Discovering the Servant in Fire and Emergency Services Leaders

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Abstract

This qualitative grounded theory designed study identified perceptions and interpretations of leaders and leadership from the perspective of mid-level fire and emergency services officers. The findings from this study discovered a possible pathway for instilling the philosophy of servant leadership into the fire and emergency services. The study took place at a large metropolitan fire and emergency services agency in the Western United States. The 15 participants in the study were affiliated, uniformed and sworn, mid-level fire and emergency services officers. The literature used to form this study, identified negative issues associated with current leadership practices within the fire and emergency services and their relations to both the physical and mental stresses that many responders suffer. The study's theoretical finding was mid-level fire and emergency service officers interpreted the role of a leader to be that of serving their followers. The theoretical finding seemingly aligns closely with the philosophy of servant leadership.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Fire and Emergency Services, Bureaucracy

The approach towards leadership within the fire and emergency services often results in negative and somewhat destructive environments (Carter, 2007; Fishkin, 1990; Floren, 1984; Kates, 2008; Kirschman, 2004, 2007; Perez, Jones, Englert, & Sachau,

2010; Sweeney, 2012; Yuan et al., 2011).   Specifically, the issue involves the bureaucracy within fire and emergency services organizations that seemingly stifles a leadership approach towards people consisting of positive human interactions and relationships, replacing them instead with top-down, and at times constraining, managerial policies and procedures (Alexander & Sanjay, 2013; Edwards, 2010; Kirschman, 2004, 2007; Marinucci, 2009; Mitchell & Casey, 2007; Rhodes, 2006; Weber 1978).   Greenleaf (1977/2002) argued that the practice of servant leadership could overcome such toxic bureaucracies. Based upon existing literature, there is a possibility that instilling the philosophy of servant leadership into the fire and emergency services, through training and education, could lessen the policy driven bureaucratic approach towards leadership.   Furthermore, current research shows the promise of servant leadership within the fire and emergency services and its potential positive impact on the overall health and wellbeing of fire and emergency services responders (Baker, 2011; Carter, 2007; Cortrite, 2007; Moonsbrugger & Patterson, 2008; Reed, 2015; Russell, 2014a, 2014b; Stanley, 1995). However, before one can create academic offerings regarding servant leadership for the fire and emergency services, there needs to be a deeper understanding of the current perceptions and interpretations that affiliated fire and emergency services personnel possess regarding leaders/leadership.

The bureaucracy is, by human design, a somewhat closed system that seeks to absorb and integrate things compatible with it (Mills 1959/2000; Weber, 1978). The potential big ideas must come from both inside and outside the system to help it grow and develop. Therefore, the fire and emergency services research project must step outside its applied and practical frame to get fresh eidetic material. Borrowing from its cousin business management has only proven incestuous in the realm of the intellect and its subsequent manifestation in the bureaucratic milieu. The fire and emergency services operate like other non-emergency services organizations except that their operations are conducted under time-pressure, and consequence.

This qualitative study explored the understanding of leadership within the fire and emergency services in order to discover possible pathways for infusing the philosophy of servant leadership into the career field. The data associated with this grounded theory study was derived from questionnaires completed by uniformed and sworn, fire and emergency services company level officers serving in a large metropolitan fire and emergency services agency in the Western United States. The central question that guided the research asked how professional fire and emergency services responders interpreted the role and characteristics of leadership as it compared to servant leadership.

The researchers chose to conduct a qualitative study in order to give a voice to the participants, thus allowing for a richer understanding often missed in statistical analysis (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). The importance of qualitative research involving servant leadership is in the methodological ability to glean a deeper understanding of what servant leadership means and how it is perceived (Winston, 2010).   Utilizing a grounded theory design allowed for theoretical development based upon the study's findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Furthermore, the emergent theoretical finding from this study, coupled with existing empirical works, allowed the researchers to discover a

possible pathway for infusing the philosophy of servant leadership into the fire and emergency services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review utilized existing empirical works to identify current leadership and managerial practices within the fire and emergency services. A major finding in the literature was the problem associated with bureaucratic practices and its negative impact on the responder (Alexander & Sanjay, 2013; Kirschman, 2004, 2007; Rhodes, 2006).   Because of this finding, the literature review begins by defining bureaucracy and its impact within organizations. The literature review then addresses the specific problems bureaucracy creates within the fire and emergency services as well as the toll such practices takes on responders. The literature review then moves on to give an overview of servant leadership philosophy. Finally, the review of the literature identifies the commonalities between the philosophy of servant leadership and the fire and emergency services.

