



## Team Effectiveness and Six Essential Servant Leadership Themes: A Regression Model Based on items in the Organizational Leadership Assessment

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As evidenced by LaFasto and Larson's (2001) work with over 6,000 team members and leaders, interest in teams continues to capture the attention of both leadership scholars and practitioners. Subsequently, research into what leadership behaviors contribute to team effectiveness becomes relevant for those at the crossroads of theory and practice. Utilizing the Organizational Leadership Assessment (Laub, 1999) as a measure of servant leadership and the Team Effectiveness Questionnaire (Larson & LaFasto, 2001) as a measure of team effectiveness, this paper presents a multiple regression model that is able to explain a significant percentage of the variance in the effectiveness of teams. The essential servant leadership variables identified were (a) providing accountability, (b) supporting and resourcing, (c) engaging in honest self-evaluation, (d) fostering collaboration, (e) communicating with clarity, and (f) valuing and appreciating.

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**I**nterest in the theory and practice of teams has grown dramatically in recent years as evidenced by LaFasto and Larson's (2001) research with over 6,000 team members and leaders. This emergence of teams may be traced, in part, back to societal shifts which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. One student of the impact of these shifts on organizational life was Robert K. Greenleaf. Writing in the 1970s, Greenleaf (1977) noted that in light of the revolution of expectation among young people, one who presides over a successful business "will need to evolve from being the chief into the builder of the team" (p. 85). It is arguable that such societal and organizational observations are even more relevant today as leaders seek to answer the question of how to lead organizations in the increasingly decentralized and team-based structures that are a growing mark of systems in the 21st century.

Some have argued that these shifts toward team-based structures are consistent with the shifts from Newtonian to Quantum paradigms (Irving, 2005; Wheatley, 1999). Addressing this point, Margaret Wheatley argued that “*relationship* is the key determiner of everything” (p. 11), rooted in physical realities at the subatomic level. For instance, Wheatley noted that “subatomic particles come into form and are observed only as they are in relationship to something else. They do not exist as independent ‘things’” (p. 11). From this, Wheatley argued that relationships, and not lone individuals, are the basic organizing unit of life. Therefore, participation and cooperation are essential for survival in this world of interconnected and networked organizations. These shifts toward the quantum world of thinking and organizing not only place an emphasis on relationships as the basic organizing unit; but they also emphasize (a) the whole over the part, (b) dynamic processes over static processes, (c) organizational networks over organizational hierarchies, and (d) systemic interconnectedness over linear progression and thought. The holistic focus on interconnectedness, relationship, and dynamic process in networked organizations naturally lends itself to the use of relational organizational structures such as teams.

Organizations reflect these macro shifts in our societies and lead to a critical leadership question for those at the crossroads of leadership research and practice: what form of leadership will be most effective in our emerging world of team-based and networked systems? This question provided the impetus for this study, which was designed primarily to examine the effect of servant leadership on team effectiveness by examining which items in Laub’s (1999) Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) will have the most significant impact on team effectiveness. The OLA as a single measure of servant leadership was the single greatest predictor of team effectiveness in a previous analysis (Irving & Longbotham, 2006). In light of this, the authors concluded that a closer examination of the OLA was in order. Based on this examination, the authors present a multiple regression model that explores this effect and identify six essential servant leadership themes that are especially predictive of team effectiveness. Toward this end, the authors review the essential literature surrounding servant leadership and teams, present an overview of the methods and results, and discuss at length the findings and implications of this study.

## Literature Review

### *Servant Leadership*

Through his initial work on servant leadership, Greenleaf (1977) provided a foundation for the contemporary study and emerging discipline of servant leadership. The key to Greenleaf’s conceptualization of servant leadership is his understanding of what characterizes the servant leader, namely being a servant first. In response to the question, “Who is the servant-leader?” Greenleaf provided his now frequently quoted response:

The servant-leader *is* servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: 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? (p. 27)

While persons in the leader-first model may utilize service at times for the purpose of realizing the visions and goals of the leader and/or the organization; the servant-first model is focused on making “sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (p. 27) and, as such, is a follower-oriented theory of leadership (Laub, 1999; Matteson & Irving, 2005, 2006; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

Building on this servant-first notion of leadership; Laub (1999), Stone et al. (2004), and Matteson and Irving (2005, 2006) all argued that the focus of the servant leader is on that which is best for their followers. On this point, Laub (2005) wrote, “servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (p. 160). Stone et al. identified this point as a key to understanding what differentiates servant leadership from transformational leadership. They argued that while transformational leadership tends to be focused on an organizational vision (what is best for the organization), servant leadership is focused foremost on that which is best for the followers. Matteson and Irving (2005) took this a step further by contrasting the focus, motivation, context, and outcomes of transformational, servant, and self-sacrificial approaches to leadership.

