

Defining Servant Leadership: A Recommended Typology for Servant Leadership Studies

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Scholarly research in servant leadership is growing. Though this is a positive development it raises serious concern as to the foundations of our understanding of the constructs we are studying. Servant leadership shares this weakness with the larger discipline of leadership studies as Rost so clearly described more than a decade ago. We have not clearly and concisely defined our terms and this has caused much confusion in how we talk about leadership, management and servant leadership. This confusion is no longer acceptable as we enter into the scholarship required to build a much needed research base for servant leadership. This paper seeks to address this situation by offering definitions for key leadership and servant leadership terms while suggesting a typology of how to understand servant leadership in relation to leadership. It also calls for a school of servant leadership to take this critical dialogue out to the international community of servant leadership scholars and practitioners to position servant leadership at the forefront of responsible leadership scholarship.

Servant Leadership is attracting increased attention from scholars, writers, researchers and practitioners. Many are now calling for a deeper study of the meaning and application of this emerging sub-field of leadership study. An excellent example of this deeper study is represented by this Servant Leadership Roundtable; now in its second year. Doctoral students are attracted to the concept in growing numbers as reflected by the many contacts this author has received from dissertation students throughout the world over the past 4 years. Graduate programs at Regent University and the new doctorate in Organizational Leadership at Indiana Wesleyan University are examples of research focused programs with an explicit commitment to exploring the servant leadership concept. The Georgia Servant Leadership Alliance is a partnership of universities including Emory, University of Georgia, Georgia Tech and Columbus State, among others, to share program ideas related to the development of servant leadership on higher education campuses. At this point, the focus of this alliance has been more programmatic than research oriented, but the fact remains that conversations around the development of servant leadership are increasing in higher education with a call for greater scholarship in this area. This author has also been contacted by representatives from the Greenleaf Center in Canada, Singapore and The Netherlands to express a need to develop a strong research base for servant leadership.

This, of course, is a wonderful development and speaks to the growing interest of people to discover and practice leadership that is truly world-changing and transforming. It also tells us that the more traditional manner of presenting servant leadership; through general principles, stories and organizational examples is no longer enough. We need a strong research base for servant leadership. We need to go beyond the personal belief that servant leadership works, to clear evidence that it does through systematic research designs. But, there is a problem.

Servant leadership suffers from the same limitation as leadership studies in general. Writers on servant leadership have not taken the time or the precision of effort to clearly define the concepts they are working with. How can we research something that we have not defined? How can we

effectively explore and then present a concept that remains vague and anecdotal? There is hard conceptual work to be done and it is important that it be developed now as the body of servant leadership research is beginning to grow. A strong foundation must be built to support the emerging structure of servant leader scholarship.

The Importance of Definitions and Precision

Joseph Rost spoke to this challenge by addressing the overall study and discipline of Leadership. In his book, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (1993) he decried the lack of consistent, useable and precise definitions of leadership terms by writers, practitioners and scholars. Writing eleven years ago he challenged the leadership academic world with his belief that “leadership studies as an academic discipline has a culture of definitional permissiveness and relativity ... there are almost no arguments about definitions in the literature on leadership. There are almost no critiques of other scholars’ definitions.” (p. 6). To address this concern, Rost called for a new school of leadership; a group of scholars and practitioners who would intentionally work to challenge, define and clarify concepts so that the discipline could move forward in a systematic manner.

I believe the same idea is needed in the sub-field of servant leadership and it is critical that we raise these issues now while new research efforts are getting underway. This paper is an effort to address this need and to create a benchmark for future challenges and revisions related to the defining of terms. I will propose a series of definitions for the terms; leader, leadership, management and servant leadership and will suggest a typology of understanding how servant leadership should be related to the concepts of leadership and leading.

Identifying the Confusion Points

There is a confusion of terms, to be sure. We talk about servant leadership as if it *is* leadership. We talk about the words leader and leadership as if they are the same thing. We describe a concept and then others use our description as a definition. This has happened repeatedly with the oft-quoted servant leadership “test” from Greenleaf’s original essay.

