

**From Paternalism to the Servant Organization:  
Expanding the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) Model**

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Servant-leadership is becoming an increasingly accepted term in the leadership and organizational literature. When the likes of Peter Senge (1997), Steven Covey (1994), Meg Wheatley (1994), and Ron Heifetz (1994) give credence and promote the term we notice that the *idea* of servant-leadership is gaining a profound and wide audience. Leaders, writers and researchers, who have espoused this idea of leadership, have done so for many reasons. Some do so because they believe that it is the *right* way to view leadership. Those with this view are drawn to servant-leadership for its moral and ethical moorings or its roots in multiple religious traditions. These leaders are less concerned with the pragmatic side of the concept; the question of “does it work?”... since the philosophical “rightness” of their belief is sufficient to maintain commitment. Other leaders are pursuing the concept because it *works*. They see the pragmatic benefits of the servant leader model worked out in successful companies. Among many examples of effective servant led companies, they point to the fact that Southwest Airlines is the only airline to maintain consistent profit while boldly caring for and maintaining all of its employees, even after the devastation of September 11. This impressive accomplishment is often attributed to Southwest’s commitment to servant-leadership. Fortune Magazine’s annual 100 Best Companies list lends support to the idea that servant led organizations may be more successful than non-servant led companies. Millard combined both rationales for his support of servant-leadership in his article *Servant-leadership--it's right and it works!* (1995).

In the past few years, The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-leadership has opened up eight international offices in Canada, the Netherlands, Korea, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, United Kingdom and Australia. This crossing of cultural borders supports the fact that the message of servant-leadership is expanding and gaining an increased level of acceptance. What does all this tell us? It would seem that the *idea* of servant-leadership resonates with a

growing number of multicultural leaders and that more are espousing the concept as being representative of their organizations. This brings a refreshing sense of international dialogue, growth, and community to the forefront in understanding servant-leadership.

Considering these positive signs, more research-oriented questions can be given greater room for development. Can we begin to operationalize some of the thought surrounding the term “servant-leadership?” Can we scientifically and humbly try to identify it within organizations? Do we know what it means when an organization is not servant-led? How do we diagnose servant-mindedness in organizations, and how do we help leaders to develop this mindset if they are so inclined? And, can we speak to and contribute to the research base to support servant-leadership?

One of the most interesting questions, and one to be addressed in this paper, is ... do we know what servant-leadership is not? In other words, when a leader, or an organization, is not servant-minded what are they? Normally, we have contrasted the servant leader with the autocratic leader. This is a useful contrast. The term, autocratic, is used as a label for leaders who use a power-and-authority, control-oriented leadership *over* others. It is, in many ways, what servant-leadership is not. When you break the English word down to its Latin root you find that “auto” means *self* while “cratic” means *rule*. Self-rule. It would appear then that autocratic leadership may stand as the antithesis of servant-leadership. So, where is the concern? It is not that autocratic leadership is *not* the opposite of servant-leadership; rather, it is that these two terms are insufficient to explain how most organizational leadership is practiced today.

Many discussions of these two opposing viewpoints of leadership draw them in sharp contrast to each other and, to be sure, there is much to learn from this exercise. However, most organizational leadership appears to be neither autocratic or servant. By focusing on only on

these two extremes of leadership we may be missing the reality in which most workers experience their organizations. Research is beginning to suggest that most organizations today operate within a paternalistic view of leadership and that, more than any other reason, hinders them from becoming true servant organizations. This perspective began to emerge once the technology was developed to measure servant-leadership within organizations through the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA).

### **The Development of the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA)**

The OLA was developed through a research study I completed in 1999 that attempted to answer three key questions. *How is servant-leadership defined? What are the characteristics of servant-leadership? Can the presence of these characteristics within organizations be assessed through a written instrument?* The first question was pursued due to the fact that servant-leadership as a ground of scientific inquiry, theory, and practice is fertile for further development. Robert Greenleaf (1970) founded the concept in contemporary leadership. He and others have deeply influenced thought and practice regarding leadership, but operational definitions useful for research before 1999 had not yet been established; from a scientific perspective these are needed to begin to empirically address critical questions surrounding the concept.

There were two main parts to the study I completed in 1999. Part one involved a Delphi survey to determine the characteristics of servant-leadership; leading to a definition, and part two used these characteristics to construct the *Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA)* instrument.

A three-part Delphi survey was conducted with fourteen authorities from the field of servant-leadership. The experts were chosen based upon the fact that they had written on servant-leadership or had taught at the university level on the subject. Fourteen of the original 25 experts who were asked to participate completed all three parts of the Delphi. These participants included: Larry Spears, The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership; Jim Kouzes, Learning Systems, Inc./The Tom Peters Group; Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell, Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates (note: these two worked together on a single response for each part of the survey and were therefore counted as one respondent); Dr. Bill Millard, Life Discovery and Indiana Wesleyan University; Lea Williams, Bennett College; Dr. Joe Roberts, Suncoast Church of Christ; Jack Lowe, Jr., TD 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.

The results from this Delphi process became the basis for the development of an OLA model of servant organizations (see figure 1). According to this model, Servant-leadership is defined as an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. In addition, servant-leadership promotes the valuing and developing 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.

This model provides one useful way of looking at organizations through a lens of servant-leadership understanding. Notably, there are other models of servant-leadership (Wong & Page, 2003; Sendjaya, 2003, Patterson, 2003) including the excellent foundational work of Spears

(1994) and his list of the ten characteristics of the servant leader drawn from the work of Robert Greenleaf. Each of these models provides a unique lens; a way of seeing that provides us with a means to operationalize and apply this concept of servant-leadership.

