



Servant Leadership's Cycle of Benefit

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Abstract

This article presents the philosophy of servant leadership's cycle of benefit, a theoretical concept that emerged from existing servant leadership literature. The purpose of this work was to identify the cycle of benefit stemming from the leader-follower relationship in which the servant leader realizes tangible and intangible benefits from serving followers. To construct the concept, the author utilized inductive logic with a secondary research design. This work builds upon the argument for the practice of servant leadership by explaining why being a servant leader secondarily serves the self-interest of the one who serves.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Followership, Benefit, Self-Interest, Selfishness

The purpose of this conceptual work is to identify a philosophy of servant leadership's cycle of benefit. The work originated from a question Feldman (2014) asked; "What is the impact of being a servant leader on the servant leader himself/herself?" (p. 13). This question revealed an overlooked topic within the field of servant leadership, one that appears to open up the field to criticism. Specifically, that servant leadership is a one-sided sacrifice on the part of the servant leader benefiting only those served (Denning, 2010; Heskett, 2013; Monroe, 2013). Supporting this skepticism are existing works, which seem to focus on the benefit servant leadership has on the follower and organization while ignoring the benefit to

the leader (Lichtenwalner, 2015; Parris & Peachey, 2013). For example, recent studies identified the benefit servant leadership practices have on follower job satisfaction and how servant leadership promotes an innovative organizational climate (Chan & Mak, 2014; Yoshida, Sendjaya, Hirst, & Cooper, 2014). These studies are just two of the many empirical works that demonstrate the benefit servant leadership has on followers and organization yet do not address the benefit to the servant leader. As a result, it seems that a need exists for empirical works allowing for theoretical emergence and discovery regarding how being a servant leader benefits the servant leader (Bryant & Brown, 2014; Feldman, 2014).

The central question that formed this work asked whether existing servant leadership literature unintentionally paints a second-place finish for servant leaders by not addressing the benefits that come from being a servant leader. Society itself is built around winners and losers (Bremmer, 2010; Zweig, 2000). It is common for people to put finishes on something, to order things and assign them places. The very use of the word “servant” conjures up feelings of servitude (Monroe, 2013). Even though Russell (2014) stated, “servant leadership is not servitude” (p.16), the field of servant leadership is lacking in supporting literature. If servant leadership is not servitude, then it seems important for servant leadership works to address the benefits resulting from being a servant leader in order to reduce skepticism surrounding the philosophy. One of the many ways of accomplishing this is to discuss the derived benefits that come from the leader-follower relationship.

The relationship between the leader and follower is an ongoing symbiotic one stemming from dually held virtuous constructs (Winston, 2003). These constructs were discovered in the research of Patterson (2003) and Winston (2003), and are specific to servant leaders and servant followers. Patterson (2003) focused on the constructs of servant leadership and Winston (2003) focused on servant followership. Winston’s (2003) argument is that the interaction between leader and follower is circular. The aim of this paper is to expand on that concept in order to demonstrate how that circular leader-follower relationship creates a continuous cycle of tangible and intangible benefits.

The tangible benefit is a quantifiable reward that one receives (Blau, 1964; Philips & Schmidt, 2011). Examples of tangible benefits are profit, promotion, and power. The intangible benefit on the other hand is an unquantifiable internal reward (Matier, 1990; Oliveria & Ferreira, 2012; Philips & Schmidt, 2011). Instances of intangible benefits are feelings of accomplishment, happiness, fulfillment, community, or the simple pleasure of seeing another succeed (Blau, 1964; Conley, 2007; Lussier & Achua, 2015; Smith, 1776/2002; Spears, 2010). Discovering how these tangible and intangible benefits personally impact the servant leader as a result of being a servant leader is the goal of this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical concept regarding servant leadership’s cycle of benefit emerged from existing empirical works. The review begins with an overview of servant leadership that

addresses the foundational aspects of the philosophy. The work then moves on to discuss the circular leader-follower relationship. Next, the review of the literature identifies current empirical works regarding the positive correlational impact servant leaders have on followers and organizations. The literature review concludes by delineating on some of the skepticisms surrounding the philosophy of servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

The philosophy of servant leadership is grounded in the notion that great leadership begins with an individual's desire to serve others (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf (1970), the originator of modern servant leadership philosophy, argued that the servant leader is one who seeks to serve others and from that service emerges a leader. The servant leader is an inspiring figure, a person others desire to follow and emulate (Autry, 2001; De Pree, 1997; Neuschel, 1998). As Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote,

Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve after leadership is established. The leader first and the servant first are two extreme types. Between them, there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature (p. 27).

