institutions, church organizations and professional societies, which provided him with leadership experience, understanding of management challenges, and insight into practitioner issues. Greenleaf started the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964, which is now the Robert K. Greenleaf Center located in Indianapolis, Indiana. He later lectured at MIT, Harvard, Dartmouth, and the University of Virginia on his observations and insights regarding ethical leadership within organizations. During this time, he refined his thoughts about leadership. He completed his first writing in 1966, which he sent to 200 executives around the United States who were believed to have leadership roles of influence. This essay, *The Servant as Leader*, was formally published 1970 and became the first of several essays regarding leadership in various roles in the institutions which serve society (Spears, 1995).

Interestingly, the writings at the Greenleaf Center catalogue his ongoing involvement in grassroots movements that addressed social disparity as well as his spiritual association with the Quaker faith. Greenleaf's involvement with the Cooperative League (now named The National Cooperative Business Association) led him to take a leave of absence from his job in 1934 to visit Denmark and Sweden to advocate for social reform and development. In 1964 he took another leave of absence and moved his family to India where he worked as a consultant to the Ford Foundation's South Asia Program. While there, assisted in the reorganization of an administration school. Both of these trips influenced his first formal writing. In 1935 Greenleaf became an active member of the local Society of Friends (Quakers), a commitment evidenced in his numerous writings on this subject throughout his life span (including an unpublished manuscript related to this faith) (Franklin Trask Library). Robert Greenleaf died in 1990 (Spears, 1995).

## The Meaning of Servant Leader and Servant Leadership

### *Servant leader defined.*

Robert Greenleaf used the term servant leader in the essay he wrote and sent to fellow managers in 1966. This first essay was the deduction of Greenleaf's personal reflection, experience and observation concerning the current state of leadership in organizations, and the reading of a metaphorical story written by Hermann Hesse. *A Journey to the East* tells the story of a group of pilgrims who are on a journey to discover the ultimate eastern order. The pilgrims undergo many trials and struggles but a loyal servant named Leo sustains them. Leo eventually leaves the journey, which results in the rising of various self-proclaimed leaders from among the pilgrims. Although the mission to discover the order ultimately fails, one pilgrim reunites with the faithful servant Leo and discovers that Leo was the actual leader of the eastern order that they sought (Hesse, 1956). Greenleaf concluded that the nature of a true leader is his willingness to be first and primarily a servant to others and it is this very desire to serve others, which makes one great (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13).

The term servant is defined as “one who is under obligation to work for the benefit of a superior and to obey his or her commands” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1933, p. 1643). The original term servant leader is accredited to Christianity and the ancient teachings of Jesus. In the Biblical text, Jesus gives instruction on the qualities of a leader, the role of the leader and the issue of power or (authority) (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Arguably, the Biblical text, specifically the teachings of Jesus, addresses who is called to serve, why one should serve, and whom one should serve. Matthew (Chapter 4) states that ordinary people and outcasts are called to serve. Matthew (Chapter 10) states we are to serve because Jesus did, out of obedience to God, and as a show of gratitude. Matthew (Chapter 4) instructs that we are to serve God and Jesus, people, children, the sick, the sinner, and we are to serve humbly (Matthew, Chapter 20) and sacrificially (Matthew, Chapter 16). The bible also instructs on the results of such servant leadership. Matthew (Chapter 5) states the greatest reward for such action and obedience will be in heaven. Matthew (Chapter 25) states that additional rewards include more responsibility, a sense of blessing, and sensitivity to others (The New International Version Bible, 1986).

Thus, a servant leader is a person who has an innate desire to lead by serving, serves to align with own beliefs, and strives to meet the highest priorities of others (Farling, Stone & Winston, 1998; Greenleaf, 1977, p 13; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Spears, 1995).

