SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN BOLIVIA:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF A
SERVANT LEADER IN MISSIONS

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In memory of Dr. Meredythe Scheflen
who passed away August 23, 2011.

ABSTRACT

Over 50 years ago, Dr. Meredythe Scheflen founded a large educational cooperative in

Santa Cruz, Bolivia that encompasses a group of evangelical Christian elementary and high

schools under the leadership of a member/employee-owned Board of Directors. Twenty years

later, she went on to found the first and only evangelical university in Bolivia. Preliminary

research on Dr. Scheflen's autobiography and interviews with her followers has revealed that she

fits the profile of a servant leader, displaying leadership behaviors that contributed to her unusual

cross-cultural success within the low-trust, male-dominant Latin American culture.[1] A

phenomenological case study was done to determine if the servant leadership principles

established by a cross-cultural female founding leader persist over time in the Bolivian culture

after this leader is no longer leading the organization. Using a multi-level approach with current

leaders and organizational members, the presence or absence of organizational servant leader

behaviors in these organizations was first determined by administering the Organizational

Leadership Assessment (OLA)[2]. Subsequently, semi structured interviews with six individuals

from each organization were conducted to gain insight into their perceptions of present-day

servant leadership, trust, and gender influence as experienced within the framework of the

Bolivian culture. The phenomenological approach was chosen for this study to "bring to the fore

the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore . . .

challenge structural or normative assumptions" [3] of theory and cultural dimensions. Both the

OLA results and the interview data confirmed the presence of servant leader behaviors within the

Universidad Evangelica Boliviana and the Rio Nuevo Educational Society 30 and 50 years after

their founding, respectively, highlighting the lasting influence that can be achieved even against

cultural odds through the application of genuine servant leadership as an essential part of

effective missionary methods.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Meredythe Scheflen may never have risen in prominence within the ranks of evangelical missiology, having never published scholarly articles or extensive treatises on the theological dilemmas of strategic cross-cultural leadership. Yet, if there is any measure of success, this humble lady, worthy of her honorary doctorate, achieved it by establishing what is arguably the most influential evangelical endeavor in the South American country of Bolivia.

For over 55 years, Dr. Scheflen lived out her missionary calling by consistently demonstrating the characteristics that have come to be associated with the theory of servant leadership: Love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. As a single foreign female commissioned in the 1950s to a traditionally low-trust culture entrenched in a paternalistic worldview, her survival, much less her success, was improbable, as she was told by at least one mission organization. However, her method of doing missions, true servant leadership, along with an integral reliance upon God's grace and sovereign guidance, allowed her to leave a legacy that continues to impact an entire country, imparting biblical truth and principles which have changed the lives of thousands of children, young people, and professionals each year for over 50 years.

Such methodology merits serious consideration, yet little research has been done that bridges the gap between the academic fields of leadership and missiology. This article is an effort to move in that direction while honoring the legacy of a true servant leader, Dr. Meredythe Scheflen.

Although cross-cultural leadership studies have grown in scope and importance in our increasingly globalized society, there has been little attempt to meld these studies with current evangelical mission work. However, leadership theory is, perhaps, as fundamental as theological,

sociological, and missiological studies in providing a theoretical framework from which to build effective cross-cultural strategies. In discussing the impact of missionary methods on an indigenous culture, it is necessary to address the leadership behaviors that missionaries employ not only within their Western organizations but, more importantly, in relation to their co-workers or followers from the target culture.

There is very little existent research linking missionaries (i.e. cross-cultural *Christian* workers) to their leadership of indigenous or national colleagues. Notice, I say colleagues, because too often the 'sent' remain distant from the 'served' and are seen as two distinct entities with entirely separate leadership structures. While spending eighteen years on the mission field, the social scientist in me observed many instances where foreign missionaries poured their heart and soul into teaching, pastoring, evangelizing and even establishing ministries that were almost completely void of direct input and cooperation from the very people they had come to serve. Thus, the leader-follower relationship should be examined within the context of cross-cultural missions.

In my study of leadership theory, it became evident that servant leadership has grown recently as a popular Christian trend so much that it seems to be overused and little understood. While many Christian workers profess to be servant leaders, very few really understand, or live up to, the theoretical framework of this leadership model.