Figure 1: Servant-leadership and a servant organization (OLA) model

<b>Servant-leadership is ...</b>	
<p>an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. Servant-leadership promotes the valuing and developing 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.</p>	
<b><i>The Servant Leader ...</i></b>	
Values People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By trusting &amp; believing in people</li> <li>• By serving other’s needs before his or her own</li> <li>• By receptive, non-judgmental listening</li> </ul>
Develops People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By providing opportunities for learning and growth</li> <li>• By modeling appropriate behavior</li> <li>• By building up others through encouragement and affirmation</li> </ul>
Builds Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By building strong personal relationships</li> <li>• By working collaboratively with others</li> <li>• By valuing the differences of others</li> </ul>
Displays Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By being open and accountable to others</li> <li>• By a willingness to learn from others</li> <li>• By maintaining integrity and trust</li> </ul>
Provides Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By envisioning the future</li> <li>• By taking initiative</li> <li>• By clarifying goals</li> </ul>
Shares Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By facilitating a shared vision</li> <li>• By sharing power and releasing control</li> <li>• By sharing status and promoting others</li> </ul>
<b><i>The Servant Organization is ...</i></b>	
<p>... an organization in which the characteristics of servant-leadership are displayed through the organizational culture and are valued and practiced by the leadership and workforce.</p>	

The expert panel was asked to name and rate the characteristics of the servant leader. A thorough review of the literature was also provided to them in the process. All characteristics that were rated from “Necessary” to “Essential” in the final survey were used in the construction of the *OLA* instrument. A significant ( $p < .05$ ) decrease was found in the interquartile range between round two and round three of the Delphi process, indicating a move toward consensus. This research process provided strong construct validity for the instrument. The original 80-item *OLA* was field tested with 828 individuals from 41 organizations. All of these organizations were from the United States, with the exception of one from the Netherlands, and they represented a wide variety of organizational types; corporate, government, educational, and religious. Estimated reliability of the *OLA*, using the Cronbach-Alpha coefficient, was .98.

The *OLA* was then revised to 60 total items plus six items to measure Job Satisfaction. The high reliability was maintained while making the instrument easier to complete. The average time to complete the *OLA* is 15 minutes. One way ANOVA and correlation tests were run with demographic data and the *OLA* score and also with the job satisfaction score. A significant ( $p < .01$ ) positive correlation of .653 was found between the *OLA* score and the job satisfaction score. A factor analysis revealed a two factor solution composed of organization assessment items and leadership assessment items. Potential subscores were considered, but there was a high correlation between the scales; therefore use of the overall *OLA* score is recommended for research purposes.

The *OLA* has shown itself to be highly reliable with strong construct and face validity. It has been used in multiple research projects as well as for organizational diagnosis and consulting. The instrument has been translated into Spanish, Dutch and Japanese.



## Utilizing the OLA within Organizations: Discovering the Paternalistic Organization

The average score on the OLA is a 3.64 on a 5 point scale. The score of 4.0 indicates the level of “Agreement” and is the breakpoint score for identifying an organization as Servant. Therefore the average response on the OLA is below that of Servant. But, what does it mean to score below agreement on the OLA? Does it mean that they are totally non-servant (Autocratic) organizations? How does an organization deal with this information and work with it to improve and become more of a servant-minded organization?

It was clear that the original OLA model needed to be expanded to provide a better description of what the various scores might mean. It was in this process that the Paternalistic Leadership view was discovered as the most meaningful way of describing how most workers experience leadership within their organizations.

What is paternalism in leadership? It is the view the leader has of him or herself as parent *over* the led. This parental view of leader has far-reaching effects as we will see later in this paper. The paternalistic view of leadership is not new. James O’Toole observed that,

“rule by a few wise and virtuous men has been the preferred mode since 400 B.C., the era of two influential near contemporaries, Plato in the West and Confucius in the East. Both believed that chaos is the enemy of efficiency and that it can be averted only by the strong leadership of an enlightened elite.” (1995, p.185)

The kind of benevolent rule described here has the effect of producing a child-like response in the followers. The led readily accept that the leaders know more, are wiser and the led must simply follow, even if it means abdicating their own responsibility to lead.

O’toole describes two contemporary organizational leaders who understand that paternalism in leadership is limiting to the success of their organizations. Ricardo Semler, CEO of Brazil’s Semco, when describing the success of his organization states that “It’s all very simple, all we are doing is treating people like adults.” This is all the more remarkable when

considering Brazil's history of political authoritarianism. O'toole's response was "so much for arguments ... that paternalism is 'necessary' in the developing world." Gordon Forward, president of Chapparral Steel of Texas, believes in a system in which all employees are viewed as grown-ups capable of accepting real responsibilities; a system he cleverly calls "management by adultery." (p. 61)

The reality and pervasiveness of paternalistic leadership has not been well explored in the leadership literature, but according to the research conducted with the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA), paternalistic organizations represent the majority of organizations. The ability to identify organizations as paternalistic began with the application of the A-P-S model to the existing OLA Model.

### **The A-P-S Model**

The A-P-S Model (Autocratic-Paternalistic-Servant) (see figure 2) provides the framework for developing the six levels of organizational health as measured by the OLA. The model provides 3 distinct paradigms of leadership. Within these paradigms, leaders choose how they will view themselves as leaders, how they will view those led and how they will view the role and purpose of leadership.

The servant leader sees him or herself as a steward of the organization and its people. They put the needs of the led first, before their own self-interest, and they treat workers as partners. The autocratic leader sees him or herself as dictator. They put their own needs as leader first and treat their workers as their servants. To be sure, they would not use these terms, but the reality still exists as perceived by the workforce.

Figure 2: The A-P-S Model

THE LEADERSHIP CHOICE		
Autocratic	Paternalistic	Servant
<p><u>Leader as Dictator</u> Putting your needs as the <u>leader first</u> Treating others as your <b>servants</b></p>	<p><u>Leader as Parent</u> Putting the needs of the organization <u>first</u> Treating others as your <b>children</b></p>	<p><u>Leader as Steward</u> Putting the needs of the <u>led first</u> Treating others as your <b>partners</b></p>

The paternalistic leader sees him or herself as parent. They normally will put the needs of the organization first and will treat the workers as children. The paternalistic leader can be either negative or positive but they still remain firmly in the parent role. It is the contention of this author that many of the organizations that view themselves as servant organizations may be, in fact, a positive version of a paternalistic organization. Servant-leadership is so much more than people being treated well within an organization. Getting to the level of servant organization requires a mindshift where the leaders sees themselves differently, view the led differently and reshape their whole view of the purpose and meaning of leadership. This will become clearer as we consider the six power levels of organizational health as assessed by the OLA.