### *Servant leadership defined.*

The concept of servant leadership was discussed by Greenleaf (1977) through example, and grounded in his understanding of philosophy and practice, but falls short of a formal definition. Greenleaf's initial premise was as follows:

1. The leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling of wanting to serve first.
2. The servant first makes sure that the highest priority needs of others are being met.
3. Success is when those who are served become healthier, freer, more autonomous, and wiser and as a result become servants themselves.
4. A servant can only become a leader if a leader remains a servant. (p.13)

Core concepts of servant leadership include an innate value and desire to serve, and willingness to act on the desire to serve by the leader, and trust from those led. Foresight of the leader is derived from their ethics and is a foundational component, as well as the ability to act constructively on that knowledge, when given a chance to act (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 26). The dependent variable is not the act of serving but rather the process in serving. However, the literature lacks further discussion or a debate regarding a definition of servant leadership

Often the literature will use the term transformational leadership, transactional leadership and servant leadership synonymously, but the focus and intent of these leadership styles are quite different and warrant clarification. According to Burns (1978), Transformational leadership is when the leader and follower both act to improve each other's lives. Specifically, these leaders focus on the higher-level needs of others such as esteem, self-fulfillment and self-actualization. Leaders like Gandhi were identified as transformational leaders because of their ability to transform their followers through inspiration and servant modeling. Although

transformational leadership aligns with the same philosophical foundation of servant leadership, the focus of the serving is to the organization rather than the individual (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Transactional leadership may appear to share similar characteristics to servant leadership however a distinct feature is that the leader's actions may or may not benefit the follower (Burns, 1978), and may even be associated with harmful gain, like that of Adolf Hitler, Sadam Hussin (Whetstone, 2002). Also in contrast to servant leadership, transformational and transactional leadership approaches place focus on personal growth of the leader or organization as primary and the follower as secondary (Yukl, 2002), in contrast to servant leadership which place focus on the individual who is being led (Greenleaf, 1996, Patterson, 2002). The leadership literature supports the practice of servant leadership but falls short of empirical theory building (Farling, Stone & Winston, 1998; Patterson, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Spears, 1995; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004).

There are two problems in the servant leadership literature that may offer insight into the current limitation of conceptual development. First, the concept of servant leadership is either discussed void of any philosophical foundation and definition, interpreted with a self-imposed philosophical foundation, or fragmented in illuminating a philosophical system. Second, this dissention of clear agreement in meaning hinders movement toward empirical theory building or empirical research of this concept. Making explicit the philosophical concepts of servant leadership, would provide clarity and the foundation from which future scientific theory building research, and later empirical research could be launched (Lynham, 2002; Ruona & Lynham, 2004). The next section of this paper will explore the historical context in which Greenleaf's philosophy was conceived.

### **Historical Influences on the Philosophy of Servant Leadership**

#### *The Historical Influences*

How did the historical context contribute to the philosophical development of servant leadership? In the early 1900's Fredrick Taylor integrated the natural sciences (applied scientific inquiry) into industry in an effort to better identify how workers could perform more efficiently. The worker was a tool of management. At the same time, the industrial revolution within the United States was culturally in full swing and the resultant educational emphasis became vocational education. By the 1920's, when Greenleaf began working for AT&T, the Hawthorn experiment questioned the legitimacy of the human sciences in organizational research. Additionally an undercurrent developed between the objective view and the workers subjective view, especially as one sought to understand performance (which at that time was measured by volume and financial profit). Later, Douglas MacGregor introduced his two schools of management thinking viewing workers as either negative or positive. The negative view depicted workers as needing to be controlled and the positive view revealed workers needed freedom to become creative and responsible. Despite encouragement for a positive view of workers, the outcome was that many organizations developed policy and procedures based on this negative view of the worker (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; Kincheloe, 1999; Gregson, 1996; Wirth, 1980; Grubb, 1996; Whetstone, 2002).

Greenleaf (1977) noted in his writings an observed change in the workplace structure where automation and production were valued. He observed in this automation a decrease in creative and critical thinking and a separation of work and self by the worker. Greenleaf discussed a growing sense that the workplace was not only a learning institution, but an avenue for personal growth and fulfillment. Toward the end of his work at AT&T, when he focused on management development, he observed a desire from people to integrate personal growth and work, an alignment the prevailing industry and education at that time did not embrace.

