



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Saudi Arabia is seeking to create more effective leaders who meet the highest needs of individuals without using their authority to complete tasks. When looking deeply at servant-leadership approach in higher education in Saudi Arabia, no known studies reflected what is really happening in practice with Saudi higher educational leaders in terms of defining and providing service. To better understand their leadership methods, it is significant to address their ways of employing authority in their day-to-day operations since power is tightly linked to leadership. The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of servant-leadership as it applies to higher education in Saudi Arabia. It also aims to analyze the authority practiced by higher educational leaders as a significant pillar of servant-leadership.

The paper is organized around five main sections that cover the major aspects of servant-leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia. The first section presents the background of servant-leadership, followed by the second section that provides a deep look at servant-leadership across cultures. The



third section focuses on the notion of servant-leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia. In addition, an analysis of authority and power is also discussed as the fourth section. The last section sheds the lights on some recommendations for further studies.

BACKGROUND OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf (1977/2002) established servant-leadership in 1970 and gave birth to this term as a leadership method. The statement of servant-leadership centered on how Greenleaf lived life, what the author learned from experiences, and more importantly, what the world needs to be a better place in which to live (Valeri, 2007). Greenleaf strongly opposed relying on authority and power in leadership, especially coercive power, believing that leaders should shift authority to those who are being led (Northouse, 2016). Greenleaf realized that the need of humanity in the 21st century was for servant-leadership because inequality and social injustice existed in many institutions, and servant-leaders advocated for those who are less privileged (Northouse, 2016).

Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) enriched the term servant-leadership, purifying the inferior and weak meaning that some leaders or scholars might hold:

It is important to note that the servant leader's deliberate choice to serve and be a servant should not be associated with any forms of low self-concept or self-image, the same way as choosing to forgive should not be viewed as a sign of weakness. Instead, it would take a leader with an



accurate understanding of his or her self-image, moral conviction and emotional stability to make such a choice. (p. 33)

The business book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, provides an excellent example of some leadership scholars who wrestled with the paradox in leadership and service concepts, as many objected to the term due to its weakness and servitude. Service and leadership are two concepts with seemingly opposite meanings, and this is where the challenge of servant-leadership lies. Northouse (2016) talked about the criticism of the title of servant-leadership, because the name seems contradictory and creates a noisy sound that diminishes the true value of the approach. Furthermore, the name servant-leadership suggests the concept of following, and following is completely contrary to the concept of leadership. These limitations of the term are partly logical for some thinkers, as Saudi leaders may possibly tend to this mindset, but the tenets behind servant-leadership are that it combines leadership and service, power and influence, and decisions and participation, enabling leaders to be effective servants.

In a traditional concept of leadership, a person lower on the chain of command is expected to serve. In servant-leadership, however, “the paradoxical concept of serving from a leadership role seems just the natural way it should work. Servant leaders often feel they are called to serve” (Tureman, 2013, p. 9). Many leaders enjoy a sense of authority over others, as it is one of the perquisites of a leadership position. Such leaders naturally put



themselves first because this is part of human nature. In servant-leadership, the natural desire brings one to serve, to serve first, then to lead, especially for those who are in lower levels of performance (Tureman, 2013). Servant-leaders no longer act as the “headmaster”; rather, they serve as “head learner” (Grogan, 2013, p. 377), engaging in the enterprise of the organization by modeling, celebrating, displaying, and serving to make sure individual’s needs are met.

Servant-leadership, most of the time, calls for bringing about change. Keeping old ways of performing one’s work is enough to stifle innovation and creativity in the workplace.

Leading as usual with traditional tyrannical styles is not only anachronistic it is also potentially dysfunctional, given the fast pace of globalization, the complexity of transnational corporations, the addition of global educational entities, and the demographical changes in the workplace. (Whitfield, 2014, p. 50)

Servant-leaders bring the desired change to organizations in shaping the culture, behaviors, values, relationships, and results of the organization. Further, leading change while being a servant to all is incalculably demanding.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP ACROSS CULTURES

Culture shapes the practice of leadership and has a marked impact on how leaders are expected to behave (Austell, 2010; Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Shahin & Wright, 2004). The body of research (Carroll & Patterson, 2014; Hofstede, 2001; Shahin & Wright, 2004)



reported that culture does not derive from one's genes but derives from one's social environment. Culture is "all of a collective society's normative behaviors and traditions" (Carroll & Patterson, 2014, p. 20). Culture could also be defined as "the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment. Culture determines the uniqueness of a human group in the same way personality determines the uniqueness of an individual" (Hofstede, 2001, pp. 550-551). Culture clearly affects leadership. Leaders need to understand how cultural differences affect leadership and life in and across organizations (Whitfield, 2014). Embracing servant-leadership characteristics and cultural dimensions is a smart strategy that creates successful servant-leaders who can effectively better serve employees and organizations.