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is the structure and process to control assets and people (Weber, 1978). Maslow (1965) described the value of fostering creativity among people in an organization of any kind by applying it to the managerial situation. Within the fire and emergency services the bureaucratic process is to control the chaos of the emergency scene. The concepts of safety and order on the emergency scene are ingrained into the minds of responders at the start of their professional training and education and constantly reiterated throughout their career.   This process exists to meet emergency objectives that are under time-pressure and consequences. Thus, when it is proposed to have a different leadership approach outside of the emergency scene it is typical to have some objections raised by some in the group who need more structure, these are the individuals who believe that without structural order, anarchy and chaos could result. It is important to proceed with this discussion rationally, but also, with an understanding that they come from deeply emotional and often irrational places (Maslow, 1965). This is a demand for a set of rules and principles in the form of policies and procedures that are written for controlling the future and for anticipating any problem that may arise (May, 1991; Mills 1959/2000; Perez et al., 2010; Weber, 1978).   Maslow (1965) continued pointing out that this is realistically impossible and that the future by nature is somewhat unpredictable. Trying to construct a comprehensive and exhaustive book of rules for any contingency is a futile effort. He proposes that this is a mistrust of our own self that drives a need to prepare. Maslow (1965) goes on to argue that it is better for most situations that the organization works toward a minimum of the rules rather than to a maximum. Perhaps it is best to regard the size of the book of rules needed as proportional to the size and complexity of the organization of people it is meant to serve. It needs noting that bureaucracy emerged as a self-created arrangement by human beings, and that both human will and judgment are governed by predetermined ideas so that freedom of ideas is constrained before it is born. Additionally, governments and organizations have

argued the need for bureaucracy as a way to protect the people (de Vries, 2001; Weber, 1978).

Bureaucratic hierarchies frame the employee's world in such a way that makes promotion the only real progress; meaning that the only way for someone to be successful is to promote (May, 1991). Moreover, the pyramid structure of hierarchies creates an ever-diminishing possibility for the employee to promote because each level gets smaller in number (Seigal, 2006). In a competitive-individualist culture, each level of success comes with a winner and multiple losers. How hierarchies deal with this is to refer back to the rugged individualist's ethos of, "get back up, dust yourself off, and go back to working hard." If one were to look at the standard distribution (bell curve), one would see that in any group of people performing the same job, there is a right-tail group of excellent performers. On the other hand, there is also a left-tail group who are insufficient performers that need to increase performance. Finally, in the distribution, there is the middle-group made up of those performers that hover about the mean, which is the hypothetical middle performer. What this means is that the right-tail group is ideally where the next "best-man for the job" is coming from. Nevertheless, by promoting only one or two, others who are statistically the same in performance are rejected and pushed back toward the middle-group to try again (Kezar, 2001; Vinzant & Crothers, 1996).

The mythology of the rugged individual promotes the idea that one gets to the top of the organization through hard work, loyalty, and dependability (May, 1991). Yet a scientific-style examination process, which is meant to be unbiased, moderates these objectively, but does not guarantee that the best overall candidate is even securely in the right tail of the distribution. As a result, decision-makers must deal with the dilemma of choosing. The choice is between promoting the person who had the best performance determined by these artificial measures within a one-time context, or the person they believe has been the dependable and efficacious performer over time. More often than some would like to see, there is a functional abandonment of the first choice because it is the qualities of the second choice that adds a contributing member to the next level of the organization. After all, if each rank in the organization has fewer and fewer people, the people need to be increasingly stronger groups in terms of teamwork and performance (Bruegman, 2012; Vinzant & Crothers, 1996). These groups must not only be efficacious, but they must also insulate themselves in terms of political power because they have ascended in an organization that is competitive at every turn; it is an exclusionary ethos. Once one becomes a winner in a bureaucracy, the fall from the upper levels becomes disastrous because he or she lands among the losers.

