Toward a Servant Leadership Model

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Abstract
This paper introduces an assertive servant leadership theoretical model that specifically addresses phenomena not fully explained in previous servant leadership literature, leaving room for a new model of servant leadership based on both Greenleaf's (1977) and Patterson's (2003) approaches to servant leadership. This proposed assertive servant leadership model is defined along with a presentation of approach.

Keywords: Leader, Assertiveness, Respect, Trust, Acceptance, Service

Leadership has been studied for thousands of years and much attention has been given to the personal actions and behaviors of those who have held leadership positions (Northouse, 2004). Over time the focus of leadership studies has shifted. According to Hannay (2010), leadership theories have evolved from a focus on traits to behaviors, to contingency theories, to more contemporary approaches including servant leadership theory. While there are countless definitions of leadership (Hannay, 2010), there is one common understanding that leadership involves an influencing process between leaders and followers, in-turn causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically consume emotional, and physical energy in a combined effort to achieve organizational missions and objectives (Winston & Patterson, 2006, p. 7). Leadership style has traditionally been construed as the extent to which an individual emphasizes or displays particular types of leadership (i.e., servant, consideration, initiating structure, transactional, and transformational), and is measured by the frequency or intensity of specific leadership behaviors or attitudes using multiple-items (Li, Gupta, Loon, & Casimir, 2016). As stated by Cornelius (2013), this paradigm, although fruitful, is limited in some ways as it overlooks micro aspects of leadership style that may profoundly influence the impact of connectedness between leadership on followers' emotional states, and ultimately on how followers respond to the leader. The study of lives and personalities has long been

concerned with questions of which types of people emerge as effective leaders and why (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002).

According to Maxwell (2007), a leader cannot move people to action until the leader first moves them with emotion. The stronger the relationship and connection between leader and follower, the more likely the follower is to willingly engage with the leader (Maxwell, 2007). This proposed theory of assertive servant leadership provides a new lens in which to view servant leadership through a combination of various leadership theories to include the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), the Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), the Managerial Grid developed by Blake and Moulton (1964), and work completed by Cornelius (2013) regarding leadership styles that can be molded to develop a positive leader-follower relationship, yet provides a stand-alone concept of assertive servant leadership that is in direct contrast to traditional leadership theories. The proposed servant leadership model introduces a concept of assertiveness where the leader asserts him- or herself into the lives of the follower, dependent upon the followers' needs and level of ability and willingness to complete tasks, in order to develop trusted leader-follower relationships.

When a leader has done the required work necessary to connect with his or her people in a positive way, one can see the positive results in the way the organization functions (Maxwell, 2007). The importance of this positive connection in the workplace renders it vital for leaders to be emotionally intelligent and emotionally engaged (Goleman, 1998), especially given that leadership is an emotion-inducing phenomenon. Yukl (2013) claimed that leadership is fundamentally an emotion-management process wherein leaders manage their own emotions and those of their followers. One presumption is that the emotional intelligence of leaders influences micro aspects of leadership style, such as preferences for different ways of combining specific leader behaviors (Li, Gupta, Loon, & Casimir, 2016). To fully comprehend the benefits of this proposed assertive servant leadership model, one should understand, emotions differ from moods in terms of their specificity, intensity, and duration. Compared to moods, emotions are more likely to be attributable to a particular incident, are more likely to be associated with a particular response, are more intense, target a person's behavior, and are of shorter duration (Frijda, 1993).

In the workplace environment, emotions are often evoked by events that occur between leaders and followers and these emotions often mediate the relationships between events, leaders, and followers (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). For example, when a follower is publicly chastised by their leader or talked to in a condescending way, the follower is likely to evoke negative emotions such as anger and/or anxiety (Fox & Stalworth, 2010), which may in-turn negatively influence follower attitudes such as job satisfaction, and ultimately instill internal pressures that affect behaviors such as leader-follower engagement. Negative pressure can result in followers experiencing negative emotions that can lead to resentment of their leaders. According to Fox and Stalworth (2010), there is

nothing else that so kills the ambitions of a person than unconstructive criticism. On the other hand, positive emotional engagement and support from the leader can increase follower job satisfaction, ultimately relieving internal pressures while reducing stress levels of followers (Carnegie, 1981). Provided this information, regarding how leader-follower interactions and subsequent personal emotions can negatively or positively affect the leader-follower relationship, after reading this article one should be able to relate the importance of this proposed assertive servant leadership model to developing effective leader-follower relationships.

Carnegie (1981) believed the greatest asset a leader can possess, and the finest way for a leader to develop the best in a follower, is the ability of the leader to assert him- or herself into the lives of followers, while showing his or her appreciation and encouragement for the follower. House (1976) claimed that positive service oriented leadership requires the leader to know his or her followers, and to know how followers will react to their influence. To gain that personal-level knowledge leaders must connect with their followers by asserting themselves into their follower's lives, proving that they genuinely care. The proposed assertive servant leadership model in this manuscript provides leaders with a tool to assess their actions in regards to developing a positive servant leader-follower relationship. Take as one example, as relayed by Carnegie (1981), the actions of an engineering safety coordinator (leader) for an oil company in Enid, Oklahoma. When his workers failed countless times to adhere to organizational safety standards, by refusing to wear their safety helmets, the leader publicly chastised his followers, but to no success toward goal accomplishment. Because the leader did not know how to personally interact with his followers, gain their trust and respect, and communicate with them in a manner that addressed their personal health and wellbeing, the followers continued to disregard organizational safety standards. However, when the leader took a positive approach and asserted himself into the lives of his workers, while getting to know their needs, wants, and desires, he was able to constructively explain to them the personal positive results they could achieve by wearing their safety helmets, the leader was successful. The leader connected to his workers like never before, developed a positive relationship, provided a positive influence, and in-turn the workers consistently adhered to organizational safety standards (Carnegie, 1981).

