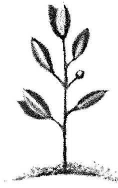

Not Just Simply Looking Forward

An Exploration of Greenleaf's Servant-Leadership Characteristic of Foresight

—Enoch Wong

Scholars widely attribute the genesis of the contemporary servant-leadership concept to Robert L. Greenleaf's (1977) seminal work *The Servant as Leader* (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber 2009; Bass 2000; Daft 2005; Dubrin 2004; Laub 1999; Northouse 2007; Spears 2004; Yukl 2013). Regarded as the "grandfather of servant-leadership" (Page and Wong 2000, 83; Sendjaya 2010, 44), Greenleaf (2002) articulated the servant-leadership concept as one that emphasizes the servant-leader as "servant first": to be a servant-leader one "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (27). Only when a servant-leader grows out of the deep desire to effect changes and growth in the followers can she develop a "conscious choice . . . to aspire to lead" (27). Greenleaf further distinguished servant-leaders from those who want to be leaders first. The leader-first individuals are perhaps motivated by the "need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possession" (27). On the other hand, servant-leadership "Manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest-priority needs are being served. The best test, and most difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?" (Greenleaf, 27).

Such leadership actions demand not so much the skills as the interior character of the servant-leader (Greenleaf 2003, 68). Greenleaf further identified listening and understanding, acceptance and empathy, foresight, awareness and perception, persuasion, conceptualization, self-healing, and community as some of the key dimensions for the servant-leadership construct (45–58). Of all of these characteristics, foresight has been regarded

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as the least researched (Spears 2010, 19). This paper attempts to identify reasons why this has been the case and then examines Greenleaf's concept of foresight and how it relates to studies of servant-leadership. But first, this paper looks at the limitations and challenges of servant-leadership and reviews different conceptualizations of servant-leadership's characteristics, followed by a probing of foresight studies.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Since the inception of Greenleaf's conception of servant-leadership, it has been subject to many misunderstandings and criticisms. For example, Komives and Dugan (2010) observed that as part of the "Contemporary Leadership theories," servant-leadership was overshadowed by the emerging community-service movement, and as a result it was misunderstood as a theory merely focusing on service or civic outcomes rather than the "changing imperative for the positional leader in corporate organizational and other settings" (115). One of the earliest criticisms levelled against servant-leadership, as identified by Sendjaya (2005), Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), Wong and Davey (2007), and Wong and Page (2003), is the characterization of the concept of servants as leaders as being oxymoronic, for it conjures up an image of slaves and people in bondage being subservient to autocratic masters (Sendjaya 2005, 2), or of the leaders giving up power altogether (Wong and Page 2003, 2). Kincaid (2011), however, countered that the deliberate choice of nomenclature by Greenleaf is rooted in his belief that no better word or combination of words than the paradoxical linkage of servant and leadership can adequately reflect his deep desire to fundamentally alter the inherent focus of leadership from the traditional authoritarian positional power to centering on serving the well-being of followers (103). Far from being an oxymoronic concept to be rejected, servant-leadership can be viewed as a paradoxical leadership practice to be embraced because it joins two seemingly opposite ideas and yet presents a single feasible reality (Graham 1991, Lad and Luechauer 1998, Spears 2004).

Another common critique of servant-leadership, as identified by Showkeir (2002), is that the concept is "too soft and touchy-feely, it does not have enough business focus . . . it is not for companies under financial strain, or it is good when times are good, but under stress, 'business as usual' prevails" (155). Yukl (2013) echoed this view, expressing the concern that "it is very difficult for a servant-leader to balance the competing preferences of owners

and employees," especially when times are tough or when hard choices have to be made between financial results and staff reduction (350). Extending from this argument is the notion advanced by Smith, Montagno, and Kuzmenko (2004) that servant-leadership is viable only for organizations in a more stable and static external environment with a spiritual generative culture that favors evolutionary change processes (86–89). For this reason, the authors suggested that servant-leadership works better in "not-for-profit and community leadership organizations," (87), a limitation also expressed by Yukl (2013, 350) and McCrimmon (2010, 3). Andersen (2009) elevated this line of criticism to a higher level, arguing that servant-leadership would not work in private or public organizations since "the ultimate goal of a company is profitability" and managers are hired to attain the organizational goal, a mandate inconsistent with that of servant-leadership to serve the interests of the followers (11, 13).

Daft (2005), however, suggested otherwise, and supported his argument with examples that servant-leadership principles have been successful "even in the business world" (230). Dubrin (2004) built on the same thesis and asserted that servant-leadership has been gaining momentum in the commercial organizations and is being practiced by "higher levels" at Walmart, for instance (106). Perhaps the most significant of all, Laub (2010) reported that "a positive relationship between the servant organization and key organizational health factors" such as employee satisfaction and team effectiveness has been established empirically via over forty studies in a wide range of institutions from higher education to health care to business and manufacturing companies (111, 113, 117). As a result, McClellan (2008) contended that a truly servant-led institution would be unlikely to suffer from an organizational culture that is static (48–49). In fact, contradicting Smith et al.'s (2004) conclusion, Ogbanna and Harris (2000) pointed out that performance in the innovative and competitive forms of culture can be directly associated with supportive and participative leadership styles (782–783). While organizational tough times or financial crisis may favor a leadership style such as charismatic (Grint 2010, 93–97; Ladkin 2010, 77), it does not necessarily imply that servant-leaders are not tough minded (Tarr 1995, 82–83). When difficult decisions are called for, servant-leaders are likely to face them with unyielding character and moral fortitude, the sine qua non of servant-leadership (Graham 1991, 117; Page and Wong 2000, 73; Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora 2008, 410), to act with the interests of the employees in mind, rather than regarding them merely as a cost item on the company's balance sheet.

