



## A KENYAN ON SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: HARAMBEE AND SERVICE

—JEREMIAH OLE KOSHAL  
KENYA

—KATHLEEN PATTERSON  
REGENT UNIVERSITY

**R**obert K. Greenleaf (1977) offers a foundational understanding of servant-leadership with this statement:

The servant-leader is servant first. . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. . . Then, conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest-priority needs are being served. The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived?” (p. 27)

Greenleaf’s statement offers all hope in the power of servant-leadership to transform society through service. A primary motivation for leadership should be to serve others, according to Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton (1994). Congruent with this thinking is Sarkus (1996), who notes that much of the current leadership literature supports serving and valuing people; as well, this line of thinking has been presaged by the work of Robert K. Greenleaf. Servant-leadership, which is a paradigm of leadership based on the philosophy of Greenleaf (1977), calls for leaders to be of service to others in society (e.g., employees, customers, and communities). To help



create a platform for more specific research on servant-leadership, Patterson (2003) developed a working theory of servant-leadership comprising altruism, empowerment, humility, love, service, trust, and vision; such research has opened the door for empirical contextual research on the theory.

This article first examines the popular literature on servant-leadership theory, servant-leadership as a viable theoretical perspective as defined by Patterson (2003), leadership and service in the African context, and the Kenyan *harambee* philosophy. The article further presents a study and findings on 25 Kenyan leaders and managers of varied backgrounds who were interviewed on the construct of service and the leadership application in the Kenyan setting. The findings show the connection of servant-leadership with the Kenyan concept of *harambee*. In addition, themes that have emerged are presented; these are role modeling, sacrificing for others, meeting the needs of others and developing them, service as a primary function in leadership, recognizing and rewarding employees, treating employees with respect (humility), and involving employees in the decision making process.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP THEORY

Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton (1994) posited that writers who study leadership suggest that one of the primary motivations of leadership should be serving others; they argued that a real customer focus requires leadership with service to others. Service to others calls for leaders who genuinely serve others' needs (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Murray, 1997; Nair, 1994), meaning that a strong relationship exists between service and leadership ("A Draft," 2000; Bass, 1995; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Bradley, 1999; Fuller, 2000; Murray; Nair; T'Shaka, 1990; Taninecz, 2002). Sarkus (1996) observed that much of the current literature that supports serving and valuing people has been presaged by the work of Robert K. Greenleaf, who is most notable in most, if not all, work in servant-leadership. In fact, servant-leadership, which is a paradigm of leadership based on the philosophy of Greenleaf (1977), calls for leaders to be of service to others (e.g., employ-



ees, customers, and communities), to give more than they take, and to serve others' needs more than their own. Though Greenleaf is the one most responsible for popularizing the theory of servant-leadership (Spears, 1996), the theory has been practiced for many years throughout all cultures (Nyabadza, 2003).

Two key notions underlie the various definitions of servant-leadership. First, servant-leadership emphasizes service (Blanchard, 2000; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Greenleaf, 1977; Lee & Zemko, 1993; Lubin, 2001; Melrose, 1995; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sarkus, 1996; Spears, 1995, 1996, 1998; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Tatum, 1995; Wis, 2002). Second, servant-leadership is other-centered rather than leader- or self-centered (Covey, 2002; Fairholm, 1997; Greenleaf; Joseph, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Laub, 1999; Melrose; Pollard, 1997; Spears & Lawrence; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). Similarly, according to Saunders (1993), servant-leadership means supporting others in their growth and development. Blanchard (1997) and Yukl (2002) posited that servant-leaders listen to their people, praise them, support them, and learn about their needs. In other words, they are constantly trying to find out what their needs are in order to be successful. Some of these characteristics, including service, appear in the list of characteristics that are central to the development of servant-leaders (Spears, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2002). Thus, the emergence of servant-leadership is likely to meet the deep desire in our society for a world where people truly care for one another, where workers and customers are treated fairly, and where the leaders can be trusted to serve the needs of their followers rather than their own (Spears, 1998).

#### *Patterson's Definition of Servant-Leadership Theory*

To help create a platform for more specific research on servant-leadership, Patterson (2003) developed a working theory of servant-leadership. According to Patterson:

Servant-leaders signify those who lead an organization by focusing on



their followers, such that the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral. Servant-leaders lead and serve with (a) altruism, (b) empower followers, (c) act with humility, (d) exhibit love, (e) lead with service, (f) are trusting, and (g) are visionary to their followers. (p. 5)

According to Patterson (2003), servant-leadership theory provides a marked contrast to transformational leadership theory. While transformational leaders strive to align their personal interests (i.e., organizational interests and the interests of the followers) with the interests of the group, organization, or society, the primary focus of the leaders in servant-leadership theory is on serving their followers individually (Arjoon, 2000).

Though servant-leadership crosses all boundaries and is being applied by myriad organizations (Spears, 1996), the theory is mainly concentrated in North American organizations (Autry, 2001; Branch, 1999; Douglas, 2003; Galvin, 2001; Levering & Moskowitz, 2000, 2001; McLaughlin, 2001; Pollard, 1997; Rubin, Powers, Tulacz, Winston, & Krizan, 2002; Spears, 1996; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Taninecz, 2002), where it has provided a means for companies to value their people in order to be successful (Fletcher, 1999; Lowe, 1998). Thus, Patterson's servant-leadership theory and the construct of service may be contextually constrained and needs to be researched in various contexts in order to see whether it applies in varied cultural and organizational settings, for example in Kenya.