Concurrently, the purpose of vocational education was under debate. Tension had surfaced regarding the education dichotomy of pragmatism and social efficiency as advocated by Sneden and Prosser and that of individual right and value as proposed by Dewey. Discussion regarding the philosophy of vocational education centered on its role, specifically as to whether it should reflect industry or serve as a change agent of industry (Dewey, 1944; Grubb, 1996; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974).

Social control theory was foundational to the argument of pragmatism and social efficiency as it proposed that the progression of society depended on its ability to control its members (Wirth, 1972, p.147). The foundational premise of social efficiency was to promote an identified set of values and customs that would

promote social order and progression. Up to this time Judeo Christian religious teaching had been used as a means of social control. Later pragmatism provided the foundational values and customs to enhance industrial development rather than the individual (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974).

Dewey (1916) not only questioned the role and focus of education and the trend toward scientific management, he argued the purpose of education was to give moral and individual meaning, that education should be focused on something other than a commodity (p.307) and that his focus on individual meaning should operate as a means of industrial transformation. This holistic view of education emphasized human worth and value.

Pragmatism, social efficiency and scientific management remained a strong undercurrent in industrial training and education (Swanson & Torracco, 1995). By the 1960's United States college campuses were undergoing an extreme amount of turmoil as a result of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Students and adults alike began to question cultural values, morals, and authority. It was during this time Greenleaf began to question the current state of leadership in educational institutions and business organizations. Greenleaf recognized in the 1960's the cultural crossfire in which war, capitalism, industrial education, political agendas, socio-economic class spread, religious debate and secular separation of religion and society, the mobility of people, and globalization, caused America to move from social efficiency to self efficiency. Humanism he believed was the cause of the leadership crisis (Greenleaf, 1977).

These historical events lend insight to Greenleaf's conceptual development of servant leadership. However, the philosophical system in which he aligned his spiritual and cognitive thoughts requires further discussion. *The Philosophical System*

Philosophical concepts are not derived in a vacuum (Senge, 1990). Revealing a philosophy is a twofold task, namely to expose the philosopher's system and to explain how the historical context contributes to this system (Catana, 2005, p. 78). A philosophical framework as proposed by Ruona and Lynham, (2004) was utilized to make explicit the nature of being, values, beliefs and assumptions that inform the act of servant leadership. Since knowledge is socially constructed (Gregeson, 1978), we can trace the historical issues which influenced Greenleaf. Three historical themes offer insight into the Greenleaf's observations and resultant essays - the movement in industry from collectivism toward empirical and pragmatic efficiency; the parallel the debate at that time on the purpose of vocational education; and the social movement of humanism, individualism and moral fragmentation (Greenleaf, 1977; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974).

What is or is not servant leadership? Since philosophy is a system in which the ontology, epistemology and axiology informs and impacts ones view of the world (Ruona & Lynham, 2004, p. 152) the answer to this question arguably is to make explicit the philosophical system of servant leadership. What is or is not servant leadership is found by surfacing and clarifying key assumptions of its ontology (Ruona & Lynham, 2003, p. 161) and this clarification can guide future discussion and theory building research.

Additionally, the system approach to philosophical development assumes that each branch of philosophy-ontology (the nature of man), epistemology (what we know) and axiology (how we act/do), is separate yet interdependent, influencing and informing the others. Furthermore, clarity of ontology and epistemology is imperative for theory building research (Ruona & Lynham, 2004).

There is sharp contrast as to how one thinks something happens (philosophy) and how something actually happens (theory). Philosophy and theory are two words that should not be used interchangeably or assumed to be similar (Moser, Mulder, & Trout, 1998). How a theory is defined is determined by an ontology and epistemology. Although axiology is often associated with ethics, it focuses on how one should act and whether that action is in alignment with the ontological and epistemological aims and ideals (Ruona & Lynham, 2004).