From the early 1990s through 2003, the work surrounding servant leadership focused on identifying themes to help to operationalize the concept of servant leadership. Graham (1991) stressed the inspirational and moral dimensions. Buchen (1998) argued that self-identity, capacity for reciprocity, relationship building, and preoccupation with the future were essential themes. Spears (1998) emphasized the dimensions of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and community building. Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) argued for the importance of vision, influence credibility, trust, and service. Laub (1999) put forward valuing people, developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership. Russell (2001) argued for vision, credibility, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciating others, and empowerment. Patterson (2003) presented the dimensions of *agapáo* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service as the essential dimensions of servant leadership. This study focuses on Laub’s (1999) servant leadership themes.

While these operational themes have been helpful for the study of servant leadership, recent developments of empirical measures for servant leadership have provided a platform for quantitative studies of servant leadership. Of the instruments that have been developed to date; including those developed by Laub (1999), Sendjaya (2003), Page and Wong (2000), Dennis (2004), and Dennis and Bocarnea (2005); Laub’s (1999) OLA has been the predominate instrument for measuring servant leadership at the organizational level. This is evidenced by Drury (2004), Hebert (2004), Irving (2004, 2005), Laub (1999, 2003), and Ledbetter (2003). Thus, the OLA is the instrument used to measure servant leadership in this study.

### *Team Effectiveness*

Team effectiveness has been in evidence since the construction of the planet’s oldest monoliths in Malta c. 4000 B.C. Unfortunately, the factors contributing to team effectiveness were not documented until the beginning of the 20th century when Elton Mayo first “uncovered the importance of teams” (Parker, 1990, p. 16). Mayo (as cited in Parker) noted the importance of leadership and the fostering of conditions in the organization conducive to developing effective teams. In the 1930s, Kurt Lewin’s work narrowed this perspective and focused on

group dynamics as the means of developing effective teams. McGregor (1960) in his *The Human Side of Enterprise* further narrowed the focus to that of individual employees, seeing them as more than just “cogs in the system.” It was the work of Blake and Mouton (1964), though, that focused on the importance of the leader in building an effective team.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of teams exploded as teams became an integral part of organizational life in the United States (Longbotham, 2000). With this explosion came the need to understand how to have effective teams. Most “how-to” literature focused on “team-building, team dynamics, conflict resolution, decision-making, and other team technologies” (Hacker, 1999, p. 61). There were, however, other voices. W. E. Deming’s (1986) book, *Out of the Crisis*, recognized the importance of leadership in the effectiveness of teams. This view was reiterated by Scholtes (1988) who viewed leadership’s importance so strongly that he attributed any team failure to indifferent or uninvolved leadership (Longbotham). The literature has identified many factors that may contribute to team effectiveness. As key as some of these factors may be to team effectiveness, it is the

role of the leader [that] is the toughest, most-important role for the team’s eventual success or failure. . . . It has been said that the role of the leader is “like giving a brain to the scarecrow, a heart to the tin man, and courage to the cowardly lion.” Teams with good leaders can accomplish results even when it appears that the deck is stacked against them. (Furman, 1995, p. 25)

In addition to these contentions from Deming, Scholtes, and Furman that leadership of teams is important; Harrington (1991) claimed that the focus on team building, team dynamics, conflict resolution, and other team technologies was on “the wrong part of the business” (p. x).

A recent Amazon.com search of popular press materials yielded 128 books on team effectiveness, indicating that the use of teams is alive and well and that there is considerable interest in how to have an effective team. A search for team effectiveness in academic literature, however, yielded few empirical studies. Most articles have proposed conceptual models or have a very narrow focus, but the trend is changing. There is an increasing focus on empirical research with respect to teams. Natalie, Sora, and Kavalipurapu (2004) identified mission, vision, and leadership as common themes in a qualitative study of 60 leaders of teams. Brenegan (2003) contended that knowing one’s team was a crucial factor in effective team leadership. Kuo (2004) studied transactional, transformational, and paternalistic leadership and found all three to be highly correlated with team effectiveness. This investigation of servant leadership and team effectiveness supports and augments the findings linking leadership and team effectiveness.