A 2003 study by Nelson explored Patterson's (2003) servant-leadership theory (i.e., all constructs: altruism, empowerment, humility, love, service, trust, and vision) among black leaders in South Africa. These leaders' perception of service was expressed as "serving and supporting the people who serve the customers" (Nelson, p. 72). This study found that Patterson's servant-leadership theory has acceptability and applicability among black leaders in South African organizations, even though there were some contextual concerns. This is not a strange outcome, given that Nelson capitalized on the *ubuntu* philosophy, which focuses on the person not living for himself or herself, but rather living for others ("An Afro-centric," 2001;



Dia, 1994; Mamadou, 1991; Mazrui, 1986; Mbiti, 1969; Mibigi & Maree, 1995; Wright, 1984). *Ubuntu* serves as a metaphor embodying group solidarity in many traditional African societies (Mibigi & Maree, 1995). In other words, it focuses on the person and stresses communal support, group significance, and cooperation. It acts like a public philosophy that ties people together as a strong, united community (“An Afro-centric”). Nelson found service based on the interest and welfare of their employees to be the primary function of leadership among black leaders in South Africa. The study is limited in the sense that it can be generalized only to black leaders in South African organizations. Thus, there is need to undertake a similar study in the Kenyan context.

However, the fact that *ubuntu* and other concepts and philosophies that relate to serving others (e.g., “I am because we are: and since we are, therefore I am” [Mbiti, 1969, p. 10]) are widely shared across Africa, mean that servant-leadership and the construct of service might be positively received by Kenyan leaders and managers. The traditional African leadership set-up has been more intent on reaching consensus (Ayttey, 1992; Mamadou, 1991; Mersha, 2000) and has always placed the community’s interests ahead of its own. Even the African communities themselves believed that the welfare of an individual means the welfare of the entire community (Bell, 2002; Gakuru, 1998; Mamadou; Waiguchu, Tiagha, & Mwaura, 1999; Wright, 1984). Furthermore, the Kenyan philosophy of *harambee*, which was adopted by Jomo Kenyatta, who was the founding president of Kenya (Chieni, 1997; Versely, 1997), is based on African traditions of community cooperation and mutual aid (Hill, 1991; Mbithi & Rasmusson, 1977; Ngau, 1987). It embodies and reflects a strong ancient value of mutual assistance and community reliance (Bailey, 1993; Chieni; Ngau; Shikuku, 2000; Yassin, 2004). The *harambee* philosophy, which is usually used in the discussion of economic and social developments (Chieni; Ngau), became a kind of voluntary movement in post-independence (after 1963) and has continued to play a cardinal role in local development initia-



tives and projects (Bailey, 1993; Chieni; Hill; Ndegwa, 1996; Ngau; Wilson, 1992).

#### LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Service has come to be identified with the African concept of interdependence, which calls for individuals, including the leaders, to depend on each other; the welfare of every individual in the African communities means the welfare of the entire community (Gakuru, 1998). Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe famously articulated this idea: “Whereas an animal scratches itself against a tree, a human being has a kinsman to scratch it for him” (cited in Gakuru, para. 11). Bell (2002) posits that Africans do not think of themselves as “discrete individuals,” but rather understand themselves as part of a “community,” which is often referred to as “African communalism.” Many local dialects have a word for the concept of mutual responsibility and joint effort. In thinking about “African communalism,” a passage from Mbiti’s widely-read book *African Religions and Philosophy* comes to mind:

The individual owes his existence to other people. He is simply part of the whole. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am.” (1969, p. 10)

According to Wright (1984), Africans are people who regard each other as brothers and sisters, and the interest of the local communities takes precedence over that of those in government, organizations, or leadership positions in general.

The strong and ancient values of service and mutual assistance have always been brought to life in African societies through networks and associations. The voluntary spirit in Africa predates modern governments and Western influence. Before the advent of colonialism, African people had structures that catered to the needy among them (Gakuru, 1998). It is



worth noting that the idea and practice of giving a hand (service) to others, whether one acts individually or through organization, is as old as Africa. Voluntary individual and communal activities retain deep roots among Africans. In practical terms, one helps and works with neighbors and fellow villagers as the need arises and dictates (Waiguchu et al., 1999). Furthermore, the interest of the local and ethnic communities takes precedence over whatever the leadership or government may declare as national interests (Mamadou, 1991).

Tradition places social achievement above personal achievement in most African communities. Common phrases usually exist that signal social disapproval of the individual who places himself or herself above fellow human beings ("An Afro-centric," 2001). Dia (1994) said that individual achievements are much less valued than are interpersonal relations. Mamadou (1991) posits that a higher value is placed on interpersonal relations and the timely execution of certain social and religious activities than on individual achievements. The value of economic acts, for instance, is measured in terms of their capacity to reinforce the bonds of the group. Thus, efficient indigenous management practices, in which shareholding is democratized and cultural values and traditions serve as a means of stimulating productivity, can be used in today's organizations.

As part of service, consensual decisions are a critical part of African leadership. According to Ayittey (1992), the traditional African leadership from time immemorial has always placed the community's interest (service) ahead of its own. For instance, the chief did not rule, but rather served and led only by consensus. In situations where the council (governing body) failed to reach a consensus, the chief would call a village assembly (representatives) to put the issues before the people for debate. This signifies the importance of service to the people. Similarly, Mamadou (1991) observed that the traditional judge in black Africa is more intent on reaching a consensus than in litigating by the book. In legal as well as political matters, African leaders tend to seek unanimity and are generally prepared to engage in seemingly interminable discussions. Perhaps this explains why self-reli-



ance and self-interest tend to take a back seat to group or community loyalty. According to Mersha (2000), studies based on African organizations indicate that decisions based on a consensus still have greater acceptability in African societies. Specifically, a study based on Kenyan industries showed that both workers and managers preferred a modern democratic style of leadership to build consensus and trust.