At what point can the rugged individual keep being passed-over and thus pushed back to the middle to try again? Does that person begin to be influenced by that push back (especially when one considers that each promotional opportunity in bureaucracies is meant to be objective and scientific in its process of validating its selections from among the applicants)? The result is that the promotion process begins with application, resume, performance testing, and interviews (Anglin, 2001). Each audition, if you will, becomes artificially a new contrived context that intentionally ignores the history and past efforts of the candidate. Moreover, it also invites new candidates that did not try out

in the last audition, so now the field of competition has changed. Overall, the employee's career is one thing that evolves over time in his or her experience. Nevertheless, at promotion time, the evaluation process becomes a performance snapshot moment by which the employee's entire history is negated. If it is not entirely negated by the bureaucracy implementing resume, performance reviews, and other instruments, his or her historical trajectory as an employee is still moderated. The employee's history is then moderated by the snapshot style evaluation mode of written exams, role-plays, and interviews, seemingly creating a bait-and-switch (Flemming, 2010).

Bureaucracy in the Fire and Emergency Services

The bureaucracy is the container in which the organization exists; it sets the parameters, conditions, and minimal standards. When the capacity of the individual becomes greater than the bureaucratic structure, problems arise, hence the reason to have an organization in a state of constantly developing followers (Keith, 2008). This bureaucratic empiricism creates problems that affect the fire and emergency services responder as they come to the career with a desire to serve others (Russell, 2014a; Salka & Neville, 2004). This is why the bureaucracy is a problem within the fire and emergency services, for as Mills (1959/2000) wrote, "[bureaucrats] are among the humanistically impoverished, living with reference to values that exclude any arising from a respect for human reason" (p. 106).

Often times the fire and emergency services is driven to be problem focused rather than solutions focused. This creates an environment that symbolizes mundane issues causing them to seem the same as real problems and chaos (May, 1991). Inconvenience becomes a problem; something missing means things are missing. Followers begin equating labeling the kitchen drawers and cabinets or the cleaning supply closet to the importance of labeling the paramedic drug-box compartments. The responder begins to believe that they cannot handle exceptions because they believe they might fail to exercise good judgment (Maslow, 1965). By mistrusting their abilities as professionals, they imagine that using the bureaucratic approach of policy building ad infinitum will serve use with safety and security from the imagined terrible tragedy that might befall them. However, over burdening people with policies creates a world of servants serving the rulebook instead of the rules serving their essential role. This destructive environment damages responders and unfortunately is common throughout fire and emergency services organizations (Kirschman, 2004).

The bureaucracy leaves people desiring for a far different situation than the one they currently find themselves functioning (de Vries, 2001). The formal bureaucratic structure works under normal operating conditions; however, the formal must be flexible in order to function within the abnormal situation (Lyden, 1974). Vinzant and Crothers (1996) found that those who operate in the field possess a leadership style that holds to their values, values that lead to questioning the need for the bureaucracy. Moreover, responders often need to bypass or even disregard the bureaucratic policy in order to save a life (Henderson & Pandey, 2013; Rhodes, 2006). Henderson and Pandey (2013) found that paramedics operating on an emergency scene had to ignore policies and protocols in order to save the lives of patients in their care. When writing on the fire and emergency

services response to hurricane Katrina, Rhodes noted that for the responders to be successful, they needed to rise above the bureaucracy in order to save lives (Rhodes, 2006). Furthermore, the bureaucratic structure slows and stifles emergency and disaster planning that will make the difference to the least fortunate within society (Aryal & Dobson, 2011; Henderson, 2004). The least fortunate of society are of great concern to servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977/2002).

Lloyd (2003) argued that a failure to develop leaders within the fire and emergency services is an immoral act. Furthermore, intervening in the aftermath of a traumatic situation with programs such as critical incident stress debriefings may be too late. Instead, there is a need to build a culture of support that strengthens the individual before the incident ever occurs (Gilmartin, 2002; McNally, Bryant, & Ehlers, 2003; Paton, 2005; Paton, Violanti, Dunning, & Smith, 2004; Sheehan & Van Hasselt, 2003); therefore, a need also exists to build a leadership culture that supports such practices. Included in this culture, is meeting the needs of individuals by fostering their intelligence and building a community of social support (McNally et al., 2003; Patton, 2005; Patton et al., 2004). That concept is found at the core of the servant leadership philosophy (Greenleaf, 1977, 2002; Patterson, 2003; Sipe & Frick, 2009; Spears, 2010).