## Identifying Organizational Power Levels

The OLA identifies six levels of organizational health each designated by a power level. These power levels are determined by the extent to which the six key areas (figure 1 - OLA Model) of servant-leadership are present in the organization. In an Org<sup>5</sup> and Org<sup>6</sup> these characteristics are perceived to be present within the leadership and throughout the organization. In an Org<sup>1</sup> and Org<sup>2</sup>, these characteristics are mostly absent. The Org<sup>3</sup> and Org<sup>4</sup> levels represent organizations with a varied mix of these characteristics.

The power levels are presented exponentially to represent an important reality. An Org<sup>5</sup> (to the 5<sup>th</sup> power) is incredibly more powerful than an Org<sup>2</sup> (to the 2<sup>nd</sup> power). This is done intentionally to represent three very different ways of looking at growth and change within organizations.

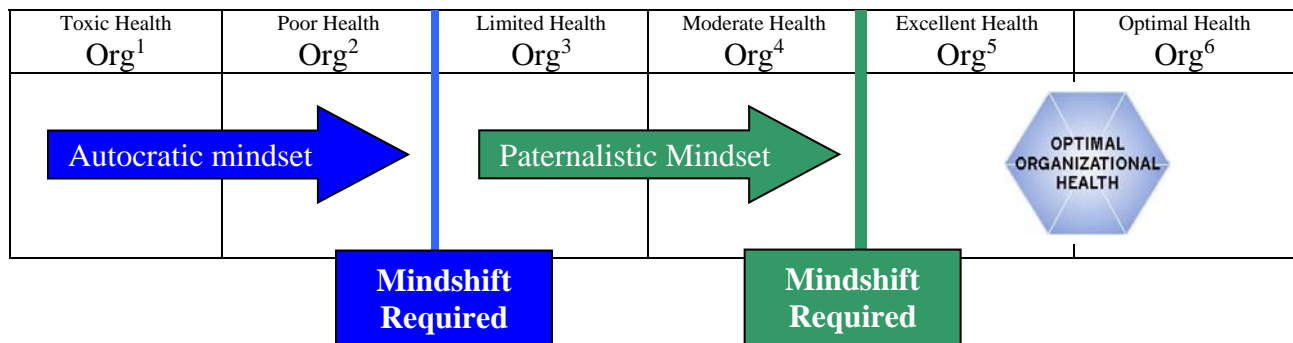
First, there is **inertia** or the inability to move or change. (Org<sup>1</sup> – Org<sup>2</sup>) This lack of growth will keep the organization from moving toward greater health and performance. The organization still functions, but it operates only on the energy of the past. It lacks the organizational health to move positively towards the future.

Second, there is gradual or **incremental** change. (Org<sup>3</sup> – Org<sup>4</sup>) This kind of growth requires a steady, measured energy; the ability for an organization to better what it has done in the past in order to make improvements over time. This organization can and will improve, but it will begin to rest on a plateau of “good enough”, dulled by its own achievement and success with an ever growing contentment to be just a little better than the rest.

Third, there is exponential or **quantum** change. (Org<sup>5</sup> – Org<sup>6</sup>) This kind of change requires something very different from what has been done in the past. It requires a totally new way of thinking about organizations and leadership. It requires a true paradigm change; a mind-

shift that sees all in the organization as potential leaders and refuses to measure itself against anything less than its own incredible potential. An organization cannot simply move from inertia to incremental change to quantum growth. Moving from one of these levels to the next requires a major shift in thinking and behaving (figure 3). This is never easy, but must be done, or the organization will continue to merely perpetuate itself without the power, or energy, to move to the next level. A mindshift of this nature first requires a new awareness. The OLA provides a place to begin this awareness by graphically presenting and contrasting the perception of the top leaders, the managers and the workforce. The power level of the organization is determined by the workforce perception. This is due to the workforce being the largest group and the one that is closest to the core business of the organization. The reality of the lack of perception match between top leaders and workforce also make this necessary. This perception match issue will be presented later in this paper.

*Figure 3: Required Mindshift Points Leading to Optimal Organizational Health*



This is the servant organization; the powerful organization. Power is the ability to do ... to act. In an organization it provides the capacity to fulfill a compelling vision, to meet goals, to develop the highest quality workers and to deal effectively and creatively with ever-present change.

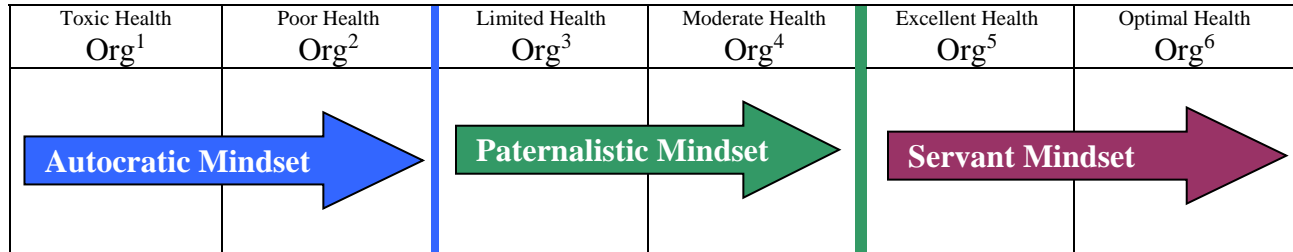
An interesting paradox is that we are the most powerful when we give our power away. Shared power within a healthy organizational environment provides for an exponential growth in the ability to act. The healthy organization is in the best position to leverage its resources, its strategies and its dreams. Figure 4 shows the relationship of the A-P-S model to the six organizational power levels.

**Autocratic** is the leadership paradigm most connected with Org<sup>1</sup> (Toxic health) and Org<sup>2</sup> (Poor health). This kind of leadership is one of “self-rule” where the organization exists to serve the needs and interests of the leader first. This often leads to the oppression of the worker to satisfy the whims of the leader.