#### THE KENYAN *HARAMBEE* PHILOSOPHY

According to Chieni (1997), *harambee*, which is a *Bantu* (a major grouping in Africa) word, has its origins in the word *halambee*, which literally means, “let us all pull together” (para. 3). While tracing the origins of *harambee*, Yassin (2004) noted that the alternative linguistic interpretation of *harambee* is derived from the twin words *halahala* and *mbee*. While *halahala* is a Swahili (a language spoken in East Africa) word for doing things quickly and collectively, *mbee* is Swahili for forward. *Halahala/mbee* would thus signify “doing things quickly and collectively with a forward connotation” (Yassin, para. 7). However, the phrase has since been simplified, given official recognition, and coined as *harambee*. The same word is echoed by everyone when a collective effort is made for the common good, such as helping a family in need, or the construction of a school or a church (“Special Feature,” 2002).

The *harambee* philosophy is based on African traditions of community cooperation and mutual aid (Hill, 1991). This may refer to the institutions of work parties, which embrace a variety of forms of cooperative labor assistance. Similarly, Mbithi and Rasmusson (1977) perceived *harambee* as the collective and cooperative participation of a community in an attempt to fill perceived needs through utilization of its own resources. They further noted that the notion of self-help to which the term *harambee* seems to refer is solidly grounded in the indigenous cultures of most Kenyan communities, where different names for joint efforts can be found. Perhaps that is the reason for Chieni’s (1997) assertion that *harambee* is variously described as a way of life in Kenya, and as a traditional custom of Kenyans that encour-



ages all Kenyans, along with their leaders, to give in order to complete any task at hand for community development and advancement. Thus, for the most part, the term embodies mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social responsibility, and community self-reliance.

Though *harambee* is a traditional Kenyan principle that has always existed, it gained prominence after independence (1963). When President Kenyatta encouraged his people to help one another in the spirit of *harambee*, he placed the destiny of Kenyans in the hands of their fellow Kenyans, especially their leaders. He rallied black, white, and brown Kenyans (both ordinary people and their leaders) to launch into the 20th century by adopting the philosophy of *harambee* (Versely, 1997). As far as Kenyatta was concerned, it was only out of everybody's efforts and toil that a new and better Kenya could be built. He stressed a continued close collaboration between the people throughout their self-help efforts, as well as with the government and the leaders, when he said: "But you must know that Kenyatta alone cannot give you everything. All things we must do together to develop our country, to get education for our children, to have doctors, to build roads, to improve or provide all day-to-day essentials" (Chieni, 1997, para. 5). Perhaps that is why some people see *harambee* as both a political slogan and a movement that developed rapidly in response to people's actions and inspirations, rather than simply as a creation of the government and its leadership (Hill, 1991). Thus, the spirit of *harambee* (i.e., we must all pull together) symbolizes the Kenyan people's attitude and effort in working together to build and strengthen themselves and their nation as a whole (Shikuku, 2000; Wilson, 1992).

According to Ngau (1987), *harambee* projects are broadly classified into social development and economic development types. The former include education, health, social welfare and recreation, and domestic projects, while the latter includes water supply, transport and communication facilities, and agricultural ventures. Chieni (1997) noted that Kenyatta realized that social development—the process by which the standards and conditions of living of the majority of the people in a community are



improved—could not be accomplished without a firm cultural foundation coupled with the involvement of the majority of the people themselves. Kenyatta then decided to stress a continued close collaboration between the people (through their self-help efforts) and the government (through the provision of necessary services). According to Wilson (1992), the *harambee* philosophy has actually come to mean the provision of goods—usually social infrastructure through the voluntary cooperation of members of the community, including their leaders. The philosophy is utilized in community self-help programs to build roads, schools, medical facilities, and daycares. The shift of *harambee* to social amenity development emanates from the fact that the basic means of production (e.g., farming, industry, and mining) have come under private, family, and company or organizational ownership. As far as most people are concerned, collective effort is aimed at, above all, schools, health facilities, roads, and churches, rather than development of farms or businesses (Ngau).

Through *harambee*, the efforts of the people, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the government have come together in a cooperative endeavor to speed up development (Chieni, 1997). In his book *The Two Faces of Civil Society: NGOs and Politics in Africa*, Ndegwa (1996) observed that besides relative political stability and a well developed communication network, the *harambee* philosophy has contributed to Kenya's having the highest number of both international and local NGOs in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. In areas where the state has been unable to fully provide adequate services such as healthcare, education, and agricultural and credit extension, the NGOs have entered these fields and become indispensable partners in service provision through the *harambee* philosophy.

According to Bailey (1993), *harambee* is not just a theoretical fancy concept—it has achieved tangible results. *Harambee* has specifically brought about near miracles in the entire nation of Kenya; Harambee self-help projects have been responsible for the building of over 200 schools, 40 health centers, 60 dispensaries, 260 nursery centers, 42 bridges, and 500



kilometers of rural access roads throughout the country. Ngau (1987) explains that a typical *harambee* today consists of fundraising, where the local people, government officials, elected politicians, church leaders, and the general public make contributions on a voluntary basis, ranging from cash and materials to pledges for labor. Further, local and foreign business firms, foreign agencies and governments, foundations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also get involved and make contributions to *harambee* projects. Hence, *harambee* has in one way or another improved the quality of life for different people and communities in Kenya.