Furthermore, upon understanding the implications of laying aside traditional transactional or hierarchical leadership models for one that gives up ones' rights, it seemed incongruent with the culture in which I was serving in Bolivia. After all, in a society where high power distance and low trust cultural dimensions predominated everyday life in very real oppression and distrust, could it really be possible that servant leadership could be effective? Could it actually permeate

an organization and make a lasting change on individual followers over an extended period of time?

If Jesus fits the model of servant leadership, according to current theory, then it seems evident that his was a successful endeavor and left a lasting impact not only on his direct disciples but also on generations that followed. Was this an exception, or could this leadership model really be effective in modern cross-cultural missiology?

This article reports on the results of a phenomenological study on the lasting impact of servant leadership behaviors on two educational organizations in Bolivia that were founded 30 and 50 years ago by the female foreign missionary educator, Dr. Meredythe Scheflen.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership theory has been gaining importance over the past three decades within the corporate business world as a viable alternative to hierarchical, transactional leader-follower relationships. Formally developed by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s, it was based upon insights gained from reading *Journey to the East*, a book written by Herman Hesse. The book tells the tale of a menial servant to a band of journeying men who, in the end, turned out to be a great and effective leader. Greenleaf's[4] proposition was that a great leader should first be a servant to those he or she intends to influence.

Obviously, this falls directly in line with biblical theology as evidenced by Jesus' admonishment to model a different type of leadership than that which was prevalent in the culture of the day:

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great

among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:25-28, New International Version)

Based on Greenleaf's original writings, and in cooperation with Spears[5] and others at The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, a list of 10 principle characteristics of servant leadership was drawn up to include: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. In essence, servant leadership

> emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making. At its core, servant leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being – that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society. (Spears 1998: 3)

Other scholars have since developed variations of this original servant leadership model. For the purpose of this study, Patterson's[6] model was chosen because it has distilled the servant leader characteristics into seven basic categories: (1) Agapao love, (2) humility, (3) altruism, (4) vision, (5) trust, (6) empowerment of followers, and (7) service. It is important to note that all servant leadership models include trust, or factors closely associated with trust, such as integrity or credibility, as vital characteristics of servant leadership.[7] As stated by Spears[8]

> There is a deep hunger in our society for a world where people truly care for one another, where people are treated humanely and helped in their personal growth, where workers and customers are treated fairly, and where our leaders can be trusted to serve the needs of the many, rather than the few.

As Christian leaders, we promote servant leadership as foundational to our calling and ministry. However, the test is in how our actions actually support our theory. Theologically, for example, there is little debate that Jesus was the supreme model of servant leadership. His actions undoubtedly define him as a servant leader even according to Patterson's model with the

characteristics of agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment of followers, and service.

The results of Jesus' servant leadership, even against all cultural norms, are evident. The small group of 12 disciples who were closest to him went on to establish a world-wide religious movement that continues to grow and impact lives today, over 2000 years since he actually lived among us. Certainly, the Holy Spirit, divine intervention and the fulfilling of God's divine purpose also has something to do with the success of Jesus' enterprise and, as we will see, the combination of these same factors continues to work together harmoniously in the most successful missions endeavors in present-day missiology.

<div align="center">Dr. Scheflen's leadership style</div>

Dr. Meredythe Scheflen, by all accounts, was an unassuming Christian leader who changed the educational systems of Bolivia on all levels. As a North American, single female missionary, she spent over 55 years working side-by-side with national leaders to establish a conglomerate of evangelical educational institutions that have served as the basis for a growing Christian education movement throughout the country. Dr. Scheflen began her missionary service by working with non-schooled elementary-age children in a remote jungle area. This simple activity grew and gained momentum as classes from different years were added. Upon moving to the city of Santa Cruz, she continued this endeavor in a local church. Again, as the classes grew, the elementary school eventually expanded into one high school, then another, then a Bible school, and finally led to the foundation of the first private evangelical university in Bolivia. Such was her success that, over the years, graduates of these institutions went on to establish many other evangelical schools around the country that continue to form and influence generations of children and youth through quality education based on biblical principles.