### **Statement of the Problem and Associated Research Questions**

#### *Impact of Servant Leadership on Team Effectiveness*

As noted in the introduction, the use of team approaches by leaders in the organizational context continues to grow substantially. While it may be assumed that leadership that works well in one organizational level will likewise be effective in teams, it is vital that those at the crossroads of leadership scholarship and practice address the important questions facing leaders of team-based organizations. The question may be framed broadly as: what form of leadership will be most effective in our emerging world of team-based and networked systems? More specifically, it has been the interest of the authors to examine the effect of servant leadership on team effectiveness by means of examining which of the individual items in the OLA will have

the greatest impact on team effectiveness. In light of this, the primary research question driving this study is: which servant leadership themes will have the greatest impact on team effectiveness and to what degree? Based upon this question and the associated results, the authors propose a model for understanding significant predictors of team effectiveness.

## Method

### *Sample Characteristics*

The research sample for this study is drawn from a U.S. division of an international nonprofit organization. The sample frame included around 1,800 members. Since the organization and the U.S. division in particular utilize team-based structures, this was an appropriate sample frame for the study. The research sample was collected from these 1,800 members in an open invitation via e-mail to each of the divisional members in order to provide equal opportunity for member participation, helping to insure a random sample and to be consistent with the method of communication frequently utilized in the normal flow of information within the organization. Of the 740 participants, 719 provided complete data that could be included in the analyses; this number represented a response rate of 40.5%. The participants (a) were 47% female and 52.2% male, with .8% not reporting their gender; (b) were 6.9% top leadership, 23% management, and 69.2% workforce, with .9% not reporting their position; and (c) 1.2% graduated high school only, 86.1% completed bachelors studies, 11.6% completed masters studies, and .7% completed doctoral studies, with .4% not reporting the highest level of education completed. Participation in the study was both voluntary and anonymous for these participants.

Once participants received an e-mail invitation to participate in the study, they were invited to a URL containing a web-based format of the OLA (Laub, 1999) and the Team Effectiveness Questionnaire (TEQ; Larson & LaFasto, 2001). In addition to these instruments, basic demographic questions related to participant position level, gender, and educational level were included. Utilizing this web-based format allowed for an electronically-mediated collection of the research data. Due to the geographically dispersed nature of the organizational division throughout the US, members of the sample frame were accustomed to using web-based resources. The instrument was available to the sample frame for a period of 2 weeks. Within this 2-week period, the minimum sample size was obtained.

For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of *team* was adopted from Larson and LaFasto's (1989) work. In distinguishing teams from groups, Larson and LaFasto (1989) defined a team as (a) two or more people, (b) a specific performance objective or recognizable goal to be attained, and (c) a coordination of activity among the members of the team that is requisite for the attainment of the team goal or objective. While some groups may share the first two characteristics of this definition, it is the coordination of activity that is a distinguishing characteristic of teams. In this study, team leaders and team participants share all three characteristics.

### *Instrumentation*

Participants in this study completed two instruments: Laub's (1999) OLA, which is a measure of servant leadership at the organizational level, and the TEQ (Larson & LaFasto,

2001), which provides a collective measure of team effectiveness. In this study, the alpha coefficients for each of these scales were (a) .97 for the OLA and (b) .82 for the TEQ.

## Results

### *Impact of Servant Leadership on Team Effectiveness*

The ideal way to study the impact of servant leadership on team effectiveness would have been a designed experiment that controlled everything except the servant leadership behaviors being tested (Box & Draper, 1987). The reality of the organizational world is that gaining permission to experiment with teams would be unlikely. The next best option is to bring empirical tools to a specific organizational setting as was done in this study.

