POLITICAL SKILL

A Servant-Leadership Complementary

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The constructs of political skill and servant-leadership may be thought of as paths to influence. Nevertheless, out of curiosity, one might enthusiastically ask whether political skill and servant-leadership are two faces of the same coin serving a similar purpose. While one may argue that political skill is an astute skill that leaders employ to influence people to gain political mileage, in some sense, this is a potent argument because leaders do not nominate, elect or put themselves into positions of leadership.

Leaders are made by others to become leaders, even the worst dictators whoever led, people catalyzed the process. For example, Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in 1933 following a series of electoral victories by the Nazi Party. He ruled absolutely until his death by suicide in April 1945 (Giblin, 2002). Idi Amin, popularly known as the "Butcher of Uganda" ruled Uganda from 1971-1979. He is considered as one of the cruelest despots in world history. Amin was appointed Commander of the Uganda Army in 1965 by the then president of Uganda Milton Obote, whom he would overthrow with the help of the army comrades (Margaritoff, 2019).

On the flip side of the coin, some leaders are identified by others as servant-leaders because of their intense commitment and desire to serve others. From whom Robert Greenleaf crafted the concept of servant-leadership, Leo was noticed by other members of the League

to the Journey to the East because of his desire to make his life meaningful and worthwhile. Herman Hesse recounts that Leo was a servant and bag carrier in the *Journey to the East*. Leo's desire to serve first can also be conceived as something more than that (Hesse, 1956).

Though marked by violent episodes, Nelson Mandela's path to leadership was surrounded by South African people, who though in prison they fought and advocated for his release. Mandela's famous speech,

> During my lifetime, I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. (Linder, 1995)

The speech demonstrates a desire and commitment to put life at risk for the sake of others. Upon his election as the president of South Africa, Mandela displayed the nature and the spirit of a faithful and true servant-leader. Thus, for leaders to lead, they need exceptional skills and traits to attract followership. In this paper, both the constructs are demonstrated as skills and attribute essential to influencing people, events, and circumstances towards a specific common goal. On this premise, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the dimensions of political skill and servant-leadership are two faces of the same coin, which can create a dynamic leadership in organizational management. Both constructs are an ally to a leader. When adopted and practiced, they can enhance one's influence, followership, and the ability to lead. The paper will examine how the four dimensions of political skill

integrate with the ten attributes of servant-leadership, analyze the concept of servant-leadership traits, and the ways these two constructs complement the efficacy of dynamic leadership.

POLITICAL SKILL

The term political skill has been in social literature for about four decades (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981). Pfeffer (1981), the first to use the term political skill in social literature, noted that political skill is needed to succeed in organizational management. Likewise, Mintzberg (1983) indicated that political skill involves influencing people towards a common goal through persuasion, manipulation, and negotiation. While Pfeffer and Mintzberg advanced the notion of political skill in organizational management, later Ferris and his colleagues reintroduced the concept in the mainstream study (Ferris et al., 1994, 1999; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Perrewe et al., 2000). Although the construct has attracted many scholarly authorships from organizational leadership, political skill remains an unpopular social leadership word. This notion has left us ill-informed about the influence it has in every sector that encourages social interaction. Yet, the construct has an enormous impact on leadership as other forms of leadership style. There is a need to examine how political skill complements other leadership skills, especially servant-leadership.

Definition of Political Skill

Ferris et al. (2005) defined political skill as the "ability to understand others at work effectively and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and organizational objectives" (p. 127). The term political skill presupposes competencies manifested in social interaction places that reflect both inherent qualities and environmental flexibility. The

construct's essential nature gives a leader the ability to combine well with social astuteness to adjust their behaviors to a context and unlock their potential. Therefore, articulating this construct would help a leader make an impactful influence on building strong relationships.