**Paternalistic** is the leadership paradigm most connected with Org<sup>3</sup> (Limited health) and Org<sup>4</sup> (Moderate health). This kind of leadership is one of leaders seeing themselves as parent to those led. This parental view of leadership encourages the led to take on the role of children. This leads to an unhealthy transactional leadership that operates more on compliance rather than true individual motivation.

**Servant** is the leadership paradigm most connected with Org<sup>5</sup> (Excellent health) and Org<sup>6</sup> (Optimal health). It is the view of leadership characterized by the six key areas of servant-leadership defined in the OLA. This view sees leadership as serving the needs of those led over the self-interest of the leader. In this kind of organization *all* people are encouraged to lead and serve. This produces a community of care where the needs of all are served and the organization is able to put its energy into fulfilling its shared mission.

Figure 4: Relation of the A-P-S model to the Six Levels of Organizational Health



### Testing the Accuracy of the Six Organizational Level Descriptions

A full-page description was written for each of the six organizational levels (see Appendix). The description of Level 5 and 6 (Servant Mindset) utilized the six key areas of Servant-leadership (OLA Model) as these characteristics relate to the worker, the leadership, the culture, teams and the outlook for the organization. Level 1 and 2 (Autocratic) were written based on the absence of the servant characteristics. Level 3 and 4 (Paternalistic) were written based on the limited presence of the servant characteristics as shaped by a parental leadership environment. These six descriptions were then tested with 136 adult students from various courses in the Adult and Professional Studies program of Indiana Wesleyan University. Each adult student took the OLA on their organization. The OLA was then scored and the appropriate full-page description brought back to the student for review. Table 1 provides the total number of adult students/organizations participating in the study along with the different organizational power levels determined.

TABLE 1: Organizational Levels Identified

Org Level	Adult students/ organizations	% of total		Adult students/ organizations	% of total
1	10	7.36%	Autocratic	42	30.88%
2	32	23.53%			
3	46	33.82%	Paternalistic	78	57.35%
4	32	23.53%			
5	13	9.55%	Servant	16	11.77%
6	3	2.21%			
total	136	100%		136	100%

Table 2 provides the results of their assessment of the accuracy of the organizational descriptions. Each adult student rated the organizational description on the following scale and then the indicated values were assigned to each response.

- Very inaccurate = 1
- Inaccurate = 2
- Somewhat inaccurate = 3
- Somewhat accurate = 4
- Accurate = 5
- Very accurate = 6

The students first read the entire description through and provided an accuracy rating. They then were asked to read each section and provide an accuracy rating for each section.

TABLE 2: Accuracy responses

Org Level	Entire description	Workers Section	Leaders Section	Team Section	Culture Section	Outlook Section
1	5.30	5.20	5.60	5.60	5.00	5.50
2	4.88	5.00	5.09	4.47	4.75	5.09
3	4.87	4.91	4.98	4.70	5.13	4.96
4	5.06	4.75	5.25	4.58	4.97	5.34
5	5.31	5.38	5.23	5.38	5.23	5.38
6	5.67	5.67	6.00	5.33	6.00	6.00
Total	5.18	5.15	5.35	5.01	5.18	5.37



The overall conclusion is that the organizational level descriptions are seen as accurate and therefore useful for providing a description of what it means to be at the various scoring levels of the OLA. These descriptions are not presented as objective truth but as a description that most people in the organization will find accurate. This description then becomes a starting point for a discussion on how the organization is being experienced by its people: workforce, managers and top leadership. This discussion is important to begin to address the implications of the autocratic and paternalistic leadership that is most prevalent in our organizations today.

Admittedly, the research referred to here is a single study with a relatively small sample taken from a limited cultural perspective. However, if, as this study suggests, paternalistic organizations account for 57% of total organizations, then another important vista presents itself for helping people and organizations become more whole. Seeing the difference between paternalistic and servant characteristics and the impact on organizational health and success can open important doorways in personal and organizational life. A dialogue then becomes possible in beginning to discuss the results of a parental style of leadership. Parent-Adult-Child dynamics applied to organizational life provides a way of entering this critical discussion.

### **Understanding the Nature of Paternalistic Leadership**

Since most organizations operate within a paternalistic understanding and practice of leadership is it important that we know what that means and what an organization can do to improve. Parent-Adult-Child dynamics, based on the concept of Transactional Analysis (Harris, 1969) suggests that when a leader acts in the role of parent then the workers tend to react in the role of a child. This is an unhealthy situation that accurately describes the communication and interactions within paternalistic (parental-led) organizations.



**The Leader as Parent** can exhibit two very different parental behaviors:

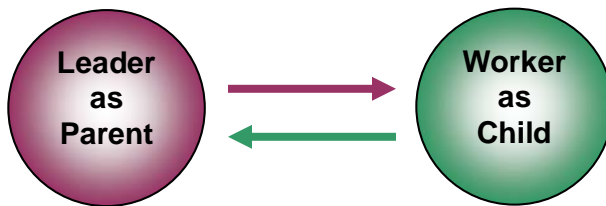
- The critical parent ... (Negative Paternalistic – Org<sup>3</sup>)
- The nurturing parent ... (Positive Paternalistic – Org<sup>4</sup>)



**The Worker as Child** can exhibit two very different child behaviors:

- The rebellious child ... (Negative Paternalistic – Org<sup>3</sup>)
- The dependent/compliant child ... (Positive Paternalistic – Org<sup>4</sup>)

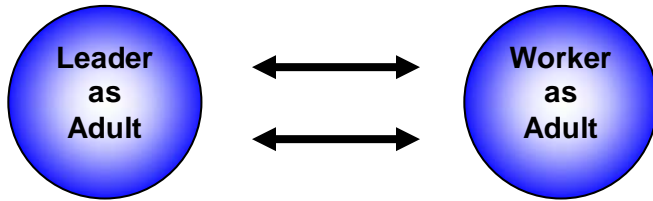
In a paternalistic organization, leaders operate in the role of Parent. Within an Org<sup>3</sup> (Negative Paternalistic) environment the leaders often view the workers as less than capable children who need strong guidance and control from the leadership. Within an Org<sup>4</sup> (Positive Paternalistic) environment the leaders view the workers as very capable children who continue to need the wisdom and foresight of the leader (a “Father knows best” mentality).