The goal in the data analysis was to develop a model for team effectiveness using individual components of the OLA to see which aspects of servant leadership at the organizational level most influenced team effectiveness in this setting. The model was developed using all possible regressions up to 10 independent variables. Determining the best subset of independent variables entails two opposing objectives: simplicity and fit. The goal “is to achieve a balance between simplicity (as few variables as possible) and fit (as many as are needed)” (Longbotham, 2000, p. 25). With this goal in mind, the best model has six OLA items. The increase from a model with six variables to one with seven had a negligible increase in  $R^2$  which will always increase with the addition of variables. The criterion used to determine the best six-factor model was lowest mean-squared error (MSE) or the tightest fit. The specifics for the possible six-item models are displayed in Table 1 with the chosen model first. All six of the OLA items in the chosen model have statistically significant coefficients as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1: *Model Summaries*

Model size	$R^2$	Root MSE	Variables in model
6	0.3867	0.3518	OLA 14, 30, 43, 47, 49, 55
6	0.3862	0.3520	OLA 7, 14, 30, 47, 49, 55
6	0.3856	0.3521	OLA 14, 30, 38, 47, 49, 55
6	0.3847	0.3524	OLA 14, 30, 47, 49, 55, 59

Table 3 shows the analysis of variance for the six-item model. It displays the strength of the model as a whole and provides the probability ( $p = .00$ ) that the relationship evidenced by the sample occurred by chance if there were no relationship between team effectiveness and the independent variables.

Table 2: *Regression Coefficients*

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>t</i> -value ( $H_0: \beta=0$ )	Significance	Decision
Intercept	1.48	0.10	15.49	0.00	Reject $H_0$
OLA_14	0.10	0.01	6.60	0.00	Reject $H_0$
OLA_30	0.08	0.02	4.35	0.00	Reject $H_0$
OLA_43	0.05	0.02	2.13	0.03	Reject $H_0$
OLA_47	0.06	0.02	2.70	0.01	Reject $H_0$
OLA_49	0.07	0.02	3.97	0.00	Reject $H_0$
OLA_55	0.13	0.02	7.88	0.00	Reject $H_0$

Table 3: *Analysis of Variance for Six-Item Multiple Regression*

Source	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-Ratio	Significance
Intercept	1	7488.74	7488.74		
Model	6	54.80	9.13	74.23	0.00
Residual	708	87.11	0.12		

## Discussion

### *Six Essential Servant Leadership Themes*

In view of the regression model identified in the analysis, the authors suggest that leaders should attend to six primary servant leadership themes when seeking to effectively lead in team-based environments. These themes, rooted in the six associated OLA items (see Table 4), are (a) providing accountability, (b) supporting and resourcing, (c) engaging in honest self-evaluation, (d) fostering collaboration, (e) communicating with clarity, and (f) valuing and appreciating.

*Providing accountability.* In the regression model, the first item raises the importance of accountability in the effective accomplishment of team goals. Based on the associated OLA item, leadership that “[holds people] accountable for reaching work goals” (OLA\_14) is a significant predictor of team effectiveness. It is important to observe the role of accountability and initiative on the part of servant leaders. While the focus of servant leaders is primarily on followers (Laub, 1999; Matteson & Irving, 2005, 2006; Stone et al., 2004), this emphasis should not imply disinterest in the accomplishment of goals. Illustrating this reality, one of Laub’s (1999) essential characteristics of servant leadership is providing leadership. For Laub (1999), providing leadership involves (a) envisioning the future, (b) taking initiative, and (c) clarifying goals.

Rather than servant leadership wandering aimlessly without initiative, servant leaders care about taking initiative toward goal clarification and attainment. The distinctive of servant leadership is not that goals are not accomplished, but rather that the leader's focus on serving the best interest of followers becomes the essential pathway for reaching goals.

Table 4: *Regression Model Themes and Associated OLA Items*

Servant leadership theme	OLA item #	Associated OLA item
Providing accountability	OLA_14	<i>"In general, people within this organization are held accountable for reaching work goals."</i>
Supporting and resourcing	OLA_30	<i>"Managers/Supervisors and top leadership in this organization provide the support and resources needed to help workers meet their goals."</i>
Engaging in honest self-evaluation	OLA_43	<i>"Managers/Supervisors and top leadership in this organization honestly evaluate themselves before seeking to evaluate others."</i>
Fostering collaboration	OLA_47	<i>"Managers/Supervisors and top leadership in this organization encourage workers to work together rather than competing against each other."</i>
Communicating with clarity	OLA_49	<i>"Managers/Supervisors and top leadership in this organization communicate clear plans &amp; goals for the organization."</i>
Valuing and appreciating	OLA_55	<i>"In viewing my own role I feel appreciated by my supervisor for what I contribute."</i>