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (1970, p. 7)

This, to be sure, is a beautiful description of the affects of servant leadership. It says something very important for our understanding of servant leadership. But, it is *not* a definition. It does not say what servant leadership *is* in terms of its essential ingredients. It describes. It expounds on the concept. It brings new meaning and understanding, but, it is not a definition. There has been reluctance by some within the servant leadership camp toward the idea of scholarly analysis of the concept. Greenleaf wrote from an intuitive approach that created a loose theoretical base for an exciting leadership understanding. Once the principles espoused by this theory were put into practice by key leaders the results were very encouraging (think Southwest Airlines and TD Industries). But, others, naturally remained skeptical. Leaders instinctively know that there is a high risk in taking on a true servant approach to leadership in organizations. The results, in terms of increased organizational health, employee growth and even bottom line results are well worth the risk. But, can we show reliable and valid evidence of that? Can we establish a business case

for this concept? Rigorous scholarship is needed to take servant leadership to the next step and clear operational definitions are essential to that process.

We must also add to this confusion the concept of *positional* leadership. When we claim that someone is the leader, we are trained to think first of the person positionally in charge of others; the CEO, the supervisor, the boss. We do the same, of course, with the term manager. The end result of this confusion is that we tend to use the various terms interchangeably and therefore muddy the waters even more. We confuse the positions of leadership with the function of leadership. The only way out of this uncertainty is to do the challenging work of saying exactly what we mean by the terms that we use. We must define them.

The confusion is increased even more when we add the concept of management to the picture. Is leadership different from management? Most today would say yes, but there is not much clarity in defining the terms to distinguish them from one another. What is servant leadership's relationship to management? This has not been well explored in the literature.

The argument can be made that all of these terms are indefinable, intrinsically vague and open to broad interpretation. Some claim that this is simply the way it is. After all, we are seeking to define human interaction and the social sciences have always struggled with the ability to clearly define terminology. There is no doubt that the challenge here is great and that experts will disagree on points of emphasis and focus. But, if we intend to do the scholarly work that must be the next step in expanding servant leadership, we must be able to define our terms clearly and effectively.

This leads us to an issue that is largely ignored in the servant leadership literature. If servant leadership is "an understanding and practice of leadership ...", then what is leadership? If servant leadership is a mindset; a way of viewing leadership, then how will we define the term that we are drawing servant leadership from? The terms "leadership" and "servant leadership" are not the same thing. We must have definitions of both terms. This would be simpler if there was a clear, accepted definition of leadership, but there is not. Rost tells us that "the reality is that, as of 1990, scholars and practitioners do not know, with certainty, what leadership is" (p. 6) A quick review of the literature tells us that we have not moved much farther in 2004. If you look at the most popular leadership textbooks out today, most of which were published in the last 2-3 years, you will find the same definitional problems Rost identified back in 1993. Most of the definitions of leadership used in today's leadership textbooks are conceptually vague, fail to clearly distinguish between related concepts such as management and make no attempt to establish a generally accepted definition of terms. Consider this statement from Yukl, "It is neither feasible nor desirable at this point in the development of the discipline to attempt to resolve the controversies over the appropriate definition of leadership. Like all constructs in social science, the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective." (2002, p. 6) Yukl then goes on to write an entire textbook on this "arbitrary and very subjective" subject. Other leadership textbooks reveal the same ambiguity and hesitancy in dealing with this issue of defining terms. (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 2002, Lussier & Achua, 2001, Pierce & Newstrom, 2003) One text prefaced their definition of leadership with the following words: "It appears to us that most students of leadership see it as"... and then they proceed on with their definition. (Pierce & Newstrom, 2003, p. 8) This uncertainty does not, nor should it, build confidence in the discipline of leadership studies in the beginning of the 21st century. In Daft's texts (1999, 2005) he decided to use Rost's definition from 1993 without discussing any of the issues related to defining leadership. It is interesting that Rost's definition is used eleven years after publication

seemingly without having been challenged and refined through more than a full decade of leadership research studies. We may be able to conclude from this that Rost's challenge to the field of leadership went mostly unheeded, except that some acknowledged his questions as being important and he did a thorough job of constructing a workable definition of leadership. It appears that the discipline of leadership is lacking the discipline to clearly define its terms.