Servant-leadership is a model of leadership employed globally. Considering the perspectives of servant-leadership cross culturally gives a broader understanding of how different cultures can shape servant-leadership more naturally than others, and how others' values, behaviors, and traditions impact the creation of effective servant-leaders. Shahin and Wright (2004) analyzed the concept of leadership in the context of culture. They stated that understanding and research on leadership itself is a "tricky endeavor, adding a cross-cultural component to the mix in leadership research makes the whole process even more complex" (p. 731). However, Spears (1998) discovered that, considering servant-leadership with global eyes, throughout history, organizations that are more



successful and viable and more caring about their employees and their growth professionally, used servant-leadership. Although servant-leadership was developed by Greenleaf in the United States, this model is applicable to leaders worldwide. Servant-leadership is suited to all leaders from varieties of cultures and workplaces.

Carroll and Patterson (2014) focused on comparing Patterson's model of servant-leadership across two cultures: India and the United States. This model consists of seven characteristics: love, trust, vision, humility, altruism, empowerment, and service. India has more than a billion citizens and exceeds developed countries politically, economically, and socially, containing immense resources and a highly educated workforce. The researchers used the same method to collect the data from Indians and Americans to examine the level of leaders practicing the seven characteristics of Patterson's model of servant-leadership. Study findings revealed that this model is appropriate for both cultures and no significant difference emerged among the two cultural samples in perceptions of servant-leadership, except for the characteristic of vision. Visionary leaders are those who focus on the future of the organizations and followers, and create imaginations and insights of the future. Indians practice vision differently from Americans, perhaps due to the difference in philosophies of the two cultures and the cultural dimension of future orientation.

Another study that showed servant-leadership from a global perspective was Winston and Ryan's (2008) work, as they revealed servant-leadership as a global rather than a Western



model. The authors used the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE), which constructs the human orientation and cultural concepts from Africa, East Asia, the Mediterranean, and India. GLOBE attends to specific characteristics of leaders that are part of the servant-leadership concept: humility, concern, altruism, service, care, fairness, and friendship. By analyzing the relation between the GLOBE study and servant-leadership, the general score of valuing human orientation is factually higher than practicing human-oriented behaviors. This implies that the practical model of leading with human orientation is lacking, and employing a servant-leadership model may help leaders be more human-oriented leaders. More importantly, Winston and Ryan's study of GLOBE showed that the regions that scored higher for human orientation were Southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Anglo regions; the middle scoring regions were Confucian Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Germanic Europe; the lowest scoring regions were Latin Europe and Nordic Europe. Thus, "overlap between servant leadership and the global acceptance of the humane orientation is evidence that servant leadership can be presented as a global rather than a Western concept" (p. 220). Nelson's (2003) study focused on Black South Africa leaders and Serrano (2005) looked at Latin American leaders. The practices of both cultures supported the viability of servant-leadership in various global cultures, as it is an appropriate style that should be practiced and learned more in Africa, Asia, and the Mediterranean (Winston & Ryan, 2008).



Hannay (2009) studied the application of servant-leadership in a cross-cultural context using Hofstede's (1993) five cultural dimensions as a framework to identify differences and similarities across cultures: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Hannay (2009) identified the best cultural fit for the servant-leadership concept. As a result of the study, Hannay discerned that servant-leadership is best applied in a culture with low power distance, low to moderate individualism, low to moderate masculinity, low uncertainty avoidance, and a moderate-to-high long-term orientation. According to Hannay's study, power distance and uncertainty avoidance seemed to be the most important to the success of servant-leadership. Hofstede (1993) evaluated the United States, Germany, Japan, France, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Indonesia, West Africa, Russia, and China, researching their manifestation of each of these five dimensions in their cultures. Chhokar, Brodbeck, and House (2008) defined power distance as "the degree to which members of an organization and society encourage and reward unequal distribution of power with greater power at higher levels" (p. 4). Uncertainty avoidance appears to be consistent with the servant-leadership characteristic *conceptualization*. Scholars defined uncertainty avoidance as "relying on established social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to decrease the probability of unpredictable future events that can adversely affect the operation of an organization or society" (p. 4). One significant finding of Hannay's (2009) study was that none of these 10



countries provided a good environmental fit for the application of servant-leadership theory. In addition, the United States was the only country of these 10 that ranked low on power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States ranked high on individualism. The United States and Germany ranked high on masculinity whereas the Netherlands ranked low on this factor. Also, both Germany and the Netherlands ranked in the moderate category on the long-term orientation factor whereas the United States ranked lowest.

