



The Relevance and Benefits of Moral Intelligence to Servant Leadership

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Abstract

Moral intelligence has a better chance of fixing morality-related issues instead of bandaging them and addressing the servant leadership best test stated by Greenleaf (1977/2002). Prudence—mature moral intelligence—is one’s skillful act in making the best, most caring alternative among all possible choices based on moral wisdom (Bradshaw, 2010). Morally intelligent people are conscious of aligning their values, goals, and actions with the universal principles of integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness (Lennick and Kiel, 2011). Such an alignment leads to purposeful living and organizational success. Borba (2001) advocated for building moral habits of empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness. Practicing these habits is relevant and beneficial to servant leadership development at the personal, relational, and communal levels. Therefore, moral intelligence equips servant leaders to make better and more caring decisions, clarify their life purpose, and build moral habits. Moral intelligence is an enduring capstone to past and present servant leaders and the making of future servant leaders.

Keywords: Moral Intelligence, Servant Leadership Development, Habits

Over the years, parents, educators, economists, government officials, and country leaders highly value how to prepare our young generation to be future ready. Scientists, psychologists, and educationalists have wrestled with the predictive validity of intelligence quotient, social quotient, and emotional quotient but not moral quotient to one’s future success. University admissions rely heavily on applicants’ aptitude and intellectual competency. However, social intelligence and emotional intelligence seem to be the determining factors for workplace success (Amdurer et al., 2014; Gupta, 2014). Although many agree that good character and

positive attitudes are important, advocates for moral intelligence are few and far between.

However, moral intelligence has a better chance of fixing morality-related issues instead of bandaging them. Moral intelligence is not a new concept, and it is an enduring capstone to past and present servant leaders and the making of future servant leaders. The phrase “servant leadership” was coined by Greenleaf (1970) in his seminal essay *The Servant as Leader*. Leader-first and servant-first are two extreme types of leadership styles with different visions, values, and results. Out of the choice to serve, servant leaders aspire to lead. Servant leaders assess their work with the following questions, which Greenleaf states as the best test.

“Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?” (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p.27)

Patterson (2003) argued that servant leadership is about the *focus* (emphasis added) of servant leaders on the growth and well-being of their people and community through the exercise of virtues—agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service—within the servant leadership context. From Greenleaf’s writing, Spears (2010) identified a set of ten characteristics of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community. Servant leadership is characterized by ethical and caring behaviours, and it requires all forms of intelligence, especially moral intelligence.

Peter Druker (2001) differentiated leadership and management as doing the right things and doing the things right, respectively. Lennick and Kiel (2001) argued that moral intelligence is not values-free and points one in the direction of doing good. “Moral intelligence directs our other forms of intelligence to do something worthwhile” (p. 24). This implies that moral intelligence leads one to do the right things, and cognitive, emotional, and social intelligence aid one in doing things right.

The literature review will explain what moral intelligence is, why it is important, and how it can be developed. The discussion section will examine the relevance and benefits of moral intelligence to servant leadership. Hence, building and practicing moral habits impact servant leaders at personal, relational, and communal levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Doing, Not Knowing; Freedom, Not Duty

Bradshaw (2010) advocated for Aristotle’s belief that “virtue and human happiness are synonymous” (p.31), and virtues are our inner strengths that “guide us morally no matter how much the world changes around us and no matter what new circumstances we encounter” (p.34). According to Aristotle’s ethics, moral

intelligence is not about obeying rules dutifully but an exercise of individual liberty, free choice, and practical intelligence.

Duty and virtue are not the same thing. Duty is a constraint, and virtue is a freedom. ...The relationship of morality (duty) and virtue (ethics) is complementary. They are symmetrical rather than identical. ...But as we reach the pinnacle of moral intelligence and live the life of virtue, our ethical maturity is rooted in the virtue of love. (Bradshaw, 2010, pp 205-206)

Indeed, love as a duty is not love at all. Love is the greatest virtue of all. Prudence—mature moral intelligence—is one’s skillful act in making the best, most caring alternative among all possible choices based on moral wisdom. Prudence is governed by the virtue of love.

One of Aristotle’s teachers, Democritus, argued that moral wisdom is “the practical know-how that allows its possessor to make ethically sound choices” (Bradshaw, 2010, p.39). This wisdom is gained from imitating wise and good people and learning from one’s mistakes throughout life. “It takes time and experience—often failure and suffering—to develop our moral intelligence as the virtue of prudence” (p.51). Its emphasis is not on knowledge about morality (i.e. what is good and what is bad) but on doing virtuous actions. Prudence is applied moral wisdom, situational conscience, and the interplay between objective moral code and circumstantial personal choice.