Although she was never the leader of any mission organization, and rarely took on the highest titles of leadership in the schools she founded, Dr. Scheflen was considered the founder and was repeatedly honored by local schools, civic organizations, churches, and professional organizations as well as the governments of both Bolivia and the United States.

What was the secret of her successful missionary career? Was it a strong overarching strategy or vision that she carried from years of theological and missions formation? Research on Dr. Scheflen's life and work showed that she consistently exhibited the very servant leadership behaviors discussed earlier.[9]

Dr. Scheflen demonstrated agapao love

Dr. Scheflen made a great sacrifice and commitment to live and work among the people she loved in Bolivia for over 50 years. Interviews with national believers confirmed that she always "expected the best from others, treating them with respect and genuine love, which motivated them to work harder and follow her example."[10] She was "able to be everybody's friend . . . if she went to the offices, she hugged everyone, asking how they were doing . . . and everyone felt that she was more of a friend than a boss."[11]

Dr. Scheflen acted with humility

Her unpublished autobiography gives insight into how Dr. Scheflen was able to accomplish what others may have considered impossible feats. Throughout the manuscript the humility of her heart is evident as she gave credit to God's empowering as she dedicated her life to serve God and others.

> Whatever may have been accomplished in my labors here in Bolivia, it has not been by personal merit, but by the combined impact of the influences, opportunities, and experiences that the grace of God has made possible in my life. I am debtor to Christian parents, to faithful professors, supportive friends, godly pastors, wholesome institutions, and above all, to the transforming, enabling, and keeping power of God. (Scheflen 2003, 60)

6

Dr. Scheflen was altruistic

She demonstrated sacrificial, altruistic love for others by giving of her time and finances above and beyond anyone's expectations. One example was how she would take chickens to market late at night just to provide support for the budding University agricultural program.

Dr. Scheflen worked tirelessly for others even when much of the workload fell upon her shoulders. She was said to treat people with their best interests at heart and not merely as a means to an end. She often carried "a full load of classes at the Bible Institute and serve[d] as Academic Dean and Dean of Women, along with the direction of the Rio Nuevo School and the new Berea Secondary School"[12] and commented that "many times as we dropped wearily into bed after still another trying day, we wondered if we would see another dawn."[13]

Dr. Scheflen was considered a visionary leader by her followers

Colleagues consistently commented that she could effectively communicate a vision in such a way that others soon adopted it as if it had been their own. This was referred to as her ability to "look at a corn field and see a university."[14]

> She has been a very good communicator of the visions that she dreamed. She would share once, twice, three times—she didn't keep track of time when it came to communicating. How many times did she stay up till the wee hours of the morning talking about her dreams with the authorities; talking about her vision, her vision, her vision.[15]

Dr. Scheflen was trusting

Dr. Scheflen was characterized as having a high level of integrity, acting in a way that was consistent with her beliefs regardless of whether her opinion was socially or politically correct. "She held to her beliefs because she had experienced them to be true."[16]

Dr. Scheflen empowered followers

She would entrust others with responsibility, showing that she believed in them and trusted them to live up to that expectation. One follower commented, she "believed in me and

gave me responsibilities and the opportunity to learn and grow as a leader."[17] She respected

people and "stimulated them to do their best. She (saw) the good in people and recognized it."[18]

Dr. Scheflen would encourage her followers by helping them to overcome obstacles,

believe in themselves and be optimistic about the future. One colleague said she "learned [from

Dr. Scheflen] to be brave, to not be afraid to confront any situation." She realized that "if she can

do it why shouldn't I be able to as well?"[19]

Dr. Scheflen was serving

Dr. Scheflen was known for her generosity and sacrificial service to all. "She helped the

whole world. She shows interest in people and helps everyone who asks."[20]

Cultural Implications

Dr. Scheflen's experience highlights the possibility that there was something about her

that allowed her to overcome at least four basic cultural dimensions that should have been

working against her success:

1) She was a highly trusting individual in a low-trust society;

2) She was an individualistic outsider in a closed, collectivist environment;

3) She had little or no official status in a high power distance setting; and

4) She was a woman in a male-dominated machismo culture.