However, considering the application of servant-leadership in one country is clearly a limiting factor that diminishes the value of the servant-leadership model and its impact on an organization as a whole. The culture of a country influences leadership and the broader culture in an organization. The results of research (Austell, 2010; Carroll & Patterson, 2014; Hannay, 2009; Hofstede, 2001; Shahin & Wright, 2004; Spears, 1998; Whitfield, 2014; Winston & Ryan, 2008) indicated an obvious correlation between cultural characteristics and the probability of the successful adoption of servant-leadership in the workplace. Scholars need to pay closer attention to “increase intercultural leader capacity to lead in culturally mixed organizations, be they domestic or international, which resulting in minimizing or avoiding institutional or organizational failure” (Whitfield, 2014, p. 48). Servant-leaders can effectively navigate cultural differences and similarities, and move around the major attitudes of servant-leaders to be a good fit with the nature of different cultures.



THE NOTION OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

To better analyze servant-leadership as it applies to Saudi higher education, it is important to present some basic features of higher education in Saudi Arabia and some studies conducted about servant-leadership in higher education. Additionally, the discussion of servant-leadership and the use of authority in Saudi higher education is displayed as well.

Background on Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

The general goal of education in Saudi Arabia is for students to understand the true Islam, the dominant religion of Saudi Arabia, and follow it in a comprehensive manner, to provide students with necessary skills and knowledge, and to prepare them to develop their behaviors as individuals and improve their communities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). Education at all levels in Saudi Arabia rests on the Islamic code of ethics, the essential ideology that shapes the lifestyle in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Gonaim, 2017). Education in Saudi Arabia is segregated by gender, including general education for boys, general education for girls, and traditional Islamic education. Both genders follow the same curriculum and take the same annual examinations (Sedgwick, 2001). The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, established in 1952, created a clear vision of education, which summarizes that education is an investment aiming not only to meet societies' demands, but also to provide Muslim individuals better quality, creativity,



and success for their lives. Saudi Arabia invested approximately \$160 billion in the education budget (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

The Ministry of Higher Education existed under the general Ministry of Education. Due to tremendous growth in the number of universities and colleges in the last decade in Saudi Arabia, many considered it necessary to establish the Ministry of Higher Education to address issues related to higher education (Alamri, 2011). Higher education institutions provide a wide range of programs and specialists in many fields. The number of universities and colleges increased significantly and the enrollment in universities doubled between 2010 and 2014 (Clark, 2014). The system of higher education witnessed marked development in expanding higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, including 23 public universities, 18 primary teacher's colleges for men, 80 primary teacher's colleges for women, 37 colleges and institutes for health, 12 technical colleges, and 33 private universities and colleges (Alamri, 2011). Education is free at all levels for Saudi students, except for those who choose to attend private institutions. According to Ministry of Higher Education (2017) statistics, 1,527,769 students enrolled in higher education institutions during the 2014–2015 academic year.

The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for funding, development of curriculums and systems, recruitment of faculties, and improvement of the higher education sector at all levels (Clark, 2014). The Ministry of Higher Education is committed to preparing teachers and faculties to best serve



universities and students. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2011), the full role of the higher education system is to “prepare and graduate qualified staff; upgrade the educational and professional standards of the current general education teachers, principals and administrators by offering various training courses in cooperation with the Ministry of Education” (p. 13).

Servant-Leadership in Higher Education

Research studies lack knowledge of servant-leadership in higher education institutions (Keith, 2010). After working in various universities and colleges after retiring from AT&T, Greenleaf realized the needs of campuses and students to achieve a high level of performance. It is unsurprising that Greenleaf cared about the growth of students, universities, and colleges (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Greenleaf found that colleges and universities were not preparing young people to lead. To best prepare young people to lead, colleges must have faculty members and leaders who devote themselves to serve others. In “Teacher as Servant,” Greenleaf wrote about an environment called “Jefferson House.” This was a residence for students who were committed to service, and who grew through conducting service projects and engaging in internships (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Greenleaf called upon university and college leaders to build campuses that value service and make it a core mission to be achieved.

Higher education is an academic setting that seeks to be



more effective in preparing students to have better lives in the future. Satyaputra (2013) reviewed the work of Wheeler (2011) that speaks about servant-leadership in higher education. Wheeler (2011) observed that most current leadership models in higher education are unsuccessful, unsuitable, and short-term models. Without intensive effort to adopt proper leadership models in higher education, higher education will face a heavy burden and potential obstacles that prevent colleges and universities from fulfilling their desired goals. Wheeler (2011) recognized that the primary aim in higher education is to provide service to others and averred that the servant-leadership is the best model to enhance the culture of service in higher education. Higher education institutions will function in a more powerful way by embodying the servant-leadership model that brings a long-term commitment to organizational effectiveness, because it is a way of living and leading that creates servant-leaders who care about thriving people and organizations (Satyaputra, 2013; Wheeler, 2011).