In his doctoral studies, Bradshaw argued that all of us possess an innate and raw moral intelligence that is perfected through the development of virtues. There are ten major sources from which moral intelligence develops:

1. **Grand will** moves a person in the direction to fulfill his life purpose.
2. **Religion** offers a powerful source of hope.
3. **Natural conscience** is an inner voice prompting us of what we have learned about right and wrong.
4. Freedom in a prepared **environment** cultivates the development of moral choices.
5. **Moral imagination** allows one to envision each alternative and imagine as fully as we can the consequences of choosing one over the other.
6. **Moral models** show us how they live their lives.
7. **Emotional intelligence** is a critical companion of moral intelligence. Being aware of one’s and others’ feelings is crucial in making good moral choices.
8. Those who learn from their **experiences** are optimistic and accept failure as their teachers.
9. **Character** gives one continuity and commitment to acting on one’s beliefs and values.
10. **Evil** motivates us to take virtuous action.

The development of virtues is a lifetime of hard work. Bradshaw suggested that “the virtue of prudence is not fully mature and operative until middle adulthood” (Bradshaw, 2010, p.183). Prudence is a combination of many factors as listed below (pp183-184).

- **Humility** moves a person to seek advice and new learning.
- **Informed conscience** as an inner voice whose promptings come from deep within us. It is informed by our emotions and intelligence and all that we have learned about right and wrong.
- **An honest long-term memory of the past** allows us to use our past experiences correctly in the present situation.
- **A balance between extremes** is the ability not to fall into polarization and extremes.
- **Practical reasoning** is to apply the general dictates of conscience to a particular moral choice.
- **Foresight** allows one to evaluate the future consequence of one's choice.
- **Circumspection** is the ability to consider all the facts surrounding the choice to be made.
- **Precaution** is the awareness of any hidden potential for evil.
- **Contained emotion** safeguards overreaction.
- **Healthy shame** keeps us from going beyond our own boundaries and prevents us from violating another's boundaries.
- **Willpower** is the mental force that rests upon focused attention.

Once mastered, virtue becomes a new power that enhances our moral performance. Just as physical exercise can strengthen our muscles and heart, repeated practices of virtuous acts form a habitus within us so that we are able to respond in morally spontaneous ways. "Prudence in action is the fruit of commitment and practice" (Bradshaw, 2010, p.202).

Alignment to Universal Principles

Lennick and Kiel (2011) defined moral intelligence as "our mental capacity to determine how universal human principles... should be applied to our personal values, goals, and actions" (p.21), and they focused their study on integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness as the core principles of moral intelligence and the vital elements for personal and organizational success.

Integrity is about living in alignment—our day-to-day behaviours, goals, and life purpose—consciously and consistently. We do what we know is right and align our actions with our principles, beliefs, and values. Integrity is about telling the truth and standing up for what is right. It is also about keeping promises.

Responsibility is about accountability for the results—anticipated effects and unintended consequences—of our choices. No blame games and no excuses. This includes admitting mistakes and failures, making an apology, and fixing the problems. Lastly, accepting responsibility for serving others gives most people lasting happiness as well as a sense of meaning and purpose (p. 122).

Compassion is about actively caring for others. It is beyond taking pity on the helpless. It can be supporting others' personal choices or aspirations. It can be challenging others to do their best or holding them accountable for unacceptable behaviour.

Forgiveness is about letting go of one's own and others' mistakes. Intimate relationships with others cannot exist without forgiveness. Forgiving does not mean endorsement of unacceptable behaviour or giving up on one's claim for justice. However, it clears the way for better future performance. Furthermore, compassion and forgiveness operate on both personal and interpersonal levels. We need to care for ourselves and forgive our mistakes and communicate gentleness, respect, care, and forgiveness to others.

The four principles—integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness—are supported by researchers of major world religions (Kinnier et al., 2000) and cultures (Covey, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as vitally valuable to people of different beliefs and from diverse cultural backgrounds. Lennick and Kiel (2011) believed that moral intelligence could be developed. Moral intelligence helps us to align our goals, values and actions to these universal principles, and it affects our work and personal well-being positively.

However, in a flight or fight situation, we can be emotionally charged with moral challenges. When our emotional brain hijacks our rational brain, we may act in a way that misaligns with our values and goals. Lennick and Kiel (2011, p.159) suggested a 4-step decision-making process to keep us on track with the alignment.

1. Recognize all the elements of your current situation and how you are interpreting your situation.
2. Reflect on the big picture and what matters most.
3. Reframe what you are thinking and how you are describing the situation to yourself.
4. Respond in a way consistent with your values, goals, and the big picture.