## METHOD

### *Description of Research Design*

The study employed a qualitative in-depth interviewing technique, which is a type of interview that researchers use to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the participant's point of view (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). It involves asking participants standardized open-ended questions and probing wherever necessary to obtain data deemed useful by the researcher (Huberman & Miles, 2002).

### *Research Participants*

Based on the theory-derived criteria for being a servant-leader, 25 leaders and managers from Kenyan organizations were interviewed who seem to espouse Patterson's (2003) servant-leadership theory's construct of service and the Kenyan *harambee*. The individual leaders and managers were drawn from the executive and upper management units that are charged with instituting and directing organizational vision/mission and policies. Such individual leaders and managers represented corporate organizations, governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and institutions of higher learning.

The number of the leaders and managers was considered significant to



identify themes and patterns that are meaningful theoretically and empirically (Bryman & Burgess, 1999; Mason, 2002), even though they may not be generalizable to a larger universe (Yin, 1994).

### *Data Collection*

A standardized open-ended interview, which involves preparing a set of open-ended questions that are carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of minimizing variation in the questions posed to the participants, was used to collect data (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The main questions were customized according to what the researcher thinks the participant might know about servant-leadership theory's construct of service. Though the questions were open enough to encourage participants to express their own opinions and experiences, they were also narrow enough to keep them from wandering too far off from the subject at hand. Probes were used to help specify the level of depth that the researcher wanted (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

All the interviews, which took an average of 60 minutes, were taped and transcribed verbatim; an audit trail was maintained (Merriam, 1988).

### *Data Analysis*

Qualitative data analysis is essentially about detection, and the tasks of defining, categorizing, theorizing, explaining, exploring, and mapping are fundamental to the role of the analyst (Huberman and Miles, 2002). As per Rubin and Rubin (1995), the goal of the analysis is to find themes that both explain the research arena and fit together in a way that a reader can understand. Thus, the analysis must move from summarizing the data, to identifying related themes and patterns, to discovering relationships among the themes and patterns (coding), and to developing explanations for these relationships (interpretations) (Walsh, 2003).



### *Summarizing Data*

After every interview, the researcher had the audiotaped interview results transcribed for qualitative data analysis. After the audiotaped interviews were transcribed, the researcher read the interview results, paragraph by paragraph and word by word, marking off the main ideas, issues, concepts, or themes mentioned during the contact (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

### *Coding Data*

The researcher used NUD\*IST, a computer program that provides for non-numerical unstructured data indexing, searching, and theory-building. The program allowed for the coding of the transcribed data. In other words, the researcher was able to sort data into categories based on participant emphasis and frequent use of concepts, terms, or key words that are indicative of servant-leadership and the construct of service.

### *Interpreting Data*

Once coding was completed, a cross-interview analysis (Patton, 2002) was conducted to group data into categories that allowed the researcher to compare what different leaders said, the themes that were discussed, and how concepts were understood. This involved comparing the material within the categories to look for variations and nuances in the meaning of servant-leadership theory's construct of service, as well as across the categories in order to discover connections between themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The categories that resulted were used to create overarching themes that guided the development of a theoretical model of servant-leadership theory's construct of service, in which the researcher presented a "logical chain of evidence" (Walsh, 2003, p. 69), and eventually offered the implications of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).



## FINDINGS

Twenty-five leaders and managers from four organizational sectors—NGOs, institutions of higher learning, corporate organizations, and governmental organizations—were interviewed; all of the interviewees hold college degrees, and most of them hold an advanced degree (e.g. master’s and doctorates) in addition to having been in positions of leadership for a number of years in their organizations. In total, 9 CEOs, 3 deputy CEOs, and 13 division heads were interviewed. Twenty-two males and three females were interviewed.

Using a text search in NUD\*IST, the researchers were able to quickly pull together all material from the imported documents containing a reference to a word or group of words, phrases, or patterns of characters related to the construct of service. The analysis of the responses resulted in seven categories: (a) role modeling, (b) sacrificing for others, (c) meeting the needs of others (employees) and developing them, (d) service as a primary function of leadership, (e) recognizing and rewarding employees, (f) treating employees with respect (humility), and (g) involving others (employees) in decision making.

### *Role Modeling*

The participants stated that the primary way they demonstrated service to their followers was by role modeling or leading by example; they expect leadership to be the best example in any situation, as it allows others to see what is required and how it is done. The participants asserted that one of their responsibilities as leaders and managers is to influence others through their own actions; they asserted that they like leading by example because if one wants things to be done in a specific manner, that is the best way to demonstrate the precise way in which one wants something to be done.

A total of 19 out of the 25 participants interviewed indicated that they demonstrate service to their followers through role modeling. Of the 19 participants, 7 indicated that role modeling signals to others (employees)



what the leader perceives to be important. For instance, Stanley Manduku, legal advisor at Daima Bank, expressed that whatever he does triggers a sense of importance and direction as far as the employees are concerned. He stated, “We like leading by example; we realize that if you want things to be done in a specific manner, you be the first person to do it” (personal communication, November 2, 2004).

Five of the 19 participants stated that role modeling is the best way to influence others. For example, Dr. B. Waruinge, principal consultant at Sarowaki Management Consultants LTD, believes he influences others primarily through his behavior. He stated, “A leader leads by example. It is how I treat customers here; it is how I treat other people that has more influence than what I tell them. It is more what I do, not what I say” (personal communication, September 25, 2004).