Scardino (2013) examined the extent to which full-time professors at three Franciscan institutions of higher education exhibited servant-leadership qualities, and whether their practice of servant-leadership impacted student engagement. The author used two types of surveys to gather the required data. Full-time professors at three institutions of higher education completed the Servant-leadership Questionnaire, which measures their levels of embodying servant-leadership characteristics. Also, Scardino used the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement to measure the engagement of students



with the faculty. The results of the study revealed a direct correlation between servant-leadership and deep approaches to learning. Those deep approaches to learning were explained by the linear combination of altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship. The most significant finding was that only emotional healing contributed significantly to the model. Thus, emotional healing was considered a vital characteristic of full-time professors at Franciscan institutions of higher education, and these types of learning environments. Emotional healing helps students at higher education institutions maximize their learning process.

Erkutlu and Chafra (2015b) investigated the relationship between servant-leadership and voice behavior by testing the role of psychological safety and psychological empowerment as two essential scales that measure how servant-leadership affects voice behavior. The authors recognized that study of how the mechanisms of servant-leadership impact voice behavior has been lacking. They focused on the psychological safety of employees in speaking up and discussing issues openly. Erkutlu and Chafra (2015a) used the Psychological Empowerment Scale, which measured meaning, competence, impact, and self-determination. To examine how servant-leadership affects employees' voice behaviors, 793 faculty members from 10 state universities in Turkey completed the voice-behavior, psychological-empowerment, and psychological-safety scales. Of those faculty members, 64 deans were asked to complete the servant-leadership scale. Results revealed a significant



relationship between servant-leadership and voice behaviors. Servant-leadership of faculty deans positively related to the psychological safety and psychological empowerment of faculty members. This implies that “given the risks associated with employees’ voice and due to the power that leaders hold over employees’ resources and outcomes, trust in leader may play an important role in employees’ decisions to voice their opinions” (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015b, p. 31).

Jordan (2006) studied the impact of servant-leader professors on students’ learning and success on campuses. The researcher hoped to contribute to preliminary discussions of servant-leadership as an educational-leadership paradigm for faculty in higher education in the 21st century. Jordan recognized that “teacher quality is one of the most powerful determinants of student achievement and virtually every category of educational outcomes” (pp. 16-17), and specifically faculty members were one of the most powerful educational forces. Faculty members not only play a significant role in the academic paths of the students they teach, but also in the universities they serve and the community as a large. To investigate this issue, Jordan conducted a qualitative case study of selected self-identified servant professors who could provide information about a real-life higher education classroom situation regarding servant-leadership. Several themes emerged from the faculty members’ participation: (a) integrity of belief and practice; (b) a commitment to student-centered learning; (c) a commitment to the development of learning communities; (d) a commitment to personal growth; (e) a commitment to the



greater common good; (f) courageously pursuing innovation; (g) displaying a passionate dedication to their students; and (h) establishing equality and justice.

Clearly, results from the Jordan (2006) study lay in reporting answers to the three research questions. The first question was, What is the praxis of servant professors? Findings showed that the perspectives of servant professors about servant-leadership in classrooms summarized “a process in which a collaborative community of learners learned with passion and excellence” (p. 197). The second question was, How does a higher education servant professor define servant-leadership? The characteristics of the three servant professors are the same 10 characteristics of servant-leadership created by Spears. Those qualities include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, building community, and commitment to the growth of people. The last question was, How does a servant professor apply servant-leadership in her or his classroom? The three faculty participants agreed that balancing among leadership, learning, and service is important to ensure the success of the application of the servant-leadership model in higher education classrooms. Furthermore, empowering each individual to become a leader and a follower—a teacher and a student at the same time—is a critical practice of servant-leadership. Jordan concluded that “educators, as leaders, impact and influence the students entrusted to them in a powerful way, whether for good or evil. Teachers can inspire and empower students or devalue, ridicule, and stunt intellectual, social, and emotional growth” (p. 7).



Servant-Leadership and the Use of Authority in Saudi Higher Education

There is a cultural and perceptual paradox when practicing servant-leadership because each culture has its own beliefs in leadership and authority even if those beliefs are outmoded and not compatible with the reality. Saudi Arabia has its unique cultural understanding of the word “servant” as it can be perceived negatively. Saudis believe that servants are those who do the common good for the society without being privileged. When it comes to the term “servant-leadership”, Saudi Arabians faced difficulties processing the word “servant” and link it to the word “leadership”. Austell (2010) looked at servant-leadership in international context. He discussed the method of servant-leadership with a Saudi doctoral student. After hearing a brief definition about servant-leadership, the Saudi student stated: “I will never be what you call a servant leader” (p. 14), believing that a leader should be the one who is being served not the one who serves others. This sensitivity is derived from the belief that leadership means authority, and has nothing to do with being servant.