The Need to Define Leadership

What happens when we don't create effective definitions? Why are definitions of leadership and servant leadership so essential? One reason is that if we don't define it we end up with non-definitions posing as definitions. You see this all of the time in the leadership literature. Maxwell says that "leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less." (1998, p. 17) This says something important about leadership but is not a definition. Influence, to be sure, is involved in leadership, but there is, in fact, much more to it than that. Other authors have claimed that "leadership is relationship" or "leadership is loving others." This kind of thinking, and writing, will not do for the kind of scholarly work that is now required for leadership and servant leadership. When we play loose with our words it is very easy for peripheral issues to become central and central issues to become peripheral, then leadership, or servant leadership for that matter, becomes whatever one wants it to be. Eventually an incredibly valuable term means anything and everything, and then, it means nothing.

We need to go beyond Rost as well. His work is critical to our understanding of the issues involved in defining the terminology of leadership. His summary of the criteria for an effective definition is an essential guide to this discussion. In summary he believes that a good definition of leadership must be understandable, usable, researchable, and comprehensive while possessing the ability to discriminate. (1993, p. 99) We should be able to use our definitions to create such clarity that research questions can be accurately stated, that scholars and practitioners can make decisions about the presence or absence of leadership and that the essential ingredients are clear and measurable.

I propose the following definitions of leadership terminology as a starting place; a benchmark for future discussions. Another paper will be required to fully explain the rationale behind the word choices within these definitions. My purpose here is to get them on the table to show the need for such work and to begin the discussion. These definitions can and should be challenged and refined. I will do that myself in future writings and I welcome the process of evaluation and critique within the bold spirit of a learning partnership.

Defining Leader

It is important that the definition of the term "leader" be distinguished from the *position* of leader. We all know of positional leaders who do not lead. It is important then that we maintain the difference between leading and simply holding a role, or office, that some would call "the leader." I believe that the following definition accomplishes that purpose. It focuses not on a positional role but on what the leader does. This is an action basis of leading versus a trait or a positional approach. Terry states that action is "the human universe within which leadership must exist." He suggests that "leadership has always been considered action, even if that connotation was unexamined and intuitive." (1993, p. 53) The person who "takes the lead" is the one who acts within a situation. The young man in Tiananmen Square who stood before the armored tanks of the Red Army ten years ago and individually halted their entry into the square stood up to take action. He took the lead. He had entered, through his action, into the realm of leading. The

definition I am proposing has four key ingredients which must each be present in order for a person to be called a leader, or to say that a person is leading.

Leader (definition) - A leader is a person who sees a vision, takes action toward the vision, and mobilizes others to become partners in pursuing change.

Essential Elements:

- Vision – Vision is the ability to conceptualize a preferred future reality. It is essentially the ability and willingness to see what is not readily apparent. It often begins with seeing what is around us in terms of needs. We care about what we see and we begin to reflect on what we may need to do about it. It then moves beyond needs into the realm of possibilities. As our competency of vision grows we find ourselves better able to look further and deeper into the future and shape a new reality. We, in fact, create the future in our mind's eye.
- Action – Action is the power to do what needs to be done to move toward the preferred reality. If we stay with our visions alone, we can be easily dismissed as mere dreamers. Leaders act toward their vision of the future. They take on the personal responsibility and risk of moving into the future and bringing it into the present through courageous action. Leaders have a bias for action. They know that initiative is the entry point into leading and that only through the example of action can others be motivated to join the process.
- Mobilization – Mobilization involves the influencing of people to voluntarily engage and move into the leadership process with you. Mobilization refers to the movement of people from one place to another; from being inactive to being active, from non-leadership into leadership. It is a word that includes the sub-concepts of influence and motivation but moves beyond them to emphasize the active movement of people toward change.
- Change – Change is an outcome achieved as a result of intentional action toward the preferred reality. Rost contends that “change is the most distinguishing characteristic of leadership” (p. 115) and I agree. Without vision, action and the mobilization of people toward change, leading will not occur.

