



SERVANT LEADERSHIP

A Whitepaper by Enparadigm:

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A well-defined leadership philosophy enables leaders to face situations with a clear mindset. It helps them be cognizant of their intent and the outcomes they want to achieve. In the absence of a clear leadership mantra, leaders become reactive and are forced to rely solely on their intuition, personal experience, and other people.ⁱ

Leadership experts are exploring philosophies that help leaders navigate the current VUCA environment and create maximum business impact. One such leadership philosophy that has become increasingly relevant for the current business environment and Future of Work is Servant Leadership.



Origins

The term 'Servant Leader' was coined in 1970 after Robert Greenleaf, a former AT&T executive published a seminal essay, 'The Servant as a Leader.' ⁱⁱ Greenleaf observed that leaders typically adopt two fundamentally different philosophies at work. Some focussed on serving themselves while others emphasized serving others. He noted that the latter was more effective in their roles over time. ⁱⁱⁱ While many leaders in past centuries had emphasized serving others, Greenleaf was the first to articulate a leadership philosophy centered on this concept.

Servant leadership is a holistic, stakeholder-centric philosophy that is more employee-focused than traditional leadership models. Servant Leaders identify employees as the most influential element in achieving organizational results and prioritize the good of their stakeholders. They value the growth, well-being, and psychological safety of their team ^{iv} and practice power-sharing, mindfulness, and compassion ^v to achieve their goals. Even though the term servant may not sound as powerful as boss, it is far more influential and effective in the Future of Work. ^{vi}

Over the past few decades, many companies, including Google, Southwest Airlines, FedEx, Starbucks and SAS, have adopted servant leadership. Prominent business leaders such as Jeff Weiner and Ratan Tata have also adopted this leadership style as their mantra.

"The highest type of ruler is one of whose existence the people are barely aware.... The Sage is self-effacing and scanty of words. When his task is accomplished and things have been completed, all the people say, 'We ourselves have achieved it!'"

- Lao-Tzu, fifth century BC is one of the earliest known advocates of principles that eventually became servant leadership.



The Rising Relevance of Servant Leadership



“There is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come.”

- Victor Hugo

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The emphasis of leaders in modern-day organizations is on stakeholder value co-creation. Today, leaders need to meet the dynamic interests of their diverse stakeholders – including shareholders, employees, customers, partners, and the larger society. ^{vii} It requires leaders to deviate from traditional models of leadership and adopt a more holistic approach to leadership.

The rising significance of servant leadership is also driven by the changes to Work, Workplace, and Workforce, the key drivers that shape the Future of Work. The technology and automation-driven change to Work and shift to hybrid workplaces have changed the structure of Workforce.

The idea of Servant Leadership gains prominence ^{viii} in this context as it helps organizations address the five needs associated with the Future of Work.



Agility

To compete in the Future of Work, organizations need to reduce bureaucracy and become flatter and faster. ^{ix} It requires providing ownership and autonomy to employees while ensuring accountability. However, a recent study ^x found that more than two-thirds of organizations are becoming more bureaucratic and only 10 percent of employees across organizations had

autonomy. Unless employees have autonomy, firms cannot respond to their environment fast enough or achieve stakeholder satisfaction.



Prudent growth

Organizations need to ensure growth while managing associated risks well. Creating psychological safety in teams is vital to achieving this. ^{xi} Unless leaders are perceived to be compassionate and respectful, team members will hesitate to take risks or experiment. When members are not afraid to seek help, acknowledge mistakes, and learn from others, organizations become more innovative and agile.



Partnership focus

Changes in demographics and higher mobility prospects for critical talent are changing the expectations of the Workforce. This is bringing a fundamental shift in organizational structures, moving from rigid teams to agile collaborations. Leading alongside, rather than hierarchical leadership, will be pivotal in Future of Work as cross-functional and cross-organizational agile partnerships grow in relevance. ^{xii}



Employee well-being

Leaders account for more than 70 percent of the variance in the level of engagement of their employees. ^{xiii} The most significant risk to employee well-being is the constant threat of employee burnout due to stress. A recent global study ^{xiv} found that nearly 50 percent of Gen Z and millennials are almost always stressed, and roughly half of them take breaks without disclosing the real reason to their managers, fearing stigma. Research suggests that employees prefer happiness to high pay ^{xv} and seek to work in organizations where they can bring their whole, authentic selves to work.