Studies by social scholars described political skill as a competence that allows organizations to analyze and operate in social and political situations at the workplace accurately and effectively (Ahearn et al., 2004; Mintzberg, 1985). Holders of this skill develop a valuable network of relationships and influence to attain personal and organizational goals (Mintzberg, 1985). Political skill is critical to power and influence in creating bridges of relationships through collaboration and persuasion. The construct is an embodiment of leadership competencies demonstrated by leader's track record and ability to get things done. Kouzes and Posner (2017) noted that "this kind of competence inspires confidence—the leader is able to guide the entire organization, large or small, in the direction in which it needs to go" (p. 34).

Studies by Ferris at al. (2000), Ferris et al. (2005), and Ferris et al. (2007) have demonstrated that the construct of political skill has four dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, social networking, and apparent sincerity. These abilities are essential to leaders aspiring to effectively influences others towards a common goal. Thus, I will endeavor to discuss each of the four dimensions and show how they complement servant-leadership characteristics.

Dimensions of Political Skill Analyzed

Ferris et al. (2007) described the first-dimension social astuteness as observing others and understanding them accurately. Possessing political skill competencies could make a leader an astute observer and become keenly attuned to diverse social situations and

"have strong powers of discernment and high self-awareness" (p. 292). By embracing social astuteness, one can be sensitive to others and identify with others in their social environment (Pfeffer, 1992). Socially astute individuals are often seen as ingenious, even clever, dealing with others. For Braddy and Campbell (2013), a socially astute leader is good at reading people's non-verbal behaviors and can intuitively sense others' motivations, especially in an environment of social interaction.

In the second dimension, interpersonal influence implies the ability to influence others using a compelling interpersonal style (Ferris et al., 2005). Such leaders are good at establishing rapport with others, they possess excellent communication skills, and they are good at getting others to like them. They have a specific personal style that exerts a powerful influence on others and can adapt and calibrate their behavior as the situation demands reaching their goals (Ferris et al., 2007). Interpersonal influence requires the leader to use his or her influence by adopting one or more different but familiar ones to influence others (Williams & Hadfield, 2003). Pfeffer (1992) explained that leaders who "possess interpersonal influence are flexible to adapting one's behavior to different targets of influence in different contextual settings to achieve the intended goal" (p. 207). The interpersonal dimension is essential in servant-leadership as it enhances building good relationships to foster others' growth, maintain personal relationships, and community building.

Third-dimension networking is the ability to establish relationships with others, commonly referred to as social networking. Ferris et al. (2007) noted that leaders or individuals with networking competency are adept at developing and using diverse networks of people. Such leaders are incredibly politically skilled at leveraging their networks to obtain the needed resources to accomplish personal

and organizational tasks. In servant-leadership, networking ability incorporates abilities to garner friends, build coalitions, strong beneficial alliances, and networks (Ferris et al., 2005). Ferris et al. (2007) described Servant-leaders talented in networking as negotiators and contract makers and can master conflict management.

The fourth dimension, apparent sincerity, involves being transparent, honest, and sincere with others. Ferris et al. (2007) said, "politically skilled individuals appear to others as possessing high levels of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and genuineness" (p. 292). Apparent sincerity is essential if the leader attempts to walk the talk. Leaders who demonstrate apparent sincerity believe their word is their bond and are committed to their words. The competency focuses on the ascribed traits that capture target perceptions that individuals consistently keep promises and enact their adopted values. Leaders who are high with apparent sincerity inspire listening, empathy, compassion, trust, and confidence to those around them because they are mindful of others' well-being and do not wish to be perceived as unreal. To influence others, politically skilled leaders should set the pace in being authentic.

A study by Treadway et al. (2004) noted that political skill competencies could make leaders appear trustworthy and committed to employee's well-being in the workplace. In support of this argument, Brouer et al. (2013) indicated that leaders' political skill increases subordinates' perception of relationship quality with their supervisors. Further, Brouer et al. (2011) noted that leader's political skill promotes confidence and trust among subordinates. The four dimensions of political skill discussed here are noted to be related to servant-leadership ten characteristics.