Defining Leadership

The concept of leadership is different than that of “a leader” or the act of “leading.” This is challenging to grasp since we commonly use these terms interchangeably. Leadership refers to the process through which leaders and followers engage to produce change. This definition includes the four key essentials that make up the term “leader” but it expands the concept to include the leadership process. The concept of mobilization is assumed in this definition now that followers have responded to the initiation of the leader.

Leadership (definition) - Leadership is an intentional change process through which leaders and followers, joined by a shared purpose, initiate action to pursue a common vision.

Essential Elements:

- An intentional change process – a process is “a particular course of action intended to achieve a result.” (Webster's, 1998) Leadership is an intentional process. It is a process that follows from a compelling vision to pursue change. It is a dynamic process in that it

is affected by more than the leader's intentions. Once the leader and follower engage in this process the vision can shift, the action become redirected and the change may take on a different form from that previously envisioned by the leader. Seeing the need for change is the vision of leadership. Pursuing change is the action of leadership. Mobilized leaders and followers engage in a process to create change and therefore are change agents. Change is always the intended outcome of leadership. Leaders and followers may not always get the change they desire, but the reason for entering this partnership is to pursue real change.

- Through which leaders and followers – For leadership to take place leaders must initiate the process and followers must voluntarily engage in it. Remember, we are not talking in any way about positional leadership. The original leaders in this process, those who initiated, may take on the role of follower during different stages of the process. Those who initially engaged the process as followers may then provide the initiation of a leader. As already mentioned, it is a dynamic process in which roles are functional versus positional and the motivating force is the common desire to see the vision realized through change. The number of leaders and followers is not essential to this definition, but both roles must be present for leadership to occur.
- Joined by shared purpose – Leaders and followers engage in this process due to a shared sense of mission, purpose and life calling. This purpose is the foundation that provides them a strong place to stand to engage the pursuit of change together. They are linked by a common set of values, a mutual list of beliefs that join them in a community of commitment around the vision. The purpose is not the vision, but it sets the stage for multiple change scenarios to be envisioned. It gives leaders and followers a reason to engage together in this leadership process.
- Initiate action – Action is essential to the leadership process. Leadership does not begin until action is taken, normally initiated by the leader, but soon taken over by the mobilized followers in a dynamic process of pursuing change. Non-leadership is the absence of action; the unwillingness to engage the issues, to speak up, to take the risk, to make a difference. The leadership change process is made possible by a shared purpose directed by the vision, but it continues to operate on the mutual action of leaders and followers.
- To pursue a common vision – The vision originates with a leader, or leaders, and then is picked up by followers who share a similar purpose with the leader. The vision then is owned by the leaders and followers in the process. It is also dynamic. It continues to take shape and clarity as everyone engaged in the process speaks to it and owns it. This mutual ownership of the vision becomes a powerful motivator to take action. Vision is the change already realized in the mind's eye. It gives leaders and followers reason and motivation to act. The vision must be more valued than the risk is feared.

Defining Follower

It is not common in leadership studies to define the word follower. But the term “follower” is essential to the definition of “leadership” just discussed. Both leaders and followers are doing something different while overlapping their efforts and roles within the leadership process.

Follower (definition) - Followers voluntarily and actively engage in the leadership process by responding to the leader's initiative to identify shared purpose, vision and action toward change.