Corporate Citizenship

For yesteryear organizations, it was enough to generate employment opportunities and develop the local economy to fulfill their social responsibility. This has changed. The government and civil society now expect organizations to contribute to a better world around them through sustainable growth and community development initiatives. There is a stronger emphasis on protecting the rights of each stakeholder group. The regulations and policies actively nudge organizations into demonstrating active 'corporate citizenship.' As a result, leaders are moving away from profit-driven and authoritarian leadership styles to more purpose-driven and inclusive forms of leadership. ^{xvi}

Servant leadership helps organizations meet these five needs and creates an agile, stakeholder-centric and productive workforce.



The Effectiveness of Servant Leadership

Leading scholars have validated the effectiveness of servant leadership. Researchers have found that servant leadership achieves more self-motivated employees, improved top-line and bottom-line, stronger stakeholder relationships, and leadership development. ^{xvii}

A report on Examination of Servant Leadership's Direct, Indirect and Total Effects on Branch Financial Performance by a team of researchers from multiple US universities found that Servant leadership can improve performance by 40 percent and innovation by over 50 percent. ^{xviii} It has also been found to have a 70 percent positive impact on financial performance. ^{xix} Servant leaders are also likely to find their roles more purposeful and be happier.



The make-up of a Servant Leader

Servant leadership can be developed by individuals irrespective of their predispositions. While many leaders innately possess some servant leadership attributes, they can be developed over time. Servant leaders possess seven defining behaviors, which are observable and measurable: ^{xx}



Behavior 1: Demonstrate conceptual skills

Servant leaders understand the organization as a whole, the inter-dependency of its parts, and how they relate to the external environment. This understanding helps servant leaders develop the foresight to envision the future of the organization. They can create acceptance for this vision through the distinct ability to conceptualize & communicate the vision with clarity & contextual understanding to various stakeholders.



Behavior 2: Empowerment

After setting the vision, servant leaders are inclined to step back and allow the team to take the lead in implementation. They constantly explore how they can enable their team members to be effective in the implementation process.^{xxi} Through empathy and an active commitment to the growth of their teams, servant leaders can delegate well and materialize their vision.



Behavior 3: Emotional Healing

A stressful business environment is the norm and not the exception for most decision-makers. However,

their judgment often suffers under stress. This has consequences at a personal level, for the organization, and the teams they work with.^{xxii} Great servant leaders are mindful of their behaviors and have control over their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Having a deep-rooted personal philosophy of servant leadership enables leaders to practice habits like forgiveness, inclination to apologize in case of mistakes, and self-healing.

Most leaders believe they are empathetic and fun to work with. It may be true most of the time. However, the litmus test for leaders is how they respond to stressful situations. While leaders may appear compassionate 95 percent of the time, more than 40 percent lose their cool in stressful circumstances. Great servant leaders are mindful of their behaviours and have control of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions.



Behavior 4: Putting others first

Leaders often lose touch with the pulse of their organization and their customers as they rise to leadership roles. Servant leaders are largely immune to this effect. When leaders remove self-interest and are perceived as others-oriented, it inspires trust in their followers. Servant leaders are good listeners and are adept at the art of persuasion, which reduces interpersonal fear. They take a genuine interest in understanding and solving the challenges faced by their teams, customers and other stakeholders. This characteristic helps servant leaders to listen without judgment.



Behavior 5: Behaving ethically

As they rise in leadership roles, leaders need to uphold the highest standards of integrity. Leaders need to practice accountability and respect the rights, diversity, and dignity of their stakeholders and refrain from bending any rules to achieve their goals.^{xxiii} Servant leadership brings these to the forefront.