The problems that arise between the responder and the bureaucracy go beyond the operational aspect of the profession. Fire and emergency services responders make meaning out of their work; the profession becomes a part of their identity (Jensen, 2005). This is also the case for those that assume officer level ranks, their rank adds to their identity. Part of what defines these individuals is their role as fire and emergency services leaders. However, many promote to officer positions without ever receiving an education or even a class on being a leader (Russell, 2014a). The research of Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007) found a need for leadership preparatory programs for followers in order to mold them into the leaders of the future. The rationale for finding a pathway for servant leadership within the fire and emergency services has to do with the servant leader being held in much higher regard by followers than others leaders (Taylor et al., 2007). In addition, unlike any other approach towards leadership, the virtues of servant leadership align with the virtues that define what it means to be a fire and emergency services responder (Carter, 2007; Russell, 2014a).

Servant Leadership

Robert K. Greenleaf penned the philosophy of servant leadership over four decades ago. Such thinking revolutionized leadership thought and academics by bringing an approach to the world that is opposite of a desire to lead first. Greenleaf's (1977/2002) work embeds a desire to serve others first, to meet their needs, arguing that the path to true happiness comes from the idea of serving others (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Stramba, 2003; Keith, 2008). However, unlike current leadership theory, servant leadership bases itself on the notion that the servant leader is one that possesses specific characteristics (Spears, 2010) and thus a servant's pathway. The idea of servant leadership is not the weakening of leaders and subduing their legitimacy but rather, strengthening their role through service (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), empathy (Spears, 2010), and humility (Hayes &

Comer, 2010). As it is with the fire and emergency services profession, being a servant leader gives meaning to one's life (Keith, 2008).

When writing on the individual, Greenleaf (1977/2002) discusses the notion of those that wish to serve and from that service comes leadership, a byproduct of serving. The theory places the individual within society, regardless of stature, as a servant to the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977/2002).   Such a notion involves the improvement and development of others as the cornerstone. Spears (2010) held such a concept, the committing oneself to the betterment and growth of others, as a core characteristic of the servant leader. Here is the individual, impressive, educated and self-aware, committing their life to the service of others for their betterment (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). The essential component of Greenleaf's (1977/2002) theory is the individual and the power they hold in the service to others as well as the outcomes of the practice. Greenleaf (1977/2002) posed two specific questions about servant leadership, the first involved whether the leader grows as an individual and the second involved the growth of the individual served.   Greenleaf (1977/2002) places the idea of putting people first as the central tenet of success for an organization, he argued that the institution that places the needs of its people before all else will in fact see everything turn positive. Such an idea bases itself on the premise that if your people are taken care of then they in turn take care of everything else. Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote that the institution that practices servant leadership flourishes because those served desire to make it so.

It was from the roots of servant leadership that Spears (2010) established what are known as the ten characteristics of the servant leader. Spear's (2010) work took Greenleaf's (1970) writings regarding servant leadership from a theory to a usable and identifiable model based upon these ten characteristics. Because of Spear's (2010) work, the theory of servant leadership now contained specific and measurable characteristics one could use to identify servant leadership qualities within individual leaders.

Derived from an interpretation of Greenleaf's (1970) original essay, the 10 characteristics of the servant leader according to Spears are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2010).   Specific and yet not exhaustive (Spears, 2010), these characteristics describe the servant leader. Besides being able to use these characteristics to measure servant leaders, they also function as a way to look inward into one's own leadership characteristics.

A groundbreaking work by Patterson (2003) moved beyond the notion of characteristics of the philosophy into the virtues that make up servant leadership. The constructs of servant leadership derive from Patterson's (2003) work that involved identifying specifics within Greenleaf's servant leadership philosophy. Unlike the 10 characteristics that Spears (2010) established, which described the servant leader, the seven virtuous constructs identified by Patterson (2003), embody the theoretical core of Greenleaf's (1970) original essay, *The Servant as Leader*. Patterson (2003) argued that the theory of servant leadership extended from and beyond the transformational leadership model and therefore demanded its own set of parameters, leading to the seven virtuous constructs specific to servant leadership. Patterson (2003) identified differences,

which led to the creation of *seven virtuous constructs* specific only to the practice of servant leadership. In order, these constructs are *agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service*. Patterson (2003) displayed how each construct flows into the next with the pinnacle being that of service. The seven virtuous constructs and their relation to the fire and emergency services are expanded upon in the next section of the literature review.