Arguing a similar point, Patterson (2003) noted that pursuing "a mission does not mean . . . that organizations with servant leaders are unsuccessful; quite the contrary is true" (p. 4). As Branch (1999) pointed out, successful organizations such as Synovus, TD Industries, SAS Institute, and Southwest Airlines have been effectively led by servant leaders. One of the explanations for such success is the servant leadership focus on stewardship; a theme that Spears (1998), Nix (1997), and Russell and Stone (2002) have argued is an essential part of servant leadership. Stewardship implies that both "leaders and their followers are . . . stewards or agents of the organizations they lead" (Russell & Stone, p. 149), thus being accountable for reaching goals is not foreign to servant leadership. In fact, this type of stewardship necessarily involves honesty and accountability (Block, 1993; DePree, 1997; Russell & Stone); since a commitment to the development of others, another central feature of servant leadership, is related to fostering ownership and responsibility and insuring that leaders and followers are accountable for the matters for which they are responsible. Such observations from the servant leadership literature help explain the finding in this study related to providing accountability.

*Supporting and resourcing.* The second item in the regression model is the importance of leaders supporting workers and providing necessary resources for the accomplishment of their goals. Based on the associated OLA item, leadership which “provid[es] the support and resources needed to help workers meet their goals” (OLA\_30) is a significant predictor of team effectiveness. Patterson (2003) argued that the servant leadership dimension of empowerment is one of the primary pathways used by servant leaders in supporting followers in goal clarification and attainment. On this point, Patterson wrote, “by empowering followers, servant leaders are allowing them freedom to proceed toward their goals, helping them make dreams reality” (p. 24).

As with the first theme of providing accountability, this second theme in the regression model supports that servant leadership is not uninterested in goals; rather, it is providing creative and supportive pathways toward fostering goal attainment. In light of this ongoing interest in goals, emphasis on the servant leader’s role of supporting becomes essential. Rather than servant leaders taking over responsibilities from followers for the purpose of insuring that things are done right and goals are accomplished, servant leaders focus their energies on providing the necessary support and resources to help followers see their goals become reality. On this point, Blanchard (1996) addressed the concept of responsibility in light of the upside down pyramid, stating that “when you turn the pyramid upside down . . . the people become responsible, and the job of management is to be responsive to them” (p. 85). Rather than locating responsibility with the leader, it is located primarily with followers. This organizational shift makes the servant leadership dimensions of supporting and resourcing all the more important since the shift in mindset toward working for your people means that your purpose as a leader becomes primarily about helping your people “accomplish their goals” (Blanchard, p. 85).

The supporting role of the servant leader helps to insure that followers have the relational and structural support needed to carry out their responsibilities. The resourcing role of the servant leader helps to insure that followers have the human, fiscal, environmental, and material resources necessary to help followers accomplish their goals. This shift in focus toward leader supporting and resourcing is consistent with leadership transitions toward the influence and empowerment of people; which Russell (2001), Miles (1997), and Pollard (1996) see as being accomplished through structuring work environments in such a way that workers feel more effective and motivated.

*Engaging in honest self-evaluation.* The third item in the regression model is the importance of leader self-evaluation over (or at least prior to) an evaluating of others. Based on the associated OLA item, having leadership that “honestly evaluate[s] themselves before seeking to evaluate others” (OLA\_43) is a significant predictor of team effectiveness. Though counterintuitive for some leaders, self-evaluation plays a central role in the type of servant leadership that is effective in the team-based context. One of the reasons for this is due to the fact that values are often instilled more through actions than words (Malphurs, 1996; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Russell (2001) built on this by explicitly engaging the importance of modeling in servant leadership. On this point, Page and Wong (2006) argued that servant leaders in high-involvement and high-impact teams model for others by setting a personal example in meeting high standards and investing considerable energy to champion the common goals of the organization. Actions often speak louder than words. In light of this, modeling humility in the form of self-evaluation is an important step in fostering an environment of personal growth and goal accomplishment for leaders and followers alike.

Seeing humility as a foundation dimension of servant leadership, Patterson (2003) described humility in leadership as a leader's ability to grasp the idea of not knowing, understanding, or having all the answers. Such a conceptualization of humility is foundational to leader self-evaluation. Ferch (2005) argued, "one of the defining characteristics of human nature is the ability to discern one's own faults, to be broken as the result of such faults, and in response to seek a meaningful change" (p. 97). While leadership in traditional or hierarchal organizational structures often is shaped around a downward flow of evaluation toward workers and followers, the present research demonstrates the importance of evaluation beginning at the level of self-leadership. In light of this, Ferch's observation about human nature holds particular value for those seeking to lead as servants in the team-based environment.