Five of the 19 participants expressed that leaders should “walk the talk.” In other words, they should not “preach water and then drink wine.”

Two of the 19 participants expressed that the leader must be an example of good service to others. John Lelaono, general manager of Keekorok & Samburu Lodges, explained:

The leader must ensure that he/she is an example of good service to the guests or to the general public; then from there the workers, who are under him or her, will follow suit and take a good example from him or her. (Personal communication, October 18, 2004)

Thus, the participants strongly believed that service is about role modeling. In other words, leaders are best understood and most influential when they lead by example.

### *Sacrificing for Others*

The participants’ view of sacrificing for others is embedded in the way they give their time, resources, and even themselves for work that benefits others. The participants indicated that they have accepted low pay on many



occasions in order to serve others. The idea of sacrificing for others also borders on the Kenyan *harambee* philosophy.

A total of 16 out of the 25 participants interviewed indicated that they sacrifice in order to serve others, mainly their followers. Seven of the 16 participants strongly expressed a desire to sacrifice their time, resources, and self in order to serve others. For instance, according to Dr. Chweya Ludeki, chairman of the Department of History and Government at the University of Nairobi, leaders should even go to the extent of spending personal resources for the welfare of the people they are leading. He explained:

There are some ways you spend your own money to make sure that the group you are leading or the unit you are leading actually succeeds. So to the extent that a leader even spends one's own money—personal resources in it suggests that the leader does not treat the job from a purely official standpoint, but treats it at the personal level as well, and sees personal stake in the matter. (Personal communication, November 4, 2004)

Two participants, both from government, expressed that working for the government has been an act of sacrifice due to a lack of necessary resources. An example is Joseph Nkadayo, principal superintending engineer of roads at the Ministry of Roads and Public Works, who said that working for the government calls for endurance and great sacrifice. He explained, “I have personally worked for twenty years and have served in many areas. But I have to be honest with you that we have so many limitations” (e.g. equipment) (personal communication, October 26, 2004).

Three of the 16 participants stated that their current jobs have been labors of love. In other words, their pay is not commensurate with their training and their contributions. For instance, Chris Kuto, Director General of Kenya Civil Aviation Authority, felt strongly that his profession could have taken him far if he had chosen not to sacrifice for others. He explained,

I want to believe that my being here has been because I have sacrificed to



be here. Technically, my profession could have taken me elsewhere for better pay if that is what I wanted. First and foremost, I saw myself contributing to the growth of the industry in this country at various levels as I grew up in the system. I went to the extent of sacrificing, rather going for low salary for job satisfaction. You know public service in this country is not well paying, and I have been around without what I think I am worth. (Personal communication, November 3, 2004)

Four of the 16 participants expressed that service borders on the Kenyan *harambee* philosophy, which calls for sacrificing for the benefit of others. In the following excerpt from an interview, Dr. Chweya Ludeki explains his idea of the connection between service (sacrifice) and *harambee*:

You see there are two ways in which you can look [at] or understand service. One, of course, you can look at the standpoint of the *harambee* philosophy, which is serving by sacrificing for the interests of others. So that is one, which borders on something like voluntary, probably sacrifice, dedication of your time and profession to the service of others. (Personal communication, November 4, 2004)

Thus, the participants believed that it is almost impossible to serve people (others) without sacrifice. Sacrifice borders on the Kenyan *harambee* philosophy, which calls on leaders to make a great sacrifice for the service of others.

#### *Meeting the Needs of Others (Employees) and Developing Them*

The participants expressed that leaders should sufficiently remunerate their employees (offer competitive salaries or wages, medical coverage, travel bonuses and loan schemes), create a productive working environment (in terms of equipment and other materials), guide employees in identifying their personal and professional goals, and develop them through training. These are indicators that the participants view the employees as the greatest assets that any functional organization can have.



A total of 21 out of the 25 participants interviewed provided strong views indicating that they care about meeting the physical as well as the developmental needs of their employees. Eight of the 21 participants offered the belief that people only follow leaders who are ready to meet their needs. This was the case with Professor Godfrey Nguru, vice chancellor of Daystar University, who said,

You can only lead if there are followers, and people are likely to follow if they can see that their interests are being taken care of. They are more easily [able] to follow if they can identify the one they are supposed to follow, and people are identified best if they see a person who is ready to listen to them and to respond to their needs. (Personal communication, September 6, 2004)

Five of the 21 participants said that providing a productive working environment for the workers has always been a core agenda for them. For example, Joseph Mpaa, manager of Serena Lodges, expressed the belief that giving employees the priorities they deserve will cause them to take good care of the company's clients. Six of the 21 participants indicated that they are attuned to helping others to achieve their goals and objectives, while four of the 21 participants said that they put emphasis on developing their followers through training. For instance, Chris Kuto asserted that if employees are to be able to provide an efficient service, they need to be trained in that area of service. He explained, "They should have customer care in their portfolio. It means you have to train them to be able to appreciate the customer; they have to appreciate that they are providing a very essential service" (personal communication, November 3, 2004).

Eight of the 21 participants made comments suggesting that employees are the most valuable assets they have in their organizations. Joshua Okumbe acknowledged this perception when he said, "Our employees, as few as they are—we must recognize that they are the most important resource that this organization has" (personal communication, September 13, 2004).



Thus, the participants were ebullient about pursuing the holistic needs of their employees.