With the expansion of conceptual writings by celebrated authors regarding the philosophy of servant leadership, Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) argued for the need of empirical studies as well as the development of models and measurement instruments. A major study that followed was by Laub (1999), whose research led to the development of one of the first instruments to be used to study servant leadership known as the Organizational Leadership Assessment Instrument (OLA). Developed through a Delphi study, the OLA became a sought after instrument to assess the presence and amount of servant leadership in organizations (Laub, 1999). Laub's (1999) OLA identified six specific areas of measurement for servant leadership, values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership. Since its publication, the OLA has led to dozens of published dissertations and theses.

Servant Leadership and the Fire and Emergency Services

The career of the fire and emergency services professional still holds true to the same traditions and passions as those who came before and the love of serving others is still the foundation of what it means to be a fire and emergency services responder (Fleming, 2010; Lasky, 2006; Morris, 1955; Smeby, 2005). Leadership in the fire and emergency services poses a unique set of challenges, where leaders must take two separate, yet simultaneous paths. The first path is leadership associated with on-scene emergency management; this situation involves a direct-authoritative role, including giving commands and orders to crews (Anglin, 2001; Coleman, 2008; van Doren, 2006). On the emergency scene, a command and control style of leadership is necessary for safe and effective operations (Smeby, 2005). Command and control of an emergency scene are a complex system, where time is of the essence and the environment is one of danger and risk (Bigley & Roberts, 2001). Within the fire and emergency services, bureaucracy needs to exist for safety and order during emergency operations, the more lethal the task the more rigid the structure of command and control. However, this control has little place outside of emergency response (Kirschman, 2004).

The second path is leadership away from an emergency scene, which is a very different role. As stated before, the fire and emergency services becomes a personal identifier for the individuals that operate in the career field. The majority of fire and emergency services responders work 24-hour to 48-hour shifts and live with one another in a family-like community; fire and emergency services stations are commonly referred to as houses. Therefore, relationships go beyond the stereotypical coworker to a brotherhood/sisterhood (Salka & Neville, 2004; Sargent, 2006; Seigal, 2006; Smith, 1972; Smoke, 2010).

There is a commonalty between the philosophy of servant leadership and the desire to serve that brings the professional fire and emergency services responder to the career field. Specifically, servant leadership and the fire and emergency services responder, seemingly share the same virtues (Russell, 2014a), *agapao* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Patterson, 2003).

Patterson (2003) placed *agapao* love as the first virtuous construct of servant leadership. For the fire and emergency services, it is a love for people that brings the individual to the profession, and it is love that allows one to remain (Lasky, 2006). The conscious decision to enter into a fire and emergency services career comes with an understanding of the inherent dangers associated with the profession (Salka & Neville, 2004). It is a love of serving others in their most vulnerable time of need that throughout history has called individuals to the profession (Morris, 1955).

Hayes and Comer (2010) argued that humility is humanity, and for the fire and emergency services responder, that humility shows outwardly with acts of self-sacrifice and care. The fire and emergency services responder deals with others in their most vulnerable situations and in their most critical time of need (Smeby, 2005). Through humility, one can reach out to others (Nielson, Marrone, & Slay 2010).

Invited into the life of others, the fire and emergency services responder becomes the humble servant, who when called upon, is willing to give their all (Smith, 1972; Useem, Cook, & Sutton, 2005). Such an act is altruism in its purest form, the giving of oneself for another (Patterson, 2003). The altruistic nature of the fire and emergency services profession is one that reaches out to others through a willingness to sacrifice in order to save others. Altruism stems from those with a passion to serve others without question and in so doing, willing to give other people ones all (Day, 2004).

For the fire and emergency services leader, vision involves seeing the future needs of those one serves and in doing so ensuring those needs are met. Bell and Habel (2009) argued that the visionary rejects complacency and looks towards the future. Inwardly, vision protects the fire and emergency services profession, keeping the career field viable by meeting future needs (Whetstone, 2002).   The fire and emergency services professional remains committed to being at the ready, which includes taking on different responsibilities for individuals within the organization, as well as the community in which they serve (Anglin, 2001; Fleming; 2010).