The above dimensions of political skill have been argued by

scholars to resonate well with servant-leadership principles and other leadership styles. For example, Ferris et al. (2007) pointed out that political skill reflects some similarities with servant-leadership on its emphasis on ethical, social interaction, and social interaction. Scholars have examined these similarities in light of leading for the sake of others. However, political skill retains its distinctiveness as a construct that fosters supportive and trusting environments that benefit organizations' performance. Thus, this article concluded that political skill competencies are interrelated with some servant-leadership traits discussed hereafter. The marriage relationship between these constructs makes a leader more effective in understanding and holistically influencing people.

Ferris et al. (2007) observed that political skill dimensions could moderate the ten characteristics of servant-leadership due to their emphasis on ethical-moral, social interaction, and interpersonal influence. Even though not every leader is endowed to possess political and servant-leadership traits, gifted ones are both servant-oriented and politically skilled and know when to moderate between the two constructs. While at their place of influence, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) observed that they could articulate their savviness to diminish perceptions of organizational politics. Servant-politically savvy leaders embrace engagement to enhance relationships, which is more effortless when a healthy relationship is present. Phipps and Prieto (2011) argued that all the dimensions of political skill would be more readily to supplement servant-leadership if the leader-follower relationship was of high quality.

The concept of servant-leadership is a multi-dimensional concept that involves power and influence. When servant-oriented and politically skilled leaders focus on people within the organization, they set the stage for safe and secure relationships. The combination

of servant-leadership and political skill gives leader credibility to be believed as truly putting others' needs before his or her needs. Studies have shown that leader's competency is driven by the knowledge and understanding of moral values of authenticity, genuineness, sincerity, and trustworthiness, which according to Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), are the hallmarks of servant oriented and politically skilled leader.

Studies by scholars have emphasized that the Servant-leadership approach and the political skill concept have a complementary effect in dynamic leadership. For example, van Dierendonck et al. (2009) noted leaders' strengths and interpersonal behaviors as crucial elements that servant-leadership and political skill embrace so much. They stressed that personal strength and interpersonal dimensions reflect "the core of servant leadership and show a certain level of interdependence" (p. 276). The authors further argued that these competencies afford servant-oriented and politically competent leaders the power and ability to navigate and negotiate a complicated social relationship effectively.

Stogdill (1974), in his research on trait theory on leaders, noted that personal strength is critical for a leader's growth in a political arena. Studies have shown that personal strength is made of seven dimensions: integrity, authenticity, courage, objectivity, humility, empathy, and forgiveness (Ferch, 2005; Patterson, 2003; Russel & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya, 2003). Thus, servant-oriented and politically skilled leaders who have integrity enhance their ethical aspirations and others (Sendjaya, 2003). This perception augurs well with the commitment to the growth of others. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) noted that a politically skilled servant-leader's integrity is a signal to others that they are honest, trustworthy, and willing to admit they are not perfect all-knowing. Individuals with integrity

focus on building consensus, wholeness, and cohesion in the community's context.

The political skill competencies give a leader the ability to learn partnership moral standards of empathy, caring, and responsibility. Empathy is a dimension of servant-leadership that provides an individual with the ability to understand and experience others' feelings. To analyze the essence of empathy in leadership, van Dierendonck et al. (2009) noted that "empathetic leaders can cognitively adopt the psychological perspective of other people and experience feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others" (p. 328). Empathetic leaders have their eyes focused on the plight of people. This intrinsic skill enables them to recognize the felt but unspoken emotions in a person or group (Goleman et al., 2009). This innate skill helps servant politically skilled leaders to understand followers' emotions, which results in compassion and empathetic concern; in doing so, leaders and followers develop high quality of an interpersonal relationship.

Studies by Block (1993) and Spears (1998) argued that politically savvy leaders earnestly desire to serve rather than lead their followers. These authors emphasized, among other things, a holistic approach to work that aims at empowering, motivating, and collaborating with others. Servant-oriented leaders use political skill to give followers abilities to foster a proactive, self-confident attitude and inspire them with a sense of personal power (Tjosvold & Wisse, 2009). Once followers have been exposed to this environment, they can easily recognize their intrinsic values to map out a meaningful life path.