In contrast to humility which contributes to the leader's self-evaluation, the leader's ego can significantly damage one's capacity for self-evaluation. Noting that the issue of identity was the first and most often recurrent characteristic of the servant leadership, Buchen (1998) associated self-identity with the curtailment and redirection of ego and image. Based on Greenleaf's thinking, Buchen noted that ego holds the capacity to clog reception in leaders. This observation is based on the argument that leaders who are full of themselves are regularly screening what and who is important to their ego and, therefore, insure that nothing else gets through. Such unhealthy filtering of information through ego works against the positive effect of servant leadership on team effectiveness. In contrast to this, leaders who have the capacity to humbly engage in self-evaluation will be able to demonstrate a level of leadership authenticity through maintaining integrity and trust (Laub, 1999) that will positively contribute to the effectiveness of teams.

*Fostering collaboration.* The fourth item in the regression model is the importance of the leader's fostering an environment of collaboration over competition. Based on the associated OLA item, leadership which "encourage[s] workers to work *together* rather than competing against each other" (OLA\_47) is a significant predictor of team effectiveness. The emphasis on collaboration in teams can be found throughout the servant leadership literature. First, it is a concept that was drawn out of Greenleaf's reflections by Spears (2005). Spears (2005) labeled this emphasis as building community. In community building, the theme is not limited to collaboration in work but goes further in an attempt to foster community. As Spears (2005) noted, this has become especially important in light of what "has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives" (p. 36).

Building on Spears' (2005) comments about building community, Laub (1999) argued that working collaboratively with others is one of the primary means by which servant leaders build community. Such collaboration fostered by servant leaders is seen as the foundation for effective teams at a theoretical level in the literature. For instance, Page and Wong (2006) argued that in effective teams, leaders empower others and foster collaborative efforts. Additionally, Laub (2003) argued that higher OLA scores are indicative of higher levels of team functioning. For example, teams with low OLA scores are characterized by (a) members being out for themselves, (b) members being manipulated and pitted against each other, and (c) members being punished for nonperformance. Conversely, teams with high OLA scores are characterized by (a) an extremely high level of community, (b) members working together well, and (c) members choosing collaboration over competition against one another. Such observations are consistent with Buchen's (1998) argument that servant leaders have a primary function of

building human infrastructure on which relationships and community may be built. In light of these theoretical connections between servant leadership and teams, the findings of this study are grounded in the servant leadership literature. The servant leader's role of fostering community and a collaborative work environment is essential in effective team leadership.

*Communicating with clarity.* The fifth item in the regression model suggests the importance of leaders communicating plans and objectives clearly. Based on the associated OLA item, leadership which "communicate[s] clear plans and goals for the organization" (OLA\_49) is a significant predictor of team effectiveness. In light of the emphasis on goals in several of the previous themes, it should not be a surprise that clarity of communication around organizational plans and goals would also be a significant leadership behavior for those leading in team-based organizations. Clarity of communication begins with clarity of ideas and concepts. In pursuing clear communication around organizational plans and goals, leaders must have the capacity to lead out of a clear vision.

Farling et al. (1999) argued that vision is an essential part of servant leadership. Leaders who possess vision are better suited to communicate plans and goals clearly since they speak out of a clear mental picture of where the organization is going. Srivastva (1983) described this concept of a clear mental picture in the following manner: "by envisioning we mean creating in one's mind an image of a desired future organizational state that can serve as a guide to interim strategies, decisions, and behavior" (p. 2). These interim strategies, decisions, and behavior facilitate goal accomplishment. In light of this, servant leaders who lead out of vision will be better suited for communicating organizational plans and goals with clarity. It is not surprising to see that Laub (1999) argued for clarifying goals as one of the primary means by which servant leaders provide leadership. The leader's focus on helping people understand the goals of the organization and insuring that they are committed to these goals is one of the essential tasks of leadership (Handy, 1996). For servant leaders who do this well, clearly communicated goals facilitate greater effectiveness in the accomplishment of team and goals.