Three questions form the servant leadership approach. The first, "do those served grow as persons" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 27)? Second, "do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 27)? Third, "what is the effect on the least privileged in society, will they benefit or at least not be further deprived" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 27)? To be a servant leader does not mean reducing one's position, but rather, strengthening one's legitimate power through service and empathy towards others (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Hunter, 2004; Spears, 2010). It is the character of the servant leader that drives their success (Spears, 2010).

Spears (2010) identified a robust yet non-exhaustive list of these characteristics. They are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2010). These characteristics inspire the behavior of the servant leader, giving meaning to his or her life (Keith, 2008; Spears, 2010). For example, a servant leader's awareness of an organizational environment coupled with their ability to conceptualize ideas with the foresight of future needs inspires positive visions that followers are willing to work towards (Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2010). Followers believe in the vision because they trust the leader (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2003). Once the vision is set forth, the servant leader becomes one who serves followers by committing to their growth and

building a sense of community so they can bring the vision to fruition (De Pree, 1997; Greenleaf, 1977/2002).

The Circular Relationship of the Servant Leader-Servant Follower

Immerging from the theoretical core of Greenleaf's (1970) writings on the philosophy of servant leadership, Patterson (2003) and Winston (2003) identified the virtuous constructs of the servant leader and the servant follower. Their works established a specific set of parameters involving servant leadership and servant followership. These constructs make up the servant leader-servant follower relationship cycle.

For the servant leader, the seven virtuous constructs are *agapao* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Patterson, 2003). Patterson's (2003) work identified how each construct flows into the next resulting in service. Winston (2003) extended Patterson's (2003) work by identifying six virtuous constructs of the servant follower. The servant follower's constructs are *agapao* love, commitment to the leader, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, altruism towards the leader/leader's interest, and service (Winston, 2003).

The relationship cycle begins with a moral love for another person known as *agapao* love. Within this cycle the leader has a moral love for the follower and the follower has a moral love for the leader. The relationship is grounded in this mutual *agapao*. From love, the leader humbly approaches the follower, acknowledging his or her humanity (Hayes & Comer, 2010). It is the leader's humility that permits one to reach out to followers (Nielson, Marrone, & Slay 2010). In addition, *agapao* allows the leader to altruistically give of himself or herself to the follower (Day, 2004). The leader's humility and altruistic approach to the needs of the follower fosters the follower's commitment to the leader (Winston, 2003). It is at this point in the relationship where the follower begins to realize their needs are being served (van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014).

The power of the leader-follower relationship is one that influences identity (Davidson, Jamieson, & Johnson, 2014). The commitment to one another positively impacts identity and thus organizational environments (Chen, Zhu, & Zhou, 2014; Davidson et al., 2014). The reciprocated commitment between leader and follower strengthens the follower's desire to carry out the leader's vision (Winston, 2003). The visionary leader rejects complacency and looks towards the future (Bell & Habel, 2009). The servant follower, being committed to the leader, accepts that the leader's vision meets future needs, and will protect and benefit the follower and the organization (Whetstone, 2002).

This relationship is embedded in a trust between leader and follower (Patterson, 2003). The follower trusts that the leader will make the right decision and is willing to carry out the leader's vision (Caldwell, Davis, & Devine, 2009). Trust is reciprocated by trusting the follower to carry out the vision without direct supervision or micromanagement (Caldwell & Hayes, 2007). On the part of the leader it is the willingness to empower the follower (Patterson, 2003). On the part of the follower it is their self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation

that allows them to be empowered (Winston, 2003). This continuous circular relationship of trust and empowerment involves the follower's trust in the leader and the leader trusting that the follower can operate outside of a centralized power and decision-making structure (Ndoye, Imig, & Parker, 2010). This trust-based relationship fosters success and achievement (Hayes, Caldwell, Licona, & Meyers, 2015).

