



THE QUALITATIVE ESSENCE OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP¹

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Robert K. Greenleaf (2002) effectively embodied lesser known servant-leadership aspects such as prophesy, foresight, and the will to better society, often through personal and collective sacrifice. In his telling essay on Robert Frost’s poem “Directive,” Greenleaf showed not only his strengths in linear thinking, but his uncommon and profound gifts with regard to nonlinear, mystery-based, and more circular aspects of wisdom. This type of wisdom is more readily associated with poets and painters than business practitioners or social scientists.

Greenleaf’s essay titled “The Inward Journey” from Greenleaf’s (2002) *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* contains an elegant, artistic, and in many respects, qualitative, look at the nature of the servant-leader. In the essay, Greenleaf relates how reading

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Robert Frost's poem, "Directive," deepened his understanding of the courageous and wise presence of the servant as leader. In this chapter, we want to present qualitative research studies that reflect Greenleaf's profound understanding of humanity in more enriched, more mystery-based, and more collectivist (vs. individualistic) ways than are often found in normative quantitative research studies.

Notably, the burgeoning quantitative research in servant-leadership conducted by Liden (Hu & Liden, 2011; Liden et al., 2015; Liden, Fu, Liu, & Song, 2016; Liden, Wayne, Liao, & Meuser, 2014; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Panaccio, Henderson, Liden, Wayne, & Cao, 2015), van Dierendonck (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; van Dierendonck et al., 2017; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014), and many others, has revealed weighty implications for servant-leadership across many dimensions of human experience. This body of research significantly fortifies and brings to the fore the new quantitative frontier of servant-leadership understandings, leading the field in unforeseen directions while contributing invaluable new knowledge.

That said, qualitative studies in servant-leadership perform a different function—again, a function less aligned with linear or super-rational knowledge, and more aligned with poetic or symbolic knowledge. Quantitative research, in its emphasis on numerical reliability, validity, and generalizability and at the expense of more intimate individual and collective expressions of human capacity, cannot, by definition, draw on the empirical



grounding in lived experience found in qualitative research (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; van Manen, 1990, 2016). Quantitative research typically disallows, or rather occludes the researcher from acknowledging and challenging personal biases, a research practice that is a common requirement for qualitative studies. This refusal to acknowledge and detail personal bias, can often prevent the servant-leader from true self-knowledge, and thus it can be a shadow-force or unknown frailty in much quantitative research. At times this results in calcification, brittleness, and eventual fracture of the knowledge base. Certainly, research using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies is necessary for more complete and robust understanding of servant-leadership. The gift of in-depth, well-designed, and deeply informed qualitative studies in servant-leadership offers the opportunity to expose our blind spots as people and leaders, and bring us to a more intimate understanding of ourselves, others, and the world.

Though the extent of Greenleaf's personal connection with Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Robert Frost is unknown, they did know each other, and spent time in one another's presence. The possibility that they directly influenced one another's thought is apparent and is a compelling thread in the history of leadership studies. Consider this moment, relayed by Greenleaf (2002):

In a group conversation with him [Frost] one evening, he digressed on the subject of loyalty. At one point I interjected with: "Robert, that is not the way you have defined loyalty before." He turned to me with a broad



friendly grin and asked softly, “How did I define it?” I replied, “In your talk on Emerson a few years ago, you said, ‘Loyalty is that for the lack of which your gang will shoot you without benefit of trial by jury.’” To this man who had struggled without recognition until he was forty, and then had to move to England to get it, nothing could have pleased him more in his old age than to have an obscure passage like this quoted to him in a shared give-and-take with non-literary people. (p. 326)

In Greenleaf’s (2002) “engagement” with Frost’s poem, he affirmed the necessity of a prophetic, circular orientation in going further into the depths of human awareness: “Our problem is circular: we must understand in order to be able to understand. It has something to do with awareness and symbols” (p. 329). Symbolic understanding is formless, it cannot be linearized, and it cannot be understood by simple 1-2-3 progressions. Rather, it is absorbed, it is an element of life and leadership in which the servant-leader chooses to become willingly submerged.

Awareness, letting something significant and disturbing develop between oneself and a symbol, comes more by being waited upon rather than by being asked. One of the most baffling of life’s experiences is to stand beside one who is aware, one who is looking at a symbol and is deeply moved by it, and, confronting the same symbol, to be unmoved. Oh, that we could just be open in the presence of symbols that cry out to speak to us, let our guards down, and take the risks of being moved!



The power of a symbol is measured by its capacity to sustain a flow of significant new meaning. The substance of the symbol may be a painting, a poem or story, allegory, myth, scripture, a piece of music, a person, a crack in the sidewalk, or a blade of grass. Whatever or whoever, it produces a confrontation in which much that makes the symbol meaningful comes from the beholder.

The potentiality is both in the symbol and in the beholder. (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 329)

From the foundations of qualitative research, philosophers of human nature such as Husserl (1970), Heidegger (1962), Gadamer (2004, 1976), and Ricoeur (1981), have spoken to the impossibility of knowing humanity without knowing oneself. Qualitative research helps us find a more accessible avenue toward increased self-awareness: through symbol, depth, and meaning. The need to name, articulate, and bracket one's own biases in the attempt to show the lived human experience more clearly, is inherent to qualitative research, even as it generally remains obscured in quantitative research. By extension, the person with a leader-first mentality—often mired in self-aggrandizement without foreknowledge, ambition at the expense of love and service, and an inappropriate power drive obscuring or negating authentic intimacy—generally lacks healthy self-awareness. The leader-first leader has limited or no capacity to name her or his own faults, let alone invite others to influence, challenge, and help change his or her faults. In this light Greenleaf's (2002) prophetic truths—warning individuals, communities, and nations against the leader-first mentality—



take on pivotal and in fact crucial meaning.