Trust

Trust is the glue that holds society together as members confidently rely upon each other

to work towards the common good. Fairholm defined trust as "reliance on the integrity, or

authenticity, of other people . . . a logical, thoughtful hope in their reality, their authenticity, and

their truth."[21] It is "both an expectation and a personal obligation to be authentic, trustworthy,

and reliable… that helps define how and in what degree members value others."[22]

Latin America is considered a low-trust culture. [23] Part of this is due to the collectivistic orientation that is suspicious of outsiders. It is also due to incessant abuse, corruption and oppression by those in positions of power; positions that are not usually earned by one's merit or capability but by the relationships or 'who one knows'. Furthermore, leaders often feel entitlement at the expense of others, creating suspicion and distrust in their followers. This distrust is felt at all levels and directly impacts leadership effectiveness.

Trust, however, is a central concept to many Western leadership theories, including servant leadership. Followers constantly monitor their leaders' actions in order to determine whether they are consistent in upholding the values and convictions they espouse through their decisions and actions. Gaining trust in such an environment can prove nearly impossible, yet Dr. Scheflen seemed to achieve an unusually high level of trust as she demonstrated self-sacrificial service that was recognized as consistent with her espoused beliefs.

Collectivism

According to Hofstede's[24] cultural dimensions, collectivism or familialism, is a characteristic of societies that place an unusually high value on family and in-group ties; the only people who are regularly trusted are members of the in-group or extended family. This results in the exclusion and distrust of outsiders.

High power distance

High power distance[25] is another cultural dimension that favors the acceptance of an unequal distribution or access to power. It also contributes to the creation of a low-trust culture by creating double standards, restricted social mobility, and suspicion of those with access to resources. Organizations in such a society have a difficult time understanding, much less enacting, servant leadership.

Gender

There is some support for the possibility that even in low-trust cultures, such as those in Latin America, trust is more evident under the leadership of women.[26] This could be because they generally adopt a more participative leadership style.[27] and less prone to corruption.[28]

In Latin America, although the macho image maintains a man's dignity, women are the ones who provide care and nurture as well as carry much of the responsibility for the home including the oversight of economic resources. Women may not always be at the forefront in positions of leadership in machismo societies but they are often the influential driving force behind the scenes. As a woman in a male-dominated society, Dr. Scheflen was able to exercise leadership that included warm, altruistic love for her followers which, in turn, gained their love, respect and trust. Servant leader behaviors, feminine traits of nurturing care, and being a foreigner seemed to allow her to lead effectively in a low-trust culture by allowing her to show altruistic love and transparent integrity that is not common in Bolivian leaders.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to determine if there was a lasting influence of these servant behaviors on the organizations founded by Dr. Meredythe Scheflen in Bolivia between 30 and 50 years ago. The primary question addressed was: Do the servant leadership principles established by a cross-cultural female founding leader persist over time in the Bolivian culture after this leader is no longer leading the organization?

Two major educational institutions founded by Dr. Meredythe Scheflen, the Rio Nuevo Educational Society and the Universidad Evangelica Boliviana (UEB) in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, were included in the study. On the institutional level the Organizational Leadership Assessment

(OLA; Laub, 1999) was used to determine the current presence of servant leader behaviors. On the individual level, in-depth interviews were conducted with six members from different levels within each organization to determine whether or not they perceive servant leader behaviors in their educational setting. All data was collected in person and in Spanish, the native language of the participants.

Laub's Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) instrument[29] was developed in an attempt to identify servant leader behaviors within organization. It focuses on the leader–organization relationship, based on the assumption that that leaders do not operate in a vacuum. The six areas of organizational servant leadership examined in the OLA are: (a) values people, (b) develops people, (c) builds community, (d) displays authenticity, (e) provides leadership, and (f) shares leadership.