This positive relationship, or positive chemistry, between organizational leaders and followers has been described as a mini democracy; after all, the underlying truth is that leaders would be nonexistent without the support of their followers (Yung & Tsai, 2013). Because of the central connection of leaders and followers "followers must be willing and able to be inspired and be led" (Jerry, 2013, p. 348). The key is rooted in shared values and indispensable conditions of leaders and followers who work together to create an effective institution. In essence, this collective responsibility requires both parties to play a reciprocal role to achieve the same goal (Jerry, 2013, p. 351). Latour and Rast (2004) noted that this connection, in fact, implies two dimensions of the leader-follower relationship: ability and relationship. Nolan and Harty (1984) suggested intelligence, emotions, cooperativeness, diplomacy, and sociability are also important qualities of the leader-

follower relationship. Therefore, in this proposal, and expanding upon concepts provided by Blake & Mouton (1964), Cornelius (2013), Graen & Cashman (1975), Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), and Hersey & Blanchard (1977), I focus primarily on laying the foundation for what could become a valid and reliable model of assertive servant leadership. Throughout this article, theories of influence, assertiveness, emotional effects of connection, servant leadership, and assertive servant leadership, as linked to the proposed model for assertive servant leadership (Figure 1), is presented. Additionally, through this framework development, I suggest theoretical limits and avenues for potential future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influence

Personal influence is the ability to have an effect on the character development, or behavior of someone or something, and leaders must understand this fundamental principle to be effective with their followers (Yukl, 2013). As previously alluded to, followers can be influenced in one of two ways: through mandate/positional leadership or socio-emotional/servant leadership (Drath, 2001). Mandate/positional leadership forces others to do something based on individual position within the organization. On the other hand, socio-emotional/servant leadership focuses less on the position of authority and more on the level of trust, commitment, and loyalty between the leader and follower. To *earn* a position of socio-emotional/servant leadership a leader should understand their followers; know their stories, appreciate followers as individuals, and tailor levels of leader-follower interactions based on individual uniqueness (Dang & Basur, 2017; Drath, 2001). For a leader to fully live these concepts he or she should assert him- or herself into the lives of their followers. To better understand this act of assertiveness, or the quality of being involved without being overly aggressive, one can compare the needs of a leader-follower relationship to the art of fishing, and the fisherman-fish relationship (Morgan, 2006). When the leader works to determine a method for engaging with followers they should consider what the follower needs, much like a fisherman should consider what a fish needs when determining how to catch a fish. Although the fisherman might prefer strawberries and cream, it is highly unlikely that same delight would appeal to the fish. In the same custom, the leader should think about what the follower wants and/or needs, and serve the follower in a manner that allows for both to focus on accomplishing goals (Morgan, 2006). It is in this regard a leader might use this proposed assertive servant leadership model to help he or she determine the appropriate relationship, or level of assertiveness, required to positively interact with the follower to ensure both personal and organizational goals are accomplished.

The secret to this success lies in the ability to acquire the follower's point of view, and to see things from the follower's angle, as well as from the leader's angle (Carnegie, 1981). When a leader takes the time to assert him- or herself with their followers, to connect with them emotionally, show their appreciation, and lead his or her followers with servant leadership, they increase their chances of *earning* follower buy-in, increasing production, increasing retention, while instigating followers to *seek* advice and

guidance from their leaders (Smith, 2016). Carnegie (1981) posited that one of the deepest principles of human nature is the craving to feel appreciated, and what better way for a follower to feel appreciated than to have the leader assert him- or herself into the followers' life, while displaying genuine care and concern for follower wellbeing. Traditional approaches to leadership might drive one to believe this style of leadership is overly soft and has no place in our contemporary work environment, however; empirical analysis is clear: higher employee productivity, the greater buy-in of followers, enhanced solutions, increased follower commitment, and an overall healthier work environment (Patterson, 2003; Smith, 2016). Maxwell (2007) declared that leaders who genuinely assert themselves into the lives of their followers over a sustained period of time can make a positive impact beyond themselves. To accomplish this, one must not only comprehend the concept of assertiveness in regards to developing and maturing a positive leader-follower relationship, one must also know how to apply assertiveness in regards to this relationship building, hence; the relevance of this proposed assertive servant leadership model.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness has been viewed as a dimension describing people's tendency to speak up for, defend, and act in the interest of themselves, their values, preferences, and goals (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Assertive behaviors can be both proactive (vocalizing needs) and reactive (guarding against annoyance), both verbal (articulating clear objectives) and nonverbal (displaying dissatisfaction), and both local or immediate (face-to-face) and diffuse or prolonged (influence diplomacies over time) (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Throughout time, work on leadership perceptions has underscored the importanace of asserttiveness (Gough, 1990), however; regardless of leadership style, the act of leadership involves some level of assertiveness on the part of the leader when engaging with the follower (Northouse, 2004). According to House, Javidan, Hanges, and Dorfman (2011), assertiveness relates to the level leaders assert themselves into relationships with followers, getting to know and understand the needs and desires of followers, and is an essential characteristic of leadership.