*Valuing and appreciating.* The sixth and final item in the regression model suggests the importance of leaders valuing their employees and expressing appreciation for the contributions they make. Based on the associated OLA item, leadership that makes employees "feel appreciated by [their] supervisor for what [they] contribute" (OLA\_55) is a significant predictor of team effectiveness. This observation is consistent with what others have argued in the servant leadership literature. For instance, Russell (2001) emphasized the importance of appreciating others in servant leadership; noting that "servant leaders visibly appreciate, value, encourage, and care for their constituents" (p. 79). Russell's observation is built upon Winston's (1999, 2002) argument for the importance of leaders exhibiting love for coworkers. Dennis (2004) further described this by noting that the love of servant leaders includes truly caring about team members as people, making them feel important and being genuinely interested in their lives.

Further affirming the importance of leaders valuing and affirming followers, Laub (1999) argued that building up others through encouragement and affirmation is one of the primary means by which servant leaders develop people. Part of developing people involves truly empowering them in the context of team work. On this connection between empowerment and valuing others, Russell and Stone (2002) made the case that "empowerment is entrusting power to others, and for the servant leader it involves effective listening, making people feel significant, putting an emphasis on teamwork, and the valuing of love and equality" (p. 7). With such

empowerment, servant leaders are able to demonstrate their words of affirmation with actions that speak clearly. This emphasis on truly valuing and appreciating followers for their contribution to the team and the organization is a significant factor that, based on the findings in the present study, is predictive of greater leadership effectiveness.

### *Recommendations for the Crossroads of Scholarship and Practice*

At the crossroads of scholarship and practice is empirical research. In the present study, the individual items of the OLA have been examined in light of team effectiveness in order to determine which servant leadership themes are most significant in predicting the effectiveness of teams. These findings provide the basis for recommendations to both leadership researchers and practitioners.

*Recommendations for leadership researchers.* While the present study contributes to the study of leadership predictors of team effectiveness, additional work is needed to advance this line of inquiry. First; because the present study was limited to the nonprofit sector; similar investigations and analyses should be extended to other sectors such as business, education, military, and government. Second; since servant leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership have all been linked to team effectiveness; these constructs, in addition to servant leadership, should be measured concurrently to explore which specific leadership themes in these constructs have the strongest impact on team effectiveness.

Third, leadership predictors of team effectiveness should be measured utilizing complementary instrumentation. While the OLA provides a well established measure of servant leadership, the inclusion of additional servant leadership measures would help to corroborate the present findings. Additionally, future studies should use other measures of team effectiveness in order to evaluate leadership predictors of this dependent variable from alternative or complementary perspectives. Finally, while this study provides a model for the effect of servant leadership on team effectiveness, it did not explicitly explore the qualitatively-oriented question of why this effect exists; though the six themes identified could provide a basis for such work. In light of this, qualitatively-oriented research could advance the field by better addressing the dynamics that make a servant leadership approach within organizations especially effective in team-based contexts. While not exhaustive, these recommendations provide a basis for future research in servant leadership studies.

*Recommendations for leadership practice.* While there are many opportunities for future research, the present research provides the basis for informed recommendations at the level of leadership practice. Because servant leadership is a significant predictor of team effectiveness, it is vital for organizations to incorporate these themes into leadership for team contexts. Beyond this broad recommendation, a second recommendation is derived from the regression model in this study. Specifically, the following servant leadership themes are recommended for those leading in the team-based context: (a) providing accountability, (b) supporting and resourcing, (c) engaging in honest self-evaluation, (d) fostering collaboration, (e) communicating with clarity, and (f) valuing and appreciating. For those seeking to lead at the crossroads of contemporary research and practice, these findings reinforce the vital importance of servant leadership in organizations structured around decentralized and team-based communities. While more autocratic or paternalistic forms of leadership may have their place in hierarchically

governed organizations, the present research emphasizes the priority of servant leadership in the emerging networked communities commonplace in today's organizations.

### Summary

In light of the emerging trends toward decentralized and networked structures, the theory and practice of teams continues to be an important issue for those at the crossroads of scholarship and practice. This study provides significant data for researchers and practitioners alike. Servant leadership has been identified in this study as a significant predictor of team effectiveness. In light of this, those who use team structures in organizations are advised to better understand both servant leadership in general and the six essential servant leadership themes in particular if they desire to increase their effectiveness. These six essential themes; (a) providing accountability, (b) supporting and resourcing, (c) engaging in honest self-evaluation, (d) fostering collaboration, (e) communicating with clarity, and (f) valuing and appreciating; hold the capacity for leaders to effectively navigate the waters of team-based leadership. We trust that these findings will encourage increased exploration into the positive effects of servant leadership on team effectiveness as well as a robust application of servant leadership in contemporary organizational settings.

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