



Are We Good: How to Attain Stability, Equality, Growth, and Balance with Human Flourishing, Mental Health, and Servant Leadership

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Abstract

A delicate balance is essential to a holistic approach to well-being, one that integrates multiple dimensions of life, including the creation of safe and supportive learning environments, opportunities for personal growth, adaptability to continuous change, the promotion of human flourishing, mental health stability, and the practice of servant leadership. Greenleaf's (1970) asserted that the most effective leaders are servants first. Greenleaf identifies key tools of servant leadership as the intentional use of language, deep listening, persuasion rather than coercion, awareness and foresight, and the practical measurement of outcomes. This paper examines the extent to which Greenleaf's model of servant leadership offers insight into the ways individuals and organizations can enhance human well-being and fulfillment. Central to this discussion is the enduring question of how individuals can cultivate goodness, stability, equity, growth, and balance while fostering human flourishing and maintaining mental health through servant leadership practices. The paper further explores the capacity of both leaders and followers to serve others within their respective roles while sustaining personal development and psychological well-being. Additionally, the paper addresses the domains of life most significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the heightened relevance of mental health, leadership responsibility, and supportive environments. By incorporating an examination of the PERMA model of well-being in relation to mental health and servant leadership, this study illustrates key implications for creating positive and resilient environments. Ultimately, the paper proposes an integrated framework that unites servant leadership, mental health, and human flourishing to offer a comprehensive perspective on how individuals and organizations can achieve harmony, equity, growth, and balance. In doing so, it aligns with Greenleaf's vision of leadership as a noble pursuit aimed at creating a "better time" for all.

Keywords: human flourishing, mental health, servant leadership, stability, growth

In an increasingly dynamic world marked by unprecedented challenges, the pursuit of human flourishing has become a critical concern. Human flourishing encompasses the multidimensional nature of individual and collective well-being, extending beyond basic survival to the realization of human potential. It involves the development of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, as well as the cultivation of meaningful relationships and purposeful contributions to society (Dahl et al., 2020). As such, understanding and promoting human flourishing is essential for fostering resilient individuals, organizations, and communities. This paper examines the interrelationship among human flourishing, mental health, and servant leadership, with particular attention to the post-COVID context (Dempsey & Burke, 2021). By analyzing these interconnected constructs, the study seeks to identify strategies for cultivating environments that support growth, balance, and reciprocal support (Aliekperova & Aliekperov, 2023). The discussion explores Robert K. Greenleaf's servant leadership framework and its conceptual alignment with the principles of human flourishing. In addition, the paper examines the PERMA model and its relevance to mental health and leadership within contemporary organizational and societal contexts (Kun et al., 2016). Through the integration of human flourishing principles, mental health awareness, and servant leadership practices, individuals and organizations can foster supportive environments that promote holistic well-being, resilience, and sustainable growth amid ongoing global challenges.

Human Flourishing

Human flourishing is a multifaceted concept that refers to the promotion of human growth and productive functioning across multiple domains of life. It extends beyond momentary pleasure or general contentment to include character development, meaningful friendships and relationships, civic engagement, and the cultivation of virtues (de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020). At its core, human flourishing involves the development of positive character traits and the attainment of meaning, purpose, and life satisfaction (Dahl et al., 2020). This holistic perspective emphasizes that individuals experience optimal well-being when they engage in productive activity, maintain supportive social relationships, and perceive their lives as aligned with their deeply held values.

Servant Leadership: Greenleaf's Vision and Its Connection to Human Flourishing

Robert K. Greenleaf initiated a significant paradigm shift in leadership theory and is widely recognized as the founder of servant leadership. He defined servant leadership as an ethical and relational approach that prioritizes the needs, growth, and well-being of followers. Central to this framework is the leader's responsibility to foster personal development, psychological well-being, and empowerment among followers, thereby

contributing to human flourishing and an enhanced quality of life (Colasanti, 2023). Greenleaf challenged traditional top-down leadership paradigms by asserting that effective leadership must originate from a genuine commitment to serve others. This servant-first orientation aligns closely with the principles of human flourishing, as it emphasizes the well-being and development of individuals within organizations and societies (Ahmed et al., 2022). By prioritizing the growth and empowerment of followers, servant leadership creates conditions in which human flourishing can be cultivated and sustained.