### *Service as a Primary Function of Leadership*

The participants did not find a dichotomy between service and leadership. They said that the two concepts are so intertwined that they can be used interchangeably. They expressed that leadership is about providing a service, that leadership does not exist in the absence of service, that service delivery is possible only through leaders that model it, and that service calls for strict adherence to certain key leadership principles.

A total of 18 out of the 25 participants interviewed offered incendiary views of service as the primary function of leadership. Seven of the 18 participants perceived leadership as service first. One among them was Dr. Joshua Okumbe, who saw service as the main function of leadership. He explained, "A leader is out there to serve, not to be served. Anybody who occupies any position of leadership must know at the very onset that their very function as they occupy those positions is to serve, to be selfless" (personal communication, September 13, 2004).

Five of the 18 participants expressed the belief that leadership is futile and meaningless if service is not there. The following quotation from Godwin Mzenge, Executive Director of the Family Planning Association of Kenya, emphasizes the fact that leadership and service cannot be divorced from one another:

In the absence of service or [in the event of] poor quality service, then leadership has no meaning. In our case, for example, if it transpires that the services we are offering in our clinics and the field offices are not meeting the expectations of the communities out there, that has a reflection directly on the leadership of the organization. If we are able to anticipate properly, correctly, the needs of the community members, the poor people out there, and satisfy that need through offering our services, that has a reflection on leadership. (Personal communication, September 23, 2004)



Six of the 18 participants expressed that service is best delivered when it is modeled. For instance, Kangethe Wagathigi, director of Biselex Kenya Limited, asserted that modeling keeps a leader from accumulating extra work because his or her employees look at him or her as a role model and emulate his or her behavior. He stated, “So in your provision of your services to the customers, the kind of leadership you show to your employees is what they will copy. If your leadership is bad, if it is crooked, your staff will be crooked” (personal communication, October 8, 2004).

Four of the 18 participants indicated that they identify service with certain fundamental leadership principles. These include integrity and excellence, which are described as being among the most important qualities of a leader. Dr. Saruni Sena mentioned these principles while discussing service and leadership. He stated, “One of them is servant-leadership, another one is excellence, another one is integrity, and another one is cherishing family” (personal communication, August 3, 2004).

Hence, leadership and service cannot be divorced from one another. In other words, leaders are simply out to serve others (their constituents or followers) selflessly by giving their time and even their resources.

### *Recognizing and Rewarding Employees*

The participants said that recognizing and rewarding employees (for their contributions) takes center stage in their organizations. They offer this recognition at various times and in a variety of ways, include putting measures and systems in place to affirm employees, using verbal and written messages when addressing them, hosting parties and get-togethers for them, and promoting divergent views as part of a learning process.

A total of 16 out of the 25 participants interviewed offered the necessary support to the notion of the importance of recognizing and rewarding employees. Four of the 16 participants said that they already have some measures and systems in place to affirm the employees in the organization. These measures and systems provide a way of granting awards and promo-



tions to the outstanding workers while putting pressure on those who are less hardworking and committed.

In addition, 7 of the 16 participants said that they emphasize both verbal and written messages as part of recognizing and appreciating their employees for excellent performance. For instance, Dr. Isaac Bekalu, Director of International Rural for Reconstruction, believes people get even more energized when they are offered appreciation in public, something not many leaders do (personal communication, September 24, 2004).

Two of the 16 participants indicated that partying, get-togethers, and common celebrations act as a precursor to recognizing and rewarding employees. One of these participants was Dr. Saruni Sena, who said that employees are rewarded and recognized through various celebrations, stating, "Everybody's birthday is celebrated in this office. Also, every now and then we come together for parties just to say thank you to the employees. Our leaders truly appreciate the employees and the employees reciprocate by giving excellent, topnotch [service]" (personal communication, August 3, 2004).

Four of the 16 participants stated that they promote the expression of divergent views by their employees in order to encourage and motivate them. An example is Mohez Kamarli, Director of Concorde Car Hire, who expressed the belief that divergent views are not necessarily negative. Thus, participants do a variety of things as part of recognizing and encouraging their employees. This encourages and motivates them a great deal.

#### *Treating Employees with Respect (Humility)*

According to the participants, leaders who adopt humility exercise great respect for others. As practitioners of this virtue, the participants reported seeing and regarding everybody as equal and important, taking the time to listen to others (having an open door policy), and handling corrections and criticisms in a manner that builds up the individual rather than destroying the individual.



A total of 17 out of the 25 participants interviewed gave splendid and detailed support for the idea that treating others with respect is a sign of humility. Twelve of the 17 leaders and managers uttered variations on the theme of valuing all and seeing them as equal and important. One among them was Dr. Isaac Bekalu, who said that people should be regarded equally even though they play different roles and functions:

I would like to see everybody as a person who is created equally. To me, it does not matter if it is my deputy or a janitor; they have got the same value, they are human beings, and I try to treat them equally. They do different jobs, they have different roles, but they have a human value that is equal. (Personal communication, September 13, 2004)

Similarly, Dr. Phillip Kitui, Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Daystar University, emphasized the importance of humility. He stated, "Humility is important because everybody's self-worth must be allowed to show" (personal communication, November 3, 2004).