Another critical examination of servant-leadership was put forward by Eicher-Catt (2005). Examining the concept from a feministic perspective, Eicher-Catt proffered a deconstruction of servant-leadership with the objective of exposing its "pragmatic function within organizational life as a cultural artifact" rather than as a natural leadership construct, and its penetrating form as the "theology of leadership that upholds androcentric patriarchal norms" (17). Characterizing Greenleaf's language of servant-leadership as "deceptively ambiguous," Eicher-Catt argued that the ambiguity allows politically motivated managers in the organizations to "advance their own agendas" (18–19). The author further problematized the servant-leadership concept as gender-biased, claiming that its rhetorical language and structure may at first seem to favor feministic leadership with commonly recognized female characteristics such as empathy. But in essence she claimed that servant-leadership privileges androcentric choice of leadership because its "masculine connotations of the concept" stem from the "religious, patriarchal ideology" behind Greenleaf's conceptualization (23). Finally, advocating a leadership that articulates a "rhetorical ethic," Eicher-Catt concluded that servant-leadership does not meet that ethical criterion because it "does not begin to highlight the creative potential inherent within organizational discourse that aims to capture a genuine ethical stance [and it fails to] articulate a leadership ethic that might be spontaneously produced through ongoing communicative deliberations with others" (23).

Eicher-Catt's examination of servant-leadership from the perspective of feminism does provide insights into how postmodernist researchers view disciplines such as leadership and is most welcome. For instance, Reynolds (2013) argued that Eicher-Catt's deconstruction serves as a viable framework for problematizing servant-leadership constructs in terms of gender (43). She extended Eicher-Catt's stance to characterizing servant-leadership as "a driving force for generating discourse on gender-integrative approaches to organizational leadership" (51). However, contrary to Eicher-Catt's gender-based characterization of servant-leadership as a juxtaposition of subjugation (i.e., servant) and domination (i.e., leader) at both extremes, Oner (2009) argued that though servant-leadership is a gendered concept with both feminine and male characteristics, it can be postulated as a gender-integrative leadership approach in offering "the potential to promote gender equality in terms of increased participation, empowerment, and relationship building in a caring humane business environment" (18).

When it comes to Eicher-Catt's dissatisfaction about servant-leadership's failure to articulate a leadership ethic, researchers such as Sendjaya (2010)

and Patterson (2010) have clearly established morality-ethic as well as virtue as the core tenets of servant-leadership through empirical studies. In addition, with research on servant-leadership increasing, as attested by Eicher-Catt's own account of over 21,000 citations in social science indices (17), many theoreticians and practitioners of leadership discipline may accept servant-leadership as a legitimate perspective (Kincaid 2011, 103). Finally, while research on gender and leadership is an important subject area to pursue, Jackson and Parry (2011) asserted that the focus of future gender research in leadership studies would tend to favor "context, power, leadership style, social construction, and identity rather than biological gender" (30).

A more recent suite of criticisms of servant-leadership was ignited by McCrimmon (2010). Arguing that the concept offers no appreciable distinguishable features compared with the "post-heroic models of leadership," McCrimmon accused servant-leadership of having a "paternalistic overtone," suggesting that serving employees conjures up the image of a parent-child relationship (2). Framed in this fashion, servant-leaders may simply be understood as switching from the role of critical parents to the role of nurturing parents. In addition, in describing leaders as servants to the employees, it follows that the employees have become the leaders' master, and under the spirit of servant-leadership, "no servants can fire their masters" when the employees are not performing (1). While servant-leadership may function better in political or religious organizations whose leaders are elected to serve the interests of the members, to survive in the business environment, leaders need to serve the interest of the owner and the customers as well (3). In conclusion, McCrimmon regarded servant-leaders as no different from "know-it-all" leaders who emphasize being in charge.

Part of McCrimmon's argument is simply an extension of a previous objection raised by others, such as Smith et al. (2004). In addition, Gill (2011) addressed McCrimmon's contention by pointing out that the latter simply "overlooks the possibility that servant-leadership may entail serving the nation[. . .], shareholders, or even an inanimate but completing cause" (70–71). Other criticisms, such as that servant-leadership has paternalistic overtones or that a servant-master relationship exists between the leader and the employee, represent a misunderstanding of Greenleaf's core commitment to humility and integrity (Page and Wong 2000, 71) and ignore the interplay between accountability and service in the relationship between servant-leaders and their followers, a relationship captured by the phrase "I am your servant, but you are not my master" (Sendjaya 2010, 44).

Finally, among the most severe criticisms levelled against Greenleaf's servant-leadership since its inception are that the concept is idealistic, that Greenleaf did not offer any empirical definition of the concept (Reinke 2004, 32), and that he did not suggest any way to measure it (Page and Wong 2000, 84). The servant-leadership framework was accused of being based largely on anecdotal evidence (Bowman 1997, 245), of being untested (Bass 2000, 33), and of lacking a consistent robust definition (Andersen 2009, 12–13; Laub 2004, 2–3). However, McClellan (2009) observed that Greenleaf never intended to establish a research model for servant-leadership, "but rather to advocate for a new conceptualization of leadership grounded in the intent of the leader to serve rather than to wield power or authority" (163). Building on Greenleaf's foundational concept of servant-leadership, researchers (listed in Table 1 and including Parolini [2004] and Rennaker [2006]) have advanced various models of servant-leadership over the last two decades. Table 1 summarizes the different themes, characteristics, attributes, or constructs that were hypothesized in the models as these researchers come to describe, define, and measure servant-leadership with an objective of making it a robust theory subject to ongoing research and standardized practices.