The relationship between servant leadership and human flourishing is further reinforced by their shared emphasis on human development. Servant leaders actively support individuals in identifying and developing their potential, pursuing meaningful work, and contributing positively to others (Ali & Anwar, 2021). This leadership approach fosters autonomy, competence, and relatedness, core psychological needs essential for optimal human functioning. Additionally, servant leaders seek to remove structural and interpersonal barriers to growth while providing opportunities that support learning and development (Bragger et al., 2020). This mutually reinforcing relationship promotes personal growth and integrity among individuals while simultaneously enhancing the well-being and effectiveness of the organizations and communities they serve.

The Synergy of Human Flourishing, Mental Health, and Servant Leadership

The integration of human flourishing, mental health, and servant leadership represents a synergistic framework with the potential to positively transform individuals, organizations, and societies. These concepts are inherently interconnected and mutually reinforcing, collectively forming a system that promotes well-being, ethical leadership, and sustainable development (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Because human flourishing involves the optimization of individual functioning across multiple life domains, it necessarily encompasses mental health as a foundational component (Lomas et al., 2023). Psychological well-being is reflected in the presence of positive emotions, supportive social relationships, and engagement in meaningful activities, all of which contribute to an individual's capacity to flourish.

Servant leadership plays a critical role in cultivating environments that support both human flourishing and psychological safety. By prioritizing the well-being of followers, servant leaders actively promote mental health through the creation of supportive, inclusive, and psychologically safe workplaces (Ahmed et al., 2022). Such leaders encourage emotional expression, recognition, and opportunities for personal and professional growth, which are associated with improved mental health outcomes (der Kinderen et al., 2020). This emphasis on psychological well-being enables individuals to navigate adversity, sustain hope, and pursue meaningful goals effectively. The dynamic

interplay among servant leadership, mental health, and human flourishing thus creates a virtuous cycle in which supportive leadership enhances individual well-being, fosters personal development, and contributes to the long-term vitality and ethical strength of organizations and communities.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Flourishing, Mental Health, and Servant Leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated profound disruptions to human flourishing, mental health, and leadership practices worldwide. This global crisis exposed the vulnerability of social and organizational systems and underscored the critical importance of mental health awareness and servant leadership. In the aftermath of the outbreak, individuals across diverse contexts experienced significant threats to psychological well-being and their capacity to flourish (Woods et al., 2023).

Contributing factors, including social isolation, prolonged uncertainty, and economic instability, were associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Luthans & Broad, 2020).

These widespread mental health challenges prompted a reevaluation of leadership approaches, highlighting the necessity for compassion, empathy, and support, core principles of servant leadership. As a result, many organizations increased the adoption of servant leadership practices during the pandemic. Leaders who prioritized employee well-being by offering emotional support, reassurance, and flexibility were more effective in sustaining performance and navigating crisis conditions (Luthans & Broad, 2020). This shift toward servant-oriented leadership further demonstrated the value of this paradigm in fostering human flourishing and enhancing organizational resilience during periods of significant disruption.

The pandemic experience has also contributed to a renewed recognition of the importance of human flourishing and mental health within the workplace and beyond. Organizations increasingly acknowledge the need to cultivate environments that support employee well-being and remain attentive to psychological health as a critical organizational concern (Madero-Gómez et al., 2023). Consequently, COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of human-centered management practices and organizational cultures aligned with servant leadership and the promotion of human fulfillment (Dempsey & Burke, 2021). This transformation presents an opportunity for leaders and institutions to reexamine employee well-being and organizational health proactively, ensuring the sustained development of human flourishing in the face of future global challenges.

Reaching Beyond Ourselves: Servant Leadership in Action

To effectively practice servant leadership and add meaningful value to the lives of others, both leaders and followers must extend their efforts beyond personal development alone. This approach requires the cultivation of compassion, active listening, and deliberate actions that support the personal and professional growth of others (Meuser & Smallfield, 2022). For leaders, such practices may include establishing supportive guidelines, providing opportunities for training and development, and implementing policies that accommodate work-life balance and family-friendly needs. Additionally, servant leaders must recognize individual differences and adapt their leadership approaches to meet the unique needs and strengths of each follower (Aliekperova & Aliekperov, 2023). By prioritizing follower development, leaders contribute to improved quality of life within both organizational and societal contexts.