Six individuals were randomly chosen from each organization to respond to 12 open-ended questions in a personal interview about their perceptions of the influence of servant leader behaviors in the present-day organization, trust, gender issues, and the influence of the founder. Those interviewed included two individuals representing each organizational level: top leadership (top level of leadership), management (supervisors/ directors), and the general workforce (staff members, teachers).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

OLA Data

The main outcome of the survey was the determination of a level of organizational health in relation to servant leadership. Organizational health is reported as a power level, from 1 to 5, which is indicative of the extent to which servant leadership is perceived to be practiced within

the organization. Org1 and Org2 power levels are considered Toxic and Poor Health, respectively, and grouped as levels pertaining to Autocratic Leadership. Org3 and Org4, Limited and Moderate Health, are indicative of Paternalistic Leadership, and Org5 and Org6 power levels, Excellent and Optimal Health, refer to those organizations that report the perceived existence of the highest level of the characteristics of servant leadership.[30]

The Rio Nuevo Educational Society was determined by the OLA to be a Level 4 organization under the category of Moderate Health. The majority of the respondents were from the workforce level ($n = 39$), but there was representation from management ($n = 2$) and top leadership ($n = 2$) positions as well.

Key patterns that were highlighted in the executive summary of OLA results for both the Rio Nuevo Educational Society and the UEB were that both workers and leaders "perceive the Organization, as a whole, more positively than the leadership,"[31] and "workers are looking for more responsibility and authority to do their jobs."[32]

The Rio Nuevo Educational Society scored above the average score of all organizations that have taken the OLA ($n = 365$) in all six areas that determine organizational health. The scores were particularly high, nearly in the category of Excellent Health, for Value People and Build Community. Although the scores did not place the educational society in the ranks of a true servant leadership organization, it is apparent that it displays more servant leader characteristics than most organizations. This is significant considering that most of the organizations that have taken the OLA are not in the Latin American culture, with limited trust, yet the educational society still outscored them.[33]

The UEB scored much closer or slightly below the average scores of all of the organizations that have taken the OLA ($n = 365$). It was determined by the OLA to be a Level 3

organization under the category of Limited Health. While the UEB scored differently and lower than the Rio Nuevo Educational Society, it is still important to note that this organization within the Latin American cultural context has scored on par with other varied organizations from around the world.[34]

Once again, although to a lesser degree than the Rio Nuevo Educational Society, the strongest areas of organizational health at the UEB are also Value People and Build Community. All of the other areas at both institutions were nearly equal and strong; however, it is interesting to note that the weakest area for the UEB, according to the OLA, is the area Share Leadership.

Interview Data

Interviews were done with six individuals from each organization. Although these were selected randomly, some care was given to get a diverse group of participants that would represent not only each organizational level but also each gender and different age groups. These were coded with letters and a number according to their organization, Rio Nuevo (RN) or University (UEB). Each response to every question was then coded in depth with every phrase being coded to multiple nodes or topic areas, such as *feelings of belonging*, *expressions of insecurity*, *fear*, *commitment to the organization*, and *frustration*—to name just a few. These were derived from the data itself and covered a wide gamut of subjects. After coding all of the questions from each of the 12 interviews, these topic areas were distilled into themes that were then categorized under the OLA leadership areas upon which they shed light. The result was an overlapping of data from all questions that was related to many of the leadership areas.

For each servant leader characteristic, one or two interview questions were specifically aimed at gathering data on individual responses regarding these characteristics.

Value People

13

Question 1: Explain how you feel valued in your organization as a person and/or for your professional contributions.
Question 2: Explain how your needs and concerns are taken into account by the leadership of the organization.

Of the six participants interviewed at the Rio Nuevo school system, all of them affirmed they felt valued as a person and for their professional contributions to the organization. Four of them mentioned they felt they had the support of all their supervisors and colleagues with one saying expressly that she felt "appreciated by all" (RN6).

Five of the six participants from the UEB also affirmed they felt valued although they qualified their answers in different ways. For example, two interviewees said they felt valued "by some authorities, but not others" (UEB4, UEB5), and they thought the situation was better "before" (UEB1). Another person felt the authorities just now valued her "now that I'm leaving" (UEB3), and two of the respondents mentioned they were at least verbally appreciated but they did not see a corresponding response in action (UEB1, UEB3). They did not receive material support for their job, expressed a lack of personal encouragement, and had not received financial remuneration for increased responsibility (UEB4, UEB5). One individual responded negatively that she did not feel valued at all, having been in the same position, receiving the same salary for over 10 years in spite of constant attention to professional development (UEB5).

