Chapter 24
A Literature Review of CEO Servant Leadership and Social Responsibility in American For–Profit Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to synthesize the literature on servant leadership and corporate social responsibility demonstrating conceptual and theoretical convergence. Servant leadership emphasizes ethics, positive psychology, and maximizes optimistic behavior and can be associated with CSR which has an ethical and humanistic framework. It is hypothesized that servant leadership is linked with both individual employee development and purpose-driven, stakeholder-based community relationships in for-profit corporations. The research gap that exists between CSR and servant leadership requires this study to analyze operational definitions through the perspective of ethics and spirituality. This study indicates that a positive relationship may exist between the perceptions of followers and attributions of servant leadership and CSR. With CSR, CEO servant leaders enhance employee psychological well-being, loyalty, improve financial performance, and address genuine social concerns.

INTRODUCTION

Servant leadership is a theory of leadership that balances leading while serving as a positive and humanistic approach to directing organizations (Amillano, Baniandrés, & Gartzia, 2020). This model of leadership emphasizes ethics, positive psychology, and maximizes optimistic behavior that may be associated with corporate social responsibility (CSR). The aim of this literature review is to establish this theoretical connection, since servant leadership creates positive social change within the organization it consequently should reflect a motive to move toward greater responsibility beyond the organization. Within the organization, Servant Leadership enables an organizational culture of sustainability, effectiveness, and employee satisfaction because of the moral and ethical behaviors exuded by leaders (Aij, & Rapsaniotis, 2017). A servant leader has the urge to give back to the community as part of his or her social responsibility. In this regard, it is paramount that more CEOs in American for-profit organizations have the qualities of a Servant Leader.

BACKGROUND

Robert K. Greenleaf, who is a pioneer in leadership studies, established the definition for servant leadership in 1970 (Hunter et al., 2013; Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). Greenleaf wrote, "[t]he 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." However, there are several other definitions and theoretical frameworks that must be considered. Likewise, the same case applies to the concept of CSR. There are many definitions and theoretical models of CSR; however, the term generally means appreciable morals and ethics being upheld in the organization as well as the contributions of the organization to the community (Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, & Williams 2006).

This study seeks to establish the manner in which CSR seems to be related to the CEO's servant leadership qualities, which is accomplished by influencing responsibility through an ethical point of view (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Peterson, Calvin, & Lange, 2012). Van Velsor, Hind, Wilson, & Lenssen (2009) generalized that the servant leader's traits enhance positive CSR. Waldman, Siegel, and Javidan (2006) added that the characteristics and values of leaders have an impact on the decisions made in the organizations. In this regard, a servant leader or CEO will be careful with regards to his or her company's public relations with stakeholders in the society. Such a leader in a for-profit organization will include activities that enhance the organization's social responsibility.

However, according to Peterson et al. (2012), there is little information existing on the core linkage between servant leadership and corporate social responsibilities. Most scholars have based their studies on either corporate social responsibilities or on servant leadership separately. Nonetheless, it can be hypothesized that servant leadership balances growth and development imperatives of the organization with the issue of long-term sustainability and responsibility of the organization to the community. This paper seeks to synthesize various scholarly works in order to bridge the gap.

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