Nine of the 17 participants stated that they understand the open door policy as a cardinal element of leadership. They stressed their belief in leaving their doors opened wide so that their employees and customers can access them without much difficulty. For instance, Kangethe Wagathigi indicated that they operate more or less in an open system. He explained, "This door is permanently opened; anybody can walk in; there is nobody, from the lowest to the highest, who will say they need an appointment to see the boss; they just walk in" (personal communication, October 8, 2004). Dr. Waruingi also observed that great ideas have come from his employees as a result of his listening to them. He explained: "I try to tell people that I have no monopoly of ideas. And whatever little project we are doing I listen to them, and some of the great ideas have come from employees, and they are very many" (personal communication, September 25, 2004).

The participants, however, observed that humility is a bit of a challenge to those who work for the government, where orders and directives



must be followed to the letter. According to Joseph Nkadayo, working for the government calls for endurance and great sacrifice. He noted:

We are a hard industry, whereby when orders are given they must be followed to the letter. You see governments operate by orders and directives, some of which do not necessarily require humility. But I always endeavor to communicate and I always try to put a human face and touch [on situations]. (Personal communication, October 26, 2004)

Four of the 17 participants indicated that humility calls for leaders who are ready and willing to correct and criticize others in a manner that does not destroy them but that builds them up. For instance, Dr. Waruinge said that he never allows his employees to be reprimanded publicly because, as he put it,

I treat them and I listen to them and I have time for them and nobody is allowed, even my supervisors, to reprimand anybody in public. I tell them to take them aside and tell them slowly, quietly, what they have done wrong. (Personal communication, September 25, 2004).

### *Involving Others (Employees) in Decision Making*

The participants strongly believed they have no monopoly on ideas and that there is always need to consult others before making any decisions. They said that they consult with their staff in departmental meetings, offer them training on teamwork, accept and respect their views and opinions, and generally view consensual decisions as having a motivating impact.

A total of 22 out of the 25 participants interviewed offered a paragon of support in terms of involving others in decision making. Eleven of the 22 participants said they consult with their deputies and other staff members before making most of their decisions. An example is Joseph Mpaa, who stressed seeking individual views and then matching them together in order to get the best solution to any problem. He stated, "We do it in the perspec-



tive of meetings of key heads of departments, where we all, the general manager, the heads of departments, will come together and say what problems, what challenges” (personal communication, October 7, 2004). Similarly, Joseph Nkadayo said they usually build consensus before making collective decisions on many issues. He stated:

One of the most common ways of building consensus in our organization is to meet as heads of branches to discuss various problems affecting the organization. This way we are able to take collective decisions on issues dealing with description, service, and ability to meet goals, and generally to plan and assess completed projects. (Personal communication, October 26, 2004)

Three of the 22 participants said they have adopted the principle of teamwork in their organizations. They argued that unlike in the past, when leadership often took the form of intimidation, employees are now receiving training on team spirit. For instance, Ole Pere stated, “What they are trying to do the last two years is train people on team basis, teamwork, and I believe that is the direction that the organization wants things to go” (personal communication, August 21, 2004).

Five of the 22 participants offered that they always take into account the opinions of others whenever they make decisions. They said that soliciting people’s ideas and suggestions and then agreeing to accept and respect the popular views plays a part in good leadership.

Six of the 22 participants expressed that consensus has a motivating impact. They said that when decisions are reached by consensus, people get highly motivated and they will make sure that the decisions or solutions reached are fully implemented. This idea is supported by Dr. Joshua Okumbe, who stated:

What we are noticing is that through consensus-building, through participation and through a review of different viewpoints, then we are likely to build the consensus, and the most important thing about consensus-building is that it has a motivating impact. When everybody feels they partici-



pated in the decisions, then they buy in; [they have] the momentum with which they will implement it and see to it that it is not the portion of the greater. (Personal communication, September 13, 2004)

## DISCUSSION

The leaders and managers who participated in this study gave statements and comments that led to the emergence of themes reminiscent of Patterson's (2003) servant-leadership theory's construct of service and the Kenyan *harambee* philosophy. A brief discussion of the following themes is presented:

### *Role Modeling*

The participants in this study stated that one of their major ways of demonstrating and practicing service is by modeling their behavior and actions. They said that role modeling signals to their followers what is important and expected of them. The Kenyan *harambee* philosophy became a success because the leaders modeled and lived it. It was the leaders, along with the help of their communities, who spearheaded *harambee* as an undertaking for collective good (Bailey, 1993).

### *Sacrificing for Others*

The participants in this study expressed strong feelings about sacrificing for the sake of others. Their view of sacrificing is embedded in the way they give their time, their resources, and even themselves for the work of others. Those participants working for the government especially indicated that circumstances (e.g., inadequate resources—such as a lack of equipment) force them to sacrifice a great deal. The idea of sacrificing for others borders on the Kenyan *harambee* philosophy, which is guided by the principle of collective good rather than individual gain. The *harambee* philosophy for the most part embodies mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social



responsibility, and community reliance. In other words, the end product benefits the general public as opposed to an individual (Chieni, 1997). According to Hill (1991), it is African traditions of community cooperation and mutual aid that are the foundation of the *harambee* philosophy.

#### *Meeting the Needs of Others (Employees) and Developing Them*

Like the proponents of the *harambee* philosophy, the participants indicated a willingness to invest their own time, energies, and personal resources for the benefit of the employees. The participants also recognized training as a way of guiding their followers in order to identify and develop their personal as well as professional goals. All these are in line with Wright's (1984) "African communalism," in which life's means are seen to be relatively minimal and natural resources scarce, and, hence, every individual must depend on his or her community. According to Mibigi and Maree (1995), some of the prevalent African values (e.g., *ubuntu*) put emphasis on a person's living for others rather than for the self.