To completely comprehend the significance of assertiveness in the leader-follower relationship one must first understand that assertiveness is not always considered an all-out aggressive behavior toward others. Cornelius (2013) announced there are various levels of assertiveness a person can use to engage with others. Applying those assertiveness levels to the leader-follower relationship I decree those levels as: submissive, low-assertive, mid-assertive, and high-assertive. Since not all people react the same to personal engagement, due to various levels of trust and the maturity levels of individual relationships, leaders should vary their levels of assertiveness when engaging with their followers. Cornelius (2013), believed that a person who skillfully regulates his or her levels of assertiveness, in order to connect with others in a productive way, greatly increases his or her chances of developing a positive relationship. In regards to the leader-follower relationship, this equates to a leader asserting him- or herself into the

lives of followers to develop a positive and productive relationship, in-turn enabling the leader to achieve buy-in from followers, and attaining their willing participation.

Research has confirmed that when leaders connect with followers through use of the appropriate assertiveness level, followers are more likely to respond in a positive manner (Christman, 2007). When individuals are connected to and respected by others, they are more likely to willing respond with openness and honesty (Cornelius, 2013). In terms of the leader-follower relationship, when the follower feels connected to and respected by the leader the follower is more willing to respond in an open and honest manner, and in-turn, the leader feels less pressure to have to engage through use of his or her positional authority. The significance of connectedness, linked to the emotional feelings of importance, cannot be over stated. It was this desire for an emotional connection with others, and the assertiveness of one important person, that led an uneducated, poverty-stricken Abraham Lincoln to greatness (Carnegie, 1981). In our contemporary world, it is quite possible this proposed assertive servant leadership model can provide the tool required to assist leaders in asserting him- or herself with followers, in-turn helping followers feel an emotional connection/comfortable with the leader-follower relationship while instigating feelings of individual importance, and developing appropriate positive relationships required to meet both personal and organizational goals.

The Emotional Effects of Connection

Emotions play a fundamental role in both decision-making and leader-follower connection, and should be considered as leaders attempt to engage with their followers (Adolphs & Damasio, 2001), given people are likely to make decisions and behave in ways that maximize positive and minimize negative emotions (Frijda, 1992). Healthy, positive emotions can enhance creativity (Fredrickson, 2001), and improve levels of individual hope (Ouweneel, LeBlanc, Schaufeli, & van Wijhe, 2012). Therefore, leaders should attempt to foster healthy leader-follower relationships, work environments, and positive interpersonal relationships (Cartwright & Cooper, 2009).

Since leaders spend approximately a quarter of their time managing socio-emotional behaviors, while attempting to mold the performance of their followers (Asllani & Luthans, 2003; Komaki, Zlotnick, & Jensen, 1986), it is critical for leaders to develop and utilize socio-emotional behaviors (i.e., asserting themselves with followers, serving followers, being approachable, and listening to followers) (Halpin, 1955; James, Mann, & Creasy, 2007; Judge, Piccollo, & Ilies, 2004), that are characterized by mutual trust, respect, and consideration of feelings (Lee, Gillespie, Mann, & Wearing, 2010). Socio-emotional leadership also involves supportive behaviors such as expressing appreciation for followers' efforts (Misumi & Peterson, 1985), and showing concern for their welfare (Bass, 1997; House, 1971). Thus, support and *earned* respect is a core component of socio-emotional leadership. Consequently the consideration of leader assertiveness with and service to followers is crucial to leader-follower development (Yukl, 2013).

Leaders who possess humility, and the socio-emotional ability required to assert themselves with followers, to inspire and *earn* their trust, respect, acceptance, and commitment to actively participate in mission accomplishment are crucial to organizational success (Maxwell, 1999; Savage-Austin & Honeycutt, 2011; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Effective, humble leadership can provide that required link between follower commitment and the drive that sparks mission accomplishment (Ayers, 2006; Lynham & Chermack, 2006). Yukl (2013) emphasized that leaders who serve with humility seek to convince followers to comply, rather than pressure them into compliance through use of his or her positional authority. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), proclaimed the leader who serves with humility, rather than with positional power, relies on confidence and encouragement to effectively develop agreement and a sense of community, and as great leaders learn to apply effective behaviors, they should continually strive to put their people first. This concept is especially true of leaders who intend to gain the confidence and support of their followers (Maxwell, 2007).

According to Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011), most leadership theories and models highlight the leader's role in motivating followers to serve and to support organizational goals, and to enthusiastically participate in organizational activities. A missing link in this regard concerns itself with how leaders should engage with and work collectively with followers to achieve both organizational and personal goals (2011). Through use of the servant leadership philosophy, a leader can address both the leaders and followers roles, encourage followers, and include them in decision-making processes, in-turn leading both to overcome challenges (Yukl, 2013). Provided these facts one can understand that servant leadership is more an attitude than a style of leadership (Cornelius, 2013).