Politically savvy leaders use persuasion rather than positional authority in making decisions within organizations and in their discussion to influence others (Greenleaf, 1998). Unlike coercion,

which utilizes positional power to force compliance, "persuasion creates change and influence through gentle nonjudgmental arguments" (Northouse, 2016, p. 228). Further, persuasion is observed as a flexible political skill that is usually compatible with other servant-leader skills of influence, such as consultation, collaboration, and emotional appeals (Yukl, 2006). Most often, persuasion is used as a nonviolent language to influence people towards common activities that have been agreed. In this sense, politically skilled and servant-oriented leaders can know how to influence effectively and, if necessary, control others' behaviors. Their strong and convincing personal style and social astuteness tend to exert a powerful influence on those around them.

An empirical study performed by William et al. (2017) to test the role of political skill in servant-leadership on students in a US state University found that personal strength and interpersonal behaviors were essential complementary traits of servant-leadership. Further, the political skill was found uniquely interrelated and integrated with servant-leadership. The study also found out that political skill exerts a more significant influence on servant-leadership in social activities. Scholars Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) argued that leaders who embrace political skill and servant-leadership have a more substantial impact on their followers, especially when working together towards a common goal.

The Dark Side of Political Skill

Even though political skill is applauded by scholars like Ferris et al. (2005) as an effective way of influencing people to act in ways that enhance group objectives, there is likelihood to be used by politically savvy leader covertly and dishonestly to secure a personal desired outcome. Politically savvy leaders are known to be good at motivating people to get things done. Their power influence can be

manipulative towards the wrong path. Mills (1959/1990) argued that manipulation is a way of exerting influence in which the target does not know that she or he has been influenced. Testimonies are evident in the social domain that politically savvy leaders use their prowess to prey and manipulate their followers for self-interest. Manipulation is perceived as a type of power that can be practiced producing intended outcomes by the power wilder (Wrong, 1995). When not checked, the political skill competencies can be demonstrated in many destructive ways.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

The construct of servant-leadership is argued as a leadership theory that begins with character. Servant-leadership maintains that if leaders practice interpersonal skills that combine with social astuteness and demonstrate appropriate behaviors, they will exemplify the personality that will make people want to follow them. Like the construct of political skill, servant-leadership specifically engages people to achieve a particular goal. Servant-leadership does not impede the use of other leadership skills. Instead, it provides a set of overarching principles that help guide practitioners, irrespective of any specific leadership model(s) one may be practicing.

Studies describes the concept of servant-leadership as leadership that is rich with ethical principles. For example. Searle and Barbuto (2011) noted that servant-leadership facilitates positive and organizational behaviors. As a holistic approach to leadership, Greenleaf (1970) analyzed servant-leadership as a type of leadership that emphasizes that the servant-leader is "servant first." Notably, he developed a relatively exact "acid test" of servant-leadership that reveals the discrete behaviors of the practice: "Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And

will the least privileged in society benefit or not be further deprived?"
(p. 15). A servant-leader's first concern is to create an interpersonal
relationship that enhances others' growth, not with self. This basic
concept goes a long way, suggesting skills and traits that are critical
for effective leadership. This definition sets a strong argument that
leading requires ethical behaviors for societal influence.

While servant-leadership focuses on service to others,
particularly to followers, the construct of political skill emphasizes
influencing and establishing social networks. I point out that leaders
who combine political skill and servant-leadership can recognize
diverse social situations, understand the essence of embracing core
values in leadership, and build formidable networks that enhance
social cohesion and well-being. As I mentioned earlier, both
constructs have a shared aim of influencing followers to action.
Politically savvy leaders embracing servant-leadership hold the idea
that leadership's goal is to create dynamic, self-confident followers
who can learn and grow when allowed to pursue activities they enjoy
learning and grow (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Such leaders
nurture followers' personal growth and spiritual growth to achieve
"balance, meaning, and personal fulfillment" (Bowen et al., 2010, p.
127) in their lived world, enhancing their followers' inspiration and
innovative endeavors.