#### *Service as a Primary Function of Leadership*

The participants indicated that service is a fundamental goal in their careers. As a matter of fact, they did not find a dichotomy between leadership and service. They expressed that leadership is all about providing a service. In other words, a leader is simply out there to serve and be selfless. Such exuberance and enthusiasm about service is not a strange viewpoint, given that some of the prevalent African values (e.g., *ubuntu*) put emphasis on the person's living not for himself or herself, but rather living for others (Mibigi & Maree, 1995). Similar emphasis is found in Mbiti's (1969) often-quoted line: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 10) from his widely read book, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

The *harambee* philosophy calls on Kenyan leaders to serve their constituents by being a part of the self-help projects that are aimed at promoting the common good (Chieni, 1997). The participants' view of service as



being a primary function of leadership also resembles the traditional African view of leadership, which places the community's interests (service) ahead of its own (Ayittey, 1992).

### *Recognizing and Rewarding Employees*

According to the participants in this study, recognizing and rewarding employees takes center stage. The participants have put certain measures and systems in place (e.g., performance appraisal) that provide the criteria for promotion and awards granting. They use both verbal and written messages to express appreciation for and recognize excellent performance. The expression of divergent views is also promoted as part of encouraging and motivating employees.

Since individual achievements are much less valued than are interpersonal relations in African traditions (Dia, 1994), not much emphasis is given to recognizing or rewarding those who do well; rather, doing well is taken as an obligation that has to be fulfilled. Furthermore, Africans see themselves as part of a community and not as discrete individuals (Bell, 2002). Thus, even those who take part in *harambee* efforts are seen as fulfilling what society requires and expects of them and not as anything special or extraordinary. This is not to say that recognizing and rewarding those who do well is unheard of in African values and traditions; it is just that it is not overemphasized. It is more implicit than explicit.

### *Treating Employees with Respect (Humility)*

According to the participants in this study, every employee has a right, a voice, and the same human value, even though each performs different functions and has different responsibilities. They indicated that they adopt an open door policy so that their employees and customers can access them without much difficulty. Corrections and criticisms are also handled in a manner that builds the individual up instead of destroying the individual. Humility, which allows everybody's self-worth to show, is rooted in the



*harambee* philosophy, which encourages mutual sharing of resources (mutual social responsibility) for the benefit of others. It calls for people to be mindful of each other's welfare—whether rich or poor, whether black or white (Chieni, 1997).

It is, however, important to note that leaders in government acknowledged that strict adherence to orders and the public service tradition of elevating the boss above everybody else hamper the development and practice of humility. They indicated that the government still operates via orders and directives, some of which do not necessarily require humility. This is not a strange occurrence, since government officials still tend to adopt the colonial mentality of controlling employees and intimidating them instead of being humble. Since the *harambee* philosophy is a product of government legislation, we should see more government officials embrace humility in their dealings with others.

#### *Involving Others in Decision Making*

The participants in this study strongly believed in making nearly all their decisions on a consensual basis, indicating they usually get in collective talks as heads of departments before making any key decisions. The participants stated that organizations are now inculcating a culture of teamwork and team spirit, and that many of their people are receiving training in these areas. According to Ayithey (1992), plurality decisions are extrapolated from a crucial pattern of traditional African leadership, which inexorably puts the community interest (service) ahead of its own. For instance, the chief did not rule, but rather served and led by consensus. Similarly, Mamadou (1991) observed that the traditional judge in black Africa is more intent on reaching consensus than in litigating by the book. Mersha (2000) also noted that a study based on Kenyan industries showed that both workers and managers preferred a modern democratic style of leadership to build consensus and trust.



## CONCLUSION

This article examined the construct of service in the context of Kenyan leaders and managers. In other words, it sought to determine whether Kenyan leaders and managers of varied organizational settings understand and apply the construct of service. It emerged that (a) role modeling, (b) sacrificing for others, (c) meeting the needs of others (employees) and developing them, (d) viewing service as a primary function of leadership, (e) recognizing and rewarding employees, (f) treating employees with respect (humility), and (g) involving others in decision making were prevalent themes consistent with Patterson's (2003) construct of service. These characteristics help leaders to both lead and serve their employees. This study found that in the Kenyan context, the construct of service is understood and applied by Kenyan leaders and managers of varied organizational settings, namely government, business corporations, NGOs, and academic institutions.

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Jeremiah Koshal, Ph.D., is a research fellow at The Center for Entrepreneurship, which seeks to transform people and nations through business. Previously, Dr. Koshal worked in the area of development, serving as project manager with Samaritan's Purse International in Kenya. While there, he was able to oversee a comprehensive community development project targeting farmers and poor communities. Dr. Koshal writes and presents at conferences in the areas of leadership, economic development, and entrepreneurship as a comprehensive poverty reduction tool in developing countries. For more information, call Dr. Jeremiah Koshal at 757-226-4593 or visit The Center for Entrepreneurship at [www.regententrepreneur.org](http://www.regententrepreneur.org).

Dr. Kathleen Patterson has been at Regent University since 1999 and is a noted expert on servant-leadership. She coordinates an annual Servant-Leadership Research Roundtable on the east coast in Virginia Beach, Vir-



ginia at Regent University, where each year both scholars and practitioners meet together to engage in servant-leadership discourse. She also coordinates a west coast Servant-Leadership Roundtable each year in Las Vegas, Nevada at the American Society of Business and Behavioral Sciences (ASBBS) conference. In addition, she coordinates a global Servant-Leadership Roundtable, with colleagues, in the Netherlands.

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