

Chapter 6.7

Assessment Strategies for Servant Leadership Practice and Training in the Virtual Organization

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in the virtual organization presents unique opportunities and challenges for the manager. Some researchers consider management in the virtual organization to be comprised mainly of challenges while others see it as the opportunity to realize competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Several leadership approaches offer interesting options for the manager within the

context of the virtual organization. One standout approach that has gained increasing popularity over the last 30 years is servant leadership in which the leader is *servant first*. Those managers in virtual organizations who have committed to a practice of servant leadership recognize the need for assessment instruments to help them understand the level of perceived servant leadership characteristics among organizational members under their guidance. This understanding acts as a foundation for training within this context. With this in mind, Laub's Organizational Leader-

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ship Assessment (OLA) offers a reliable survey instrument accepted by the servant leadership practice community. The OLA is easily administered to virtual organization members as a set of Web pages and can be used in conjunction with complementary, third-party data sets such as the World Values Survey database. Future directions for the assessment of servant leadership in the virtual organization include the potential modification of the OLA, as well as the creation of survey instruments to be used in conjunction with it.

INTRODUCTION

The practice and training of organizational members as servant leaders in the virtual organization is conducted under the same constraints as any other leadership approach (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Burns, 1982). An important aspect of any leadership practice is the efficient and effective administration of survey tools to gauge the perceptions of organizational members. This helps managers hone their practice in ways that increase its efficacy in order to serve the organizational members under their guidance. In the case of the virtual organization, servant leaders are presented with the logistical challenge of assessing the perceptions of members in a widely distributed organization. Laub's (1999) Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) instrument offers a reliable tool that is widely accepted by the servant leadership research community. As an introduction to ways in which a servant leader may enhance her practice by using the OLA, this chapter introduces servant leadership and its practice, covers the opportunities and challenges of practicing servant leadership in the virtual organization. It discusses the OLA in greater depth and explains how the OLA might be used in the virtual organization with original and third-party data sets to assess the perceptions of organizational members regarding the level of servant leadership practiced by organizational members. This will help managers better under-

stand the groups they manage and allow them to tailor training programs as necessary. As a forward-looking conclusion, future directions for the assessment of servant leadership in the virtual organization using the OLA, along with complementary instruments, are offered.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf's (1970) publication of *The Servant as Leader* represents a Kuhnian paradigm shift in the truest sense of the term. Kuhn (1996) presents the notion that new ideas arise not from a single prophet in the wilderness, but rather from a groundswell of knowledge and research which most often culminates in a seminal publication, or publications, representing both a consolidation of knowledge and the opening of a new knowledge gateway through which others may pass. The creator of the seminal publication is often quite new to the discipline. This is where the Greenleaf story diverges from the Kuhnian concept of paradigm shift, though paradigm shift it most certainly was. Robert K. Greenleaf presented the idea of servant leadership after he had retired from AT&T where he held various leadership positions for forty years (Frick, 2004).

Greenleaf claims to have come upon the idea of servant leadership after reading Hesse's (2003) *Journey to the East* in which one of the characters, Leo, plays a central role as guide to a group of Europeans traveling in Asia. After a long and arduous journey in which several characters lose their lives, the main character of the book discovers that Leo, the seemingly insignificant servant of the troupe, is actually "the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 58). At the time of Greenleaf's epiphany, the United States was still in the throes of the social discord and violence created by the Vietnam War. Greenleaf eventually published what has become the seminal book on servant leadership, *Servant Leadership: A Journey*

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