Followers also play a critical role in advancing servant leadership principles. By applying insights gained through personal development, supporting colleagues, and actively fostering positive and inclusive environments, followers can themselves embody servant leadership behaviors (Liao et al., 2020). This shared commitment promotes a culture of continuous improvement and collective success across the service delivery process (Liao et al., 2020). Ultimately, the practice of serving others is rooted in the recognition of mutual interdependence, whereby individual well-being is closely linked to the well-being of others. Through this reciprocal process, service to others enhances both personal fulfillment and psychological well-being, reinforcing the foundational connection between servant leadership and mental health.

The PERMA Model

The PERMA model, developed by Martin Seligman, is widely recognized as a foundational framework in positive psychology and mental health. PERMA is an acronym representing five core elements of well-being: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement, each contributing to overall happiness and life satisfaction. Positive emotions encompass experiences such as gratitude, contentment, curiosity, optimism, enjoyment, passion, admiration, and affection, all of which are associated with enhanced psychological health and resilience (Qahtan et al., 2023).

Engagement refers to the extent to which individuals are fully absorbed in activities that are both meaningful and appropriately challenging. This state of “flow” promotes personal growth, skill development, and the attainment of meaningful outcomes (Kun et al., 2016). By cultivating awareness of positive emotions and deep engagement, individuals can enhance both their quality of life and their capacity for self-development.

The component of Relationships emphasizes the importance and value of social connections within one's personal and professional networks. Supportive interpersonal relationships, alongside self-acceptance, are critical for maintaining mental health stability and fostering overall well-being (La Agteren & Iasiello, 2019). Collectively, these elements provide a structured approach to understanding and promoting human flourishing, highlighting the interdependence of psychological, social, and personal factors in achieving optimal mental health.

Meaning refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their activities and roles as valuable and purposeful. A clear sense of purpose enhances subjective experiences of energy, engagement, and overall life satisfaction (Kun et al., 2016). Achievement encompasses the effort, completion of goals, and demonstration of competence across personal and professional domains. Together with Relationships and Meaning, these components provide a stable foundation for psychological well-being by offering social support, purpose, and tangible accomplishments that reinforce life satisfaction.

The PERMA model aligns closely with both mental health principles and servant leadership practices. By attending to these five dimensions: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement, servant leaders can create conditions that facilitate positive psychological states among their followers. For instance, leaders can cultivate positive emotions through recognition and appreciation, design tasks that are engaging and suited to employees' strengths, strengthen team relationships, emphasize the significance of work, and celebrate accomplishments. These actions collectively foster a culture of thriving within organizations (La Agteren & Iasiello, 2019). Accordingly, the application of the PERMA model supports the enhancement of psychological well-being and psychological capital, particularly during periods of challenge and recovery, such as the post-COVID-19 era.

Fostering Better Times: Psychological Safety, Inclusivity, Growth, and Development for Human Flourishing Within the Workplace

Creating environments that sustain human flourishing is a fundamental responsibility of leadership across all populations. Such environments should be psychologically safe, inclusive, and supportive of growth to enable individuals to reach their full potential. Psychological safety, as defined by Jamal et al. (2022), refers to a context in which individuals feel free to express ideas, take interpersonal risks, and make mistakes without fear of negative consequences. Psychologically safe environments encourage open dialogue, curiosity, and experimentation, providing the foundation for learning, creativity, and personal development, core elements of human flourishing.

Promoting diversity is a critical step in building societies and organizations that support human flourishing. Equality ensures that individuals are not discriminated

against based on culture, gender, sexual orientation, race, or any other characteristic, and that everyone has access to the same opportunities (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Rather than merely tolerating diversity, inclusive environments actively value diverse perspectives, experiences, and ways of thinking. Inclusive leaders intentionally involve others, amplify the voices of marginalized groups, and ensure that all members are heard in organizational decision-making processes (Dahl et al., 2020). This approach not only enhances individual satisfaction through a sense of belonging but also improves organizational productivity by leveraging the full spectrum of talent. Practical strategies such as bias-free recruitment, cultural competence training, and structured mentorship programs help dismantle systemic barriers, fostering equitable opportunities for growth and advancement (Ely & Thomas, 2020). By promoting universal participation and inclusiveness, leaders strengthen the conditions necessary for human flourishing, generating benefits that extend across society.

