IDENTIFYING PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP:  
A DELPHI STUDY  
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ABSTRACT  
The purpose of this study was to more clearly define servant leadership by identifying primary characteristics of the phenomenon through a Delphi study. Greenleaf (1977) stated that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 13). Greenleaf clearly stated that in servant leadership, service comes before leadership. Because a servant leader serves first, I designated those characteristics of a servant as the primary characteristics of servant leadership. In order to serve first, a servant leader must first exhibit the primary characteristics and then aspire to lead. Over 100 characteristics of servant leadership have been identified in the literature (Sendjaya, 2003, p. 4). I discuss 64 characteristics identified with servant leadership in the literature. I conducted a Delphi study with experts in the field of servant leadership and, after three rounds, 12 characteristics were identified as primary characteristics of servant leadership. These characteristics include valuing people, humility, listening, trust, caring, integrity, service, empowering, serving others’ needs before their own, collaboration, love/unconditional love, and learning.