Saudi Arabia faces major challenges in practicing leadership in higher education. Wilson (2011) revealed that “there is a remarkable scarcity of solid studies on leadership theory and practices in Saudi Arabia” (p. 180). Although it is a time when service is mostly needed, not enough attention and support is given to the value of service in Saudi Arabia, as it diminishes and ignores the servant-leadership method, because no definition or determination of its use as a practical



leadership style exists (Al-Yousef, 2012).

In their study, Shmailan and Wirbaa (2015) revealed that the majority of educational leaders in Saudi Arabian universities are transformational leaders and transactional leaders, and fewer are laissez-faire leaders. The general concept of servant-leadership remains undefined as a practical leadership model in Saudi Arabia (Al-Yousef, 2012; Shmailan & Wirbaa, 2015).

Salameh, Al-Wyzinany, and Al-Omari (2012) determined the absence of important servant-leadership principles among academic administrators in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Researchers found a lack of research in the area of servant-leadership not only in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, but also in the research world in general (Russell & Stone, 2002). In addition, the number of years of teaching experience one achieved identified to what extent one practiced the principles of servant-leadership. Faculty with more experience perceived the level of practice of “developing other” and “building community” higher than those with less experience (Salameh et al., 2012). Previous studies (Al-Yousef, 2012; Salameh et al., 2012; Shmailan & Wirbaa, 2015) concluded that servant-leadership needs more attention in the area of research across countries generally, and in Saudi Arabia specifically.

Gonaim (2017) investigated the leadership characteristics and behaviors of department chairs in higher education in Saudi Arabia. Very few studies measured the leadership approaches used by higher educational leaders in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. “The academic department is a



fundamental unit for transforming the university's visions and goals into reality" (p. 1). The findings demonstrated that department chairs are distinguished by their attitudes such as appreciation, respect, and trust, in addition to their knowledge and skills such as clear communication, listening, convincing, problem solving, time management, and adopting change. More importantly, according to department chairs' perspectives in Saudi Arabia, a tendency exists to call for more collaborative leadership approaches that urge common effort, shared authority, ethics, and collective interest (Gonaim, 2017).

Higher education leaders in Saudi Arabia still practice the oldest forms of leadership that focus on the performance of workers, not the workers themselves (Alamri, 2011). Although the majority of Saudi higher education leaders (e.g., deans) received their education internationally, they tend to use bureaucratic leadership styles that heavily rely on formal authority. Bureaucracy is still the major challenge for the higher education system in Saudi Arabia (Alamri, 2011).

In addition, researchers conducted very few studies that examined leadership styles of staff in universities in Saudi Arabia (Shmailan & Wirbaa, 2015). The researchers found that significantly more leadership development and training for managers and staff was taking place in universities in Saudi Arabia because increasing demands of higher education in Saudi Arabia requires successful educational leadership that brings positive change to the organizations. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia revealed that Saudi leaders suffer from unfamiliarity with leadership education. They receive no



leadership education before they receive leadership positions (Mathis, 2010). When educators become eligible to advance their careers to be educational leaders, they get their new leadership positions without prior engagement in any professional-development activities that prepare them professionally to be successful leaders (Mathis, 2010).

Because servant-leadership is not yet known and practiced by some leaders in Saudi Arabia, no known studies assessed the nature of the authority used by Saudi higher education leaders. For instance, some Saudi leaders may embody the characteristics of servant-leadership but do not think of themselves as servant-leaders. Their potential lack of knowledge about servant-leadership may cause a failure to recognize themselves as servant-leaders. The type of authority of those leaders who are servant-leaders still needs to be defined. Currently, no study explored servant-leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia. Researchers need to determine the level of the use of moral authority by Saudi higher educational leaders, as an essential pillar of servant-leadership. Their ways of employing authority will clearly define whether they are real servant-leaders.

ANALYSIS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP, POWER AND AUTHORITY

Authority is a main pillar of servant-leadership, as a servant-leader is careful when choosing the right type of authority that does not hurt others. Three essential issues show the link between authority and servant-leadership, which



include understanding the authority and power in servant-leadership, shifting from “formal authority” to “moral authority”, and the relation between the five bases of power and servant-leadership.

Authority and Power in Servant-Leadership

Some people want power to live a better life, make money, or create a good reputation and image in other people’s eyes. San Juan (2005) illustrated that power is one of the most studied topics in the world. That because power is desired by every individual to some extent. In a workplace environment, leaders and employees seek to gain this power: leaders need power to run an organization and its employees; and employees desire power to gain the ear of their bosses to, for example, change some of their daily work life (Fuqua, Payne & Cangemi, 2000). Of consequence is how leaders use their power without hurting the organization and its members.