Essential Elements:

- Voluntarily and actively engage in the leadership process – Followers engage in the leadership process voluntarily and actively. This draws a clear distinction between true followers and mere employees or members. It also distinguishes what is happening in leadership from the transactional nature of most employment contracts. As a true follower, I chose to engage in the leadership process. I am active not passive within the process. Leadership itself would not occur without my willing involvement. A leader may initiate a vision and act on that vision but without my will to engage, leadership will not occur.
- Respond to the leader's initiative – The leader initiates action based on a vision and that creates the opportunity for leadership to take place. The follower's willing response allows for the process that moves toward change. This response is crucial. Without it the leader has failed to mobilize others to action and therefore has failed to lead. Leadership begins with the individual but it is fulfilled within community.
- Identify shared purpose – Community becomes possible through the supportive framework of a shared purpose. We agree on why we are together. We are aligned and going the same direction. There is reason why we exist together and this reason allows us to communicate, trust, commit and labor together toward a common vision.
- Identify shared vision – the vision that originates with the leader is shared with potential followers. When the followers voluntarily and actively engage in the leadership process it is normally motivated by a compelling vision. But what is compelling about the vision is usually very personal and individual. Each person that hears it begins to reshape it according to their own view of reality. The process of leadership allows for a refinement, even a redirecting of an original vision based on the common wisdom of the group. This protects the leadership process from being derailed by a single leader's ego and self-absorption. It allows for the most preferred change to be pursued by those who now desire it the most.
- Pursue shared action toward change – There is incredible power in a common vision pursued by the shared coordinated action of a group. This power will result in change, even if the change is not what was originally envisioned. Sometimes the change is an increased awareness of the need for change. Sometimes the change is in the resolve of the leaders and followers to continue the change efforts.

Defining Management

In continuing to develop this typology of definitions we must deal with the concept of management since it is one of the ongoing confusions in the use of these terms. I will use Daft's (2005) definition for management. It utilizes the traditional and accepted meanings of the term while showing a clear contrast with the definitions offered here on leadership. Daft fortunately avoids the common mistake made by recent textbooks on management of presenting leadership as a sub-set of management. Leadership is not a part of management. It is a separate process altogether with different functions and outcomes.

Management (definition) - “Management is the attainment of organizational goals in an effective and efficient manner through planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling organizational resources” (2005, p. 16)

Notice the very different outcomes envisioned from the process of management compared to the process of leadership. These are not the same things and should not be confused, and yet they are confused with regularity. It is even more confusing due to the use of these terms for positional roles. We speak of the manager or leader as the person in charge and we use the terms interchangeably. This is a habit that will die hard, if at all, but we would be better served to call someone a positional leader or a positional manager instead of using the same terms to refer to the position as well as the function.

Leadership is about action toward change while management is about making things run well and stabilizing them to work more efficiently. These are both essential processes in any organization and one is not more valuable than the other. Any group or organization needs both processes to be running effectively and consistently. To be sure, they sometimes seem to be working at odds with each other, but that tension is healthy and must be maintained to allow for anything worthwhile to be accomplished and maintained over time. Unfortunately, some leadership writers have slipped into the habit of denigrating management in order to ennoble leadership. For instance, Daft felt the need of contrasting the personal qualities of management and leadership such that leadership is shown to have the stronger qualities of listening, character and heart while management is portrayed as talking, only concerned about the organization and emotionally distant. (2005, p. 18) This is an unfortunate way of drawing a distinction between these two concepts since it reinforces the positive stereotype of leaders and the negative stereotype of managers. Let’s affirm that leading and managing are both important and different functions that bring value to an organization.

This raises a very interesting question for proponents of servant leadership. Is there such a thing as servant management? If leadership has a sub-set of servant leadership, might management have a similar sub-set? It would seem that the process of management would be well served by the values of servanthood. We might, then, look at a definition of servant management as “An understanding and practice of management that places the good of those managed over the self-interest of the manager.” This is a very interesting concept and worthy of being developed by people interested in servant leadership who value the critical function of management.