Servant Leadership

According to Greenleaf (1977), a leader should first act as a servant and one who behaves with integrity and spirit, while building trusts that lifts followers and helps them grow. When leaders are truly committed to the development of their followers, they allow the follower the freedom to experiment, to take risks, and even to make mistakes without fear or punishment. This leadership trait, or commitment to serve others, departs from the traditional positional-based forms of leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). While Hannay (2010) and Walker (2003) claimed that traditional leadership theories are behaviorally based, Patterson (2003) believed servant leadership emerges from the leader's principles, values, and beliefs as related to: (a) love, (b) altruism, (c) trust, (d) service, (e) empowerment, (f) vision, and (g) humility (p. 8).

Such principles of a servant leader have been compared to personal characteristics enthused by a higher spirit (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). Callahan (2013) suggested that such leadership can be summarized with three distinct traits that include the presence of personal priorities, fidelity of authority and the commitment to purpose, and community responsibility, and the extension of character and authority of the leader

to the larger community. According to King (2013), such leadership character, provides an evolving foundation for all leaders. Comparable to the foundation of a building, the foundation of a leader upholds and strengthens who he or she is as a person, in-turn providing the groundwork for an organization while lending to the influential and humble growth and development of organizational members (King, 2013).

Leaders who serve with humility do not think less of themselves, they just think of themselves less (Blanchard & Peale, 1988). Applying the art of humility, confidence, and encouragement clearly defines the approaches between traditional authoritarian leadership and that of a leader willing to assertively serve others (Cornelius, 2013). Provided this information, one must consider that those leadership skills required to serve and assert oneself at diverse levels, dependent upon both the situation and the follower, must be deliberately developed (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), however; Northouse (2004) believed that once established, these skills allow a leader to empathize with the thoughts, feelings, and frustrations of those they are attempting to lead. According to Yukl (2013), individuals gravitate toward leaders who respect and accept others for who they are, and who are sensitive to their needs and concerns.

Assertive Servant Leadership Model

According to Yung and Tsai (2013), in many contemporary successful organizations, great leaders are asserting themselves into the lives of their followers, creatively serving their followers, and creating environments in which leaders and followers work together to passionately accomplish remarkable things; take for example Southwest Airlines. Herb Kelleher, a previous leader of Southwest Airlines, made it a ritual to assert himself into the lives of his followers, and served his followers in a manner like few others (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Herb Kelleher went beyond the traditional leader open-door concept, asserted himself with his followers in their work environments, and became what his followers were, in order to earn their trust and respect. For example; he asserted himself into the lives of ticket agents in their work environment and took on the task of issuing tickets to passengers, just as his ticket agents did; and he asserted himself with baggage handlers in their work environment and moved baggage, just like his baggage handlers did (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). In essence, through his assertive servant leadership behaviors he earned the trust and respect of his followers, and created an organizational circle of safety (Sinek, 2014).

Service-oriented organizations, led by assertive servant leaders, such as military units or first-responder organizations, are able to develop circles of safety and are able to trust each other so deeply they will literally put their lives on the line for each other (Sinek, 2014). This organizational principle has been alive since the earliest days of mankind, when survival was predominantly dependent upon reliance on others, and is alive and well in contemporary organizations (Ascol, 2005). Sinek (2014) proclaimed that as with the first-century world, our contemporary world is full of distrust, fear, and individuals motivated by self-interest, however; the best organizations foster trust and cooperation because their leaders assert themselves with their followers, serve the needs

of their followers, and build a circle of safety that separates the security inside the team from the challenges outside. According to Hicks (2003), it is this type of adaptive, confident, workplace environment that provides members with a sense of belonging, where employees feel they can live their vocation, and where organizational member energies are devoted to facing obstacles and seizing opportunities (Hicks, 2003).

In this type of organizational environment, leaders are charged with asserting themselves with their followers, and with developing empathy while injecting that empathy into their organizations through unconditional trust, respect, and acceptance (Sinek, 2014). Choosing to see followers as humans, rather than machines used to complete tasks (Weber, 1947), contemporary servant leaders can assert leadership characteristics that assist them with knowing their followers, enable them to honor people for who they are in order to *earn* their trust, respect, and acceptance (Hicks, 2003; Upshur-Myles, 2008), and to develop a circle of trust (Sinek, 2014). Through an understanding of the complexity of the times; where individuals are torn between their beliefs, and do not know who or what to trust and/or who to follow, leaders can learn to serve and protect their followers in a manner that eliminates jealousies that have the potential to shatter traditional organizational cultures (Upshur-Myles, 2008), while accepting all for who they are and what they bring to the organization (Hicks, 2003). According to Sinek (2014), when people believe they have to protect themselves from others within the organization, individuals and organizations suffer. When people trust and cooperate with each other they thrive internally, they pull together, and the culture and/or organization grow stronger (Sinek, 2014). When certain conditions are met, and people inside an organization feel safe among each other, they tend to work together to achieve things none of them could achieve independently. When leaders assert themselves into the lives of their followers and serve their follower's needs, followers tend to trust their leaders and co-workers more and do a better job for their leader, their teammates, and the organization, in order to maintain that trust (Sinek, 2014).