The core of this chapter is a review of six qualitative studies to express how qualitative servant-leadership research and inquiry can benefit our understanding of the world, ourselves, and servant-leadership theory and practice. Servant-leaders—aligned with the ancient history of servant-first leading, rather than leader-first leading—seek greater self-awareness and greater awareness of others. Servant-leaders seek the essence of what it means not only to lead and follow, but to live. In so doing, they embody great will, considerable modesty, and active engagement with a circular world. The following six articles by Ramsey (2006), Reynolds (2013, 2014), Matesi (2013a, 2013b), Kincaid (2017), Campbell (2017), and McCollum and Moses (2009), two based in the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, one based in mixed methods content-analysis, one based in ethnographic content analysis, one based directly in prophetic foresight, and the final one based on Greenleaf’s original longitudinal research at AT&T, reveal the richness of human understanding associated with in-depth studies of human nature in light of servant-leadership. In this chapter, we discuss servant-leadership essence in six major themes: (a) servant-leadership, empathy, and healing; (b) servant-leadership and gender balance; (c) servant-leadership and foresight; (d) servant-leadership and corporate responsibility; (e) servant-leadership, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and (f) servant-leadership and Greenleaf’s modelling. The chapter ends with a section that covers essential understandings.



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP ESSENCE

At the outset of my research I was unsure, even questioning the heart of humanity. I can now say a life for others, a servant-led life, exists, heals the world, restores us to one another, and gracefully makes us whole.

(Ramsey, 2006, p. 134)

Servant-Leadership, Empathy, and Healing

In 2002, Marleen Ramsey set out to interview six political perpetrators from the Apartheid era in South Africa who were found guilty of murder and other gross human rights abuses. Going through political turmoil and being tormented by violence, South Africa had its first democratic elections in 1994. Nelson Mandela became the president and initiated the process of investigating human rights abuses and negotiating national reconciliation through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was chaired by Desmond Tutu. Mandela and Tutu modeled servant-leadership through the process of the TRC. The TRC employed public truth-telling hearings to give voice to the victims who had been silent about the suffering they had been through and to let political perpetrators be honest about their violent deeds. Through this process, truth was revealed, suffering was heard, forgiveness was given and received, and lives were transformed. Ramsey's (2006) hermeneutic phenomenological study depicted a particular and fine-grained picture of this movement a decade after the fall of Apartheid. Among Ramsey's six participants, two were responsible for the death of Amy Biehl in 1993, one



was tried for the Heidelberg Tavern attack in 1994, one was responsible for the St. James Church massacre in 1993, one commanded the attacks on the Heidelberg Tavern and the St. James Church in Cape Town, and one ordered the attack on a house in the village of Trust Feed in 1988. In each case, lives were taken and innocent blood was shed.

Amy Biehl, an American Fulbright scholar, had been helping black South Africans complete registration forms so that they could vote in the forthcoming democratic elections, which were to be held in 1994. Her work was a powerful example of servant-leadership. Increasing black-on-white violence took place in South Africa in the years of 1993 and 1994 under the influence of the slogan, “One settler, one bullet, we want our country right now, liberate” (Ramsey, 2003, p. 124). What happened to Amy in the black township of Gugulethu on July 25, 1993 was the result of one of these uprisings. The crowd spotted a government truck and behind it was Amy driving a yellow car. Someone saw Amy’s white face and shouted that there was a settler and the crowd began throwing stones at Amy’s car. They caught her, stabbed her multiple times, and stoned her to death. Two of Ramsey’s participants were found guilty for the death of Amy Biehl.

In another set of interviews, focusing on a different and also traumatic set of events, Ramsey interviewed a white commander of the State security forces. This commander was in charge of controlling the region and thwarting the activities against whites in a remote corner of the Kwa-Zulu Natal Midlands. The commander’s forces, all white, oversaw a village—Trust Feed—



with 7,000 black people. On December 3, 1988, the commander ordered an attack on a house in Trust Feed. He thought he was destroying an ammunition holding house and a location where petrol bombs were being manufactured. When he walked into the house the morning after the attack, blood covered the room and eleven bodies lay still, mostly women and children. He realized that the wrong house had been targeted and innocent people had been killed. In order to protect the image of the South African State Security Forces, he and his superiors planned a cover-up of the atrocity by blaming the attack on the black United Democratic Front forces.

Ramsey's data did not come from a questionnaire distributed to hundreds of people, but from in-depth interviews on the lived experiences of six participants. Her questions sought the heart of the matter:

- Please describe what it was like to face your victim or victim's family and to receive empathy and forgiveness from them.
- If it came as a surprise to you to receive empathy and forgiveness from the victim's family, please describe what response . . .
- Please describe the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions you experienced . . .
- Have your thoughts, goals, or behaviors changed in any way due to your experience of receiving empathy and forgiveness, and if so, please describe them for me.
- Would you please describe the most transforming moment you experienced throughout the ordeal?



(Ramsey, 2003, p. 261)

By using a phenomenological approach, Ramsey (2003, 2006) gave space to the participants and let them share what they had experienced. This formed the starting point for inquiry, reflection, and interpretation. Hermeneutic phenomenology goes beyond merely describing the foundations of lived experience and looks for meanings embedded in the essences of the lifeworld (Lopez & Willis, 2004; van Manen, 2016). Reflecting on her work, Ramsey (2006) said:

Time and again, during the interviews and during the interpretation of these men's stories, I was struck by the enormity of the psychological pain that we often cause others and ourselves. I was also struck by the realization of how healing the experience of forgiveness can be to both victims and perpetrators. It is through the stories of these six men that greater understanding may be gained regarding the transforming powers of empathy and forgiveness. It is also through their stories that we can see how the practices of servant-leadership can restore community to people deeply separated by violence and brutality. (p. 120)