Where there are positive behaviors and a commitment to one's leader, there is an enhancement of wealth creation and organizational success (Hayes et al., 2015). Moreover, follower self-efficacy has a positive influence on organizational climate and customer satisfaction, thus leading to higher growth and profits (Chen et al., 2014). This occurs because when a leader empowers the follower, the follower is then free to actualize their creative and innovative talents (Conley, 2007; Yoshida et al., 2014).

The constructs coexist with one another, driving the reciprocated service between leader and follower. Within the leader-follower relationship, the leader and follower give completely of themselves in service to the other (Patterson, 2003; Sipe & Frick, 2009; Winston, 2003). Each of the constructs becomes intertwined, forming the continuous circular relationship resulting in service (Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2003).

The Influence of Servant Leadership

This section of the literature review moves from the philosophical aspects of servant leadership in order to present current research involving the positive impact servant leaders have on followers and organizations. Parris and Peachey (2013) conducted a systematic review of 39 servant leadership studies, discovering that each study revealed a positive benefit to the follower and the organization. Parris and Peachey (2013) stated in their findings that the practice of servant leadership is "viable and valuable on an individual and an organization level, which can lead to increased overall effectiveness of individuals and teams" (p. 386). Research findings across multiple industries have also identified positive outcomes resulting from organizational loyalty and a commitment to serve followers (Grant, 2013; Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997). This relationship was shown to increase follower loyalty to customers, correlating to greater profits and organizational growth (Grant, 2013; Heskett et al., 1997).

Empirical works reveal a relationship between servant leadership practices, follower success and positive organizational benefits (Chan & Mak; 2014; Hunter et al., 2013; Liden, Wayne, Chenwei, & Meuser, 2014; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Yoshida et al., 2014). For example, Chan and Mak (2014) determined that the practice of servant leadership resulted in positive job satisfaction amongst followers, as well as increased trust between leaders and followers. Hunter et al. (2013) showed, that the practice of servant leadership decreased follower turnover and increased sales performance. Liden et al. (2014) found that a culture of servant leadership increased follower performance and creativity, as well as decreased employee turnover. Shaw and Newton (2014) discovered that when teachers perceived their leader to be a servant leader, there was greater job satisfaction and loyalty to the organization. In addition, Yoshida et al. (2014) discovered

that the practice of servant leadership fostered follower creativity and a climate of innovation.

Each of these highlighted studies demonstrates the positive impact the servant leader had on organizations and followers. Overall, these studies discovered that where servant leadership is practiced or perceived there existed a trust for leaders (Chan & Mak, 2014), employee engagement and reduced turnover (Hunter et al., 2013), follower creativity, greater customer service (Liden et al., 2014), greater job satisfaction (Shaw & Newton, 2014), and follower creativity and innovation (Yoshida et al., 2014). Although the benefits are revealed for the follower and organization, each study seemingly overlooks the benefit to the servant leader. It is possible that this oversight contributes to the skepticism surrounding the practice of servant leadership.

Skepticism Toward Servant Leadership

The final section of the literature review involves delineating certain skepticisms surrounding servant leadership. Existing works involving servant leadership seem to leave many individuals and organizations still asking *what's in it for me?*. It is conceivable that this is one of the reasons that skepticism surrounding servant leadership exists and the practice of servant leadership is not more prevalent, especially in the for-profit sectors (Bryant & Brown, 2014; Heskett, 2013; Myatt, 2015). As Monroe (2013) stated, "some people have a negative reaction to the concept of servant leadership others simply misunderstand it". Existing literature does a good job addressing the benefits a servant leader has on followers and organizations (Parris & Peachey, 2013). However, it seems to overlook the self-interest of the servant leader (Feldman, 2014).

