

# Chapter 11

## Implementation of CEO Servant Leadership: From Research Into Practice by Exploring Roles of CEO Servant Leadership in American For-Profit Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that expressions of servant leadership (SL) have on perceived corporate outcomes, performance, and employee satisfaction. Linking symbolic interactionism and grounded theory, this research analyzed the descriptive, empirically-driven, and theoretical underpinnings of the implementation of servant leadership philosophy and value on chief executive officers (CEOs), as well as the organizational barriers associated with the implementation of SL in American for-profit organizations. This qualitative study found indications of a relationship between SL and a strong ethical organizational climate and culture, employee morale, empowerment, and commitment to organizational effectiveness. The interviews with CEOs formed a consensus among executives that SL provides long-term sustainability, boosts social responsibility, and encourages a global mindset. Additionally, a servant leader's approach to strategy mitigates corporate scandals, toxic work environments, and the risk of employee burnout.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Scholarly experts agree that the dimensions of leadership involve leader, follower, and influence where leadership is logically based on the process of influence (Kameli, Daryani, Kheirandish, & Ahmadlou, 2020). Servant leadership theory integrates serving and leading. Servant leaders instill optimism with an emphasis on employee satisfaction, to establish a culture of organizational effectiveness, sustainability, and social responsibility through ethical guidance (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). The goal of the study was to determine the role, if any, that these unique foci have in the experience of chief executive servant leaders in American for-profit organizations.

The primary problem this study addressed was understanding the dynamics of servant leadership in general, given that servant leadership could improve the workplace environment, to address issues of job dissatisfaction and low productivity. A consensus was found among the CEOs that servant leadership as an organizational leadership strategy is the answer for long-term sustainability, social responsibility, and can mitigate the corporate scandals and toxic work environments that lead to employee burnout. What's more, this study adds to servant leadership research by translating CEO servant leadership experiences into practice by adding meaningful value, virtue, and interpretation through in-depth qualitative interviews with CEO servant leaders in American for-profit organizations. This study demonstrates a conceptual distinction in organizational leadership literature, as it helps to differentiate between a leadership theory, model, style, and category.

Both academics and practitioners are increasingly drawn to a caring style or leadership that focuses on people-centered management, as this style of leadership can lead to success for all stakeholders (Ozyilmaz & Cicek, 2015). Servant leadership is a model that focuses on fostering relationships and measuring results according to the purpose of the organization. Hence, it is proposed that CEOs who are servant leaders improve the work environment through mutually beneficial relationships between leaders and followers, leading to a more ethical culture through employee satisfaction, empowerment, and engagement (Matteson & Irving, 2005). This study is meant to examine if and how servant leadership can contribute to long-term sustainability and social responsibility in a global society.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since Greenleaf initiated the concept of servant leadership in 1970, the concept has fascinated researchers and managers with its paradoxes, premises, and intuitive attractiveness (Greenleaf, 2003). In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of organizational theory developed to address the complexity of organizations, such as railroad companies, the military, and the Catholic Church (Perrow, 1973). These types of organizations were the only organizations that equaled the size and complexity of these burgeoning organizations. Early scholars as Galbraith (1971) recognized that new forms of organizations and leadership was needed for management to solve new problems.

As the business environment evolves, the rules of business must change which in turn creates the blueprint for exploring new dimensions of leadership (Dutta & Khatri, 2017). Greenleaf's (2003) servant leadership focused on healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous conditions of followers, which might prove valid as a set of values in postmodern organizations. In the postmodernism century, servant leadership revolved around cooperation, service, and collaboration (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 2003). Servant leaders shift the focus from processes and outcomes to that of the people (Dutta & Khatri, 2017).

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