Since leadership is a collective, relational activity (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000; Ferch & Mitchell, 2001; Bass, 1990) it is argued therefore that the philosophy of servant leadership is informed by a philosophical system, with a distinct ontological aim and ideals as to the nature of man, and actions as a result of this alignment.

An extensive review of the literature revealed three separate trajectories within the servant leadership literature: to avoid discussion of a philosophical system by focusing on the concrete and literal work of

Greenleaf; to alter or fragment the meaning of servant leadership by imposing an alternative ontological view; to expose a partial philosophical framework which falls short of being comprehensive and inclusive of the historical issues and personal reflections of Greenleaf.

Several scholarly contributions to the discussion of servant leadership focus on identifying the behavioral or cognitive components of servant leadership apart from an explicit philosophical framework (Farling, Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 1995; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004; Stone & Winston, 1998). Spears' (1995) list of servant leadership characteristics were extracted from the writings of and working relationship with Greenleaf. Additionally a model of servant leadership introduced by Farling, Stone and Winston (1998) and later refined by Russell and Stone (2002) identifies and operationalize constructs of a servant leader, but fails to integrate leadership as a relational system within the context of an organizational system. There has been an extensive amount of work done to address concerns regarding charismatic traits (Whetstone, 2002) and clarify the nature and intent of servant leadership and transformational leadership (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004; Patterson, 2004). These models were derived from the literal writing of Greenleaf and the literature, and fail to make explicit a philosophical framework. As a result, the literature has been unable to evolve to scientific theory building and has potentially lent itself to alternative interpretations or fragmented application of specific concepts.

Acting on partial or alternative forms of these concepts without an explicit core philosophy creates problems and raises concern about the nature and intent of servant leadership (Whetstone, 2002). Our philosophy becomes who we are and thus informs, impacts, and influence what we know, and think and how we act (Ruona & Lynham, 2004). Servant leadership asserted by organizations that do not embrace or make explicit a philosophical system alignment can create skeptics and foster manipulation of the follower. For example, the largest retail giant in the World contends it has incorporated servant leadership by *teaching* three basic beliefs to each new employee: to respect the individual, to serve their customers, and to strive for excellence. Servant leadership was equated to "*taking care of others' needs*" (p.20). The accomplishment of these values is through *open communication, policy, and aggressive hospitality*. Furthermore, excellence was related to *fiscal profit* (Newsome, 2000 p. 20). Although the external behavior of the leader in this example may be reminiscent of servant leadership, the beliefs are externally imposed, taught rather than internal, with the focus ultimately on financial gain.

The process of philosophical fragmentation may be common in practice, as evidenced by a longstanding pattern in which organizations establish policy without a clear theoretical foundation. When alternative forms of influence are introduced, the concept and meaning are altered (Dubin, 1963). Since servant leadership behaviors have been adapted out of a popular cultural trend, caution is warranted. For example, spirituality in modern language has become ambiguous in meaning and context, and has been associated with everything from a new age corporate spiritualism to evangelical capitalism (Nadesan, 1999). Without an explicit foundation, these practices have the potential for hazardous or short-lived results, much like a flavor of the month program (Swanson & Holton, 2001; Torraco, 1997).

Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) offered the most notable contribution to any discussion on a philosophical framework for servant leadership. They contend Judeo Christian and biblical teaching are foundational to Greenleaf's ontology and thus inform and direct the act of servant leadership.

The original work of Greenleaf and how he viewed the world was grounded in what he described as an eastern paradigm (Greenleaf, 1996). The term paradigm as used here refers to the collective related concepts of phenomena (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). His thoughts were formulated out of his spiritual beliefs, how he lived and his values. As a self professed Quaker, his was influenced by community and commitment, the later being a commitment to grow in spiritual faith. Moreover, the Quaker faith is grounded in Judeo Christian philosophy and biblical scripture, and advocates for the integration of spiritual faith in all aspects on ones life.