While Table 1 captures most of the characteristics identified by researchers over the last fifteen years, it is worth noting that many have

Table 1.
Servant-leadership characteristics and attributes

Authors	Characteristics, themes, attributes or constructs
Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)	Calling, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, community-building
Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999)	Vision, influence, creditability, trust, service
Laub (1999, 2010)	Value people, develop people, build community, display authenticity, provide leadership, share leadership
Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008)	Emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, relationship, servanthood

Authors	Characteristics, themes, attributes or constructs
Page and Wong (2000)	*Character-orientation*: Integrity, humility, servanthood *People-orientation*: Caring for others, empowering others, developing others *Task-orientation*: Visioning, goal-setting, leading *Process-orientation*: Modeling, team-building, shared decision-making
Patterson (2003)	*Agapao*: Love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, service
Russell and Stone (2002)	*Functional attributes*: Vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, empowerment *Accompanying attributes*: Communication, creditability, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching, delegation
Sendjaya (2003, 2005, 2010); Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008)	Voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality, transforming influence
Spears (1995, 2004, 2010)	Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, building community
van Dierendonck and Heeren (2006)	*Personal strength level*: Integrity, authenticity, courage, objectivity, humility *Interpersonal level*: Empowerment, emotional intelligence *Organizational level*: Stewardship, conviction
van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011)	Empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, courage, interpersonal acceptance, stewardship
van Dierendonck and Rook (2010)	Empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, forgiveness, courage, stewardship
Wong and Page (2003)	Developing and empowering others, vulnerability and humility, visionary leadership, servanthood, responsible leadership, integrity (honesty), integrity (authenticity), courageous leadership

built upon the initial works of Laub (1999), Page and Wong (2000), Spears (1995), Patterson (2003), and Sendjaya (2003). The summary of these characteristics, attributes, and dimensions appears to lead to one conclusion: there is not a consistent singular framework, model, or instrument with

clearly validated characteristics for emergent servant-leadership research. In a recent attempt to synthesize the differing characteristics identified through the extant literature on servant-leadership, van Dierendonck (2011) asserted that there are at least forty-four overlapping servant-leadership characteristics with a number of stand-alone attributes (1232). He further asserted that these characteristics can be distilled into the following "six key characteristics of servant-leader behavior that bring order to the conceptual plurality" (1232): Empowering and developing people, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship (1232–1234).

Of the characteristics listed in Table 1, foresight appears to be seldom researched (Spears 2010, 19), and when it is studied, it is often linked with intuition, vision, and insight (Laub 1999, 32, table 1). Researchers' reluctance is perhaps due to a biased interest in analyzing leadership traits, characteristics and competencies with the positivistic paradigm of knowing (Ladkin 2010, 4). Thus, many researchers devise instruments to quantitatively gauge the presence and validity of servant-leadership characteristics, as reflected in the previous section (Winston 2010, 180). The positivistic approach tends to favor characteristics whose variables can be defined and measured. Foresight, however, is not a leadership attribute that can be evaluated easily, partly due to the difficulty in operationalizing the parameters necessary for any measure to be valid and meaningful (Spears 1995, 6). However, I suggest that the challenge also lies with the quandary of pinpointing the exercising of foresight that may lead specifically to avoidance of certain events, trends, and decisions. In contexts of absence of certain consequences, linkage to the causes can virtually be impossible to ascertain. Unlike other servant-leadership characteristics, such as listening or courage, exercising foresight may not yield any specific immediate outcomes for measurement at all, especially when it comes to outcome prevention. For example, implementing a talent-management practice may lead a company to be able to continuously maintain the status quo of talent retention and avoid the flight of top-tier performers. While one can gauge why employees maintain their loyalty with the organization, tying loyalty to foresight in the implementation of such talent-management practice may prove difficult. Yet as Ladkin (2010) advocated, when it comes to exploring a phenomenon such as leadership, "what one does not see may be as important as what one does see" (6). When leadership, in particular leadership foresight, "is serving its purpose, it is difficult to 'see'" (Ladkin 46). I suggest that an exploration of how foresight operates in servant-leadership is an important aspect of

servant-leadership's contribution and it can be drawn on as the leadership framework for further examination of critical leadership research.

FORESIGHT AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Researchers offer divergent opinions and a wide range of definitions when it comes to foresight and its research. For example, in linking foresight to a corporation's strategy, Courtney (2001) argued that the concept does not originate from thorough studies of the current environment, nor does it emerge from gleaning state-of-the art forecasting techniques. Rather, the capacity of foresight is derived from having a complete understanding of the uncertainty the organization is facing (3). Courtney asserted that 20/20 foresight can only be arrived at by embracing uncertainty, exploring it, investigating it from a variety of different perspectives, and getting to know it (3). For Courtney, having 20/20 foresight does not mean one can make "flawless future predictions" (3). Instead, this kind of foresight can provide as much clarity as possible about the future. Rejecting what he considered to be a binary definition of uncertainty (i.e., either uncertainty exists or does not), Courtney suggested that four levels of residual uncertainty exist, the kind of "uncertainty left after the best possible analysis to separate the unknown from the unknowable" (4). Level one of uncertainty, the lowest of the four, is equivalent to a point or concrete forecast with an identifiable outcome. Level two presents a set of distinct possible outcomes, one of them being the actual occurrence. Level three specifies only a range of possible outcomes with no particular forecast of the actual occurrence. Finally, level four indicates that no definitive range of outcomes is possible. An organizational strategy can only be obtained by first identifying the level of uncertainty the organization is facing and then answering the following five questions relative to strategic choices: (1) Shape or adapt? (2) Now or later? (3) Focus or diversify? (4) New tools and frameworks? and (5) New strategic-planning and decision-making processes? (5–10).