This relationship becomes self-perpetuating, as each role tends to draw out and encourage the opposite role. This is an unhealthy situation for any organization that desires to develop leadership throughout the organization, empower others to act, and build a community of capable partners to fulfill an agreed upon mission and vision.

The answer to this dilemma is to foster adult roles that emphasize open, direct communication, partnership, receptive listening and mutual respect. When a leader operates in the role of Adult and relates to the worker in this way, the worker tends then to react in the role of Adult. This is the healthiest scenario ... when people at all levels of the organization trust and

respect one another and encourage active participation and leadership, the organization as a whole prospers.



This is a healthy organization; one in which people serve the interests of others above their own self-interest for the good of the organization as a whole. This is a servant organization in which all people talk and act as adults and partners for the good of each person and the organization as a whole. When an organization integrates the six key areas (OLA Model) of a healthy organization and works to achieve a healthy adult maturity in relationships, in light of the concepts defined in the OLA this organization is likely moving toward optimal organizational health.

Paternalistic organizations share another key characteristic. Research has revealed a lack of perception match between top leaders, management and the workforce related to how the organization exhibits servant-leadership characteristics. This perception gap is most pronounced between the top leadership and the workforce.

### **Identifying the Perception Match**

Research utilizing the OLA has revealed a common phenomenon within organizations. A significant difference,  $F(2,807) = 9.611, p < .05$ , was found in *OLA* scores between top leadership, and the categories of management/supervision and workforce with top leadership scoring higher. No significant ( $p > .05$ ) difference was found in the *OLA* scores of management/supervision and workforce. A significant ( $p < .01$ ) negative relationship of  $-.139$

existed between position/role and the total instrument score, indicating that the higher the position in the organization, the higher the scores on the instrument. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for each category.

TABLE 3. *OLA* Means and Standard Deviation by Position/Role

<i>Position/role</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Top Leadership	102	297.78	35.01
Management/Supervision	197	278.59	46.76
Workforce	511	274.88	50.89
Total	810	278.67	48.69

This finding, of a significant difference between top leadership perceptions and that of the workforce, has been confirmed through later research in an American cultural context.

(Horsman, 2001, Thompson, 2002, Ledbetter, 2003). Osburn’s study, utilizing the *OLA* within a Japanese cultural context, found that “overall ratings seem to decline with status. While the Top Leaders respondent has a combined mean of 3.9, the averages were 3.3, 3.1, and 2.9 for the Teachers, Managers, and Workforce, respectively.” (2004, p.12). Certainly, more study needs to occur within various cultural contexts to see if this result continues to hold true across cultures.

A clear lack of Perception Match exists between the top leadership in an organization and the workforce in terms of how the organization is viewed. Top leaders frequently see the organization more positively (in terms of the *OLA*’s six key areas of servant-leadership) than does the workforce. In other words, when an organization, as perceived by the workforce, sees itself as an *Org*<sup>4</sup> it is quite common to see the top leadership of this organization perceiving it as an *Org*<sup>5</sup>.

Does this lack of perception match make a difference? Does it affect how different workers and leaders work together in the organization? Does it affect the performance of an

organization in any way? There is more research that needs to be done on these critical questions, but it would seem that this lack of perception does make a difference.

When a low perception match exists between leaders and workers it is clear that they are *experiencing* the organization in very different ways. Some, commonly the leadership, may be assuming that the organization is healthier than it really is and therefore do not see the need of addressing unhealthy aspects of the organization. This is not surprising, since top leaders often find themselves insulated from the reality of the day-to-day functioning of the organization. This lack of awareness is dangerous and tends to perpetuate an “us-and-them” mentality that works against true community.

Others, commonly members of the workforce, know that the things that they are experiencing are often not understood by the leadership ... and communication suffers. An effective, healthy organization tends to share an accurate awareness of its strengths and weaknesses so that a healthy and positive consensus begins to emerge in terms of organizational improvement. These two critical issues—shared awareness and open communication—may be more essential than we imagine for establishing and growing the trust needed to create an organization that is healthy and growing.

### **Foundations and Limitations**

The addition of the A-P-S model to the existing OLA model of servant-leadership and the creation of the six levels of organizational health can be a strong foundation from which to assist organizations in their development towards greater health. Here is a summary of what can be affirmed in this expanding area of servant-leadership research and servant organizational

development. The OLA model hopes to provide the following for ongoing servant-leadership research:

- 1) an operational definition of servant-leadership
- 2) a description of what servant-leadership is not through a model of contrasting mindsets of leadership
- 3) the ability to measure the perception of servant-leadership characteristics in organizations
- 4) the ability to determine if a perception match exists between top leaders and the workforce within organizations

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations to this study. The OLA and the research that produced it emerged out of an American cultural perspective and this western cultural bias should caution researchers to avoid generalizing these findings to other cultures. Will this model find application within other cultures and viewpoints? More study remains to be done and hopefully new studies will emerge out of multiple world cultures to provide a balance and a challenge to the concepts presented here. Also, there is a diversity of cultures within the American experience and each of these cultures bring unique insights and experiences into the understanding of leadership and organizational life. In the OLA, I am not claiming that there is one definition and one model of servant-leadership that will be applied to all. This paper provides one model, one that remains to be tested and challenged and ultimately improved or changed altogether.

There certainly are inherent limitations to the scientific study of such concepts. Servant-leadership involves issues of the heart and of the soul, topics that don't fit well within the cold analysis of the scientific model. We must be careful that we do not obscure the truth by attempting to categorize and fully explain it. Servant-leadership calls for a process of listening

over speaking, of reflection over thoughtless action, and of inquiry over certainty. In light of this, it is important that we continue to seek a strong research base for the concept and application of servant-leadership. This kind of process will never give us the complete picture but it can provide significant insights that are not available through other means.