Ramsey (2006) found five themes through her study: (a) violence harms both victim and perpetrator, (b) denial and arrogance are self-protections used to shield the perpetrator from shame, (c) empathy creates an environment whereby the perpetrator can ask for and receive forgiveness, (d) the gift of forgiveness increases the ability to forgive oneself, and (e)



forgiveness is a bridge to the future. Facing violence and tragedy, we learn some of the details of damage through news reports and numbers of deaths, but in order to know the impact on victims' and perpetrators' hearts and souls, we have to listen to their stories. Ramsey pointed out that labeling perpetrators as "evil" or "inhuman" does not help us understand them. All of her participants revealed intense pain such as "I felt a pain in my heart," "I felt pressed with a huge weight," "I felt as if I was being suffocated," and "There was a poison that needed to be released" (p. 124). However, many amnesty seekers appeared unbroken, unrepentant, arrogant, and with no sign of remorse as they were testifying before the TRC. Ramsey developed deeper understanding of human blame-shifting through her interviews. One participant said, "I was not prepared to make myself appear weak because it would create more shame than I could bear" (p. 125). Five of the six participants mentioned their needs to maintain dignity and self-respect in an environment they felt was extremely hostile. After capturing the human side of the perpetrators, Ramsey found that perpetrators' feelings of empathy for their victims and receiving empathy from victims' families were emotional bridges that perpetrators could use to ask for and receive forgiveness. She showed the long and torturous journey toward self-forgiveness each of these participants faced. In the attack on Trust Feed, one participant's action resulted in the death of eleven innocent people. Years later, in response to Mandela and Tutu's servant-leadership, the people of Trust Feed brought him back for reconciliation and forgiveness and invited



him to live with them. He said, “I was dead until that day. . . And after that day I lived” (pp. 135-136). Today he has succeeded in helping raise the funds to build a community center, hand in hand with people whose family members he killed.

All six participants received empathy and forgiveness from victims’ family members or loved ones, but only four developed close relationships with the people they had harmed. These four participants expressed a greater feeling of self-forgiveness and hope for the future than the other two who did not have such relationships with their victims’ families. Today, after years of profound relationship, the men who killed Amy Beihl call Amy’s mother their mother, and she calls them her sons. They all see this as a miracle, and the world echoes their sentiment. Together these men, along with Amy Beihl’s parents, have worked to improve quality of life for families and children of South Africa. The conclusions of Ramsey’s (2006) study contribute to understanding the role of empathy and forgiveness in the healing of interpersonal wounded relationships. Even with the most hardened and unrepentant perpetrators, the practice of the principles of servant-leadership—empathy and healing—have the generative power to bring hope for redemption and the restoration of community. Servant-leaders help those who have been lost in the wilderness find their way home.

Servant-Leadership and Gender Balance

Through a feminist perspective, Reynolds (2013) used a



mixed methods content analysis to study commencement messages delivered by 50 of the top female and male American business leaders based on the ranking of their organizations on *Fortune* lists from 2005 to 2012. Her purpose was to understand gender differences between expressions of leadership in the constructs of servant-leadership and expressions of decision-making in the constructs of the ethic of care. She also explored whether gender differences among prominent American business leaders support the conceptualization that servant-leadership is a gender-integrative mode of leadership. She found this to be intuitively and qualitatively true. In other words, no overall gender distinction was found on the main servant-leadership characteristics, but some gender differences were observed. For instance, women spoke more about humility and standing-back in leadership whereas men highlighted accountability; female speakers considered the motivation to lead as an ethical drive and a choice, whereas male speakers articulated it as an obligation (Reynolds, 2013). She stated that gender differences found in the qualitative analysis could serve to reify gender congruency expectations if read without critical gender understanding. To counteract such reification, her study presented evidence of female leaders combining care-orientation and relationality (typically feminine aspects of leadership) with courage and contrarian thinking (typically masculine aspects) and evidence of male leaders combining accountability and risk-taking (typically masculine aspects) with forgiveness and being attuned to others' needs (typically



feminine aspects). Reynolds (2013) concluded that servant-leadership combines both feminine and masculine aspects of leadership.

Furthermore, Eicher-Catt (2005) proposed that the serving aspect of servant-leadership is associated with submissive femininity, and the leading aspect with oppressive masculinity. Reynolds (2014) challenged Eicher-Catt's framework, revealing Eicher-Catt's conclusions with regard to servant-leadership to be largely based on her perception of the two words "servant" and "leader" and not on Greenleaf's own interpretations of these words. Greenleaf's interpretations serve to deconstruct the words and return them to their original meanings, affirming their value across gender, culture, time, and context. Reynolds analyzed Spears' (2002) 10 characteristics to examine servant-leadership constructs in terms of gender. She argued that six of the 10 characteristics distinguish servant-leadership from other forms of leadership whereas the other four are more in line with traditional notions of leadership (Reynolds, 2014). These six distinguishing characteristics are: stewardship, listening, empathizing, healing, commitment to the growth of people, and building community; the other four are comprised of foresight, conceptualization, awareness, and persuasion. Reynolds (2014) asserted that foresight, conceptualization, awareness, and persuasion can be characterized as leader behaviors, which are often associated with the more traditionally masculine aspect of leadership. The six distinguishing characteristics of servant-leadership, on the other hand, are predominantly needs-focused and other-oriented, and thus, for Reynolds (2014), comprise the



feminine-attributed aspects of leadership.

Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed, from her particular feminist perspective, that the apposition of servant with leader associated with subjugation and domination respectively, instantiates a paradoxical discourse game that perpetuates male-centric patriarchal norms rather than neutralizes gender bias. Reynolds (2014) agreed that Eicher-Catt's (2005) critique reveals otherwise obscure discursive and behavioral meanings and hidden cultural assumptions in servant-leadership.