The nature of the fire and emergency services operation is built upon trust. Individuals thrust into emergencies must rely on not only their own abilities, but also the abilities of others (Klinoff, 2012). At the core of the operation is a trust between leaders and followers, as well as coworkers. This trust involves believing in the abilities of those in command to make the right decisions and from this trust comes a willingness to carry out orders without question (Caldwell, Davis, & Devine, 2009). A leader earns trust in the fire and emergency services; it does not come automatically with a position (Sargent, 2006). Instead, it comes over time through a leader's actions (Caldwell et al., 2009). Furthermore, trust must exist from the leader to the follower, where the actions, commitment, and abilities of the follower allow for the leader to trust them to operate without direct supervision (Caldwell & Hayes, 2007; Smoke, 2010).

The trust of the follower leads to a willingness of leaders to empower their followers. Within the fire and emergency services, centralized leadership is a standard practice that seemingly flows over from the emergency scene to the day-to day activities. Ndoye, Imig, and Parker (2010) argued for removing centralized leadership practices as a way to share the decision making and empower followers. The very nature of the fire and emergency response organization involves multiple independent companies controlled by junior officers who operate in designated strategic areas (Choo, Park, & Kang, 2011; Fleming, 2010; Smoke, 2010). Companies and crews are empowered to respond to emergencies and make tactical and patient decisions, depending on the size and severity of the situation, free from the direct supervision of chief officers (Coleman, 2008; Salka & Neville, 2004; Smeby, 2005). Therefore, the fire and emergency services profession operates in a continuous state of trust and empowerment. Leaders have to empower their officers in order to function.

As Patterson (2003) explained, the constructs come together to form the core construct of service, which Sipe and Frick (2009) argued was the absolute giving of self to service of others. Service is indeed the core value of the fire and emergency services responder; it is in that essential desire to serve that the individual steps forward. As Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote, it is from a desire to serve that the leader appears. Likewise, it is from that same desire to serve that the fire and emergency services professional comes forth and through that desire, leads.

Servant leadership is at the core of the fire and emergency services profession, because the constructs that bring forth the individual and formulate their desire to serve, are the very same that make up the servant leader (Carter, 2007; Patterson, 2003; Russell, 2014a). Cortrite (2007) found that the practice of servant leadership showed promise for overcoming toxic leadership practices that stifle human relationships and often times lead to destructive work environments within public safety organizations. In addition, as noted earlier, Greenleaf (1977/2002) argued that the practice of servant leadership could overcome toxic practices within organizations, the fire and emergency services being among them.

METHODOLOGY

The setting of this qualitative research study took place at a large metropolitan fire and emergency services organization in the Western United States. To conduct the study, the researchers employed a grounded theory design. Grounded theory is a systematic approach of data collection and analysis, which leads to theoretical discovery (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The researchers used theoretical sampling, a process used for theoretical discovery involving data collection and analysis, to determine the sample size and reach saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Saturation, as it pertains to qualitative research, involves data collection analysis to a point where nothing new emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). To conduct the study, the researchers developed a script consisting of open-ended questions to be used in the questionnaire. To avoid researcher bias towards any specific leadership theory or philosophy, the script avoided key terms and language that would compel participants to answer questions in a specific way. The researchers

developed the script using existing empirical works within the fire and emergency services in order to glean an understanding of the participants' interpretations and perceptions of leaders and leadership. Participants answered the questions privately in writing by accessing the questionnaire anonymously online through SurveyMonkey.

Data collection consisted of 15 questionnaires obtained from uniformed and sworn fire and emergency services officers. Prior to conducting this study, the researchers obtained permission from their University's Institutional Review Board to conduct a pilot study to determine the script's veracity. The pilot study involved fire and emergency services company level officers that answered the questions in the form of a written answer survey (Babbi, 1998, 2010). The pilot study allowed the researchers to edit and refine the questions in order to develop a rich and meaningful script (Babbi, 2010).

To protect the study participants, the researchers sought permission to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board at the University where the study took place, ensuring participant anonymity through the removal of any personal identifiers. To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers triangulated data sources from multiple participants, had another researcher preform an analysis for comparison, and present the data as in-depth rich descriptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, the researchers followed a specific, systematic grounded theory approach to analyze the data and established a secure database for data collection and storage to ensure data reliability (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Garson, 2013; Glaser, 1998).