### **Ongoing Research Possibilities**

There remain more questions than answers. Here are several research questions that can be considered and pursued. It is hoped that the OLA instrument will provide a resource to address these questions, and others, to promote servant-leadership research in the years to come.

- What is the relationship between the OLA score and organizational health factors? Are servant organizations healthier than paternalistic or autocratic organizations?
- How can we better understand the Paternalistic Organization? What are the limitations of this mindset and practice?
- How can we improve communication within Paternalistic Organizations utilizing the Parent-Adult-Child dynamics model?
- What is the significance of the Perception Match within organizations? What does it mean for organizational communication and shared awareness?
- How can we better assist organizational leadership in navigating the necessary mindshifts needed to move toward a healthier, more servant-minded organization?
- To what level do these concepts translate to other cultures and world-views?
- What training programs can be developed to assist organizations to develop toward becoming true servant organizations?

## **Conclusion**

What is a healthy organization? Why do organizations so often fall short of their potential? Why do workers report that they are working at low levels of productivity? What would it take for our organizations to fulfill their mission and reach their vision while developing healthy, productive workers? What kind of leadership could make this happen?

World history is written around the use and abuse of leadership power. This type of leadership, even when revealed to be harmful and counterproductive, does not die easily. This is not surprising since positional leadership has always brought with it the perks and benefits that can be hard to turn away from. Autocratic rule has always been around and is firmly with us today.

However, this research suggests that paternalistic leadership may hold the strongest influence in our organizations, more pervasive even than autocratic leadership. This model needs to be further explored and explained so that organizations can begin to accept their limitations and move beyond them toward a servant-minded paradigm of leadership.

The healthy organization is an organization in which the characteristics of servant-leadership are displayed through the organizational culture and are valued and practiced by the leadership and workforce. This is a healthy, servant organization: one that puts the needs of others first and through that gains profound and pervasive power. Leaders can choose this kind of an organization. They can choose a different way of thinking about leadership and how it impacts their organizations.

What might happen if that were to take place? What vision could be realized? What might the future of organizational life become? Within this vision ...



- 1) Workers, Managers and Top Leaders will be working together in a committed partnership based on common awareness, vision and open, honest communication
- 2) People throughout all organizations will be valued and developed towards their full potential
- 3) Leadership will be shared and developed at all levels of the organization providing for continual improvement and rapid response to changing needs
- 4) Creativity will be unleashed providing new products, better services and dynamic solutions to societal needs
- 5) The health of the workplace will overflow into the homes and neighborhoods of our communities allowing for engagement of citizens in the remaking of their communities
- 6) Organizations of all types and sizes; for-profit business, education, non-profit community organizations, government, medical and associations of various kinds will be challenged to improve the way they lead and serve within their organizations.

Through the accumulation of these changes a critical mass of organizations will begin to take seriously their responsibility to lead and serve their communities, their workers and their world who will, through the power of their example, create a new model of leadership that will literally transform the way organizations are experienced, and invigorate the influence of such organizations throughout the world.

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## Appendix

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## Six Organizational Health Level Descriptions

Servant-leadership	<b>Org<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Optimal Health</b>	Workers experience this organization as a servant-minded organization characterized by authenticity, the valuing and developing of people, the building of community and the providing and sharing of positive leadership. These characteristics are evident throughout the entire organization. People are trusted and are trustworthy throughout the organization. They are motivated to serve the interests of each other before their own self-interest and are open to learning from each other. Leaders and workers view each other as partners working in a spirit of collaboration.
	<b>Org<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Excellent Health</b>	Workers experience this organization as a servant-oriented organization characterized by authenticity, the valuing and developing of people, the building of community and the providing and sharing of positive leadership. These characteristics are evident throughout much of the organization. People are trusted and are trustworthy. They are motivated to serve the interests of each other before their own self-interest and are open to learning from each other. Leaders and workers view each other as partners working in a spirit of collaboration.
Paternalistic Leadership	<b>Org<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Moderate Health</b>	Workers experience this organization as a positively paternalistic (parental-led) organization characterized by a moderate level of trust and trustworthiness along with occasional uncertainty and fear. Creativity is encouraged as long as it doesn't move the organization too far beyond the status quo. Risks can be taken, but failure is sometimes feared. Goals are mostly clear, though the overall direction of the organization is sometimes confused. Leaders often take the role of nurturing parent while workers assume the role of the cared-for child.
	<b>Org<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Limited Health</b>	Workers experience this organization as a negatively paternalistic (parental-led) organization characterized by minimal to moderate levels of trust and trustworthiness along with an underlying uncertainty and fear. People feel that they must prove themselves and that they are only as good as their last performance. Workers are sometimes listened to but only when they speak in line with the values and priorities of the leaders. Conformity is expected while individual expression is discouraged. Leaders often take the role of critical parent while workers assume the role of the cautious child.
Autocratic Leadership	<b>Org<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Poor Health</b>	Workers experience this organization as an autocratic-led organization characterized by low levels of trust and trustworthiness and high levels of uncertainty and fear. People lack motivation to serve the organization because they do not feel that it is <i>their</i> organization or <i>their</i> goals. Leadership is autocratic in style and is imposed from the top levels of the organization. It is an environment where risks are seldom taken, failure is often punished and creativity is discouraged. Most workers do not feel valued and often feel <i>used</i> by those in leadership. Change is needed but is very difficult to achieve.
	<b>Org<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Toxic</b>	Workers experience this organization as a dangerous place to work ... a place characterized by dishonesty and a deep lack of integrity among its workers and leaders. Workers are devalued, <i>used</i> and sometimes <i>abused</i> . Positive leadership is missing at all levels and power is used in ways that are harmful to workers and the mission of the organization. There is almost no trust and an extremely high level of fear. This organization will find it nearly impossible to locate, develop and maintain healthy workers who can assist in producing positive organizational change.