At the core of individual self-interest is a desire for achievement, profit, and power (Locke, 1689/1949). Such desires are legitimate aspirations and noble pursuits if achieved virtuously without abuse, force, or coercion (Harman, 1974; Rand, 1966; Sayeg & Balera, 2013). Within society itself, a leader's success is weighed by their achievements, profits, and power (Carden, 2009; Chusmir & Azevedo, 1992; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Gunn, 2002; McClelland, 1961; Winter, 2010). It seems that to reduce skepticism, servant leadership literature needs to demonstrate how a leader's achievement, profit, and power stems from serving the needs of followers. One way of accomplishing this is acknowledging that the servant leader receives tangible and intangible benefits as a result of serving followers.

Claar, Jackson, and TenHarken (2014) raised a concern when discussing leaders that make risky, irrationally selfish decisions that hurt followers and organizations. Such irrational decision-making results in benefits only to the leader at the demise of others (Claar et al., 2014). The abusive and coercive practices of leaders at the Enron Corporation for their own financial gain is an example of this type of behavior (Rapoport, 2009). The risky and illegal practices bankrupted the corporation and decimated employee retirement savings (Rapoport, 2009). Therefore, it needs noting that the servant leader cannot legitimately make irrationally selfish decisions that harm followers or organizations (Monroe, 2013). This is

because the servant leader ensures that the least privileged are not further deprived (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). In the case of the Enron Corporation, it was the everyday worker that lost everything (Rapoport, 2009). A servant leader is a virtuous leader and a virtuous leader is neither abusive nor coercive (Rand, 1966). Being a servant leader defines the individual's character making it improbable that a true servant leader could ever be abusive and/or coercive, especially to the most vulnerable (Greenleaf, 1970; Keith, 2008; Monroe, 2013).

Another misunderstanding fueling the skepticism is the notion that the servant leader functions in servitude to followers stemming from an altruistic desire (Berger, 2014; Denning, 2010; Heskett, 2013; Monroe, 2013; Mooney, 2015; Russell, 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011). The concept of altruistic servitude, especially in the for-profit sector, is seen as destructive and self-defeating (Rand, 1966; Schwartz, 2015). Though Patterson (2003) and Winston (2003) discovered the construct of altruism existing within the interpersonal relationship between leader-follower, it does not seem to be part of the motivation for being a servant leader because there is a beneficial impact from being a servant leader (Beck, 2014).

This has to do with the realized benefits that come to the servant leader as a result of the leader-follower relationship. These can be tangible benefits in the form of greater profits, or intangible like the personal fulfillment that comes from serving others (Smith, 1759/2010; Grant, 2013). Regardless of type, it is unlikely that individuals who aspire and grow as servant leaders never once imagine what the benefits would be to their own life, even if it is something as simple as the intangible benefit that comes from seeing others succeed just "for the pleasure of seeing it" (Smith, 1759, p. 3). Hence, if there is always a benefit to self from being a servant leader then should being a servant leader be considered an altruistic or rationally self-serving decision (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Rand, 1964)? For as Smith (1776/2002) stated,

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages (p. 19)

Sun's (2013) research discussed the behaviors of servant leaders in decision-making, discovering that identified servant leaders have factors that "combat self-serving decisions" (p. 547). This seems to generate more skepticism and more questions. The first asking whether being self-serving is an immoral practice when it is free from abuse, force, or coercion (Biddle, 2002; Locke, 1689/1949; Rand, 1964)? For as Locke (1689/1949) argued, self-interest drives human motivation and success. Second, when the servant leader makes the decision, does the outcome from that decision negatively impact the servant leader on a permanent basis? Third, does a seemingly selfless decision never benefit the servant leader? For example, during a market downturn the leader decides to take a temporary pay cut and use that money to keep a follower employed. Over time, does that leader's salary continue to be diminished to a point where the leader fades away or does that decision not benefit the

leader in the future through greater follower loyalty, trust, gifted power, and higher income? Finally, if in fact the decision to serve the follower does benefit the leader, can that decision then be defined as selfless?

Laub (1999) stated that the servant leader “places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (p. 81). However, if the led being served is in turn serving the leader then there is self-interest in serving the needs of the led (Biddle, 2002; Grant, 2013). This has to do with the fact that the one who serves others benefits from that service. And because they benefit, it is then possible to say that the servant leader that puts the needs of others before self is serving their own needs. For example, if one is in charge of a project and one will benefit from the project's success and the project is successful because one serves the needs of followers that make the project successful, then such service is a benefit to self.