Rather than studying foresight in an organizational context as Courtney did (2001), Slaughter (1995) examined the concept in a broader framework of future study. He argued that the future could not be predicted precisely, nor were there any "iron laws" or "blueprints" governing "the process of human or cultural development" that might contribute to shaping the future (xv). Though the future could not be viewed clearly and precisely in all respects, Slaughter hypothesized that there exist models and constructs by which researchers could arrive at a "broad-brush overview of our context

in time: past, present, and near-term future" (xvi). To Slaughter, study of foresight is the discipline that "captures the key quality of all successful futures work" by enhancing "our ability to understand and then to act with awareness" (xvii). With this in mind, Slaughter characterized foresight as a "deliberate process of expanding awareness and understanding through futures scanning and the clarification of emerging situations" (xvii). He further suggested that such a process could help expand the boundaries of perception for the future in at least four dimensions: (1) "by assessing possible consequences of actions (and) decisions," (2) "by anticipating problems before they occur," (3) "by considering the present implications of possible future events," and (4) "by envisioning desired aspects of future societies" (xvii). In addition, exercising foresight in this manner is in perfect alignment with the leadership mandate for executing the "twin themes of prudence and responsibility" (Slaughter 1991, 44).

Slaughter (1995) further postulated that instead of being an ability to view the future for what it precisely is, foresight is a "human attribute that allows us to weigh up pros and cons, to evaluate different courses of action and to invest possible futures on every level with enough reality and meaning to use them as decision-making aids" (1). Slaughter characterizes foresight as the human capacity to be open to the future, and to develop options for the future and make choices among them (1). With this characterization, Slaughter placed special emphasis on both the necessity to choose and the call for actions to define "what it is we really want, and then putting in place the means to achieve it" (2). At the same time, Slaughter was careful in insisting on what foresight is not: "the ability to predict the future" (1). Rather, he argued that the entire purpose of future scanning, something he stated to be fundamental in developing foresight, is to seek to understand what options might be available. For Slaughter then, foresight is not so much about prediction as about understanding what options are available so that well-informed choices can be made (33). The fundamental ability to make choices is what defines human autonomy through the exercise of foresight to "look ahead and to make provision for what may happen" (Slaughter 1991, 44).

To make well-informed choices, Cornish (2004) echoed the need to detect contemporary currents of change that may become trends in the future (23). Similar to Cornish, Hammett (2004) referenced the role of trends and argued that based on trends, scenarios can be generated to anticipate what futures may look like (2). According to Funk (2008), studies of scenarios require an interpretative approach, rather than a predictive

approach (42). Funk explained that the predictive approach is better used in scientific or technical systems that can be measured and quantified. Social systems, on the other hand, are far too complex to be approached with the predictive approach, since they are based on qualitative variables such as "values, beliefs, ideologies (and) presuppositions" (42). By focusing on examining "structures and processes," the interpretative approach "looks back to derive insights, data, and knowledge about the past as a basis for understanding the present and looking forward to create provisional knowledge about futures" (42).

Similar to Funk, Slaughter (1995) advocated a three-part approach of "looking backward, looking around, and looking ahead" to derive foresight about the futures (5, 21, 29). First he looked backward into history to gain insights into the worldviews of the past. "Looking back is a kind of ground-clearing exercise to help us locate ourselves in the wider process. By understanding a little of the world we have emerged from we can more clearly see the world we live in and those that potentially emerge from it" (5).

Slaughter (1995) argued that by looking back into the past, the defects of what he called the "Western industrial worldview" can be identified (9). This worldview manifested itself as a metaproblem that gave rise to phenomena such as the dominance of instrumental rationality, reductionism and loss of the transcendent, the use of science and technology for irrational ends, and the desacralization of nature (15–20). In engaging in the second part of the approach of "looking around," Slaughter detected that the same defects of the past reveal themselves and affect the major institutions of the contemporary world, institutions that include politics, governance, economics, commerce, and media (21–27). Slaughter concluded that the impact is caused by the past-oriented culture attempting "to move into the future without futures perspective—that is, without sustaining and viable notions of how they might be constituted" (28). If the impact is not addressed, Slaughter warned that the future would become "an empty space," void of existence and meaning (28). To buck the trend, Slaughter suggested in the third part of the approach of "looking forward" to take steps to tap into the human capacity to create foresight to anticipate issues and events and understand their potential impacts and significance before the events occur (48–49).

The World Future Society (2009) made a similar point when it claimed that "foresight may reveal potential threats that we can prepare to deal with before they become crises" (2). The society argued that foresight "gives us increased power to shape our future," because "people who can think ahead

will be prepared to take advantage of new opportunities that rapid social and technological progress are creating" (1). In summary, Slaughter and others argued that there is a need to examine events in a time continuum to detect if there are trends that may lead to potentially devastating events in the future. If such events are detected, options need to be developed in advance so leaders can choose and implement them, to avert or mitigate crises and foster growth and prosperity.

Extending Greenleaf's thought on foresight in the context of exploring Native American leadership, Baldwin (2011) characterized the relationship between servant-leadership and foresight in this way: "Servant-leaders cultivate *foresight* in order to apply the lessons of history to the realities of the present and to a compelling vision of the future in such a way as to recognize the probable outcome of the actions about to be taken" (143).

On the other hand, inspired by the biblical imagery of wisdom in building a house with seven pillars, Sipe and Frick (2009) expanded Greenleaf's idea of servant-leadership with the following definition: "A servant-leader is a *person of character* who *puts people first*. He or she is a *skilled communicator, a compassionate collaborator* who has *foresight*, is *a systems thinker*, and *leads with moral authority*" (4). Building on Greenleaf's (2002) characterization of foresight as "*a sense for the unknowable*" and as an ability to "*foresee the unforeseeable*" (35), Sipe and Frick advocated that "*foresight is a practical strategy* for making decisions and leading" (106). Unlike traditional forecasting pointing toward a particular future occurrence, similar to Courtney's (2001) level one, or mapping out alternative scenarios, similar to Courtney's level two, Sipe and Frick surmised that foresight is derived from our intuition, which originates from our heart and gut. They advocated a five-step approach in harnessing the power of foresight: (1) analysing the past, (2) learning thoroughly about the issue at hand, (3) allowing the information you gather to incubate, (4) being open and ready for discovery, and (5) sharing your insights with trusted colleagues (113–115).