Assertive servant leadership is about serving, cultivating and harvesting a flock of committed and devoted organizational members, who are willing to place the needs of others before their personal needs and desires, and to promote a community of trust and respect (Lett, 2014). To gain a better understanding of these assertive servant leadership principles, leaders can exhume strategic and tactical assertive servant leadership strategies, and learn how to apply diverse levels of assertive connectedness and servant leadership, rather than relying on his or her positional authority, to *earn* the trust, respect, and acceptance of followers. Leadership literature provides a treasure trove of leadership knowledge, especially regarding assertive servant-based strategic and tactical decision-making methods, for use by contemporary organizational leaders (Upshur-Myles, 2008), however; one must understand how to apply these principles in a positive, assertive manner.

Contemporary servant leaders can learn to move people with emotion while inspiring individuals to willingly take action (Maxwell, 2007). Servant leaders can learn

to assert themselves with their followers, and to give him- or herself to others, in-turn inspiring others to give back (Ascol, 2005). "Leaders commit themselves to people and activities that provide explosive growth" (Maxwell, 1999, p. 340). Burns (1978) declared that contemporary servant leaders could learn to meet the needs of their followers and their organizations, while keeping his or her mission in the forefront of their minds. Servant leaders can learn to personalize his or her teaching and mentorship style through examples provided by servant leaders throughout history (Ascol, 2005). Cornelius (2013) believed that contemporary leaders can learn to apply various levels of assertiveness to connect with their followers.

I openly suggest leaders apply various levels of assertiveness in the following fashion: submissive-assertiveness when followers just need a sounding board/need to vent, low-assertiveness when followers need encouragement, mid-assertiveness when followers need someone to motivate them, and high-assertiveness to direct followers. Expanding upon leader-follower concepts developed by Blake & Mouton (1964), Cornelius (2013), Graen & Cashman (1975), Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), and Hersey & Blanchard (1977), I developed this proposed model of assertive servant leadership in an effort to provide a tool for leaders in assessing their levels of assertiveness, while developing leader-follower relationships. Contemporary leaders can learn assertive servant leadership skills, to thrust aside their positional authority, and to rely on their ability to *earn* the trust, respect, and acceptance of followers for the advancement of the mission. Contemporary leaders can learn to apply various levels of assertiveness to their practice of assertive servant leadership to help them remain flexible while assessing each follower and group encounter on an individual basis. As a result of exceptional situational awareness (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), and application of respectful-pluralism (Hicks, 2003), contemporary servant leaders can gain a greater understanding of the criticality of asserting themselves *with* followers to develop and mature relationships required to complete their organizational missions (Christman, 2007; Yukl, 2013).
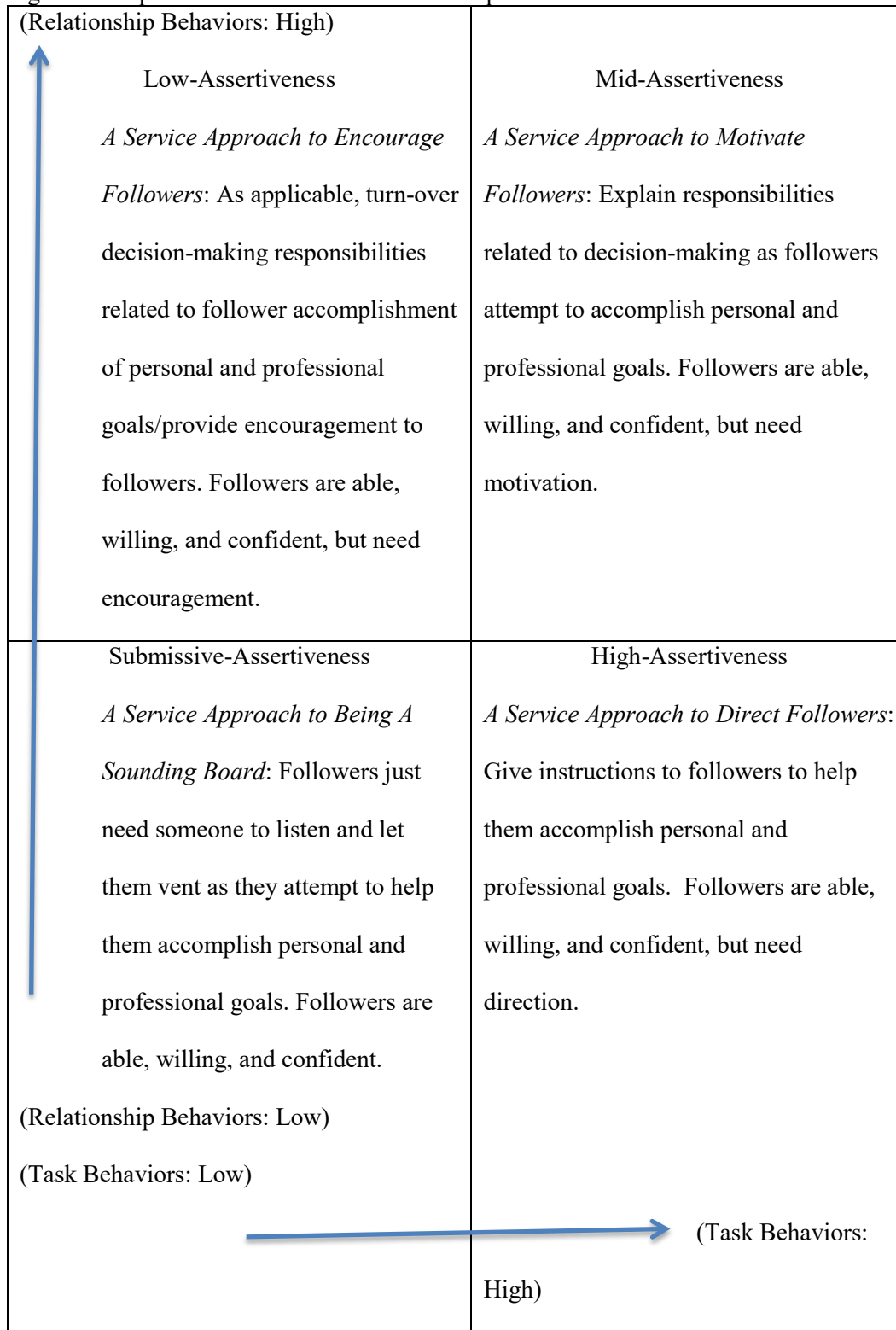
This assertive servant leadership model; assumes that each follower is able and confident, focuses on the fit of the servant leader to the needs of the follower, and assumes the servant leader empowers the follower. Similar to the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), the Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), and the work conducted by Blake and Moulton (1964) and Cornelius (2013), and in contrast to traditional leadership theories, this assertive servant leadership model requires the leader to assert him- or herself into the lives of the follower, dependent upon the followers needs and level of ability and willingness to complete the task, to develop trusted relationships. Willingness of the follower, in this sense, is largely based on two major factors; the relationship between the leader and the follower, and the followers confidence in the leader.