However, Reynolds (2014) exposed how Eicher-Catt lacked the will to go deeply into Greenleaf's original texts in order to find a more central discursive and deconstructive essence that can be ascribed to Greenleaf's sense of "making things whole" across gender, culture, and context. Reynolds (2014) argued that the combination of servant facets and leader facets of servant-leadership do not automatically confirm the negatives Eicher-Catt associated with gendered notions, but on the contrary, provides a model of ethical and gender equity-enhancing leadership. "Servant-leadership espouses a nonhierarchical, participative approach to defining organizational objectives and ethics that recognizes and values the subjectivity and situatedness of organizational members" (Reynolds, 2014, p. 57). It can serve as "a driving force for generating discourse on gender-integrative approaches to organizational leadership" (p. 51).

Reynolds proposed the paradoxical linguistic term "servant-leader" is not a disguise for male-centric norms as Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed, but a complementary and



harmonious dualism. This dualism resonates with the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, which represent female and male, respectively, in ancient Chinese literature.

As for *yin* and *yang*, they are the Way of heaven and earth, the fundamental principles [governing] the myriad beings, father and mother to all changes and transformations, the basis and beginning of generating life and killing, the palace of spirit brilliance. (Unschuld, Tessenow, & Zheng, 2011, p. 95)

Lao Tzu (2005) said, “All the myriad things carry the Yin on their backs and hold the Yang in their embrace, deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending of the two vital Breaths” (p. 49). *Yin* and *yang* cannot exist without each other. They are a contradictory, yet complementary unit. Women were degraded in ancient China based on the ascendancy of patriarchy, the focus on the contradictory aspect of *yin* and *yang*, and the elevation of *yang* (Bao, 1987). The same kind of degradation still exists in leadership field today. Having stressed the equally and mutually complementary character of *yin-yang*, some scholars paved the way for the women’s egalitarian movement in nineteenth-century China (Bao, 1987). Likewise, this is what Reynolds (2013, 2014) and many other servant-leadership scholars are doing—elevating complementary without neglecting contradictory aspects of gender.

Through a discussion of the complementary character of *yin-yang* and servant-leader elements, without ignoring the contradictory aspect, leaders may establish harmony and gender-integrative models wherever they serve. Although the



results of Reynolds' (2013) study indicated that gender stereotyping continues to affect conceptualizations of leadership, her study also provided evidence of servant-leaders crossing gender boundaries and integrating gendered traits and behaviors. As Reynolds (2014) noted, by integrating the female perspective with a male perspective, a paradigm shift in leadership theory (through avenues inherent to servant-leadership) could move organizations from hierarchy-driven, rules-based, and authoritative models to value-driven, follower-oriented, and participative models with gender balance.

Servant-Leadership and Foresight

Foresight has been recognized as the most important virtue for leaders in China since ancient times. Chinese historian Sima (1993) wrote from approximately 145 BCE to 86 BCE, "An enlightened [person] sees the end of things while they are still in bud, and a wise [person] knows how to avoid danger before it has taken shape" (p. 294). For Greenleaf (2002), "Foresight is the 'lead' that the leader has" (p. 40).

One goes in prepared with strategies, with knowledge, and with as much as can be anticipated by foresight in the way of preparation. Belief that the needed insight will come, in the situation, is then the supporting faith that relieves one of stress in a way that permits the creative process to operate, that makes dynamic visionary leadership possible. (Greenleaf, 1996a, p. 324)

Matesi (2013a) outlined Greenleaf's (1996a) understanding of foresight in three creative and cognitive capacities:



intellection—the capacity to strategically prepare and analyze; imagination—the capacity to visualize scenarios or symbols that complement or expand intellection; and insight—the capacity to be open to what lies beyond intellect and image. Matesi (2013a) claimed that intellection, imagination, and insight constitute foresight, which fuels vision and is deployed through narrative forms of servant-leadership. Based on Sashkin’s (2004) articulation of vision—constructed mentally and behaviorally—Matesi (2013a) argued that the mental construction of vision is achieved through foresight and the behavioral construction of vision is achieved through narrative leadership. Foresight requires a leader to live at two levels of consciousness: the real world and the detached one (Greenleaf, 2002). Vision is fueled by foresight and exercising foresight employs intellection to see underlying structures and consequences, imagination to embrace and wrestle with paradoxes and visualize the whole, and insight to open awareness and perception through purposeful disorientation (Matesi, 2013a).

Vision is meant not only to be mentally constructed, but also behaviorally, emotionally, and spiritually conveyed and carried out. Through a literature review on the relationship between vision and narrative, Matesi (2013a) concluded that narrative leadership is the mechanism by which foresight-informed visions are communicated: “Narrative leadership draws out the cognitive, creative, and moral power of the leader through mentally and behaviorally constructing a narrated vision that intends to move, raise, and invigorate” (p.



83). Matesi supported her statement through the words of Wangari Maathai (2004) of Kenya,

In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now . . . there can be no peace without equitable development; and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space. This shift is an idea whose time has come. (para. 28-30)

Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 and the above words were from her Nobel lecture. Her whole lecture was intellection-driven, imaginative, and insightful (Matesi, 2013a). Maathai (2004) conveyed her vision through narrative and called on people to examine their own environmental values. A vision, constructed through foresight, cannot mediate social movements without narratives.

Matesi (2013b) examined the relationships among foresight, vision, and narrative leadership through an ethnographic content analysis of the text of 17 lectures delivered by Nobel Peace Prize laureates who won the prize for their leadership in human rights. She discerned each laureate's vision and then the textual traces of foresight used by the laureate to fuel that vision. In all lectures, a clearly articulated vision was identified. Foresight enables servant-leaders to understand the lessons from the past, see and rise above the events in the present, and foresee the consequences of a



decision for the indefinite future (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 2010). A leader is “at once, in every moment of time, historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet—not three separate roles” (Greenleaf, 1996a, p. 319). In her study, Matesi (2013b) found these three roles in the narratives of laureates who incorporated past, present, and future time orientations in their visions. Concerning the three creative and cognitive capacities of leader foresight, Matesi found the capacities of intellection and imagination existed explicitly in the lectures whereas the capacity of insight was present but not as extensive as the other two. Furthermore, in her study, the Nobel Peace laureates employed narrative leadership to share their visions of peace and to inspire and mobilize people through directly addressing the audience, referencing allies, naming opponents, capturing metanarratives and visions, and participating in a form of peace leadership attribution chain. Through her study, we can see that mental construction of vision through foresight, and behavioral construction of vision through narrative leadership, tie social knowing and acting together. To fuel narrative leadership, leaders may consider cultivating foresight by strengthening their intellection, imagination, and insight (Matesi, 2013a).