Young (2002) suggested that foresight in Greenleaf's conception is "an art, not a science" (245). Foresight helps facilitate the process of drawing together the strands of contributing factors we face in any environment and enables the leaders to "act in that critical moment when we have the ability to do so, and then to move in some direction with a plan" (246). For Young, discernment plays a vital role in shaping one's foresight (248). Discernment starts with an "ability to step back, to listen, and to nurture wider awareness" (248). With this in mind, Young drew the linkage of another key

characteristic of Greenleaf's servant-leadership in listening to foresight. He argued that "to discern is to be able to withdraw and listen to a wider voice, a more overarching purpose" (249). Indeed, in Greenleaf's servant-leadership, leaders should get closer to the ground with a full environmental scan: "Servants, by definition, are fully human. Servant-leaders are functionally superior because they are closer to the ground—they hear things, see things, know things, and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are dependable and trusted" (56).

Servant-leaders are not power-wielders who bark orders and demand subservience. Rather, they work among followers and listen first to their followers. As Yukl (2013) summarized, "Servant-leaders must listen to followers, learn about their needs and aspirations, and be willing to share in their pain and frustration" (349). The practice of listening can favorably frame the leaders to be regarded as servants and build trust, care, and strength between leaders and followers (Bogle 2002, 174–177; Young 2002, 252). I argue that the art of active listening includes hearing, seeing, and knowing about the environmental factors that contribute to the capacity to see the bigger picture.

Young (2002) further suggested that the exercise of discernment would then allow us to detect trends and patterns that help us see "how things are moving either in the direction of our core values and vision, or away from them" (249). Thus the exercise of discernment in terms of stepping back and listening allows foresight to emerge and "foresee the unforeseeable" and moves the leaders "into vision and into seeing things whole."

GREENLEAF'S SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND FORESIGHT

In discussing the idea of the servant as a leader, Greenleaf (2004) emphasized the "servant" part of the equation (6). However, he also discussed what constitutes the "leader." In addressing servant-leadership as a general principle and how it is linked to fields such as education, foundations, churches, and bureaucracies, Greenleaf (2002) constantly used a simple phrase to describe leadership: to lead is to show the way (28–29). He (1988) further framed the concept of "lead" in contrast to the ideas of "guide, direct, manage, or administer" (4). Unlike the latter group of concepts, which conjure up the image of "maintenance . . . coercion . . . or manipulation," the word "lead" implies creative venture and risk-taking (4). Those who are led, therefore, are not forced to follow, but rather

are persuaded to do so out of their own volition (4). In addition, to show the way implies knowing the way, and in this regard, Greenleaf (2002) was more interested in intuitive knowledge than empirical knowledge when it comes to "having a sense for the unknowable" as a key attribute possessed by a leader (35). According to Greenleaf, intuitive knowledge, or insight, is the ability to penetrate beyond what empirical information may present and to see the patterns and the generalized trends that can be used to make decisions (37).

In the decision-making process, Greenleaf asserted that a leader is usually confronted with a gap between the information that is available at hand and what is really needed to make a solid decision, and the "art of leadership rests, in part, on the ability to bridge that gap by intuition" (36). To exercise intuition means to "have a sense for the unknowable," a sense that is tied inextricably with seeing the way (35). Leadership decisions based on intuition are what leaders are called to exercise (Greenleaf 1996a, 319). Indeed, a mark of leaders "is that they are better than most at pointing the direction" because they have the ability "to foresee the unforeseeable" (Greenleaf 2002, 29, 35). Foresight then, according to Greenleaf, is the ability to make sense of the unforeseeable. Thus foresight is what Greenleaf equated to "the 'lead' that the leader has" (40). He further explained, as quoted by Bogle (2002), that "The lead that the leader has is his ability to foresee an event that must be dealt with before others see it so that he can act on it in his way, the right way, while the initiative is his. If he waits, he cannot be a leader—at best, he is a mediator" (175).

So paramount is foresight in relation to leadership that Greenleaf declared, "Once leaders lose this lead (i.e. foresight) and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only" (40). Indeed, timing and the courage to act are so crucial that if leaders wait when they need to act, they are no longer leaders, but function only as a mediators of events and variables that force their hands (Bogle, 2002, 175). And a leader in name only is no longer leading because "he is only reacting to events, and he probably will not long be a leader if he does not recover his 'lead'" (Greenleaf 1996a, 319).

Spears (2004) regarded the concept of foresight as a "characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of a decision for the future"

(15). To examine how this characteristic is related to Greenleaf's servant-leadership theory, I will look at Greenleaf's conception of foresight in four different dimensions: foresight and time continuum, foresight and awareness, foresight and consciousness, and the ethical dimension of foresight, with special emphasis on the last-mentioned.

Foresight and the Time Continuum

In characterizing foresight, Greenleaf (1996a) differentiated the concept from "the prevailing popular view of prescience" (318). To explain foresight, Greenleaf (2002) started with an exposition on the concept of *now* (38). He observed that people tend to be fixated by events that are happening *now* and neglect a broader concept of time and continuum. The time continuum is analogous to the spread of light from a narrowly focused beam. The light has a "bright intense center . . . and a diminishing intensity, theoretically out to infinity on either side" (Greenleaf 1996a, 317). By applying the statistical concept of "moving average" to the explanation, Greenleaf proposed that *now* is not limited by clock time such that when the clock ticks, *now* moves along (317). Rather, *now* is situated in a continuum that includes the past and the future. In other words, the concept of *now* includes all that is in the past and all that will be in the future. This characterization of the time continuum provides Greenleaf with a framework to differentiate foresight from the popular concept of prescience, something he called "a sort of mystical gift that a seer calls into play now and then when he chooses to look at his crystal ball" (318). By extension, for Greenleaf (2002), foresight is the ability to see things in the future from the present moment with a connection to the past (37–38). In the context of continuum, foresight is the ability of "regarding the events of the instant moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events—with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future" (39).