Even though it is unlikely that the servant leader leads out of pure selflessness or a desire for servitude, because the leader often seems to benefit, that should not reduce what it means to be a servant leader. The strength of the leader-follower relationship is the dual reward (Grant, 2013). In the leader-follower relationship there is not an either/or, but rather, a both. It does not matter that the choice is to serve first when one understands that serving others is in fact serving self (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). If this is the case then it is plausible that being a servant leader is a rational-selfish choice (Rand, 1964).

METHOD

Multiple pathways exist for theoretical discovery within the social sciences (Shoemaker, Tankard, & Lasorsa, 2004). One path involves discovering emergent theories within existing literature through a process known as secondary research (Shoemaker et al., 2004; Stewart & Kamins, 1992). Secondary research design opens up the possibilities for discovering new theoretical findings through a synthesis of existing empirical works (Stewart & Kamins, 1992). The secondary research approach allows researchers to glean deeper meanings and new theoretical concepts by looking at existing works through a fresh lens (Stewart & Kamins, 1992).

To construct this work, the author employed a secondary research method to identify the theoretical concept of servant leadership's cycle of benefit (Shoemaker et al., 2004; Stewart & Kamins, 1992). The process began by identifying and utilizing academic databases to acquire the data that formulated the article's literature review. The literature review process identified a seemingly overlooked topic within servant leadership literature pertaining to the personal benefits to the leader derived from being a servant leader. The author then utilized an analytical process involving inductive reasoning to address the topic (Coyne, 1984). The analysis formed the theoretical concept of servant leadership's cycle of benefit (Coyne, 1984; Shoemaker et al., 2004). The next sections of this work present

servant leadership's cycle of benefit, as well as a rich discussion of the theoretical concept (Shoemaker et al., 2004).

The Theoretical Concept of Servant Leadership's Cycle of Benefit

Servant leadership's cycle of benefit begins when one decides to be a servant leader. The decision drives a keen awareness and prioritization of the needs of the follower (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2010). The follower benefits from that service by having his or her needs met (Grant, 2013; Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Spears, 2010; Ton, 2014). The follower in turn is then able to serve the needs of the leader, and from that service the leader benefits (Grant, 2013; Ton, 2014; Winston, 2003). This ongoing service between leader and follower forms servant leadership's cycle of benefit; *see Figure 1.*

Figure 1.

Servant Leadership's Cycle of Benefit



Central to the cycle of benefit are the individual self-interests of both sides tangibly and intangibly benefiting through a mutual exchange of service (Locke, 1689/1949; Rand, 1966). This exchange is the cycle's dual reciprocity stemming from the leader-follower relationship and beginning with the leader serving the follower. In order to demonstrate how this cycle of benefit occurs, the next section will provide a rich discussion to promote an understanding of how the cycle appears from the leader-follower relationship.

DISCUSSION

To be a servant leader, one makes a conscience decision to serve the needs of followers (Greenleaf, 1970; Sipe & Frick, 2009). There are numerous ways in which the servant leader

serves. However, for this discussion only a few will be highlighted. The servant leader establishes a vision followers can believe in and desire to work towards (De Pree, 1997; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2010). The vision lays the groundwork for moving forward. The leader is committed to the growth of followers, meeting their needs so they can grow as individuals (Spears, 2010). The servant leader builds community within the organization, cultivating an environment where followers have a sense of belonging (Spears, 2010). In addition, the servant leader empowers followers, fostering shared decision-making (Patterson, 2003; Russell, 2014). These actions by the leader enhance the follower's sense of community and ownership (Spears, 2010).

The follower benefits from the leader's service, growing from the opportunities provided to them (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). The service strengthens a follower's trust in the leader (Chan & Mak, 2014). Because the leader builds a sense of community and ownership, followers experience greater satisfaction (Shaw & Newton, 2014). When follower's needs are served, they openly engage leaders and colleagues (Hunter et al., 2013). Moreover, when followers are served, they develop feelings of belonging, leading to their ability to self-actualize (Conley, 2007). When a follower self-actualizes, they are now open to explore their creative and innovative possibilities (Conley, 2007; Liden et al., 2014; Ton, 2014; Yoshida et al., 2014).