Spears (2011) pointed that servant-leadership as a holistic
leadership style engages ethical dimensions that include listening,
empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight,
stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building
community (pp. 11-14). It seeks to establish an interpersonal
relationship with the followers based on putting their interests and
well-being before self (Greenleaf, 1970). Followers are more
influenced by leaders who seem to understand their lived world and

can connect with them emotionally and physically. Though the ten servant-leadership traits impact followers significantly, I note listening, persuasion, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of people, and building community to be commonly practiced by servant-oriented politically skilled leaders. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of how they complement each other politically.

Listening entails identifying the others' will in reaction to what is said and what is not stated. Listening is a communication skill with the ability to receive and interpret other messages correctively. Listening "encompasses getting in touch with one's inner voice and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating" (Spears, 2011, p. 11). It facilitates the development of mutual understanding and trust (Lloyd et al., 2014). Often listening has been viewed as one of the hallmark skills of a strong leader, allowing politically skilled servant-leaders to influence their followers successfully. Good listening is the main gist of being politically savvy leader. The flip side is that "failing to listen, we fail to learn" (Forester, 1989, p. 109). The implication is when leaders fail to listen to their followers, they lose understanding, reputation for fairness, and trust resulting in damaged dimensions of political skill and servant-leader's traits. From this, I note that listening is a critical competence for servant-oriented politically savvy leaders with which one can make an effective influence. It cannot be divorced from the construct of political skill.

Persuasion has been concluded as one of the factors that influence people to say "yes." Though it is not easy to convince people to alter their status quo. Mastering the art of persuasion can transform dominant life style and inspire new ideas. Scholars such as Spears (2011) credited persuasion as a characteristic that every effective leader primarily relies on. Through persuasion, politically

savvy can influence others through interpersonal influence and networking to move towards an envisioned organizational goal.

Observing political skill and servant-leadership one can conclude that they share one common role to influencing people towards growth. This intersection is the essential link that sparks the power of influence a politically savvy leader needs for effective leadership. This intersection motivates people to demonstrate their capacities to actualizing growth and social transformation. At merging point, politically savvy leaders commit to helping each person grow personally and professionally. Even though growth cannot be enforced or directly influenced, it can be facilitated at one point. The focus on growth for others implies a shift from a mediocre life to encouraging empowerment. The undertaking to others' growth does not mean only external achievement but also intangible things important for life, such as spiritual and character transformation (Spears, 2011). The commitment to peoples' growth requires leadership skills to empower people and lead them towards self-actualization, including political and servant-leadership skills.

Scholars describe the principle of building community as one way of enhancing followership. Spears and Lawrence (2002) pointed out that the servant-leader understands that society is only possible through strong relationships. These relationships are critical in creating a thriving environment where people find opportunities to grow socially and individually. Servant-leadership seeks to encourage the rebuilding of communities, in organizations, and even in social enterprises. The idea of rebuilding communities has always remained the quest for leadership transformation. Spears and Lawrence (2002) argued that much had been lost in recent human history due to a shift from individual entities to large institutions. Thus, politically skilled leaders are tasked with rebuilding the community as a viable life form

for many people in our society. Building the community can be concluded as one way of creating a safe and nourishing environment that helps people grow, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous and become servant-leaders (Greenleaf, 1996).

Leadership knowledge refers to creating a future-oriented concept that provides vision and mission for an organization or followers. Leadership knowledge as a strategy involves the ability to conceptualize ideas to offers insights into the followers' relationships, demands, resources, and preferences that can be leveraged by the knowledge holder to shape their behavior and interactions with the followers. In servant-leadership and political skill, conceptualization is applauded as a mark of a leader. This attribute puts the leader in a position to show the way for others. From a conceptualizing perspective, a leader "must think beyond day-to-day realities" (Spears, 2011, p. 12), as well as pointing the direction and articulating the vision to the followers. The ability to conceptualize leadership to facilitate followers with shared vision and value is a common theme in political skill and servant-leadership.