Servant-Leadership and Corporate Responsibility

Although today’s industrialized society in the context of servant-leadership is ethically meant to satisfy the needs of people—especially the least privileged, many organizational leaders still put profits ahead of people, instead of building a profitable community that helps people flourish. Paradoxically,



in the midst of the profit-first culture, servant-leadership research reveals how some people lead by putting others' needs first even if great sacrifice is required in order to do so. Kincaid (2017) described his study as sitting at servant-leaders' feet and learning from their stories. Sitting at a master's feet is the sign of becoming his or her disciple in ancient Greco-Roman culture. The nature of this gesture in terms of qualitative studies is to join into a shared dialogue with participants, achieving a deeper level of engagement, and gaining a richer understanding of the topic under study. Kincaid employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the essence of corporate social responsibility from a servant-leadership perspective. He interviewed three male and three female corporate leaders from different industries and variously sized organizations, which are preliminarily considered servant-led and socially responsible organizations.

Kincaid (2017) built his study on the literature surrounding corporate social responsibility and servant-leadership. No single definition for corporate responsibility is sufficient, therefore, Blowfield and Murray (2008) suggest using it as an umbrella term to capture the various ways to define, manage, and act upon business' relationship with society. They offered prominent areas or key pillars of corporate responsibility: business ethics, legal compliance, philanthropy and community investment, environmental management, sustainability, animal rights, human rights, worker rights and welfare, market relations, corruption, and corporate governance. Kincaid (2017) used these key pillars as a framework for organizations



practicing servant-leadership in socially responsible ways.

Greenleaf (2002) asserted that the quick shift of our society from one of individuals to one dominated by large institutions and the failure of trusteeship in these institutions causes societal problems. He contended that for a better society to be built, we have to “raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them” (p. 62). Kincaid (2017) selected leaders who understood the imperative role of the institution as servant. In his study, all participants shared rich stories about successful business practice in financially, environmentally, and socially responsible ways. In other words, their organizational leadership teams had acted as a servant to their workers and their surrounding communities.

Comparing his participants’ notions of social responsibility in servant-led organizations with the key pillars of corporate social responsibility in the literature, Kincaid (2017) found three themes. The most prevalent one was that “the language surrounding corporate social responsibility is uninspiring and therefore not embraced” (pp. 262-263). In his study, Kincaid’s participants, despite being leading practitioners in the field of corporate responsibility, were neither aware of, nor able to make a meaningful connection with the key pillars of corporate responsibility provided by Blowfield and Murray (2008). These leaders also did not consider corporate social responsibility as a goal with specific checklists. Kincaid (2017) pointed out that the most effective leadership goes beyond objective definition and prescribed behavior, reaching people at the level of heart,



thought, and insight. Kincaid's participants shared the value of forming a mission statement and holding themselves and their fellow workers accountable to the mission. This finding reinforced the role of vision as an intrinsic motivator and the inspiring power of the servant-leader.

The leader does this [inspiring people] by engaging the entire team or organization in a process that creates a shared vision that inspires each to stretch and reach deeper within themselves and to use their unique talents in whatever way is necessary to independently and interdependently achieve that shared vision. (Covey, 1998, p. xii)

In his study, Kincaid (2017) discerned a vital difference between the uninteresting language of corporate social responsibility and the robust, inspiring, and even illumined language of servant-leadership. He suggested that the reason for the disengagement of organizational leaders from the literature of corporate social responsibility is that it is imposing and autocratic and fails to motivate people. The disengagement produced by more autocratic terms did not mean that these leaders failed to care deeply about social responsibility; they were, in fact, making great efforts in shaping their organizations in a socially responsible way. They did it through cultivating visions, empowering fellow workers, and fostering intrinsic meanings (Kincaid, 2017). As Ferch (2005) said, "A common experience of being led from the traditional model is one of dominance or control, while the experience of being servant-led is one of freedom" (p. 99). Kincaid (2017)



suggested that in the corporate social responsibility movement, a shift—from dominance and control to empowerment and freedom—needs to take place. This is not just a challenge to the field of corporate responsibility, but also a challenge to all leaders—encouraging leaders and followers to move from leadership that *works* to leadership that *inspires* and *endures* (Covey, 2002).

Servant-Leadership, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

Campbell (2017) deepened the field of servant-leadership through building a theoretical foundation upon which leaders can integrate forgiveness and reconciliation as an organizational leadership competency to resolve conflicts and sustain peace and harmony in the face of local and global challenges. First, the author introduced definitions and conceptualizations of forgiveness and reconciliation within transitional justice and organizational leadership disciplines. Second, the author compared religious themes of forgiveness in Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Third, the author discussed the necessities of integrating forgiveness and reconciliation as an organizational leadership competency. Finally, Campbell suggested that servant-leadership can serve as a theoretical framework to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation within organizations.

Enright, Freedman, and Rique (1998) defined forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of



compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her” (pp. 46-47). Forgiveness is a process of replacing complex negative emotions with positive other-oriented emotions; and it requires empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love along with clear understanding in the face of social tensions and injustice (Worthington, 2006).