As previously emphasized, this proposed assertive servant leadership model ties together work completed by Blake & Mouton (1964), Cornelius (2013), Graen & Cashman (1975), Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), and Hersey & Blanchard (1977), yet stands

on its own. In some respects this proposed assertive servant leadership model is very similar to Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid, sometimes called *leadership grid*, which depicts two dimensions of leader behavior, concern for people (accommodating people's needs and giving them priority), and concern for production (keeping tight schedules) with each dimension ranging from low (1) to high (9), thus creating 81 different positions in which the leader's style might fall. However; this proposed model provides four dimensions of assertive servant leadership behaviors. As with the managerial grid, or leadership grid, this proposed assertive servant leadership model can be used to help managers analyze their own assertive servant leadership behaviors through a technique known as grid training. Whereas the managerial grid is aimed at assisting leaders to reach the ideal state of high concern for people and production, this proposed assertive servant leadership model can assists leaders with identifying the levels of assertiveness required with their followers based on the respective leader-follower relationship.

This assertive servant leadership model operates from the concept that leaders are willing to give themselves to their followers, as according to Greenleaf (1977) and Patterson (2003), and who are willing to vary their emphasis on their roles in the leader-follower relationship. Assertive servant leaders respect the capabilities of their followers and enable them to exercise their abilities and share power (Hannay, 2010; Oster, 1991; Russell, 2001). To accomplish this style of leadership the leader relies on, and asserts, his or her personal characteristics related to hope, responsibility, and strength (Spears, 1998), and demonstrates their ability to serve the needs of followers in relationship to: (a) love, (b) altruism, (c) trust, (d) service, (e) empowerment, (f) vision, and (g) humility (Patterson, 2003, p. 8). As previously discussed, there are four assertive servant leadership levels possible, as displayed in the two-by-two matrix shown in Figure 1 below. A crucial point to remember when considering the relationships within my proposed assertive servant leadership model is that, assertiveness relates to the level leaders assert themselves into relationships with followers, getting to know and understand the needs and desires of followers, in-turn assisting leaders in determining levels of engagement, such as directive (clarifying, structuring), and supportive (friendly, positive) behaviors, as he or she engages with followers (House et al., 2011).

Figure 1: Proposed Assertive Servant Leadership Model

(Relationship Behaviors: High)	
Low-Assertiveness *A Service Approach to Encourage Followers*: As applicable, turn-over decision-making responsibilities related to follower accomplishment of personal and professional goals/provide encouragement to followers. Followers are able, willing, and confident, but need encouragement.	**Mid-Assertiveness** *A Service Approach to Motivate Followers*: Explain responsibilities related to decision-making as followers attempt to accomplish personal and professional goals. Followers are able, willing, and confident, but need motivation.
Submissive-Assertiveness *A Service Approach to Being A Sounding Board*: Followers just need someone to listen and let them vent as they attempt to help them accomplish personal and professional goals. Followers are able, willing, and confident. (Relationship Behaviors: Low) (Task Behaviors: Low)	**High-Assertiveness** *A Service Approach to Direct Followers*: Give instructions to followers to help them accomplish personal and professional goals. Followers are able, willing, and confident, but need direction. (Task Behaviors: High)

- Submissive-Assertiveness Style: In this style relationship behaviors and task behaviors are low, as the servant leader takes a position of a sounding board for followers when the follower is capable and willing. In the submissive-assertiveness style the leader takes the role of a listener providing the follower with the opportunity to vent to someone without repercussion, as the follower attempts to accomplish their personal and professional goals.
- Low-Assertiveness Style: In this style relationship behaviors are high, however; task behaviors are low, as the servant leader takes a position of encourager for followers when the follower is capable and willing. Both the servant leader and the follower feel comfortable in the leader-follower relationship so the leader turns the decision-making process over to the follower, as applicable, in regards to what is best as the follower attempts to accomplish their personal and professional goals.
- Mid-Assertiveness Style: In this style relationship behaviors and task behaviors are high, as the servant leader takes a position of a motivator for followers when the follower is capable and willing. The servant leader explains responsibilities related to decision-making as the follower attempts to accomplish personal and professional goals.
- High-Assertiveness: In this style relationship behaviors are low and task behaviors are high, as the servant leader takes the position of instructor for followers when the follower is capable and willing. The leader gives directions to followers as the follower attempts to accomplish personal and professional goals.