To better understand how servant-leaders should use power, it is helpful first to understand the concept of power because “power is a compelling aspect of leadership” (San Juan, 2005, p. 187). Scholars hold different definitions of power based on their perspectives and perceptions. They defined power as a relationship between people, control over people, use of resources, and access of information. Van Der Toorn et al. (2014) stated, “power is typically defined as asymmetric control over valued resources in the context of social relations” (p. 2). Cangemi (1992) asserted: “power is the individual’s capacity to move others, to entice others, to persuade and encourage others



to attain specific goals or to engage in specific behavior; it is the capacity to influence and motivate others” (p. 2). Still other researchers defined power as the “ability to influence the actions of others, individuals or groups. It is understood as the leader’s influence potential” (Krausz, 1986, p. 69). Despite these different dimensions of power, scholars agreed that power is the ability to influence others toward better accomplishments of organizations. Power can be understood as *power over* and *power to*, as Grogan (2013) described. Power over emphasizes controlling people and outcomes, such as what, when, or how people do things. Power to is goal bound, viewed as a resource of energy for achieving shared purpose and goals.

Authority and power seem similar, but each one provides certain resources and focus. Power is the ability to influence others to achieve an organization’s goals (Christman, 2007). Authority is not an ability; rather, it is the right given to the manager to accomplish certain tasks (Serrat, 2014). Every leader holds authority to give orders to accomplish tasks, but any individual—not necessarily leaders—can hold power when they are able to influence others to do, avoid, or change things (Mooney, 1985). The major difference between power and authority rests in the notion that authority aligns with social position, whereas power ties to personal characteristics. Power is a factual relation whereas authority is a legitimate relation (Coleman, 2013).

As authority is one of the prerequisites of leadership, Serrat (2014) wrote about authority and power in terms of function, application, and comparison. Formal authority is a type of



authority used by leaders to control and change certain objects.

Formal authority—the power to direct—is the defining characteristic of societal and organizational hierarchy. Charting a chain of command, one eventually locates somebody, or some group, who administers an organization’s collective decision rights, and enjoys the perquisites ascribed to the function. (p. 10)

Serrat (2014) argued that formal authority is best described as power held because of one’s position. Although the 21st century needs to expand this type of authority by leveraging mutual influence, “the power of formal authority is eroding as its utility becomes less evident” (p. 10). Greenleaf turned down many promotions because of a fear that the formal authority would interfere with the moral authority that Greenleaf admired (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Legitimate and moral authority need to be practiced and inherited in today’s organizations (Sipe & Frick, 2015).

A majority of leadership writers acknowledge leadership as a position, not as a function, whereas position does not mean leadership. Servant-leadership recognizes that leadership is a function and mindset that shapes an organization and its people. Servant-leaders cherish the resulting behaviors and ethics, and carefully using the position to allow this paradigm and its values to be realized, then practiced (Christman, 2007). One requires position to easily and quickly accomplish tasks, but position is not necessarily required to lead (Christman, 2007). Northouse (2016) stated: “people have power when they have the ability to affect others’ beliefs, attitudes, and courses



of action” (p. 6). Robbins (1998) added that position is not a prerequisite for power. Some people prove their abilities and power to change others’ behaviors but they do not hold a position that allows them to control others.

Christman (2007) argued that power is often perceived as a negative force, and Karp (1996) listed three perspectives of power: good, evil, and natural. Christman (2007) stated: “power isn’t good and it isn’t bad; it simply is, just as electricity isn’t intrinsically good or bad, it just is. It is how it is used that makes a difference” (p. 13). Robbins (1998) enhanced the understanding of power by stating, “power refers to a capacity that A has to influence the behavior of B, so that B acts in accordance with A’s wishes” (p. 396). Leaders need to realize that personal power is an optimal source for the development of a servant culture and authority is autonomous from providing service. Effective leaders grow their personal power by actually growing and empowering others in the organization. Fuqua et al. (2000) illustrated, leaders who exercise authority over others most of time are seen as untrustworthy, because their employees feel the need to avoid arguing, dominating, and engaging in any informal conversation with them.