One of the leaders at the Rio Nuevo school system discussed how long- and short-term plans were methodically prepared by the directors, approved by the General Assembly of members, and then carefully followed to ensure that the needs of the organization and all individuals within it were sufficiently met (RN1). Other interviewees affirmed this approach, saying the "leadership functions well" (RN3) and "they are always ready to help with anything I ask for, not denying anything, even economically" (RN5). One individual mentioned that

because of their sincere interest in the cause of Christian education, the leaders are supportive of her initiatives and give her the freedom to carry out her plans (RN6). All respondents expressed satisfaction that their personal financial needs were met.

People in both organizations felt there was a genuinely caring atmosphere among colleagues and towards the students they work to serve. There was an effort in Rio Nuevo to help each other with problems, to give advice when necessary, or to be attentive "in order to understand why a professor is sad" or has some unmet need (RN6). At the UEB, special concern was shown on several occasions to individuals who were suffering illnesses associated with stress. One individual expressed gratitude that, after taking a leave of absence for health reasons, he was able to "return to a place where [he] feels [he] can contribute to the University" (UEB2).

Share leadership

Question 3: Describe the relational atmosphere of your organization.
Question 4: Explain why you are willing or not willing to do what is necessary for the organization whether it benefits you personally or not.

Overall, the individuals from both the Rio Nuevo Educational Society and the UEB described a warm, caring atmosphere that is distinct from other workplaces they have experienced, mainly because of the Christian heritage and extended family relationships that have been nurtured over many years. They emphasized the fact that they "get along just great, like a family, just perfectly" (RN5). "No one is a negative influence" and "there is a good relationship between people . . . like a family" (RN6). Although certain individuals may be less enthusiastic than others, for the most part, there is a willingness to collaborate on projects and to go beyond the expectations of a particular job description. It was mentioned that, as Christian institutions, they differ from other organizations because people are not clamoring for the position of others, trying to put people down, or "fighting for power" (UEB3). One interviewee

said, "since we are working with Christian colleagues, it is my perception that there is harmony, at least in this office there is harmony . . . and this is quite different from the place I did my internship" (UEB6).

Individuals at all levels in the Rio Nuevo school system felt that those who recognized God's sovereignty in their lives showed humility and were "willing to serve and to help us so that we can do our best" (RN5).

> I do not feel that I have special rights (as the child of a partner) . . . but I am conscious that God put me here because this was not something that I sought but that I had prayed about. I put everything in the Lord's hands and He will place me wherever and whenever He wants. (RN4)

At the university, there was also a strong sense of calling to the job as a ministry as expressed by one individual who said that "as long as the Lord says, 'this is your ministry, your place,' then I must give it my all" (UEB2). Humility was also evident in comments about realizing one is not indispensable and no one is perfect.

> Things will continue to function even if you are not here. That doesn't mean that you should do your work haphazardly; while you are here you should give your all. But you also need to realize that we are just passing through and this passage should be transcendental so that when we are gone they will remember us and say "that person, yes, was effective." What else are we going to take with us? Nothing, right? I believe that is our satisfaction, having been able to influence others. (UEB2)

Provide leadership

> Question 5: Explain how the vision/mission of the organization is determined, carried out, and shared with its members.
> Question 6: Describe who or what has most influenced the present vision of your organization.

The vision of the Rio Nuevo school system is "Christ-centered" with "all of the teaching [centered] on the purpose that many can know the Lord" (RN6). One interviewee said, "even though the school is not 100% evangelical, there are many students accepting Christ and they do not forget their instruction here" (RN5).

In the hiring process, prospective teachers are asked about their view on the purpose of the school. They are expected to know that "more than teaching knowledge, it is about planting the Word of God, the Seed" (RN4). However, although the vision is purposefully "imparted to new personnel" (RN2), many still "do not even know the mission . . . it is there on paper but very few can say it" (RN4). Nonetheless, as the coordinator of spiritual life pointed out, "even though I don't worry about memorizing the vision, I know it . . . it is very clear for us" (RN6). "It is there implicitly" (RN4).