## Description

### Toxic Organizational

*This organization is now operating with Toxic Organizational Health in terms of its workers, leadership and organizational culture and it exhibits these characteristics throughout all levels of operation.*

**The Workers:** Motivation, morale, attitude & commitment, listening, relationships vs. tasks

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Workers are devalued here. They are not believed in and in turn do not believe in one another. Workers are used and even abused in this work setting. There is no opportunity for personal development. Workers are not listened to. Their ideas are never sought or considered. All decisions are made at the top levels of the organization. Relationships are dysfunctional and people are only valued for conformity to the dominant culture. Diversity is seen as a threat and differences are cause for suspicion.

**The Leadership:** Power, decision making, goals & direction

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True leadership is missing at all levels of the organization. Power is used by leaders in ways that are harmful to workers and to the organization's mission. Workers do not have the power to act to initiate change. Goals are unclear and people do not know where the organization is going.

**The Team:** Community, collaboration and team learning

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People are out for themselves and a highly political climate exists. People are manipulated and pitted against each other in order to motivate performance. Focus is placed on punishing non-performers.

**The Culture:** Authenticity, integrity, accountability, creativity, trust, service, communication

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*This is an environment characterized by dishonesty and a deep lack of integrity among its workers, supervisors and senior leaders. It is an environment where failure is punished, creativity is stifled and risks are never taken. People are suspicious of each other and feel manipulated and used. There is almost no trust level and an extremely high level of fear because people, especially leadership, are seen as untrustworthy. At all levels of the organization, people serve their own self-interest before the interest of others. This is an environment that is characterized by totally closed communication.*

***The Outlook:*** *Type of workers attracted, action needed*

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*This is an organization in name only that will find it impossible to find, develop and maintain healthy productive workers who can navigate the changes necessary to improve. The outlook for this organization is doubtful. Extreme measures must be instituted in order for this organization to establish the necessary health to survive.*



## Description

### Poor Organizational

*This organization is now operating with Poor Organizational Health in terms of its workers, leadership and organizational culture and it exhibits these characteristics throughout most levels of operation*

**The Workers:** *Motivation, morale, attitude & commitment, listening, relationships vs. tasks*

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Most workers do not feel valued or believed in here. They often feel used and do not feel that they have the opportunity of being developed either personally or professionally. Workers are rarely listened to and only when they speak in line with the values and priorities of the leaders. Their ideas are rarely sought and almost never used. Most all decisions are made at the top levels of the organization. Relationships are not encouraged and the tasks of the organization come before people. Diversity is not valued or appreciated.

**The Leadership:** *Power, decision making, goals & direction*

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Leadership is autocratic in style and is imposed from the top levels of the organization. Power is held at the highest positions only and is used to force compliance with the leader's wishes. Workers do not feel empowered to create change. Goals are often unclear and the overall direction of the organization is confused.

**The Team:** *Community, collaboration and team learning*

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This is a highly individualistic and competitive environment. Almost no collaboration exists. Teams are sometimes utilized but often are put in competition with each other in order to motivate performance.

**The Culture:** *Authenticity, integrity, accountability, creativity, trust, service, communication*

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This is an environment often characterized by lack of honesty and integrity among its workers, supervisors and senior leaders. It is an environment where risks are seldom taken, failure is often punished and creativity is discouraged. There is a very low level of trust and trustworthiness along with a high level of uncertainty and fear. Leaders do not trust the workers and the workers view the leaders as untrustworthy. People lack motivation to serve the organization because they do not feel that it is *their* organization or *their* goals. This is an environment that is characterized by closed communication.

### *The Outlook: Type of workers attracted, action needed*

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This is an autocratic organization, which will find it very difficult to find, develop and maintain healthy productive workers. Change is needed but very difficult to achieve. The outlook is not positive for this organization. Serious measures must be instituted in order for this organization to establish the necessary improvements to move towards positive organizational health.



## Description

### Limited Organizational

This organization is now operating with *Limited Organizational Health* in terms of its workers, leadership and organizational culture, and it exhibits these characteristics throughout most levels of operation.

**The Workers:** *Motivation, morale, attitude & commitment, listening, relationships vs. tasks*

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Most workers sense they are valued more for what they can contribute than for who they are. When they receive training in this organization it is primarily to increase their performance and their value to the company not to develop personally. Workers are sometimes listened to but only when they speak in line with the values and priorities of the leaders. Their ideas are sometimes sought but seldom used, while the important decisions remain at the top levels of the organization. Relationships tend to be functional and the organizational tasks almost always come first. Conformity is expected while individual expression is discouraged.

**The Leadership:** *Power, decision-making, goals & direction*

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Leadership is negatively paternalistic in style and is focused at the top levels of the organization. Power is delegated for specific tasks and for specific positions within the organization. Workers provide some decision-making when it is appropriate to their position. Goals are sometimes unclear and the overall direction of the organization is often confused.

**The Team:** *Community, collaboration and team learning*

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This is mostly an individualistic environment. Some level of cooperative work exists, but little true collaboration. Teams are utilized but often are characterized by an unproductive competitive spirit.

**The Culture:** *Authenticity, integrity, accountability, creativity, trust, service, communication*

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Workers are unsure of where they stand and how open they can be with one another, and especially with those in leadership over them. This is an environment where limited risks are taken, failure is not allowed and creativity is encouraged only when it fits within the organization's existing guidelines. There is a minimal to moderate level of trust and trustworthiness along with an underlying uncertainty and fear. People feel that they must prove themselves and that they are only as good as their last performance. People are sometimes motivated to serve the organization but are not sure that the organization is committed to them. This is an environment that is characterized by a guarded, cautious openness.

### *The Outlook: Type of workers attracted, action needed*

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This is a negatively paternalistic organization. The compliant worker will find this a safe place to settle in. The best and most creative workers will look elsewhere. Change here is long-term and incremental and improvement is desired but difficult to achieve. The outlook for this organization is uncertain. Decisions need to be made to move toward more healthy organizational life. In times of organizational stress there will be tendency to move backwards towards a more autocratic organizational environment.