Behavior 6: Helping others grow and succeed

When Daniel Goleman researched leadership preferences in 2000, most leaders ranked 'developing others' as their least favorite style.^{xxiv} It was considered too tedious and time-consuming. However, the modern-day workplace requires leaders to invest in their teams.^{xxv} Great servant leaders are keen to develop every stakeholder they work with, including vendors and customers.^{xxvi} More importantly, they don't look for developing only the immediately monetizable qualities in others. Instead, servant leaders focus on their holistic development through their commitment to the overall growth of all stakeholders.



Behavior 7: Creating value for the community

Greenleaf, the pioneer of servant leadership, believed that the 'acid test' of servant leaders is to produce followers who would also serve the organization and those around them.^{xxvii} Servant leadership is a commitment to serve others, and most servant leaders invest their time, energy, and other resources to make the world a better place, and lead a "Life of Significance" through genuine contribution to their communities.

7 Behaviors of Servant Leaders

07 Creating value for the community

Practice and helping understand the value of giving back. Drawing attention to needs and gains and fostering the attitude to everyone helping everyone

06 Helping other grow & succeed

Growing people and helping them perform as a key strategy of long term success

05 Behaving Ethically

Practicing accountability. Respecting the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people



04 Putting others first

Focus on the needs of others first. Listening with empathy, objective and constructive feedback and coaching.

01 Demonstrate conceptual skills

Understand the organization as a whole, interdependency of parts, and how it relates to its external environment. Evaluate situations and develop alternative courses of action.

02 Empowerment

Effective win-win conversations. Prioritization and Goal setting. Delegation

03 Emotional Healing

Understanding self and practicing reflection. Process to take control of our thoughts, feelings and emotions

Transitioning towards Servant Leadership

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Despite its immense benefits and significance in Future of Work, practicing servant leadership philosophy is not easy. Many leaders hesitate to practice servant leadership due to its inherent challenges.^{xxviii} There are four common reasons why some leaders are reluctant to take up servant leadership.



1. Sharing power while ensuring accountability

The ability to provide ownership while ensuring accountability is a crucial attribute of servant leadership. Giving ownership to team members requires leaders to share control. This can be intimidating, uncomfortable, and challenging for leaders accustomed to autocratic leadership, focused on gaining power rather than sharing it. Sharing power is easier when leaders feel safe and secure themselves. It requires leaders to exhibit trust in their team and have a commitment to developing them.



2. Concerns over generosity burnout

Servant leadership comes with significant energy costs. It requires leaders to expend considerable time and emotional energy looking after the well-being of others and helping them succeed. This generosity burnout^{xxix} requires leaders to understand how they can balance their well-being and others'.



3. Managing perceptions of being 'soft'

In some cases, leaders are concerned about appearing soft and weak if they adopt servant leadership traits. Many leaders believe that they should possess narcissistic, overconfident and Machiavellian qualities to be effective. Contrary to popular perception, these attributes are not the norm in leaders, nor do these qualities generally help them succeed as leaders.^{xxx} Research by Harvard University Professor Amy Cuddy and others found that servant leaders are more effective than those who lead with toughness and skill.^{xxxi}



4. Lack of know-how

Another reason why some leaders are reluctant to take up servant leadership is due to the skill gap. Some leaders prefer sticking to the tried and tested traditional leadership philosophies because they are not confident of their ability to succeed as servant leaders. Sharing ownership while being accountable, managing perceptions of being soft, being self-aware, and promoting the well-being of others without hampering personal well-being are not easy skills to master.



CRISP Levers to Achieve Servant Leadership in Organizations

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Organizations can play an active role in promoting servant leadership traits through the following CRISP levers:



Communication: Generating awareness on servant leadership and demonstrating a visible commitment to its ethos through appropriate communication plays a vital role in transmitting the culture across the organization. Storytelling is a great tool that can be leveraged to achieve it. In addition, communication through engaging digital tools & frameworks can enable faster transmission of the desired culture.



Role-modelling: Emulating leaders is one of the most important ways people learn to respond to their environment.^{xxxii} By role modeling servant traits, leaders can create the stakeholder-centric culture they desire. Leadership habits define sub-cultures in teams and set behavioral norms. Simulating business situations, making decisions based on the tenets of Servant Leadership, and seeing their impact drives insights faster and deeper within leaders and managers.