Moral intelligence addresses the existential questions and helps us to search for and clarify our life purpose. Its essence is to balance “competing drives and managing the dark side of our human nature” (p. 47). Therefore, Lennick and Kiel argued that moral intelligence should “direct our other forms of intelligence to do something worthwhile” (p.24).

Building Moral Habits

Borba (2001) argued that all of us need “the moral bearings by which to stay on the path of goodness” (p.6). Through role modelling, purposeful teaching, meaningful discussion, guided practice, and setting clear expectations and consequences, parents, caregivers, and teachers encourage and inspire children and young people to develop the following moral habits.

Empathy is the core moral emotion that allows one to understand the feeling of others. When one is sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, they are more likely to help those who are hurt and treat others with compassion. When one can comprehend the emotional pain of others, they are likely to consider not acting cruelly. A person who learns empathy is more understanding and caring. Empathy can be cultivated through expanding one's emotional vocabulary and learning to take perspectives from others' points of view.

Conscience is a strong inner voice that helps one decide right from wrong and stay on the moral path. Conscience can be learned through role modelling, moral reasoning and questioning, purposeful teaching of virtues, and guided

practice. Clear moral behavioural expectations and discipline also help youngsters to learn right from wrong.

Knowing right from wrong as head knowledge is not enough. **Self-control** is the gatekeeper to stop one from acting out of impulses but on what they know is morally right in their heart and mind. In addition to role modelling, self-control can be taught using praises for the targeted behaviours, developing internal motivation instead of relying on external approval from others, and practising anger-control strategies in stressful situations. The acronym “STAR” sums it up as Stop, Think, and Act Right.

Respect is like a lubricant that smoothes and sustains healthy interpersonal relationships. When children and young people are treated respectfully by their trusted adults, they are more likely to internalize the importance of treating others with inherent worth and dignity. Respect for self and others is demonstrated through actions of consideration, courtesy, and civility. Teaching and practicing good manners on different occasions (e.g., at mealtime, when visiting others, at sports events) is a good starting point for developing respectful behaviour. A respectful person is often treated by others with respect, and they often feel good about themselves. Furthermore, it is important for children and young people to learn how to disagree with others respectfully.

A kind person shows genuine concern about the welfare and feelings of others. Teaching **kindness** to children and young people by highlighting the effect of their kindness on others is essential. Therefore, volunteering and community services are effective ways to instill the virtue of kindness in children and young people. They also need to be guided on how to replace an unkind action with new behaviour. Lastly, they need coping strategies to deal with bullying, prejudice, and other forms of unkindness in a calm and assertive manner.

Tolerance is about respecting others as persons regardless of differences in race, gender, appearance, culture, beliefs, sexual orientation, or abilities. Tolerant people respect others for their character and attitudes and accept people with different perspectives and beliefs. This virtue is vital to building our world as a peaceful and humane place. It begins with a healthy understanding of self and cultural identity. With increased exposure to people from different backgrounds, opportunities arise to the discussion of stereotypes, prejudices, biases, discrimination, and hatred. With intentional searching, there are often some similarities and beauty among differences. From tolerance to appreciation, a more harmonious world can only be built on people who recognize the value, embrace the attitude, and take action to celebrate diversity.

Fair play and taking turns are baby steps to teaching children and young people the meaning and practice of **fairness**. When they are treated by their trusted adults fairly with recognition of their uniqueness and avoidance of unfair comparison against others, they are likely to incorporate this virtue into their decisions and actions. Children and young people need to be a pivotal part of the solution in dealing with perceived unfairness amicably in their lives. Eventually, involving children and young people in understanding and solving social justice projects give a deeper commitment to practice.

Borba (2001) believed that moral intelligence is abilities-based, and it can be nurtured by building habits of empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness.

Table 1 summarizes the findings of moral intelligence from Bradshaw (2010), Lennick and Kiel (2011), and Borba (2001). Although there may be other authors discussing moral intelligence, these three researchers are chosen for this literature review because they have distinct and clear views on moral intelligence. Next, this paper will discuss the relevance and benefits of moral intelligence to the being and becoming of servant leaders. In addition, it will analyze and group Borba's (2001) 7 moral habits into three levels of personal, relational, and communal development of servant leadership.