The data analysis began with the researchers organizing and preparing the data for analysis, removing any personal identifiers of each of the participants and assigning numbers, then reading through the data, taking notes, and writing memos (Glaser, 1998). Researchers utilized a tiered process for the sorting and analysis of the data that consisted of constant comparisons (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The coding process began with open coding, then developing relationships through axial coding, to finally, selective coding that reached saturation to reveal and relate core categories allowing for theoretical development with attributes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The researchers then interpreted the theoretical findings, reporting them in the conclusions. These findings resulted in a greater understanding of how fire and emergency services company officers perceive and interpret leadership, as well as the development of propositions for further study (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

RESULTS

A single theoretical finding emerged from the data analysis of the questionnaires: *fire and emergency services leaders must serve their followers*. The three attributes that converged to form the theoretical finding were, *develop followers*, *meet the needs of followers*, and *listen to followers*. The following section presents the theoretical finding's attributes that resulted from the data analysis in the words of the participants. To protect the identity of the participants, each was assigned a "P" and a number.

Develop followers. The first attribute within the theoretical finding was a leader must develop their followers. P1 stated that "the front line officer is the most influential

to the crews, they need to educate and always be learning." P1 went on to argue that functioning within this role "allows the people to do their job without micromanaging them." P7 added to this by arguing that in order to develop followers a leader must have "a working knowledge of the fire ground and administration." P2 acknowledged that the officer must possess the "technical knowledge to run a crew, and ensure that tactics are preformed correctly and timely." After acknowledging this, P2 stated, "the main role of a leader is to be a teacher and mentor." P2 elaborated on the role of teacher/mentor as "an attitude of learning and improving with personnel management, interpersonal relationships, and communication. It takes a culture of education, continued improvement, and mentoring." P3 argued, "leadership is accomplished through mentoring and modeling this service in you so that they can also in turn reflect what they have learned out into the community." P4 discussed the leader developing followers into something more, "extraordinary and uncommon are the things that inspire others to be more than they are." P5 stated that a leader "prepares followers to do their job through training followers." P5 went on to state that a leader is "always teaching his replacement by his actions and coaching." To add to this, P10 stated, "a leader within the fire service must have the ability to effectively organize, direct, and mentor followers."

Meet the needs of followers. The second attribute within the theoretical finding was a leader must meet the needs of followers. P1 claimed that leaders needed to "provide followers with what they need to overcome challenges." P2 argued, "a leader should have crew's well-being in mind in all things." P3 stated that a leaders responsibility involves "facilitating the support to the firefighters so that they may safely, efficiently and effectively deliver emergency service." P3 added to this by stating leadership involves the "support of others in the accomplishment of a common task." P3 identified that "servant leadership is built into responders, a leader needs to realize that a lot of it just needs to be brought out of people." P4 stated that a leader "acquires the things necessary for the crew to do their job." P4 then went on to state that "leadership is what more or less sets the standard for the future of the fire service, a leader can be a follower and a follower can be a leader."

P5 discussed that "leaders need to make the crews feel like they are there for them, and that they have their backs; going to bat for employees that are having problems." P5 went on to say that this was about "fostering an environment where the employees feel important and protected." This is accomplished by "encouraging employees to do the right thing to make every situation better." P6 suggested that leaders had a responsibility to "ensure that people are operating as safely as possible and that people have the resources needed to accomplish their tasks." P7 argued that leaders needed to "help followers communicate better, respectfully both up and down the chain." P7 went on to say that leaders must "know the needs of our citizens, what are their needs and how can we serve them; relating that to members and listen to how they would address issues." P8 argued that a leader must "make sure self and crews are ready to act and make sure it happens appropriately." P9 stated that a leader is responsible for keeping the "crew happy and mentally stable." P11 discussed specific traits a leader needed to have in order to successfully meet the needs of followers, "to be calm, wise and knowledgeable, a leader should also be approachable, non-judgmental." Adding to this idea, P12 argued that a

leader must be "knowledgeable and have the ability to influence persons below him/her to believe and follow." To meet the needs of followers, P12 stated, "a leader works with the group and for the group." Meeting the needs of followers comes from a leader desiring "to do good and care about individuals." According to P14, when you meet followers' needs, leaders "empower their people." P15 stated that leaders "needed to get what followers need." P15 went on to state that a leader "should be worrying about followers needs before your needs, because in the end they're the ones doing the work."