In identifying the source of inspiration, Greenleaf (1996a) freely attributed it to Machiavelli in his formulation of foresight (318). According to Greenleaf, Machiavelli provided a fitting approach to harness foresight: "To allow knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do) the evils that are brewing, they are easily cured. But when, for want of such knowledge, they are allowed to grow so that everyone can recognize them, there is no longer any remedy to be found" (318).

Thus, as a prudent man, a leader, needs to be the "one who constantly thinks of *now* as the moving concept in which past, present moment, and future are one organic entity" (Greenleaf, 2002, 38). In other words, someone who is a practicing leader is "at once, in every moment of time, (a) historian, (a) contemporary analyst, and (a) prophet—not three separate roles" (39). The dimension of time continuum in Greenleaf's concept of foresight provides a linkage to understanding the next dimension: foresight and awareness.

Foresight and Awareness

Spears (2004) summarized awareness as the "general awareness, and especially self-awareness, [that] strengthens the servant-leader" (14). Spears further suggested that awareness is the ability to elevate oneself to see the unusual and ask, "Is what is there more than what is meeting the eye?" Spotting the unusual is not necessarily about looking at the big picture all the time, for awareness also implies having the ability to look into the "grandeur that is in the minutest thing, the smallest experience" (Greenleaf, 2002, 41). The ability to spot the unusual in the minutest thing is critical to leaders, according to Greenleaf, for they are constantly asked to lead in stressful circumstances and could easily overlook the "smallest things." To gather insights from the smallest things, leaders must improve their awareness, a process Greenleaf (1996a) likened to opening the door of perception wider to take in more from sensory experience than "people usually take in" (322). Greenleaf observed that people move about with very narrow perceptions of sight, sound, and touch, and thus easily miss great opportunities that may be hidden in the minutest thing. Leaders need to master the function of awareness to not "miss great leadership opportunities" (323). By extension, Greenleaf suggested that awareness, especially awareness of danger or harm, could come from examining normally unnoticeable details or events (323).

Examination of potential dangers would best take place when dangers are seemingly absent, in times of peace and prosperity, according to the Chinese history book 春秋左傳 (*Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan*, n.d.). The book spoke of preparedness for crisis "有備無患" (*you bei wu huan*) this way: "Where there is preparedness, there is no crisis." ("襄公十一 *xiang gong shi yi*" (11th year of Xiang Gong section). The story behind this Chinese proverb speaks of someone in authority who would be investigating a

potentially lurking crisis 危機 (*wei ji*) (crisis in Chinese characters means *danger* plus *opportunity*) in time of peace, when no apparent ills are present. If a potential crisis has been detected, precautionary steps can be taken in advance. Part of a servant-leader's moral responsibility is to temper the unbridled optimism in times of stability by detecting probable risks, and to take appropriate preparatory actions to either address the risks or make plans to mitigate their impact if a crisis materializes.

When Greenleaf (2002) spoke about awareness, he was referring to another critical aspect in which awareness is considered as "value building and value clarifying" (41). Greenleaf focussed not only on what actions need to be taken in advance to avert crises, he asserted that awareness acts as a sensor for moral and value alignment. The sensory capability of moral and value alignment starts first with what Spears (2004) described as "self-awareness" (14). DeGraaf, Tilley, and Neal (2004) extended the concept further to the development of self-awareness by advocating the adoption of reflection as part of our daily routine. Reflection would allow servant-leaders to be purposeful, to renew passion and align values, and to adjust priorities (143–144).

The exercise of daily reflection will produce two results according to Greenleaf (1996a, 323). It would facilitate the opening of awareness to stock "both the conscious and unconscious areas of the mind with a richness of resources for any need one faces" (323). But more importantly, the exercise will build and clarify values for leaders that will in turn guide them to "act rightly" (323). It is in this context of understanding awareness as a value-regulating sensor that we come to a greater understanding of Greenleaf's characterization of awareness as "*not* a giver of solace," but as "a disturber and an awakener" (2002, 41). The understanding of Greenleaf's awareness is critical in explaining the ethical dimension of foresight, which will be examined later in detail. For leaders to act on foresight from the perspective of the ethical imperative, Greenleaf (1996a) argued that they must have a fully functional capacity for awareness (323). He pointed out that awareness regulates values that would guide leaders to see their own "peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities," which helps them make the right choices of sorting out the difference between what is urgent and what is important (323). If awareness is not being put to proper use, leaders miss "leadership opportunities" to detect impending danger and to question implications from a long-term perspective (Greenleaf, 2002, 41). The absence of awareness is illustrated

by Handy (1989) in the story of a frog in cold water: "A frog if put in cold water will not bestir itself if that water is heated up slowly and gradually and will in the end let itself be boiled alive, too comfortable with continuity to realize that continuous change at some point becomes discontinuous and demands a change in behavior" (7–8).However, for awareness to function properly in detecting dangers and opportunities, foresight is needed to see the here and now as well as the far and there, something Greenleaf related to the two levels of consciousness that a leader must exercise to capitalize on the insights derived from awareness (Greenleaf, Fraker, and Spears 1996, 22).