Sendjaya & Sarros, (2004) contend that the spiritual foundation (holism) in which servant leadership is grounded has been the greatest cause of confusion regarding its acceptance and adaptation in western culture (specifically the United States). Francis Schaeffer (1996) offers insight as to the cause of this philosophical confusion through a comprehensive analysis of human thought and action in current Western culture. He analyzed theology, history, sociology and arts and contends the current trend in western culture is

away from the biblical or eastern paradigms of thinking (its original roots), toward a self-generated individualistic ideal. The role of spiritual beliefs in the formation of ontology, while simplified for the purpose of this discussion, have been studied extensively in the discipline of spiritual psychology, and offer additional insight into this discussion (Miovic, 2004). The summary of this analysis is in Figure 1.

| Philosophical System  | Biblical Paradigm  | Eastern Paradigm   | Western Paradigm  |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Ontology/<br/>What is the nature of man?</p> <p>Epistemology</p> <p>Axiology</p> | <p>To love God and to love man</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absolute truth revealed in Gods word (biblical scripture)</li> <li>• Relates to reality through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ</li> <li>• Relates to universe through values/beliefs and faith</li> <li>• Goal of prayer and scripture reading is revelation of Gods truth, understanding and fellowship</li> <li>• Collectivistic in focus</li> <li>• Uses reason to inform integrity development</li> <li>• Knowledge is revealed</li> <li>• Serving is a way of being</li> </ul> | <p>To discover the creator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truth is discovered by the individual who is part of the whole</li> <li>• Attempts to relate to reality “how do I fit in as I see it”?</li> <li>• Relates to universe in a holistic sense- mind/body/spirit</li> <li>• Goal of meditation is to relate</li> <li>• Use of intuition to reason with the whole being, integrity</li> <li>• Collectivistic in focus</li> <li>• Knowledge is discovered</li> <li>• Serving is a way of being</li> </ul> | <p>To be enlightened and become one with the creator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truth is centered on the individual</li> <li>• Reality and the universe can be discovered by thinking it through</li> <li>• Relates to universe by compartmentalizing who we are as individuals: mind; body; spirit</li> <li>• Reason is utilized to understand</li> <li>• Reason is limited, exclusive and one directional (cognition excludes emotion)</li> <li>• Focus is on individualism</li> <li>• Knowledge is created</li> <li>• Serving is a way of doing</li> </ul> |
| <p>Psychological and scientific models of the mind (Miovic, 2004, p.106)</p>        | <p>Theism- the belief that there is a God (a supreme being or spiritual reality)</p>   | <p>Agnosticism-the belief of uncertainty as to whether or not God exists</p>   | <p>Atheism-the belief that God (as currently known) does not exist</p>  |

Figure 1

As previously discussed, there is Biblical precedent for servant leadership. In fact, Warren (2002) contends there is specific biblical scripture and Judeo Christian teaching associated with servant leadership and that serving others is one of the five main tenets within the Biblical worldview. Consequently, Warren argues humans are created to serve, to make ourselves available to serve, to pay attention to the needs of others, to do the best with the resources available to us, to do everything with equal dedication, to be faithful and humble (p. 257-264). In addition, the Biblical worldview promotes the concept of *grace*, which is foundational to the altruistic nature, and focus of a servant leader. The integration of *grace* from God into ones being, by following the teachings of Christ, allows one to interact with others in the same manner. Others then do not need to do or act, they receive love and serve simply because of whom they are as fellow human beings (Schaeffer, 1978; Warren, 2002).

The very nature of being a servant as described by Greenleaf was an internalized calling to serve others. Integrity and alignment with ones own beliefs and values were imperative. This alignment should not be confused with a required spiritual conversion or religious affiliation. It is simply referring to an alignment with the core beliefs, values and assumptions that inform and direct the servant leaders’ actions, which are more accurately reflected in the teachings of Jesus within a biblical or eastern paradigm. Greenleaf often signed his

letters *in the spirit*, a confirmation of an alignment as a holistic self. This should not be confused with religion. Religion is one manner in which spirituality is often practiced but is not spirituality in itself. Ethics and values that are grounded in a Biblical or eastern worldview are at the heart of the servant leader as it's axiology (Spears, 1995; Greenleaf, 1977; Bass, 1990).