Listen to followers. The third attribute within the theoretical finding was a leader must listen to their followers. P1 argued that through listening, leaders attempt to "understand the challenges followers face." P15 argued, "Leaders need to be better listeners than talkers." P2 stated, "this requires a culture of open communication; it also requires that systems be evaluated to allow for that communication." P3 discussed that listening was done to "keep your finger on the pulse of the boots on the ground." P4 stated that a good leader "must ask questions and truly attempt to understand the follower's concerns and voices." P5 argued, leaders must "visit the stations and talk with the crews."   P7 also stated, "leaders need to visit the stations as well as the supporting departments." This was also the case for P8, "heeding feedback from followers and conducting station visits." P5 elaborated more on this idea by arguing that it was about "asking for feedback and being open to suggestions; crews need to feel like the leaders at the top think about how their decisions affect those people fighting fire and touching patients." P6 stated, "leaders need to have an open door policy." P9 argued that leaders "must make a point to listen to followers." P10 stated, "Executive level leaders need to stay engaged in all levels of the department, through daily interaction." P11 discussed that is was important to have "face-to-face conversations, leaders have to be willing to listen, not just hear." P12 argued for "open forums and daily interaction, they seem to be a better way to understand what the organization's employees feel." P13 stated interaction allows a leader to, "be a part what goes on everyday." According to P14, this is accomplished by "meeting with all crews multiple times throughout the year."

DISCUSSION

The emergent theoretical finding discovered in the data analysis was *fire and emergency services leaders must serve their followers*. The attributes that formed the theoretical finding were *develop followers*, *meet the needs of followers*, and *listen to followers*. The theoretical finding emerged from the writings of the study's participants, 15 affiliated and sworn fire and emergency services officers. In comparison to existing servant leadership literature, the study's theoretical finding and its attributes hold commonality to the characteristics and constructs of the philosophy of servant leadership

The first of the three attributes, *develop followers*, aligns with the servant leadership characteristic of a commitment to the growth of people (Spears, 2010). The servant leader focuses on making their followers better, seeing their potential and nurturing it (Keith, 2008; Laub, 1999). Developing followers leads to stronger individuals and thus a stronger organization (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Hayes & Comer, 2010; Keith, 2008).

The second attribute, *meet the needs of followers*, goes to the heart of what it means to be a servant leader (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Laub, 1999). As Greenleaf (1977/2002) argued, "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" (p. 27). When the follower's needs are met, they in turn can self-actualize and serve the needs of the organization (Maslow, 1943).

The third attribute, *listen to followers*, is another characteristic of servant leadership (Spears, 2010). It takes humility for the leader to listen to followers (Frick, 2011; Hayes & Comer, 2010; Laub, 1999). Servant leader listening involves hearing both what is and is not being said (Frick, 2011). The servant leader is keenly aware of the need to listen (Frick, 2011).

The three attributes converged to form the theoretical discovery; *fire and emergency services leaders must serve their followers*. The theoretical finding directly relates to the philosophy of servant leadership and what it means to be a servant leader. For at the core of servant leadership philosophy is a desire to serve others (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Keith; 2008; Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study builds upon current literature involving the philosophy of servant leadership within the fire and emergency services (Reed, 2015; Russell, 2014b). The work expands Russell's (2014a) work by discovering that fire and emergency service responders perceive and interpret leadership in such a way that it relates to the characteristics and virtues of servant leadership. Discovering that fire and emergency services professionals possess commonly shared servant leadership characteristics and virtues highlights a need to cultivate the philosophy within the profession.

This study is limited to the data collected from the participants in the form of a written questionnaire. The questionnaire did not allow the researchers to ask follow-up questions or further seek clarification to answers. The researchers recommend future studies that utilize interviews with the participants. In addition, the researchers recommend future studies that recruit participants from other fire and emergency service ranks, as well as different geographical locations.

The implication of the theoretical finding and its relationship to the philosophy of servant leadership is the identification of a possible springboard for infusing servant leadership into fire and emergency services education, training, and literature. The attributes that formed the emergent theoretical finding are ones that are personally held by current mid-level fire and emergency service leaders. Nurturing these attributes in current and future leaders could possibly overcome destructive bureaucratic practices that many fire and emergency services organizations experience (Kirschman, 2004).

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