## Description

### Moderate Organizational

*This organization is now operating with Moderate Organizational Health in terms of its workers, leadership and organizational culture and it exhibits these characteristics throughout most levels of operation.*

**The Workers:** *Motivation, morale, attitude & commitment, listening, relationships vs. tasks*

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Many workers sense they are valued while others are uncertain. People receive training in this organization in order to equip them to fulfill company goals. Workers are listened to but usually it is when they speak in line with the values and priorities of the leaders. Their ideas are often sought and sometimes used, but the important decisions remain at the top levels of the organization. Relationships are valued as they benefit company goals but organizational tasks often come first. There is a tension between the expectation of conformity and encouragement of diversity.

**The Leadership:** *Power, decision making, goals & direction*

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Leadership is positively paternalistic in style and mostly comes from the top levels of the organization. Power is delegated for specific tasks and for specific positions within the organization. Workers are encouraged to share ideas for improving the organization. Goals are mostly clear though the overall direction of the organization is sometimes confused.

**The Team:** *Community, collaboration and team learning*

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Some level of cooperative work exists, and some true collaboration. Teams are utilized but often compete against one another for scarce resources.

**The Culture:** *Authenticity, integrity, accountability, creativity, trust, service, communication*

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Workers are sometimes unsure of where they stand and how open they can be with one another and especially with those in leadership over them. This is an environment where some risks can be taken but failure is sometimes feared. Creativity is encouraged as long as it doesn't move the organization too much beyond the status quo. There is a moderate level of trust and trustworthiness along with occasional uncertainty and fear. People feel trusted but know that that trust can be lost very easily. People are motivated to serve the organization because it is their job to do so and they are committed to doing good work. This is an environment characterized by openness between select groups of people.

*The Outlook: Type of workers attracted, action needed*

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This is a positively paternalistic organization, that will attract good motivated workers but may find that the "best and brightest" will seek professional challenges elsewhere. Change here is ongoing but often forced by outside circumstances. Improvement is desired but difficult to maintain over time. The outlook for this organization is positive. Decisions need to be made to move toward more healthy organizational life. This organization is in a good position to move towards optimal health in the future.



## Description

### Excellent Organizational

*This organization is now operating with Excellent Organizational Health in terms of its workers, leadership and organizational culture and it exhibits these characteristics throughout most levels of operation.*

***The Workers:** Motivation, morale, attitude & commitment, listening, relationships vs. tasks*

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*Most workers are valued here, for who they are as well as for what they contribute to the organization. They are believed in and are encouraged to develop to their full potential as workers and as individuals. Most leaders and workers listen receptively to one another and are involved together in some of the important decisions of the organization. Most relationships are strong and healthy and diversity is valued and celebrated.*

***The Leadership:** Power, decision making, goals & direction*

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*People are encouraged to provide leadership at all levels of the organization. Power and leadership are shared so that most workers are empowered to contribute to important decisions, including the direction that the organization is taking. Appropriate action is taken, goals are clear and vision is shared throughout most of the organization.*

***The Team:** Community, collaboration and team learning*

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*A high level of community characterizes this positive work environment. People work together well in teams and prefer collaborative work over competition against one another.*

***The Culture:** Authenticity, integrity, accountability, creativity, trust, service, communication*

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*This is an environment mostly characterized by the authenticity of its workers, supervisors and senior leaders. People are open and accountable to others. They operate with honesty*

and integrity. This is a “people first” environment where risks are encouraged, failure can be learned from and creativity is encouraged and rewarded. People are trusted and are trustworthy throughout the organization. Fear is not used as a motivation. People are motivated to serve the interests of each other before their own self-interest and are open to learning from each other. This is an environment that is characterized by open and effective communication.

**The Outlook:** *Type of workers attracted, action needed*

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This is a servant-oriented organization, which will continue to attract some of the best and most motivated workers who can welcome positive change and continuous improvement. It is a place where energy and motivation are continually renewed to provide for the challenges of the future. The outlook is very positive. Ongoing attention should be given to building on existing strengths and continuing to learn and develop towards an optimally healthy organization.



## Description

### Optimal Organizational

*This organization is now operating with Optimal Organizational Health in terms of its workers, leadership and organizational culture and it exhibits these characteristics to a very high level throughout all levels of operation.*

**The Workers:** *Motivation, morale, attitude & commitment, listening, relationships vs. tasks*

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*All workers are valued here, for who they are as well as for what they contribute to the organization. They are believed in and are encouraged to develop to their full potential as workers and as individuals. All leaders and workers listen receptively to one another and are involved together in many of the important decisions of the organization. Relationships are strong and healthy and diversity is valued and celebrated.*

**The Leadership:** *Power, decision making, goals & direction*

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*People provide dynamic and effective leadership at all levels of the organization. Power and leadership are shared so that all workers are empowered to contribute to important decisions, including the direction that the organization is taking. Appropriate action is taken, goals are clear and vision is shared throughout the entire organization.*

**The Team:** *Community, collaboration and team learning*

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*An extremely high level of community characterizes this positive work environment. People work together well in teams and choose collaborative work over competition against one another.*

**The Culture:** *Authenticity, integrity, accountability, creativity, trust, service, communication*

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*This is an environment characterized by the authenticity of its workers, supervisors and executive leaders. People are very open and accountable to others. They operate with complete honesty and integrity. This is a “people first” environment where risks are taken, failure is learned from and creativity is encouraged and rewarded. People throughout the entire organization are highly trusted and are highly trustworthy. Fear does not exist as a motivation. People are highly motivated to serve the interests of each other before their own self-interest and are open to learning from each other. This is an environment that is characterized by open and effective communication throughout the organization.*

### *The Outlook: Type of workers attracted, action needed*

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*This is a servant-minded organization throughout, which will continue to attract the very best and most motivated workers who can welcome positive change and continuous improvement. It is a place where energy and motivation are continually renewed to provide for the challenges of the future. The outlook is extremely positive. Ongoing attention should be given to building new strengths and continuing to maintain and develop as an optimally healthy organization.*