There are strengths in connecting servant leadership to that of Biblical and eastern way of viewing the world. Judeo Christian teaching has historically persisted, maintained a large following in the United States, and has empirically demonstrated utility in helping people cope with life issues. Additionally, the Eastern paradigm embraces psychology and religion as one, and promotes holism. This paradigm has enabled empirical research on the mind/body connection. However, there are also weaknesses with these associations. Judeo Christian doctrine and biblical teaching have long been criticized for its dualistic view of God and Man. Furthermore, Christianity- and more recently evangelicals, have been associated with fanaticism, war and repression. In addition, there has been a long-standing problem with explaining a benevolent God to a world inflicted with evil, pain, and suffering. However, what may be more poignant to the philosophical foundation of servant leadership is the incompatibility of biblical and Western worldviews. Although humanism from the West challenged the status quo of religious institutions, it offers the individual self-empowerment, individual focus, and "existential bleakness" (Miovic, 2004, p.107).

*Greenleaf's Philosophical System*

Perhaps the leadership crisis that Greenleaf observed in organizations and on college campuses was the result of these ongoing debates about human value and purpose. Greenleaf spent most of his career in management, research, and education, beginning in the mid-1920's. He experienced the management practices promoted by Talyor and MacGregor, and studied how they influenced business leadership education. The consequence was increased level of stress in organizations (Greenleaf, 1977). He wrote, "the enemy is strong natural leaders who have potential to lead but do not lead, or who choose to follow a non servant" (p.45).

It was these observations which led Greenleaf to challenge educational institutions and business organizations to consider their social and human obligation to develop leaders who seek to ultimately improve society in a collectivistic rather than individualistic manner. What he proposed was a revolutionary paradigm shift in the role and assignment of leaders. Greenleaf (1977) stated

A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. (p.10)

Interestingly, the very definition of servant reflects these historical and philosophical trends as well. In the 14th and 15th century when religion and philosophy were compatible, a servant was described as "one who is under obligation to work for the benefit of a superior and to obey his or her commands". Around the 17th or 18th century, when there was a clear separation of theology from philosophy, a servant was also defined as "slave" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1817, p.1643). This connection with slavery within the western paradigm has also added confusion and possible opposition to the concept of a servant leader (Spears, 1995). The summation of the philosophical system is found in figure 2.

| What is the nature of man?  | How do we know what we know?  | How do we act or do?  |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To love and serve God (Supreme Creator)</li> <li>• To love and serve others</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical scripture (teachings of Jesus)</li> <li>• Historical text</li> <li>• Lived experiences</li> <li>• Reason in alignment with</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve</li> <li>• Lead by serving</li> <li>• Collectivistic</li> <li>• Address disparity</li> <li>• Challenge pervasive injustice in society</li> </ul> |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scripture teaching</li> <li>• Psychological insight</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistically</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

Figure 2. Greenleafs (1970) Philosophical System of Servant Leadership.

Servant leadership was derived through analogical or interpretive reasoning (Kneller, 1997) in which Greenleaf essentially used a metaphorical character (identified as a servant leader) and demonstrated leadership which aligned with his own values, beliefs, and knowledge view to conceive servant leadership. When the historical context and philosophical underpinnings are connected, the following ensues:

Greenleaf himself at the time of his writing was in a state of self-reflection.

Historically the United States was in a cultural crossfire, questioning truth, values and authority. Self-serving leaders were surfacing with evil motives or personal agendas.

Although Greenleaf himself referred to the need for adaptation to a eastern paradigm, it is conceivable since there was biblical precedence of servant leadership that he was referring to the eastern paradigm in its purest sense prior to the separation of theology and philosophy.

A vision or insight was the first step in the interpretive paradigm building that Greenleaf displays, birthed out of fictional literature with a character that was a servant, and who had the most powerful influence of all.