Foresight and Two Levels of Consciousness

In characterizing religious leadership, Greenleaf ascribed to religious leaders the role of prophet, who bring "vision and penetrating insights" to their community (Greenleaf et al. 1996, 14). Greenleaf suggested that as a prerequisite for establishing a vision, a leader needs to exercise foresight and see the unforeseeable (21). The exercise of foresight requires the leader to operate simultaneously at what Greenleaf called the "two levels of consciousness" (22). Greenleaf explained that on one level, consciousness resides in the physical world: it is "concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented" (22). On the other level, consciousness is detached and rises above the physical world, seeing beyond current events and looking into "the perspective of a long sweep of history . . . . (and projecting) into the indefinite future" (22). Leaders would only function as prophets when they operate on the second level, in foreseeing the "unforeseeable" and shaping and modifying the vision for their community (22).

Greenleaf (2002), however, was not interested simply in explaining how a leader needs to foresee the unforeseeable. More importantly, he was interested in how a leader needs to *act* and *show* the way that the unforeseeable points to (40). For Greenleaf, what makes these two key leadership characteristics, acting and showing, interconnected is the leader's ability to move between these two levels of consciousness, an ability characterized by what he described as a "schizoid life" (40). Imagining that an invisible ladder exists for the leader to traverse between these two levels of consciousnesses, Greenleaf explained, "From one level of consciousness, each of us acts resolutely from moment to moment on a set of assumptions that then govern our life. Simultaneously, from another level, the adequacy of

these assumptions is examined, in action, with the aim of future revision and improvement. Such a view gives one the perspective that makes it possible for one to live and act in the real world with a clearer conscience" (40). To act with a clearer conscience means being able to execute the responsibilities of a leader freely and, as Greenleaf suggested elsewhere, ethically (39).

The Ethical Dimension of Foresight

Northouse (2007) asserted that "ethics is central to leadership" and as such it is at the crux of any decision leaders make, since "the choices leaders make and how they respond in a given circumstance are informed and directed by their ethics" (342, 346). Northouse further singled out Greenleaf and his servant-leadership thinking as one of the few leadership approaches that carries strong altruistic ethical overtones in caring for the followers and the less fortunate (348–349). And if there is any specific reference by Greenleaf (2002) about ethics and leadership, it is found in his discussion of foresight (39). Inspired perhaps by a speech made in 1972 by Howard W. Johnson, chairman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Corporation, as suggested by Bogle (2002, 175–176), Greenleaf pointed out that there is an ethical dimension to the characteristic of foresight when leaders fail to exercise foresight. Greenleaf explained: "The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an ethical failure, because a serious ethical compromise today (when the usual judgment on ethical inadequacy is made) is sometimes the result of a failure to make the effort at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act" (39).

Greenleaf further contended that what is regarded as unethical action by society is not really the action of making an unethical or a wrong choice, but rather the action of "no choice" (39). By an action of "no choice" Greenleaf meant that leaders could have foreseen the failure of inaction and could have chosen to act constructively when there was freedom to do so earlier. Though they might have foreseen the dire consequence earlier, unethical leaders chose not to act at the time. When the situation has deteriorated to the extent that those constructive choices no longer exist, the unethical leaders are then left with no alternative but to accept the eventual damage (40).

The indictment of a leader as an ethical failure for not acting with foresight is shared by Bazerman and Watkins (2004). They advanced the

notion that although both may be situated on a continuum of predictability, there is arguably a distinction between a predictable and an unpredictable event(4–5). A leader's responsibility is to foresee and identify potential crises and take action to prevent them (1, 4). Bazerman and Watkins pointed out that a predictable surprise "arises when leaders unquestionably had all the data and insight they need to recognize the potential for, even the inevitability of, a crisis, but failed to respond with effective preventative action" (4). The lack of action, according to Bazerman and Watkins, has an ethical dimension that stretches from conflicts of interest, as in the case of accounting firms providing both audit and consulting services to the same client (e.g., Arthur Anderson provided both audit and consulting services to Enron), to "accepting aggressive accounting practices of clients without complaints" (49–50). The consequences of these unethical actions go beyond simply loss of profit and demise of corporations. The financial loss would affect other stakeholders, such as individual investors and retired employees whose livelihood may depend on the income from the investment and the pension plans when they put their unbridled trust and confidence in corporations such as Enron (44).

The ethical failure to act based on foresight results in consequences much more far-reaching than loss of profit and the damaged livelihoods of investors and pensioners. The moral infraction manifests at times in the inability of leaders to prepare future generations for unseen challenges down the road. Greenleaf (1996b) addressed the ethical dimension of foresight by referencing Thomas Jefferson as a leader, someone Greenleaf considered to be "as good an example as one could want of foresight in action" (78). Greenleaf gave much credit to Jefferson's contemporary George Wythe, the legislator, with whom Jefferson studied law. According to Greenleaf, Wythe was instrumental in guiding the young Jefferson through his maturation process and providing "timely" and "incalculable" guidance to Jefferson when he was a lawmaker for Virginia (79–80). The example of Wythe prompted Greenleaf to claim that "the greatest foresight, the most difficult and most exciting, is the influence one wields on the future by helping the growth of people who will be in commanding positions in the next generation" (79). Greenleaf further argued that neither personal wisdom and character nor institutions of society can be used to alter or "bind the future" (79). The reason is that by the time personal wisdom is crystallized, the future is already here, and wisdom would be out of date to be bound with the future (79). On the other hand, he contended

that "the future can be radically altered by the kinds of people now being prepared for the future" (79).

Kim (2004) agreed with Greenleaf that servant-leaders are often entrusted with building future generations, and that actions taken or not taken now often determine what sort of world the next generation will inherit from us (222). He argued that "in the end, foresight is about being able to see all things that are important to our future" (222). But the most important target in the future, which foresight needs to be able to see and induce leaders to act, and the target that would suffer the most if leaders fail to exercise foresight, is "our children's future" (222). In this regard, Kim agreed that the failure to act when foresight has shown a clear path of action is indeed considered an ethical failure (202). Understood in this context, Greenleaf's concept of foresight in its ethical dimension stands out from other leadership approaches, which hold foresight either as a skill (Day and Schoemaker 2008) or a role-based capacity (Jaques 1990), rather than an interior quality of leadership that has an implicit moral dimension.