A study, conducted in Uganda by the Refugee Law Project and the Center for Civil and Human Rights from 2014 to 2015, found that the practice of forgiveness, combined with transitional justice measures—such as judicial accountability, truth telling, governance, and reparations—can be a strong asset for peace-building (Shaffic, 2015). Campbell (2017) claimed that transitional justice practitioners, who may be called to lead victims through the emotional and intellectual process of forgiveness, need to develop their leadership capacities, such as empathy, emotional intelligence, accountability, humility, and compassion. Within an unforgiving organization, Campbell stated, leaders may employ dishonesty, power politics, and manipulative measures; employees may be afraid to speak out and may be hiding their feelings; and such organizational climates are definably toxic. He asserted that forgiveness plays a principal role in restoring relationships, rebuilding trust, nurturing healthy work climates, improving organizational performance, and transforming organizations. Campbell discerned that forgiveness in the context of servant-leadership is “a social interaction among individuals designed to resolve intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts toward organizational and national peaceful coexistence” (p. 151). Furthermore, he



pointed out that forgiveness not only frees victims and perpetrators from guilt and pain, but also fosters personal, organizational, and global reconciliation.

Campbell (2017) claimed that the process of forgiveness focuses on individual healing while the process of reconciliation fosters social healing. Brouneus (2007) defined reconciliation as “a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behavior into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace” (p. 6). Reconciliation involves changes in emotion, attitude, and behavior; social healing among victims and perpetrators; and an ongoing process in which relations are rebuilt for sustainable and peaceful coexistence (Brouneus, 2007). Campbell (2017) proposed two levels of the conceptualization of reconciliation: the microlevel where reconciliation is both a leadership competency and an interpersonal endeavor and the macrolevel where reconciliation redresses the physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds generated by abusers at organizational, communal, national, and global levels. For Campbell, the best example of this two-level reconciliation is found in the process of the TRC in South Africa. Tutu (1999), the leader of the TRC, said, “Forgiveness will follow confession and healing will happen, and so contribute to national unity and reconciliation” (p. 120). Furthermore, Tutu claimed that South Africa had to move “beyond retributive justice to restorative justice, to move on to forgiveness, because without it there was no future” (p. 260). Campbell (2017) proposed that restorative



justice through servant-leadership builds a narrative toward reconciliation, facilitates forgiveness and societal reconciliation, and creates a therapeutic impact on the society.

Campbell (2017) compared religious themes of forgiveness in Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and found that forgiveness is accompanied by moral virtues, benevolence, and reliance on leaders' spirituality. Perpetrator accountability and psycho-social healing is impossible without a spiritual component, Campbell concluded. Thus, he confirmed that "forgiveness is an integral ingredient of individual psycho-social healing, facilitates restoration of individual and community healing, and necessitates spiritual strength as societies heal from human rights atrocities in a post conflict environment" (p. 164).

Campbell (2017) pointed out that organizational conflicts may come from the misperceptions generated from a lack of dialogue, listening, empathy, and understanding between leaders and the fellow workers. Leaders' decisions and actions based on misperceptions may produce an environment that lacks forgiveness and hinders peacebuilding. In order to avoid misperceptions, Campbell proposed that communications at individual and organizational levels take place by building an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, and dialogue. Integrating forgiveness within an organization can not only free victims and perpetrators from their wounds, but can also nurture and sustain such an atmosphere, further increasing retention and productivity. Thus, by fostering forgiveness and reconciliation, servant-leaders "create a supportive environment where



individual growth toward emotional, relational, and spiritual maturity strengthens” and organizational performance increases (Campbell, 2017, p. 174).

Yergler (2005) asserted that “a servant-leader must incorporate forgiveness as a leadership competency if the benefactors of that leadership are to experience true transformation into servant-leaders themselves” (para. 3). When Mandela laid down his vengeance after 27 years in jail, a spirit of forgiveness was kindled in the whole nation. Campbell (2017) argued that servant-leadership has essential ingredients that end up fostering an organizational climate of forgiveness and reconciliation. He compared the characteristics of unforgiving leaders with forgiving leaders at different levels—individually, dyadic, in teams, and organizationally—and listed servant-leadership competencies needed to nurture forgiveness and reconciliation within organizations. To form the formless and to chart the uncharted, servant-leadership scholars like Campbell (2017), strive to shift the stereotypical paradigms in leadership.

Servant-Leadership and Greenleaf’s Modeling

The above servant-leadership studies we have analyzed find some of their roots in Greenleaf’s original research shown in McCollum and Moses’ (2009) article. In this article, McCollum and Moses presented Greenleaf’s legacy at AT&T—the shaping of the contemporary development of assessment centers that were naturally qualitative, personal, and communal in nature and paired with certain quantitative understandings. After college, Greenleaf was hired by AT&T



Ohio Bell subsidiary in 1926. Three years later he was moved to the headquarters of AT&T in New York. In the 1920s, Bell initiated a comprehensive study to evaluate the success of college recruits. Through the study of 3,800 college hires, it concluded that college grades and class standing can predict salary and job success (McCollum & Moses, 2009). A thriving program had been developed to attract and retain these talented graduates within AT&T when Greenleaf came to New York.

In the 1950s, Greenleaf spearheaded the Bell Humanities Program—developing executives through exposure to the humanities. The Program provided opportunities of a year-long liberal arts curriculum from 1953 to 1958 and later a series of shorter programs until 1970 (Frick, 2004). Greenleaf incorporated these programs into the Initial Management Development Program (IMDP) for the development of potential managers in their early career (McCollum & Moses, 2009). In order to better understand how these programs had been developed, we have to look at Greenleaf’s Management Progress Study (MPS), which explored the factors in the shaping of managers’ development. MPS’ roots began during World War II. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was responsible for selecting spies who could work in Europe in resistance to Nazi Germany. In 1943, Dr. Henry Murray, given his groundbreaking research in the field of personality development in the 1920s, was assigned the task to develop a special school to select and train spies (Frick, 2004). After the war, the results of Murray and his colleagues’ efforts were published in a 1946 *Fortune* article called “A Good Man is



Hard to Find” and a book entitled *The Assessment of Men* in 1948. Greenleaf saw the relevance of formal assessment in the OSS and in a businesslike AT&T. He brought this article and the book to the attention of executives at AT&T, and eventually launched a highly visionary project—MPS—a twenty-five-year longitudinal study.