Clarifying Servant Leadership

To understand servant leadership we must have a clear understanding of leadership. That has been the purpose of our discussions up to this point. Once we understand the nature of leadership we are able to understand the unique contribution of the servant paradigm to the effectiveness and ultimate success of the leadership process. Understanding the concept of leadership calls on us to answer the simple question, “will I lead?” Will I begin to look out beyond myself to envision a preferred future? Will I take action toward that vision? And, will I mobilize others to join with me in pursuing change?

The servant leadership concept asks a different question; it asks *how* will I lead? Once I have chosen to lead, what mindset will I have in relation to my role as a leader, to the purpose and outcomes of leadership and, most importantly, to the led? Leadership has always been exercised within a paradigm, or a mindset of the leader. The first two Kings of Israel provide a stark contrast between the self-absorbed, autocratic Saul and the more humble and heart-driven David.

David's plea to God, "who am I that you have brought me so far?" is an expression from the heart of a humble King; a king who both failed and succeeded and yet maintained a heart after God. Servant leadership is not a new concept. The paradigm has always existed. The choice has always been before every leader. Do I lead to serve my own interests first? Or, do I lead to serve the needs of those led before my own self-interest? This brings us to the central core of the definition of servant leadership.

Defining Servant Leadership

When I researched the definition and characteristics of servant leadership back in 1999 it was for the purpose of establishing valid constructs for producing an assessment tool for measuring servant leadership in organizations. The *Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA)* was the result. (Laub, 1999) The OLA continues to be used for quantitative research in servant leadership as well as for consulting in organizational development. For more information on this tool see www.olagroup.com. The definition I am proposing for servant leadership came out of a Delphi survey process involving 14 experts in the field of servant leadership. The 14 participants included: Larry Spears, The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership; Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell, Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates; Jim Kouzes, Learning Systems, Inc./The Tom Peters Group; Dr. Bill Millard, Life Discovery and World Servants; Lea Williams, Bennett College; Dr. Joe Roberts, Suncoast Church of Christ; Jack Lowe, Jr., TDI Industries; Dr. Pam Walker, Cerritos College; Grace Barnes, Azusa Pacific University; Ann Liprie-Spence, McMurray University; Deborah Campbell, Servant Leadership Community of West Ohio; Dr. Ted Ward, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Michigan State University; Bishop Bennett Sims, The Institute for Servant Leadership. These experts came to consensus on 60 characteristics of a servant leader which were then clustered into six key areas each with three descriptors. This model then provided the conceptual foundation for the following definition.

Servant Leadership (definition) - "Servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader." This definition is further expanded by adding the following descriptive framework. "Servant leadership promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the total organization and those served by the organization." (Laub, 1999, p. 81) These six key areas stand as the main constructs that describe servant leadership in action. Servant leaders value people, develop people, build community, display authenticity, provide leadership and share leadership.

This definition provides the first step toward an understanding of what servant leadership is in distinction from other viewpoints on leadership. Let's break it down into the essential parts. Servant Leadership is:

- An understanding and practice of leadership ... – servant leadership requires a mindshift, or a paradigm change, that views the leader, leadership and the led in a different way from other competing mindsets. This paradigm can be contrasted to an autocratic mindset, in which the leader leads for self over others or a paternalistic mindset, in which the leader leads as a parent over "children". Servant leadership is not a style of leadership though it is often portrayed that way in leadership theory texts. It is a paradigm that reshapes our understanding and practice of leadership. The autocratic leader will engage in the leadership process towards change, but will do it from a central focus on self. This

will end up effecting how followers are treated and how the vision is pursued. The vision, of course, will be the leader's vision and the led are called on to meet the leader's demands. Obviously, the leadership process will look very different when based on an autocratic paradigm in contrast to a servant one. For a more complete description of these contrasting mindsets see *From Paternalism to the Servant Organization: Expanding the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) Model* (Laub, 2003).