Assertive servant leadership, as I have conceived it in this article, has links to the motivations and behaviors specified in this model. As such, leaders might benefit by adjusting their behavioral assertiveness in light of the context this model highlights. By proposing an optimal range in perceptions of assertive servant leadership, I do not mean to suggest that successful leaders always fall within these proposed parameters. Rather, by providing a leadership style that is neither markedly competitive nor submissive, leaders might be more able to show a greater range of behavior, using more situationally appropriate levels of assertiveness. Leaders might be well-served by behavior adjustment, depending on the assertiveness of followers. Leaders who successfully apply the assertive servant leadership model should be able to implement the level of service needed by their followers. To accomplish this, servant leaders should truly know and understand the maturity levels and goals of their followers, be capable of asserting him- or herself into the lives of their followers at the appropriate level in order to relate to the follower on their level, and have empathy with the follower, that is; the leader is able to view things through the eyes of the follower.

DISCUSSION

The intent of this article, and more specifically this proposed assertive servant leadership model, is to provide leaders and followers with a concept of servant leadership operations that can be applied as an alternative source to traditional leadership theories. Although this proposed servant leadership model does not encompass every challenge a leader might face, and not all leaders might be willing and not all followers might be receptive to implement this leadership model, the proposed assertive servant leadership

model provided here offers a leader-follower relationship focus not previously provided, to a world that desperately needs a different, yet ethical approach to leadership. Already the subject of numerous books, scholarly articles, seminars, and workshops (Patterson, 2003), servant leadership has been adopted by various business and command and control organizations as a shared leadership philosophy (Smith, 2016), however; this proposed assertive servant leadership model provides the potential to compound the benefits of traditional servant leadership philosophies, while increasing various levels of team development.

Day in and day out, contemporary leaders are provided with a myriad of opportunities to assert themselves with their followers, to connect in a manner that allows them to *earn* their trust, respect, and acceptance (Avolio, 1999). There is potential for this assertive servant leadership model to be applied in mechanistic organizations (Weber, 1947), such as McDonalds fast-food restaurants or various phases of basic military training units (United States Air Force, 2015); organismic organizations (Burns & Stalker, 1961), such as Southwest Airlines; or learning organizations (Senge, 1990), such as Google or small special military units (United States Air Force, 2015). Regardless of organizational structure, a servant leader can assert him- or herself into the lives of their followers on a daily basis. Although positional authority within an organization provides a *formal* structure of respect, the formal structure does not automatically provide the opportunity for *earned* respect (Schein, 2011). Contemporary servant leaders can connect with individuals at a level equal for all, to provide a clear path for leader-follower interactions (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), necessary to win the hearts and minds of followers, as they become a dwelling place for personal and professional goal achievement (Smith, 2016). As stated by Sinek (2014), brilliant leaders truly love and care for their followers and understand that the only true cost of leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest (p. 15).

As one can harvest from the information provided in this article, the subject of leadership is complex, and one of the main concerns facing contemporary organizational leaders involves the ability to connect with followers in a manner that motivates and inspires followers in order to gain their buy-in. To accomplish this, leaders should know and understand their followers and be willing to serve and meet follower needs while empowering followers for personal growth and development (Yukl, 2013). From the servant leadership concept, a movement has spawned that is rich in moral philosophy (Spears, 1998). As previously discussed, Patterson's (2003) approach of linking servant leadership to integrities implied that servant leadership is ethical leadership. Whetstone (2002; 2003) further demonstrated that principle and stated that servant leaders serve from a moral concern for others. According to Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011), servant leaders thrive on opening themselves up to followers and providing opportunities to share ideas, as the sharing process creates accountability.

Yukl (2013) emphasized that servant leaders seek to convince followers, rather than pressure them into compliance, while Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) stressed that the assertive servant leader relies on assertiveness and persuasion to effectively build

relationships and agreement. Having the ability to assert oneself at various levels with followers is a skill that must be calculatedly developed, yet once matured, should allow the leader to empathize with followers thoughts, feelings, and frustrations. People are inclined to follow those who relate to, and are sensitive to, the concerns of others (Yukl, 2013).

As can be expected, leadership is heavily dependent upon the foundation of a good leader-follower relationship, where miniature democracies are developed that support leader-follower dependency (Yung & Tsai, 2013). A collaborating assertive servant leadership philosophy can address the importance of both the leader and the follower (Ascol, 2005; Yung & Tsai, 2013), and as claimed by Yukl (2013), can imply that meeting the needs of followers, and encouraging input from followers in organizational processes, enables leaders, followers, and organizations to grow and mature. This proposed assertive servant leadership philosophy can allow contemporary leaders to assume the role of a shepherd, personally charged with guiding his or her flock (Greenleaf, 1977; Laniak, 2006; Savage-Austin & Honeycutt, 2011).