An Empirical Study on Servant-Leadership Characteristics of Empathy

Empirical studies by Cerit (2010), Hale and Fields (2007), and Pekerti and Sendjaya (2010) suggested that servant-leadership can enhance people's well-being and emotional healing from the servant-leader's empathy. To justify this argument, Jit et al. (2017) conducted qualitative research. The researchers were interested in understanding how servant-leaders empathize with and address the emotional turmoil of employees. The researchers based the interview questions used to get feedback on the Executive Servant-leadership Scale development by Reed et al. (2011). Jit et al. conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with leaders in the education, corporate,

and public government sectors. The study identified respondents with an orientation of servant-leadership.

Jit et al. (2017) interviewed 8-10 subordinates and colleagues of each leader. They based the interview questions on five critical dimensions of servant-leadership, as identified by Reed et al. (2011): interpersonal support, building community, altruism, egalitarianism, and moral integrity. The research questions attempted to study the approach of the servant-leader towards healing the emotions of their subordinates. They analyzed the respondents' statements using the model of Plowman et al. (2007), which advocates the ermined framework for carrying out data analysis. After the study, Jit et al. (2017) too found that the process of emotional healing is journey from the felt compassion and empathetic concern to compassion responding. Also, awareness creates a servant of compassion and empathetic concerns triggering the urge to understand the situation and relieve the suffering. Jit et al. overall results suggested that servant-leaders with their orientation for empathy, compassion, healing, altruistic calling, and listening adopt a compassionate approach to manage people's emotional turmoil.

The Strengths and Criticality of Servant-Leadership

Whereas there is a variety of servant-leadership strengths noted by scholars, Greenleaf's (1996) assertion of serving, putting other peoples' needs first, and courage are key strengths of servant-leadership. Spears (1998) highlighted awareness as a strength of "perception beyond the usual alertness of light, sound, smell, and tactile to increase both general and self-awareness" (p. 4). Northouse (2016) noted that the ethical dimensions emphasis in servant-leadership is a great strength. Empathy was analyzed by George (2000) as an emotional strength that gives a servant-leader the ability to share and understand other emotional turmoil and feelings. Northouse (2016) emphasized that the

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servant-leadership approach provides followers with the skills
necessary to become servant-leaders.

The strength of servant-leadership is demonstrated by
acknowledging people's ability and allowing individuals to discover
unique talents. The proponents of servant-leadership point out that
among other things, the concept has a great emphasis on holistic and
constructive awareness and development, empowering and
collaborating true listening, and constructive feedback (Ashforth &
Pratt, 2003). This is made possible by its counterintuitive and
provocative approach.

Another strength is building the community to create value.
Servant-leadership does not only feel an obligation to serve the
community and give back but also promotes activities that would
help followers understand the value of giving back. Reed et al.
(2011) argued that building a community, both within and outside
the organization, is a critical attribute of servant-leadership. The
servant-leader understands that the community is only possible
through expanded relationships. Relational behavior is a strength
demonstrated in servant-leadership. It helps followers feel
comfortable with themselves, with each other, and with the situation,
they find themselves (Northouse, 2016). Thus servant-leadership in a
social organization encourages creating a unique culture that inspires
and encourages every individual to grow and develop to become all
they can become (Barrett, 2003).

CONCLUSION

This article examined how political skill competencies integrated
with the servant-leadership construct and analyzed the concept of
servant-leadership traits and how these two constructs complement
the efficacy of dynamic leadership. I found out listening, persuasion,
conceptualization, commitment to peoples' growth, community

building, are key servant-leadership traits essential in political skill. The intersection between political skill and servant-leadership forms the basis of experiencing dynamic leadership. Both constructs are characterized by social perceptiveness and the ability to influence followers towards a transformative path. Thus, this paper noted that, while governments and social organizations are in uncharted waters in dealing with the resulting social economic turbulence, leaders of all cadre have a responsibility to help people navigate through the social welfare crisis. I concluded that political skill and servant-leadership are critical constructs that can significantly change organizational and social behavior when articulated well.

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