Characteristics of this leader was a innate “calling” and desire to lead others out of a personal value and development process, and the desire to serve others to help others better themselves as a result of a personal development process. This was not a radical mind shift, but a new paradigm in that the focus of leadership was not on personal gain or enhancement but rather a result of and belief in serving others and the innate desire to invest in others first (Greenleaf, 1977; Reynolds, 1971; Zohar, 1997).

This original premise provided a framework for a research-then- theory approach (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). A concern using the research then theory model could be the difficult task in identifying variables due to the lack of consensus among researchers (Reynolds, 1971). There are not however an infinite number of characteristics when there is adherence to Greenleaf’s servant leadership philosophical system, and future theory building can ensue.

#### Discussion and Implications for HRD

The behavioral or natural sciences generally ground the leadership literature. There is a void in the literature regarding the plausible connection between philosophical underpinnings and a leadership approach. It is reasonable that some leadership approaches are reflective of a clear ontology. Consequently, in order to advance scholarship HRD professionals ought to engage in research and discussion on the role of ontology in leadership, or at minimum make explicit the philosophical framework of a proposed theory (Lynham, 2002; Ruona & Lynham, 2004; Toracco, 1997).

The ontology of servant leadership offers a set of beliefs that inform a set of natural laws which are relevant, and are not changeable. Empirical theory building will allow for the development of these concepts for more informed implementation. Greenleaf’s democratic educational idealism and empowerment philosophy can create an ecosystem that offers individuals and the organizations in which they work a foundation of something good despite it being perhaps contrary to mainstream current American culture.

Leadership is a social phenomenon that has not responded well to traditional fundamental paradigms (Gioria & Pitre, 1990). Leadership itself is multidimensional in nature (Lynham, 2000). There is a need to understand leaders because leadership ultimately should enhance organizational performance (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Lynham, 2000; Schein, 1992; Rummier & Brache, 1995; French & Bell, 1999). Scholars who have relied strictly on quantification and positivistic models are limited in scope concerning leadership development (Reynolds, 1990; Lynham, 2000; Gioria & Pitre, 1990). In order to perhaps better understand and develop leadership approaches that enhance individual and organizational performance, HRD scholars and researchers would benefit from embracing alternative knowledge building paradigms.

If the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) is to move leadership to firmer foundation, theoretical development is imperative (Torracco, 1997; Lynham, 2000; Swanson, 1997). The development of any

scientific concept through research begins with theory (Torracco, 1997; Swanson, 1997; Dubin, 1963; McMillian, 2000). Despite the fact that there is no unified agreement to a theory building methodology (Lynham, 2002), empirical theory building that adheres to scientific rigor will guide the collection of data, allow for prediction, and direct what should be studied. Additionally, sound theory should be internally consistent, generate testable hypothesis, reflect the data, and describe, predict and explain the phenomena (Lynham, 2002; Torracco, 1997; Torracco, 2005)

Practitioners and researcher are to partner in the development of theory building which is a recurrent evolving cycle (Lynham, 2000). Research done on behalf of theory building is to further understanding, not to add to confusion. "Theory allows us to interpret new data, respond to new problems, define applied problems, evaluate solutions, discern priorities, interpret old data in new ways, identify new research directions, and supply practitioners and researchers with a common language and frame of reference" (Torraco, 1997, pp. 117-119).

Theory building in the servant leadership literature is warranted to gain knowledge as to the strengths and limitations of this model and whether or not it may enhance both individual and organizational performance. Although theory building can start by either inductive or deductive means, it ultimately seeks to identify generalizable truths. In addition, the process of empirical theory building can make explicit theoretical concepts that may have been implicit in the literature and is the next logical step if this concept is to advance in development.

This paper sought to advance the topic of servant leadership in the scholarly literature by making explicit the philosophical framework in which this concept is grounded. It discussed the nature of Robert Greenleaf, the meaning of servant leader and servant leadership, the historical context when it was written, the biblical and eastern paradigms which align with this concept, and discussed the implications of servant leadership for HRD in a comprehensive and inclusive manner.

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