In contrast, servant-leaders do not rely on their position, but rather, rely on their legitimacy and ethics in addressing followers and meeting their needs (Spears, 2010; Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Greenleaf strongly opposed relying on authority and power in leadership, especially coercive power, believing leaders should shift authority to those being led (Northouse, 2016). “The more that power is concentrated in the



office of a leader, the more inevitability that later will become isolated” (Mooney, 1985. p. 82). Further, Russell and Stone (2002) demonstrated the danger of viewing leadership as an authority or power and diminished the value of the service-in-leadership concept. They stated,

as long as power dominates our thinking about leadership, we cannot move toward a higher standard of leadership. We must place service at the core; for even though power will always be associated with leadership, it has only one legitimate use: service. (p. 145)

Leaders can only practice servant-leadership by modeling moral authority. To establish moral authority, one’s authority must be viewed as legitimate (Grogan, 2013). Christman (2007) reported some types of power servant-leaders could practice. One of these types is rooted in followers viewing their leaders as legitimate, dubbed *legitimate power*. Legitimate power is the type of power viewed as fair. People do what they are asked to do under a sense of volunteering because they see their leaders’ behaviors and decisions are legitimate. Leaders never receive obligation if their power is seen as illegitimate (Tyler, 2006).

Shifting From “Formal Authority” to “Moral Authority”

Ethics is the core value of the development of leadership. Leadership scholars realize that although servant-leadership and other leadership theories—transformational, cultural, and ethical—emphasize ethical behaviors and values; “the world is full of the selfish, non-transparent and greedy leaders” (Dambe & Moorad, 2008, p. 585). Thus, embracing leadership ethics,



modeling ethical behaviors, and shifting leaders' practices of authority from formal authority to more moral authority is critical in today's workplace more than ever before.

An effective leadership style does not depend on formal authority. Often leaders who avoid relying on their authority create it into a seeming necessity (Serrat, 2014). Leaders who heavily use their authority and power seek to get conformity without acceptance and to issue a chain of commands without influence, giving them a feeling of clutching the reins and controlling others' performance (Serrat, 2014). Servant-leaders do not use formal authority. They recognize that formal authority may prevent them from providing service that is the core element of servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Moral authority is character strengths that are considered a primary greatness, whereas formal authority is a secondary greatness that can be defined as wealth, reputation, and position (Covey, 2006). When people with formal authority or a position of power (secondary greatness) use their authority or power as a last resort, their moral authority tends to increase because they use persuasion, empathy, reasoning, and trust instead of subordinating their ego.

Leaders with moral authority act as servant-leaders (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Sipe and Frick (2015) detailed that moral authority does not come automatically with position. Earning moral authority depends on following the six pillars of servant-leadership because those pillars represent the essential moralities that align with servant-leadership attributes. The six pillars are (a) leaders need to act as people of character with



integrity, humility, and spirituality; (b) putting people first through serving, caring, concerning, and mentoring; (c) being skillful, empathetic communicators who appreciate feedback; (d) collaborating compassionately and building diverse teams; (e) exercising foresight and inspiring and supporting an audacious vision; and (f) being a systems thinker, who considers the greater good and effectively engages in a complex environment (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote the following famous passage summarizing the moral authority in servant-leadership:

A new moral principle is emerging, which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant nature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants. (pp. 23-24)

The significance of moral authority goes beyond the advantage it brings to an organization and its people. It can be considered a survival tactic or the demise of an entire organization (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Every institution should adopt enduring moral principles rather than rules because moral principles are the critical indicators of the health of the environment that ensures continuity and productivity. Moral authority leads to formal authority. Leaders who use moral authority earn the power and freedom that are given by



people to expand their voices. When they become advocates for their people, they naturally gain formal authority that enables leaders and followers to share a common vision. Exercising formal authority leads to the accomplishment of the required tasks, but through exercising moral authority and leading by example, leaders strengthen their power and see followers' potential and worth.

The Relationship Between the Five Bases of Power and Servant-Leadership

Processes of power are varying and complex in our society. The five bases of social or organizational power and influence comprise a theory developed by French and Raven in 1959. Those bases started from the premise that power and influence involve relations between at least two parties. These bases of power include legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and referent.

Legitimate power. To enrich legitimate power and fully understand it, it is critical to be familiar with the dimensions of the word *legitimacy*. Tyler (2006) defined the term legitimacy as “psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just” (p. 375). Because of legitimacy, people feel they can follow rules, obey orders, agree with decisions, and do what they are asked to do in a satisfactory manner, without fear of punishment or anticipation of rewards, but rather under the feeling of obligation and through volunteering. Fuqua et al. (2000) revealed, “people with legitimate power fail to recognize they have it, and then they



may begin to notice others going around them to accomplish their goals” (p. 2).

Reward power. Reward power comes from individuals who have the ability to reward and compensate, and to mediate the reward, as perceived by others (French & Raven, 1959). Reward power is the ability to give either positive consequences or to remove negative consequences for doing what is wanted and expected. Powerful leaders can provide tangible and intangible rewards to employees to keep them influenced. Tangible rewards are physical items such as salary increases, bonuses, and certificates. Intangible rewards are moral rewards such as recognition, positive feedback, and praise (Petress, 2013).