In 1956, Greenleaf hired Douglas Bray to design and deliver the first AT&T assessment program. During the first four years, the program assessed 422 high-potential new recruits or beginning managers. The initial assessment was conducted in a one-week assessment center, where psychologists and managers observed the participants and rated them according to 26 specific assessment dimensions (Bray, 1982).² A second assessment was conducted eight years later and a third assessment 20 years later. The same set of dimensions was used for years zero and eight while 21 new dimensions were added at year 20 to reflect the challenges of middle age (Bray, 1982). Yearly follow-up interviews were used to learn about participants’ work and life activities. Two hundred and sixty-six out of 422 participants went through all three assessments; the rest left AT&T at some point (Bray, 1982). This landmark study has had a great impact on the identification and development of leaders. Its success kindles thousands of corporate assessment centers all over the world.

Keeping this longitudinal qualitative and quantitative study

² These 26 dimensions were described as 25 attributes in Bray, Campbell, and Grant (1974) because oral communication skill and written communication skill were combined as one attribute in Bray et al. (1974).



viable in the long-term did not hinder Greenleaf from transferring the results from the research into operational programs and sharing with others as early as possible. McCollum and Moses (2009) pointed out that a key finding of MPS is that more challenging job assignments in one's early career could make a manager progress faster and further regardless of his or her assessed potential. Thus, we see the seeds of Greenleaf's deep-seeded affinity for developing the autonomy of others. Based on this finding, rotational assignments and formal training were provided to the participants. Paralleling with MPS, Greenleaf developed IMDP to provide a framework for manager development during their early years in the company. IMDP integrated classroom learning with job experiences and contributed to the development of thousands of managers in AT&T. It continued for many years after Greenleaf's retirement in 1964 and spawned a new industry in adult learning and development.

Another key finding of MPS, as mentioned by McCollum and Moses (2009), is the strong correlation between assessment center predictions on participants' managerial potential and the actual progress of the participants. Assessment centers were used to select and develop leaders. By Greenleaf and Bray's idea, the research model of MPS was modified into an operational program in 1958, which soon spread throughout various AT&T subsidiaries (Frick, 2004). IBM, Standard Oil, and Sears were among the first companies that adopted the process of operational assessment centers after AT&T (McCollum & Moses, 2009). Alverno College, a Catholic



liberal arts women's college, was the first educational institution to integrate assessment centers into an educational curriculum (McCollum & Moses, 2009). Today, assessment centers are widely studied and used in various settings all over the world for identifying and developing potential leaders. As McCollum and Moses pointed out, this is mainly due to Greenleaf's pioneering, prophetic, and foresight-oriented vision regarding human development.

Greenleaf's innovations in human development were radical and remain radical. Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) described a strategic shift from financial resources to human and intellectual capital in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Without Greenleaf's mental construction through foresight and behavioral, emotional, and spiritual construction through narrative servant-leadership, a paradigm shift in the field of management development may not have happened, and certainly would have been dampened. McCollum and Moses (2009) said of Greenleaf's MPS: "among behavioral research conducted over the last 100 years, the Management Progress Study stands out as one of the luminary events in the development of managers" (pp. 104-105). The authors stated that not only through his leadership roles and impact in management development, but also through his embodiment of the concept of empowerment, "Greenleaf left a major mark on contemporary business practices" (p. 108). Greenleaf's modeling of servant-leadership not only nurtured this twenty-five-year longitudinal qualitative and quantitative study, but also contributed to its paradigm-shifting fruit.



According to Bray (1982), “the most significant single finding from the Management Progress Study is that success as a manager is highly predictable” (p. 183). Thus the 26 assessment dimensions used by MPS offer a tool to assess abilities, motives, traits, and attitudes and predict potential managers’ success. These assessment dimensions include: administrative skills—organizing and planning, decision making, and creativity; interpersonal skills—leadership skills, oral communication skill, behavior flexibility, personal impact, social objectivity, and perceptions of threshold social cues; cognitive skills—general mental ability, range of interest, and written communication skill; stability of performance—tolerance of uncertainty and resistance to stress; work motivation—primacy of work, inner work standards, energy, and self-objectivity; career orientation—need for advancement, need for security, ability to delay gratification, realism of expectations, and Bell System value orientation; dependency—need for superior approval, need for peer approval, and goal flexibility (p. 184).

Two interesting discernments emerge after comparing these 26 dimensions with the 10 characteristics of servant-leadership. First, three of the initial four areas of these dimensions—administrative skills, cognitive skills, and stability of performance—resonate with Reynolds’ (2014) notion of traditionally masculine aspect of leadership—conceptualization, persuasion, awareness, and foresight. For example, organizing and planning, decision making, and general mental ability relate to conceptualization; leadership



skills, oral and written communication skills, and personal impact are necessary for persuasion; while creativity, general mental ability, and tolerance of uncertainty may help generate foresight (Bray, 1982; Reynolds, 2014). Meanwhile, interpersonal skills, including social objectivity (the degree of being free from prejudices) and perceptions of threshold social cues are associated with more circular or feminine attributes such as awareness listening, healing, empathy, commitment to the growth of others and community building (Bray, 1982; Reynolds, 2014).

Second, the next three areas of the MPS' assessment dimensions—work motivation, career orientation, and dependency—relate to personal motivation and needs, rather than the needs of others as embodied in servant-leadership's characteristics of stewardship, commitment to others' growth, and building community (Bray, 1982). Throughout MPS' 26 dimensions, listening, empathy, and healing are less noticeable, but were likely subtle yet present in successful mentoring of future servant-leaders (Bray, 1982). For instance, in the case of oral and written communication skills in MPS, the goal was to convey information and thus persuade others, rather than articulating the element of listening with openness as a key element (Bray, 1982). After AT&T, Greenleaf further developed his understanding of the servant-leader. Therefore, we found it likely that the notions of listening, empathy, and healing were present to him, but not yet fully articulated. For example, being that the six distinguishing characteristics of servant-leadership—the more feminine aspect of leadership



(Reynolds, 2014)—are present, but not specifically named in the MPS’ assessment dimensions, we see Greenleaf’s personal growth in later life lending to the growth of others in more unified and far-reaching ways. Greenleaf’s later developments in servant-leadership, after he left the corporate environment, appear to have bloomed in the direction of the greater gender balance found in the 10 characteristics of servant-leadership.