Sinek (2014) postulated that contemporary leaders can learn to adapt to cultural customs and traditions of their followers in order to *earn* their trust, respect, and acceptance while building a circle of safety. Though the core of the leader's message might not change, the message can be delivered differently for each individual (Upshur-Myles, 2008). Leaders can display what Zweifel (2003) referred to as "global citizenship," or one who respects cultures and customs of various people while remaining open to doing things differently. Contemporary leaders can assemble a collaborative, diversified group that shares respect and meaning (Hicks, 2003; Staglich, 2001). This assertive servant leadership philosophy, and subsequent development of a circle of safety, can be applied to organizational operating procedures or standards of ethics with the intent to bring a feeling of organizational belonging, of shared organizational values and a deep sense of organizational empathy, while dramatically enhancing trust, cooperation, and problem-solving (Human dimension capabilities development task force, 2014).

One can see through Herb Kelleher's' assertive servant leadership behaviors while leading the people of Southwest Airlines (Hackman & Johnson, 2013), he understood the concept of asserting himself into the work lives of his followers, allowing him to connect with followers in a manner not normally seen through traditional leadership behaviors. Contemporary assertive servant leaders can demonstrate a wholesomeness of intentions while providing a platform for an influence not dependent upon authoritative power (Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin, 2005). Yukl (2013) emphasized that through the practice of servant leadership contemporary leaders can empathize with others. Through assertive behaviors servant leaders can show followers the commonalities between leader and follower: the need to feel special (through sincere conversation), the want for a better future (through display of hope), the desire for guidance (through navigation of goals), and the human nature to be selfish (through discussing their needs) (Maxwell, 1999).

Future Research

I have attempted to sketch a broad outline of the socio-emotional and situational processes required to understand and implement the assertive servant leadership model, however; the information provided is just a foundation; greater work is required. Although leadership is a topic of high interest, with various approaches and characteristics, the results of leadership definitions and applications have focused on isolated variables. A critical dimension of leadership (i.e., assertiveness), has received little to no attention in discussions concerning leadership, and according to Carnegie (1981), one must admit, the act of leadership is non-existent without assertiveness. In the future more fine-grained quantitative or qualitative investigations, using instruments such as the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), to explore lived experiences of servant leaders and followers working with assertive servant leaders, and/or a modified version of the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2007), across multiple organizational structures, and multiple organizational and societal cultures, could be conducted to uncover valid and reliable data for analysis. Additionally, it is possible that Tuckman's (1965) theory of team development could be used to study the levels of forming, storming, norming, and performing between a leader and follower in specific regard to my proposed assertive servant leadership model. I hope that future work will build upon the foundation established in this article and will continue to explore the role that assertiveness plays in servant leadership.

CONCLUSION

Provided the information presented here, one can understand that assertiveness appears to be a meaningful component of servant leadership, yet the concept of assertive servant leadership has been perhaps understandably overlooked in research to date, possibly because the pattern of linear effects of assertiveness on servant leadership was confusing or misunderstood. This new concept of servant leadership is brought to the reader at a time when organizations are downsizing, being pulled in varied and numerous ways, while operating with reduced budgets, accomplishing more with less, and some organizations are in need of a change in leadership approach in order to make the most of the resources they have. It is suggestively important for leaders to *earn* the trust, respect, and acceptance of their people, as did Herb Kelleher, in an effort to better prepare the people, and the organization, for the future (Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Smith, 2016). Through the information provided in this article, and building from concepts developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), Cornelius (2013), Graen and Cashman (1975), Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), and Hersey and Blanchard (1977), contemporary leaders can learn to be a co-partner with their followers, and interact as a miniature democracy (Yung & Tsai, 2013), the emphasis being not on getting, but sharing with others. Leaders should understand that the strength of the organization does not come from the sharpness of spears, or the traditional leadership approach of the leader knows all and cannot be challenged for fear of repercussion; it comes from the strength of the shield, or protection from such antiquated leaders and/or leadership approaches, as the shield provides safety for the whole (Sinek, 2014).

When positive leader-follower relationships are developed and matured, trust is planted and harvested (*earned*); individual and team skills and strengths are amplified, and the organization is healthier (Human dimension capabilities development task force, 2014). If there is potential for production to increase, employee motivation to intensify, and for greater solutions to organizational problems to be unearthed, under an assertive servant leadership style why not give it a try? For many, the answer might be simple; because traditional leadership is easier. Akin to servant leadership, assertive servant leadership requires unique habits of thought, and requires relationship-building skills (Dang & Basur, 2017; Drath, 2001). These attributes are not only rare within organizations; they are not always discussed or taught (Drath, 2001). Assertive servant leadership requires personal development for both the leader and the follower, so they can become one (Smith, 2016). To develop these skills the servant leader must self-evaluate their personal traits such as; (a) altruism, (b) vision, (c) humility, (d) service, (e) love, (f) empowerment, and (g) trust (Patterson, 2003, p. 8), and must humble him- or herself in a manner that allows vision from the followers perspective (Human dimension capabilities development task force, 2014; Smith, 2016).

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