In summary, the four dimensions of foresight do not stand in isolation from one another in Greenleaf's writings. Collectively, these dimensions are interconnected to support the assertion that Greenleaf (2002) made about foresight being "the 'lead' that the leader has" (40).

CONCLUSION

Based on the exploration of Greenleaf's foresight in this analysis, I suggest that his concept can in fact play a significant role in shaping strategies to mitigate risks, eliminate danger, and harvest growth in an organization or agency. A lesson from the episode of Hurricane Katrina provides an illustration of how his concept could have been applied in dealing with the disaster in 2005. Ladkin (2010), for example, observed that two years before Katrina, a scenario planning exercise was conducted by the appropriate government agencies. It identified a number of challenges New Orleans might face in the event of a hurricane of Katrina's strength, and produced a number of recommendations to mitigate the risks (49). However, no proactive or preventive measures were ever implemented "to prepare for the onslaught of a storm like Katrina" (Ladkin, 49). This leads Ladkin to conclude that the "failure of leadership" occurred "long before August 2005" when Katrina came on shore in Louisiana (49). In examining the practice of this scenario planning,

one can note that local and state governments did undertake the exercise in a manner analogous to Greenleaf's concept of foresight. Consistent with the four dimensions of the concept, the exercise did raise the *awareness* for potential dangers, engage in a *time continuum* to understand patterns and trends of hurricane trajectories in times past and present, and elevate the collective *consciousness* by identifying *actionable* recommendations (such as how to better evacuate residents and strengthen the levees) for preventive measures (Ladkin, 2010, 49). The regrettable lesson lies in the failure of the government agencies to act on these recommendations. No one could predict how much of the risk would have been mitigated and danger prevented had the measures been acted on. But Greenleaf's (2002) characterization of foresight with its ethical dimension as well as his admonition to take timely action speak volumes about the episode of Katrina: "A serious ethical compromise today (when the usual judgment on ethical inadequacy is made) is sometimes the result of a failure to make the effort at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act" (39).

I suggest that Greenleaf's concept of foresight provides linkages to at least two potential areas for further studies on foresight and leadership. The first relates to how foresight can be developed and deployed. Greenleaf provided an explanation of the four dimensions of foresight and explained how the concept fits into his thought of servant-leadership, but he did not expand on how the concept can be operationalized. Spears (2004) suggested that foresight is the characteristic that enables the servant-leader to link the lessons of the past to the realities of the present and to suggest options for a decision for the future (15). A framework for developing this characteristic of servant-leadership is required to identify the interrelationship of the events of the past, the trends of the present, and options available for a decision for the future. One example of how foresight can be applied can be found in the concept of feedback mechanisms put forward by Senge (1994).

Senge suggested that events on a time continuum can be analyzed from the perspective of two feedback processes: "reinforcing and balancing" (79). When it comes to understanding foresight and how it relates to cause and effect on a time continuum, Senge cited a French school-children's jingle to illustrate the effect of reinforcing the feedback process. Senge (1994) wrote, "The jingle describes how at first there is just one lily pad in a corner of a pond. But every day the number of lily pads doubles. It takes thirty days to

fill the pond, but the first twenty-eight days, no one even notices. Suddenly, on the twenty-ninth day, the pond is half full of lily pads and the villagers become concerned. But by this time there is little that can be done. The next day their worst fears come true" (83).

The story lends itself fittingly to Greenleaf's (2002) characterization of how leaders do not act when there is freedom to do so (39). The example of the exponential growth of the lily pad could represent the unexpectedly fast pace at which a danger could explode. If the leaders are unaware of the danger that has been lurking, they are unlikely to engage in any action to eradicate the danger in advance. When the leaders are left with "little that can be done" because the danger has advanced to its terminal stage, disasters are likely to strike (Senge 1994, 83). An exploration between Senge's feedback mechanism and Greenleaf's foresight could provide leaders with greater understanding of how such a concept of foresight can be applied.

The second area of further studies is exploring how a greater understanding of Greenleaf's concept of foresight contributes to ethical leadership studies. I noted earlier that Northouse (2007) singled out Greenleaf as a strong proponent of ethical leadership (348–349). Northhouse further identified "respect, service, justice, honestly, and community" as the five principles that form the foundation for development of sound ethical leadership (350). I suggest that Greenleaf's concept of foresight, particularly his ethical dimension of the concept in terms of how leaders need to act when they have the freedom to do so, could form a complementary sixth principle in the ethical leadership development process. Northhouse asserted that leadership is "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal," and an ethical leader is required to influence or inspire his followers in a way that would subscribe to these principles of ethical leadership (3, 350). Bass and Steidlmeier (2004) pointed out that a crucial approach to influence followers is by articulating a vision that contains the ethical values to allow "followers (to) either embrace or reject" (175) it. Greenleaf cautioned that as a prerequisite for establishing a vision, a leader needs to exercise foresight and see the unforeseeable (Greenleaf et al. 1996, 21). Gary (2005) echoed that "strategic leaders should know better that vision without foresight lacks insight" (2). One area Gary noted is exercising caution when leaders move into the future, preparing for the potential danger in the horizon (2). Foresight in this context is not simply one of the competencies an effective CEO or senior executive needs to possess, as suggested by Bass (2008, 688). Rather, foresight is a core leadership characteristic that forms what Greenleaf (2002) considered to be a moral

basis for leaders to think, choose, and act ethically, not just for the here and now of the constituency they support, but for generations to come (40). In this regards, Greenleaf's line of thinking is consistent with Slaughter's (1995) call to leaders with foresight to choose and to act for the future (2). Foresight may be one of the key contributions Greenleaf has to offer regarding the formation of ethical leaders and the pursuit of leadership development.

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