Coercive power. Coercive power is an inappropriate tool in addressing others because it results in distrust, fear, lack of loyalty, and satisfaction toward the powerful (Petress, 2013). Leaders use coercive power when they force or threaten others for noncompliance. Force includes emotional, social, and political force. Leaders who use this power punish others because they do not conform with leaders’ ideas and demands.

Expert power. Expert power is the faith that a person is more knowledgeable and has more insights and expertise in certain ways (French & Raven, 1959). Expert power is very similar to informational power, which was added five years after developing the five bases of power by French and Raven in 1959. Informational power implies the control of information and knowledge needed by others to reach specific goals (French & Raven, 1959).



Referent power. Raven (2008) described referent power as a basis of identification of a person with others.

Referent Power stems from the target identifying with the agent, or seeing the agent as a model that the target would want to emulate. (“I really admire my supervisor and wish to be like him/her. Doing things the way she believes they should be done gives me some special satisfaction.”) (p. 3)

Referent power is the ability to cultivate the admiration and respect of followers, so leaders can influence others because of others’ friendship, admiration, and loyalty (French & Raven, 1959). Only people who create a strong interpersonal relationship with others can gain referent power because it heavily relies on the mutual perspectives between people and power (Raven, 2008).

In this taxonomy, Christman (2007) defined the types of power used by servant-leaders through the lens of the two major categories of power: positional power and personal power. Positional power is the authority bestowed by a position to whoever is occupying this position. The individual who has positional power is using the rights to exert power in the scope of a particular position, which means this category of power is limited to the boundaries of the title or position, and its advantages do not go beyond this exact position (Greenberg & Baron, 2003). Positional power emerges in the form of a CEO or vice president who takes their role seriously and uses their given rights to create a safe and growth-oriented environment, so employees and stakeholders can be served better. Greenberg and Baron divided positional power into four possible



subcomponents, originally classified by French and Raven in 1959. These four types of power are legitimate, coercive, reward, and information power, described in previous paragraphs.

The second main category of power is personal power. Personal power is the power one has based on the ability to influence. Effective leaders are those who rely on their personal power more than their positional power (Christman, 2007). Personal power is what “one derives because of his or her individual qualities or characteristics” (Greenberg & Baron, 2003, p. 445). Those qualities are the predominant source of influence. One realizes personal power by establishing deep relationships with others that in turn creates a bond of trust, honesty, ethics, and collaboration. Leaders who use their personal power tend not to use their title or position to influence others to encourage them to do their work; instead, they seek to build trusting and long-lasting relationships that make followers feel secure and engaged. Personal power can be actualized by a position-holder by practicing the last two types of power defined by French and Raven (1959): expert power and referent power (Greenberg & Baron, 2003).

Servant-leadership can only be practiced by those leaders who consider personal power as an optimal resource for the creation of a servant culture in an organization (Christman, 2007). Positional power is not an optimal platform for development of servant-leadership because it may be a deterrent to its actualization. Not all who use personal power



are servant-leaders but all who are servant-leaders use their personal power.

Personal power, utilized by a position-holder within an organization, simply becomes an optimal platform for actualizing servant-leadership. In some respects, positions, like power, are a neutral value, neither positive nor negative. It simply becomes a vehicle of opportunity for a servant-leader. (p. 12)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a remarkable scarcity in the area of servant-leadership research in Saudi Arabia. The phrase servant-leadership might be confusing for some leaders because of the assumption that leaders are the ones who are being served. Changing this mindset could be a challenge especially for those leaders who rely on authority and believe in it as an essential factor in leadership. Shifting from the traditional leadership style to servant-leadership can be misunderstood as a weakness of a leader that she/he is no longer able to control things. Saudi higher educational leaders need to be educated in some of the bases and foundations of leadership, which are critical in reforming and developing higher education and its system in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi educational leaders need to engage in continuous professional development and need to be given more accessible and available opportunities and programs designed by the Ministry of Higher Education. Shafai (2014) viewed the need of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia to



respond to the current challenges in education institutions. She reported:

In terms of the introduction of new approaches in the educational process, the need for changing the traditional pattern in the education process, and the discovery of alternative techniques of teaching, strategies, and methods of modern education, professional development is essential. (pp. 4-5)

Shifting from the traditional method to servant-leadership method needs to be gradually and smoothly to reduce the potential risks and challenges that can be occur.

This paper focuses on an analysis of servant-leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia. Future mixed method studies might focus on experiences of male and female leaders separately, whether they have different perspective on servant-leadership and the use of power. Additionally, exploring and comparing between higher educational leaders from different region in Saudi Arabia will be helpful and can give a deeper understanding of the impact of an educational environment in practicing servant-leadership and authority.

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