The interviewees at the UEB knew that it was also born with a clear vision and mission "that throughout these 30 years has been carried out in good part" (UEB2). Many things have been accomplished over this time in spite of the fact that early leadership was perceived to have often acted "on a whim" (UEB2). Whereas, "before it was more heart, more desire to do things, but without much planning" in the "last 5 or 6 years, there is a more formal way of imparting the mission and the vision" (UEB3).

Dr. Meredythe Scheflen, the founder of the Rio Nuevo Educational Society and the UEB, was nearly unanimously mentioned as having a profound influence on the vision and mission of the current organization. One person from Rio Nuevo said, "the one who has had the most influence is Miss Mery, very much influence. We have taken that, at least I have, as a long term vision and we are managing to achieve it" (RN3). Similarly, another from the University

commented, "Miss Mery, in the time when she was part of the executive body, was always insisting on [it] and she really lived it!" (UEB4)

Display authenticity

> Question 7: Explain how much you trust your leaders and feel that they trust you.
> Question 8: Describe the level of transparency/authenticity in your organization as compared to other organizations in Bolivia.

The individuals from the Rio Nuevo Educational Society felt there was a high degree of trust among all levels of leaders and personnel within the system. For example, when asked if she felt her leaders trusted her to make decisions, one individual responded, "yes, yes, that is for sure" (RN4). Others responded similarly with regard to trust saying that "at the university, it was felt that there is a degree of trust at most times, but "it is not the norm" (UEB3).

> In my department one of the main elements is trust . . . because it is possible to falsify grades and no one would even know . . . So I believe they have a high degree of trust in the work I am doing and any paper that I put on their desk they sign because they know that I am doing well. (UEB4)

Although one individual stated, "everything is very transparent" (RN5), another said, "there isn't a lot of transparency in that they don't inform us directly of the decisions they make. There isn't much communication that 'this is what is happening' or 'it is like this'" (RN4). Others clarified that it was not an issue of trust as much as frustration in not being included in the decision-making process.

The UEB enjoys a distinct reputation of integrity within the general community. Within the university itself, it was felt there was a high level of integrity particularly in dealing with legal matters that oftentimes are considered optional within the general Bolivian culture.

> There is a difference [from other institutions] . . . In talking about transparency, we need we have to mention the image that we project to others as well. When we

18

celebrated 30 years, many authorities at the banquet spoke in favor of the
university, praising it in a way that reflects the image that it has. (UEB1)

Develop people

Question 9: Explain how you feel that you have been developed as a leader in your
organization.

Within the Rio Nuevo Educational Society, one of the ways mentioned for helping to

develop people was a keen understanding of individual abilities and interests. This was

particularly true regarding teachers and the level of their participation in school activities. There

was an attitude of appreciation for the encouragement of the directors and administration in

giving employees a sense of creativity for coming up with ideas that can be approved and carried

out.

Like the Rio Nuevo Educational Society, the UEB also had an environment where many

of the higher-level authorities had been there for a very long time. Many had come through the

school system and later moved into the university. A few worked together with the founder and

the original board in establishing the university 30 years ago. Others were second- or third-

generation leaders. Over the years, the UEB had cultivated these individuals by regularly placing

them in positions of increased responsibility.

I have developed myself here since I was a student, then an assistant, later head of
the laboratory . . . always advancing. (UEB2)

My professional growth has been very nice because I started as an hourly
professor, then part time, then full time, then department head, and later head of
investigation. My advancement has been gradual and in each step I had to learn
through trial and error because there wasn't any clear instruction on the
responsibilities of each role. (UEB3)

Build community

Question 10: Explain why you are committed or not committed to your organization.
Question 11: If someone offered you a similar position at a different/competing institution would you accept? Why or why not?

The environment at the Rio Nuevo school system was often referred to as a family atmosphere. "We get along really well, just like a family" (RN5). "One of the best things about this institution is that the older people are like our parents, giving us a sermon like a father" (RN6).

The situation at Rio Nuevo was unique because not only are many of the society members still active in the school system but their children and even grand-children are students, teachers, and even directors. It was considered to be a close-knit community of Christians whose families have become intertwined over the course of the past 50 years.

