


Leading for the Common Good: An Act of Service?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main focus of the chapter is to introduce and describe the central characteristics of common good leadership and establish existing connections to servant leadership. The multiple notions of the common good have originated in different philosophical traditions, and common good leadership overlaps with a variety of positive and propositive leadership styles, particularly servant leadership; therefore, the most relevant traits and skills of both leadership styles will be analyzed, providing insights into whether leading for the common good can be considered an act of service and if acts of service are enough to drive collective actions towards the common good. Literature review and content analysis were used as the methodologies of the study.

INTRODUCTION

Renewed interest in the notion of the common good provides a fertile ground for studies on the subject, such as connecting it to different areas such as leadership. This chapter presents a general background that introduces the basic foundations of the common good and the essence of servant leadership to connect them further.

The main issues and controversies that can be found in that the notion of common good might seem, for some, too abstract to fully understand its meanings and applications, mainly when analyzed from the perspective of leadership. In its roots, the concept describes the welfare of all community members, where private interests must be compatible with the general well-being, and this usually involves some type of leadership to attain and guide those shared goals. Research abounds on the action or process of leading, but it is not much about leading for the common good (Chappell, 1993). Although the notion of common good appears in research about leadership, specific studies on the matter are still lacking. In existing research, the notion is scarcely defined or described, and there is an inconsistent base of literature that makes the construction of a solid theoretical framework difficult.

In most published materials regarding leadership in which there are mentions the common good, it is stated that a particular leadership style or trait is in service of, in pursuit of, striving for, is dedicated to, contributes to, fosters, or focuses on the common good, but without actually stating how this is done, or why. Servant leadership, by contrast, has been researched and analyzed in more detail and is one of the leadership styles in which mentions of the common good are more frequently made.

Acts of service and acts of citizenship appear to be how servant leadership and common good leadership are performed, and although they might also appear similar in their focus, differences are essential based on two particular notions: stewardship and *bienveillance*.

BACKGROUND

Foundations of the Common Good

The concept of the common good has recently re-emerged as a notion that provides a positive perspective to different activities in which creating a sense of community is essential and in which collective goals are to be achieved. It is usually present in political speeches as a selling point to attract voters and, in everyday conversations with colleagues, friends, and family, as a buzzword that has frequently appeared in the media and published works. Regardless of its growth in use, little emphasis has been placed on its actual meaning and implications. In part, the lack of understanding of the meaning is based on the common good being an abstract notion that is sometimes difficult to grasp. The concept is by no means novel. It has been present since the works of Roman and Greek philosophers. It has undergone several changes over the centuries, being used to understand the purpose of a society, such as public utility and society's welfare, which have been further developed based on the principles of the Catholic social doctrine.

This chapter focuses on providing an understanding of the notion of the common good and generating a framework for leadership for the common good, based on previous works regarding the dynamics of the common good (Nebel & Medina-Delgadillo, 2022) as displayed in municipalities, families, businesses, universities, and at the individual level.

In this sense, the common good is not conceived as a theoretical concept but as a practical one; it is a dynamic concept in which practical reason comes into play. This involves how the concept is considered a regulating principle of life that promotes the integration of the members of a specific community (be it family, education, political, business, religious, or other institution). Five dimensions come into play to create the dynamics, namely: agency, governance, justice, stability, and humanity. Agency is the engine of societies; it is the collective freedom one has to be able to think, imagine, reflect and discuss how the community will be; without it, the commons could not be generated or sustained; in other terms, it

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