As Bray (1982) pointed out, MPS has its own historical and social limitations, such as women and members of minority groups not being included. Bray questioned whether the characteristics underlying their successful performance would be different from the ones for white males. Yes, Greenleaf’s vision of servant-leadership was far ahead of his time; and yes, it was also bound by blind spots associated with the dominant white and male corporate culture of his day. The 10 characteristics that eventually showed the symbolic wholeness of servant-leadership as a more rounded and holistic female-honoring and male-honoring form of leadership are abstract principles, hard to measure, and even more difficult to embody. Greenleaf (2003) himself offered a practical example of a fictional character in his writing “Teacher as Servant.” Through the story of Mr. Billings, Greenleaf portrayed a true servant-leader, who cares deeply about his students, nurtures the servant motive in them, and lives out his beliefs. Therefore, the quest to be a servant-leader, like the quest to be an authentic and whole person, sustains itself in commitment to seek to understand life in all its mystery, abundance, and grace—tested in the furnace of human relations.



ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

In this chapter, we reviewed six qualitative studies and discussed servant-leadership essence around six themes: (a) servant-leadership, empathy, and healing; (b) servant-leadership and gender balance; (c) servant-leadership and foresight; (d) servant-leadership and corporate responsibility; (e) servant-leadership, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and (f) servant-leadership and Greenleaf's modelling. These essential themes of servant-leadership, interwoven with one another, give us a more in-depth and more enriched understanding of qualitative research of servant-leadership.

Greenleaf, in leading others to transcend the human furnace through listening and grace, through gentle strength and unique wisdom, was imperfect, a man with feet of clay, a devoted husband, father, and friend. He was not unlike the rest of us: imbued with gifts and faults. That said, he was, in the truest sense, a believer: one who believes. In his explication of the Frost (1947) poem "Directive," one of the very latest writings of his life, he again warns against the too rational mind.

Those of us who undertake the journey must accept that, simply by living in the contemporary world and making our peace with it as it is, we may be involved in a way that blocks our growth. Primitive people may have suffered much from their environment, but they were not alienated; the Lascaux cave paintings attest to this. They probably did not articulate a theology, but they may have been religious in the basic sense of "bound to the cosmos." With us, sophistication, rationality, greater



mastery of the immediate environment have taken their toll in terms of a tragic separation from the opportunity for religious experience, that is, growth in the feeling of being bound to the cosmos. (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 330)

Greenleaf calls servant-leaders to follow wise people, guides who have in mind the opportunity to be lost, to lose oneself, in order to be found, in order to find oneself. Qualitative studies take us into the powerful gravity of human experience, laced as it is with losses beyond our comprehension, in order to gain greater compassion, greater fulness, and greater wholeness with others. Greenleaf (2002) speaks beautifully of our need to be humble and to be willingly lost:

We already feel lost. Why then would we want a guide who only has at heart our getting lost?

This is the ground on which the great religious traditions of the world have always stood. The tradition built around the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the one in which I grew up and which has the greatest symbolic meaning to me now, seems especially emphatic on this point. Jesus seemed only to have at heart our getting lost; he was mostly concerned with what must be taken away rather than with what would be gained. We find clues to what must be lost in such sayings as “Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom,” “Cleanse the inside of the cup, that the outside also may be clean,” and “Unless one is born



anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

A few general terms describe what will be received: heaven, eternal life, salvation, the kingdom of God. The believers of the literal word know what these terms mean; they have to. But seekers who are responding to symbols don't know, don't have to know, wouldn't be helped by knowing. They are not too interested in meaning as bounded by the vagaries of language. Rather they seek a guide who only has at heart their getting lost. (p. 331)

Those who lead us into a blessed sense of being lost—lost in love, lost in service to others—lead us to the kind of servant-leadership Greenleaf envisioned. Having escaped the ever-indulgent desires of ego, need, power, and ambition, we are free to be lost in the best sense of being lost.

Lost, we are found.

Greenleaf (2002) reminds us the journey is beautiful, and fraught with suffering. Servant-leaders are required to help guide us into the most ultimate sense of what it means to be a person who lives with and for others.

To be on with the journey one must have an attitude toward loss and being lost, a view of oneself in which powerful symbols like *burned, dissolved, broken off*—however painful their impact is seen to be—do not appear as senseless or destructive. Rather the losses they suggest are seen as opening the way for new creative acts, for the receiving of priceless gifts. Loss, *every loss one's mind can conceive of*, creates a vacuum into which will come (if allowed) something new and fresh and beautiful,



something unforeseen—and the greatest of these is *love*.
(pp. 339-340, emphasis in original)

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Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life (Rowman & Littlefield/Lexington), an Amazon Top Ten Hot New Release in War and Peace in Current Events, *The Spirit of Servant Leadership* (Paulist Press), edited with Larry Spears, and *Conversations on Servant Leadership: Insights on Human Courage in Life and Work* (SUNY Press), edited with Larry Spears, Mary McFarland, and Michael Carey. His novel *American Copper* (Unbridled Books) won the Western Writers of America Spur award and considers colonization, racism, and cultural dignity in the American West. His collection of poems, *Balefire*, won the High Plains Book Award and appears with Lost Horse Press. As a poet and prose writer, his work has appeared in some of America's leading literary venues including *Esquire*, *Poetry*, *McSweeney's*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Journal of American Poetry*, *Poetry International*, and *Salon*. He has served as a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellow and as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Research Division.