Human development and advancement are essential for individuals to realize their full potential. Leaders and communities can facilitate this by providing diverse opportunities for personal and professional growth, ranging from foundational education and formal learning programs to professional development initiatives, challenging assignments, and avenues for creativity and innovation (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Such opportunities allow individuals to engage in learning experiences that are both meaningful and tailored to their interests and capabilities. By fostering multiple pathways for growth, leaders cultivate a culture of continuous self-improvement and progressive transformation. As individuals develop holistically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially, they contribute to the creation of happier, more prosperous, and resilient communities.

Creating Safe Spaces for Human Flourishing

To ensure the protection of human well-being and the advancement of quality of life both now and in the future, leaders can implement a variety of targeted strategies. First, fostering open communication and practicing active listening helps establish trust, encourages the exchange of ideas, and supports knowledge generation (Vera et al., 2020). Second, providing constructive feedback and recognition acknowledges individuals' accomplishments, motivates continued effort, and promotes overall well-being, particularly when combined with initiatives that support work-life balance and meaningful engagement (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Third, creating opportunities for collaborative work and access to peer support cultivates cooperation, learning, and the sharing of expertise (Vera et al., 2020). Fourth, implementing fair and transparent policies enhances equity, builds confidence, and reinforces a sense of organizational justice (Baker & Dutton, 2017). By applying these measures, leaders can create psychologically safe and growth-oriented environments in which individuals are empowered to develop, flourish, and succeed. These strategies contribute to building a

stronger, healthier society in which individuals can collaborate effectively, support one another, and succeed collectively.

Conclusion

The integration of human flourishing, mental health, and servant leadership provides a robust foundation for fostering meaningful change in individuals, organizations, and communities. In the context of the challenges posed by the post-COVID world, the strategies outlined in this paper offer guidance for creating environments that support growth, adaptation, and resilience. By practicing servant leadership, leaders can cultivate organizational cultures that enhance well-being, empower individuals to realize their potential, and promote collective success.

The PERMA model offers a practical framework for fostering well-being, while psychologically safe environments provide the security necessary for individuals to learn, experiment, and develop without fear. Looking toward the future, it becomes clear that achieving “better times” requires the deliberate creation of conditions that enable individuals to thrive, the prioritization of mental health, and a commitment to the welfare of others. By transcending self-interest and fostering supportive, inclusive environments, we can work collaboratively to realize Greenleaf’s vision of a society characterized by compassion, strength, and shared joy.

Building such a culture is an ongoing, dynamic process. Nevertheless, by embedding these principles into daily life, organizational practices, and global community efforts, significant progress can be made toward establishing a world in which stability, equity, growth, and harmony are the standard. In such a world, every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential while contributing to the well-being of others, creating a sustainable cycle of human flourishing and collective success.

About the Author

Joycelynn Green has spent over 18 years navigating the complex landscapes of mental health and healthcare, driven by a single, unwavering purpose: to give a voice to those who are too often unheard. As a psychotherapist, she reaches individuals who struggle to understand or access the support they need for mental and medical stability, translating care into language they can trust and understand. For Joycelynn, trauma and mental health are never one-size-fits-all, they look and sound different for everyone, and her work is about building bridges where misunderstanding and bias might otherwise stand. Her voice carries beyond the therapy room.

Joycelynn frequently speaks at nonprofits and licensed mental health organizations, exploring the precarious line between crisis and stability, and asking a vital question: “Do we know where to turn when the line starts to zig-zag?” Her insights challenge

both professionals and communities to rethink how mental health is understood, supported, and nurtured.

Joycelynn's academic path is as diverse as her work. She earned a doctorate from Regent University School of Business and Leadership, a master's degree in government, healthcare policy, and ethics, and a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies from Norfolk State University. Complementing her education, she holds multiple licenses and certifications spanning pharmacy, mental health, and healthcare administration, blending clinical expertise with systemic understanding. Her most ambitious endeavors are, The Rose Orchard and Cohesion Community Development Organization, innovative initiatives where housing stability and mental health support intersect. Through these programs, Joycelynn is reshaping communities, creating spaces where people not only survive but flourish, and proving that when care is thoughtfully designed and accessible, real transformation is possible.

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