- ... that places the good of those led ... – servant leadership requires a different focus; a focus that is on the led first and foremost. This places other key concerns; the leader's wishes, organizational interests, even customers in a peripheral category. It doesn't ignore these critical issues but it places the priority of focus on the place where it must rest—on the led. “Servant leadership stands alone in regard to this follower focus” (Patterson, 2003, p. 2) Stone draws an important distinction between servant leaders and transformational leaders when he states that, “Transformational leaders tend to focus more on organizational objectives while servant leaders focus more on the people who are their followers” (2003, p. 1-2) These are important distinctions and help to build the scholarship structure around the concept of servant leadership. Servant leaders believe that by taking the risk of focusing on the led the other critical issues of productivity, teamwork and customer service will increase by maximizing the full potential of each employee. This certainly is taking a huge step of faith but there is growing evidence that this is actually a practical and workable strategy. (Collins, 2001)
- ... over the self interest of the leader. – servant leadership is the only understanding of leadership that acknowledges the critical dimension of self-interest in leadership and deals with it head on. Power is the ability to do; to act. Leaders always possess it and wield it for various purposes. The autocratic leader uses their power to serve their own interests. Paternalistic leaders use power to meet organizational goals by parenting the organizational family. Servant leaders, while fully aware of the pull of their own self-interest and the reality of organizational needs, intentionally place the good of the led as their main concern. The servant leader acknowledges their power, but they chose to use it to serve the best interests of the led over their own self-interest.

So, we have placed servant leadership conceptually where it belongs; as a sub-set of leadership and therefore it must be understood within the context of how leadership is defined. Servant leadership is not a leadership style that can be used or set aside based on the needs of the situation. Servant Leadership is a mindset ... a paradigm ... a way of leading. It is a way of engaging in an intentional change process through which leaders and followers, joined by a shared purpose, initiate action to pursue a common vision. It stands in contrast to an autocratic or paternalistic way of leading. You chose this way of leading because you believe it is right, or because you believe that it will work best to produce the changes you seek. But, you do choose. The leader always chooses the mindset that will guide their efforts to lead. This choice then guides the practice of our leadership and the way that use various leadership theories or styles. Bill Millard has developed a concept he calls the Z-axis to describe how the autocratic, paternalistic or servant paradigm will determine our leadership behavior as we utilize a particular leadership or management approach. He applies this specifically to the popular Situational Leadership approach and makes a strong case for servant leadership as an underlying paradigm vs. another style of leadership. (2001)

Some Recommendations and Closing Thoughts

If we are to pursue research and scholarship in the field of leadership, or within the sub-field of servant leadership we must be clear on our use of concepts and terms. We must state our understandings clearly and boldly and welcome the challenge that should inevitably come from other theorists and definition-makers. Our textbooks should be able to confidently state definitions that have been developed through the crucible of scholarly debate and then they should use those definitions to shape a consistent framework for their ongoing discussions on leadership. We should not be using definitions of these critical terms haphazardly or carelessly. Our definitions should shape our dialogue around these themes and provide the basis for ongoing inquiry to create a solid and credible research base for servant leadership. When we do so we will begin to see a greater acceptance of an understanding and practice of leadership that truly is world-changing.

We need a school of servant leadership studies; one that draws together the scholars, writers and practitioners from across the world to engage in spirited debate toward the goal of continually refining our understanding and our application of servant leadership. This school must be deeply rooted in the discipline of leadership and should continue to influence the direction that leadership studies as a whole is moving. It will practice a rigor and discipline of study that positions servant leadership at the forefront of leadership scholarship. This school will not be located within a particular university, association or organization. It will come together around a shared commitment to servant leadership research and scholarship to build a powerful business and organizational case for the only paradigm of leadership that has a hope of transforming a self-focused and self-destructive world. Leadership can be done differently. Organizations can change. Servant leadership can gain credibility, if not full acceptance, and then will transcend its current limited role as merely another leadership style to be applied situationally. When this happens, more people will take on acts of leading through service to others, organizations will become healthier places to work, communities will be transformed through a shared commitment to the common good and society and its leaders will have another, more powerful, model of leadership to emulate.

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