Integration: Servant leadership can be embedded in culture frameworks, competencies, policies, and talent management practices. Organizations can show their commitment towards servant leadership by reinforcing such behaviors. These values can be recognized and rewarded during selection, performance appraisal, and promotion decisions. Having an expert validated Servant Leadership Framework and getting it customized to your organization makes the integration faster and effective.

CRISP Levers to Build Organizational Alignment





Skilling: Through appropriate development interventions, organizations can provide opportunities for their critical talent to learn the know-how and nuances of servant leadership. Coaching conversations, expert-driven workshops, training modules, simulation interventions, and customized digital tools helps in skilling the organization with Servant Leadership.



Probing: Identifying ways to measure servant leadership attributes and their impact is essential. This can be done at a team level and organizational level. A starting point can be assessment performed by trusted partners & experts in Servant Leadership. Then, these attributes can be measured periodically using customized tools to monitor the adoption and effectiveness of tenets of Servant Leadership.

Adopting servant leadership philosophy will allow organizations to be ready for the Future of Work. Many studies show that servant leadership qualities will help leaders handle the complex challenges of today and the dynamic expectations of tomorrow. To be competitive, organizations need to be listening, empathetic, agile, and purposeful. This is what servant leadership strives to achieve. Servant leadership will enable businesses to become more agile, be innovative, and ensure sustainable growth.



How can Enparadigm help?

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Enparadigm, in partnership with Dr. Madana Kumar (PhD.) of Leadyne, an internationally acclaimed expert and evangelist of Servant Leadership, offers customized Servant Leadership in Action for Momentum (SLAM) program that helps leaders across levels understand and implement the tenets of servant leadership.

SLAM program participants undergo a blended learning journey to deliver practical, relevant, and impactful insights for sustained behavioral change. Enparadigm adopts a 4 A approach - Awareness, Acceptance, Application, and Advantage for comprehensive implementation. After a diagnostic study using tools like 360-degree feedback, SLAM participants are provided level-customized workshops, coaching, and ongoing support for self-reliance.

The SLAM methodology has been validated through implementations across the industry, academia, and social sector organizations. In 12 to 18 months, the program can improve retention by 3 to 5 percent, employee engagement by 5 to 7 percent, and innovation by 10 percent.



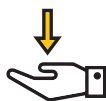
A Client Story

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The Context

A global digital solutions and transformation services organization, headquartered in the United States with operations in over 25 countries, believes in applying a human-centric lens to designing solutions and putting relationships first. Servant Leadership is a part of the core philosophy of how the firm operates today.



The Need

The organization wanted to drive the understanding, assimilation and adoption of servant leadership across managerial levels. They had already trained over 2000 junior, mid-level, and senior managers through a two-day program on servant leadership. However, they were only able to cover employees with formal leadership responsibilities due to limitations of the program design. They wanted a digital solution that could be easily deployed across the organization.



The Solution

Enparadigm delivered a highly scalable, affordable, and engaging SLAM program built on proprietary digital technology encompassing self-learn simulations and micro-learning tools to implement the program. The program trained all existing employees and new-joiners on servant leadership by crafting specific learning paths for the different cohorts of Individual contributors, potential leaders, and newly transitioned leaders. Today, the program has trained over 4000 employees, helping them operate in line with the identified corporate values of Servant Leadership.



The Impact

The program received excellent feedback from the participants and other stakeholders. 90 percent of the participants shared that they would gladly recommend this program to their peers. The feedback shared by participants is summarized below:

Impact on Attitude



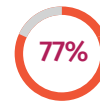
My attitude has changed towards leadership

Impact on Behaviour



My colleagues say there is a noticeable change in my behaviour

Overall Impact



I have better working relation with team members leading to a better work environment



Furthermore, the organization has received global acclaim as an employer brand and for its executive performance.

- The organization was named as the top employer 2021 In 16 countries
- The CEO was named by Glassdoor as one of the highest-rated chief executives during Covid times
- The company was honored as one of the top 100 best places to work in 2020



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