As far as intentions to leave or the willingness to move on if offered a similar position in another organization, no one expressed any desire to do this unless he or she felt it was clearly a new direction from God. "To work in another institution? No, I would only consider leaving in order to spend more time with my family" (RN2).

At the UEB, commitment meant being willing to do anything for the institution even when there would be no personal benefit gained. "I love the university and everything here . . . because I see it as a service and I have really seen lives changed . . . I would give everything for her, even though I don't feel personally benefitted" (UEB5). Part of the reason for such loyalty and dedication at the UEB was because of a commitment to the original founder.

> Yes, I am totally committed to the university. I feel that it is my second home. . . . I have my house nearby and do everything thinking of this institution. It is something that we founded with Miss Mery, my spiritual mother. I must accompany her until the end. (UEB1)

When asked about the possibility of leaving if offered a similar position, there were mixed responses. "No, no that would be a lack of loyalty," said one teacher who confessed that once, when offered the opportunity to teach a course elsewhere, she was "torn by her conscience" about it and finally turned them down (UEB1).

Leader as servant

Since this study sought to determine the perception of the presence of servant leader behaviors within the Rio Nuevo Educational Society and the UEB, two additional questions were included in the interviews specifically for this purpose.

> Question 12: Have you seen servant leadership modeled in your organization? Please describe.
> Question 13: Describe a model leader from your organization.

Responses were vague and unspecific from individuals in the Rio Nuevo school system, as if there was uncertainty as to exactly what servant leadership meant. In considering a model leader, one respondent spoke about everyone on the board being Christians, "although some with more conservative ideas than others" (RN2). One said she had not "seen it much because most people expect to be served and expect personal benefits more than serving others" (RN4). A model leader to her would be "giving completely of oneself . . . not in search of personal benefit. Giving more time, not in the sense of just being here, but in giving all of one's time by giving the best of oneself" (RN4).

One individual at the UEB discussed how it was necessary for leaders to demonstrate humility, recognizing one's weaknesses and errors, in order to gain the respect of others that would qualify him or her as a servant leader. In response to being asked to name a model leader, the most frequently mentioned was Dr. Meredythe Scheflen,

who is my star. There are many things about her that I admire. I don't know if someday I will ever be like her, but I admire her. I see her as a light. I consider her to be a servant leader, totally surrendered at the feet of the Lord. (UEB3)

Throughout all of the interviews, characteristics were expressed that led to a description of the culture of valuing people at the Rio Nuevo school system and the UEB. One of these characteristics was the repeated expression of the willingness of individuals to serve others. As one individual said, "we are here to serve, not to be served, so we should take this position and attitude towards other people" (RN1). This type of service often stemmed from a profound expression of a sense of calling by God to this place and work. More than one person claimed to "put everything in the Lord's hands" (RN4), therefore, giving completely of oneself to the institution.

People in both organizations felt there was a genuinely caring atmosphere among colleagues and towards the students they work to serve. There was an effort in Rio Nuevo to help each other with problems, to give advice when necessary, or to be attentive "in order to understand why a professor is sad" or has some unmet need (RN6).

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the lasting influence of a female cross-cultural servant leader on the organizations she founded over 50 years ago. As corroborated by both the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) and personal interviews with organization members, there is strong evidence that servant leadership characteristics are still present within both organizations founded by the Dr. Meredythe Scheflen. The overall positive result in each of the six areas of organizational health is indicative of the persistence of the influence of servant leadership upon both the Rio Nuevo Educational Society and the UEB.

Although there are differences and deficiencies in each area, as with any organization, overall, and against the Bolivian low-trust cultural context, the results indicate that there has been an enduring effect of Dr. Meredythe Scheflen's founding leadership upon these organizations.

It is posited, therefore, that there is an increasing need to understand successful cross-cultural and servant leadership in the global context specifically within the field of missiology. Validating that servant leader behaviors have the ability to be passed down over time in a low-trust society testifies to the effectiveness of this method of doing missions even where outsiders may otherwise be unable to leave an enduring legacy. May all those who serve in the capacity of missionaries consider whether their leadership truly reflects the characteristics of a servant leader according to the model discussed here.

Endnotes

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