The follower's self-actualization serves the leader. This allows for a reciprocation of service that seems to have positive impacts on the leader. Though there are many ways that a follower's service tangibly and intangibly benefits the leader, this discussion will concentrate on certain leadership achievements, the realization of higher profits, and the gift of legitimate power.

One way in which a leader's achievement is measured is through reduced follower turnover. Research has discovered that reduced turnover is correlated with the practice of servant leadership (Hunter et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2014; Ton, 2014). This means the servant leader is not saddled with the high cost and stress surrounding the replacement of skilled followers (Ton, 2014). This is important because these followers possess a greater commitment and loyalty to the organization and its customer (Heskett et al., 1997; Liden, et al., 2014; Ton, 2014). This commitment and loyalty leads to organizational growth, which is considered a leadership achievement (Ton, 2014).

Organizational growth, committed followers, and happy customers support higher profits (Heskett et al., 1997; Ton, 2014). Profits are realized when followers desire to stay with the company and understand how vital it is to have satisfied customers (Carden, 2009; Ton, 2014). These greater profits are a financial benefit to the leader (Carden, 2009; Chusmir & Azevedo, 1992).

Another way the servant leader benefits from the follower's service is through legitimate power (Chusmir & Azevedo, 1992; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Hunter, 2004). This power originates from the trust-based relationship between the leader-follower (Caldwell et al., 2009; Hunter, 2004; Patterson,

2003). That trust furthers a follower's commitment to the leader, bringing about a willingness to carry out the leader's vision (Winston, 2003). Additionally, it strengthens the trust of a leader's decisions (Caldwell et al., 2009). This is the benefit of a leader's legitimate power, it is a gift to them from followers who believe in their vision and trust their decisions (Greenleaf, 1977/2002).

The purpose of the discussion was to give a rich descriptive example in order to provide an understating of servant leadership's cycle of benefit. This discussion demonstrated how a leader benefits from achievement, profit, and legitimate power because they served their followers. These are only a few of the many tangible and intangible benefits that positively impact the servant leader within the cycle of benefit.

CONCLUSION

This article presented the theoretical concept of servant leadership's cycle of benefit. Formed from the literature, this ongoing cycle of benefit involves a reciprocated relationship where the leader serves the follower and in return the follower serves the leader. Within this cycle, the individual self-interests of the leader and follower are met through the realization of tangible and intangible benefits. This concept is seen in the work of Smith (1776/2002) who wrote,

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favor, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this, which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices, which we stand in need of (p. 25).

The implication of this theoretical work is to begin to address Feldman's (2014) question, which asked, "What is the impact of being a servant leader on the servant leader himself/herself" (p. 13)? By addressing some of the benefits of being a servant leader, this article has the possibility of sparking future dialogue and research on the subject. In addition, by identifying some of the benefits to the servant leader, this article begins to address the skepticism surrounding servant leadership that asks *what's in it for me?*

Servant leadership's cycle of benefit has the possibility of changing the way an individual interprets the philosophy. By establishing an awareness of the benefits to self that come from serving followers this theoretical concept addresses the skepticism of servitude (Berger, 2014; Denning, 2010; Heskett, 2013; Monroe, 2013; Mooney, 2015; Russell, 2014;

van Dierendonck, 2011). The article does this by describing how being a servant leader is not one of altruistic sacrifice, but rather, a decision of rational selfishness (Rand, 1964).

This work is limited to a single theoretical concept formed from an analysis of existing empirical works, as well as the author's use of inductive logic (Coyne, 1984). The author acknowledges that others may interpret literature differently. Future works are needed in order to expand the dialogue on the cycle of benefit. Because this work utilized existing literature to discover the theoretical concept, future research is needed for theoretical validation and a deeper understanding regarding servant leadership's cycle of benefit (Shoemaker et al., 2004). Moreover, future research is needed in order to explore the perceptions leaders have of the benefits they receive from their own service to others.

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