Table 1: What, Why, and How of Moral Intelligence

	Bradshaw (2010)	Lennick and Kiel (2011)	Borba (2001)
What is moral intelligence?	One's skillful act in making the best, most caring alternative among all possible choices	Alignment of our personal values, goals, and actions to the universal human principles of integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness	Our moral bearings
Why is moral intelligence important?	Mature moral intelligence leads to freedom, inner strength, and happiness	Such alignment clarifies our life purpose, balances the competing drives, and manages the dark side of our human nature	Keep us on the path of goodness
How to develop moral intelligence?	Imitate wise and good people and learn from one's mistakes throughout life	Practice a 4-step decision-making strategy to recognize, reflect, reframe, and respond in flight or fight situations	Cultivate moral habits

DISCUSSION

Moral intelligence is relevant and essential to past and present servant leaders and the making of future servant leaders. Bradshaw (2010) contended that moral intelligence is not about intellectual knowledge of what is right and wrong but choosing to do what is virtuous—the most caring alternative of all options. For servant leaders, the most caring alternative of all options should lead to the growth and well-being of the people and their community. Therefore, moral intelligence reminds servant leaders to move *from knowing to making* (emphasis added) good choices. Having options implies one's freedom to evaluate what to do. This freedom can liberate, energize, and motivate servant leaders to carry out their visions and missions.

Bradshaw (2010) argued that mature moral intelligence is rooted in the virtue of love. It is not out of one's duty but desires to do what is good. This proposition is congruent with Greenleaf's (1970) belief in servant leadership. Servant leaders do not serve because of obligation, duty, or pressures. It is out of one's desire to serve others that servant leaders choose to lead. Patterson (2003) believed that agapao love is the first of the seven virtuous constructs of servant leadership, and love is the cornerstone of the servant-leader/followers relationship.

Bradshaw (2010) considered that prudence is a combination of humility, informed conscience, honest long-term memory of the past, a balance between extremes, practical reasoning, foresight, circumspection, precaution, contained emotion, healthy shame, and willpower. Foresight is mentioned as a factor of prudence and a character trait of servant leaders by both Bradshaw (2010) and Spears (2010) respectively. Furthermore, it is argued that humility, informed conscience, and honest long-term memory of the past help the development of one's awareness. Practical reasoning, circumspection, and precaution assist in the development of one's conceptualization. Awareness and conceptualization are two of the ten attributes of servant leaders, as stated by Spears (2010). Hence, it is probable that the development of moral intelligence shapes the characters of servant leaders (Table 2).

Table 2: Probable Overlaps Between Factors of Prudence and Characteristics of Servant Leaders

Factors of Prudence (by Bradshaw)		Traits of Servant Leaders (by Spears)
Foresight	↔	Foresight
Humility Informed conscience Honest long-term memory of the past	⇒	Awareness
Practical reasoning Circumspection Precaution	⇒	Conceptualization
Other factors: a balance between extremes contained emotion healthy shame willpower		Other traits: Listening Empathy Healing Persuasion Stewardship Commitment to the Growth of People Building Community

Lennick and Kiel (2011) emphasized the importance of alignment between one's personal values, goals, and actions and the universal principles of integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness. This alignment brings personal fulfillment of life purpose and organizational success. Similarly, servant leaders need to have the same alignment to answer the questions outlined by Greenleaf's best test. When the works of servant leaders align with integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness, they are likely to help others to grow and become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely to become servant leaders

Lennick and Kiel (2011) argued that moral intelligence is the driving force of all other types of intelligence. When servant leaders develop their moral intelligence, they are able to effectively channel their strengths and abilities to serve others and their communities.

Bradshaw (2010), Lennick and Kiel (2011), and Borba (2001) share the same belief that moral intelligence can be developed. As listed in the literature review section, Bradshaw (2010) suggested multiple sources for moral intelligence development. It takes a lifetime of hard work with commitment and practice to

imitate wise and good people and learn from one's mistakes throughout life. Lennick and Kiel (2011) suggested a 4R—recognize, reflect, reframe, and respond—decision-making process to develop one's moral intelligence. This strategy can assist servant leaders in balancing competing drives and managing the dark side of their human nature. It avoids the hijacking of the emotional brain due to flight and fight situations. As a result, servant leaders are able to live out their life purpose as they intended. Borba (2001) argued that moral intelligence is ability-based. Hence, servant leaders develop moral intelligence by practicing moral habits. More specifically, the following discussion illustrates how the cultivation of these 7 habits—empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness—nurtures the being and becoming of present and future servant leaders at personal, relational, and communal levels.

First of all, the habits of empathy, conscience, and self-control require the self-mastery of one's desire, mind, attitude, willpower, and behaviours—the personal level. This internal work includes the individual effort to understand one's own and others' feelings, be mindful of the inner voice which speaks softly of what is right and wrong, and control one's impulses for appropriate actions. Before one can lead others, they need to know and lead themselves (Drucker, 1999). Leadership is first and foremost an inner journey of self-awareness and self-discipline.

Then, the habits of respect and kindness are essential for building healthy relationships with others—the relational level. It is noteworthy that the relational level encompasses handling disagreements respectfully and dealing with others' unkind or hostile actions such as bullying and prejudice in an assertive and calm manner. Servant leaders work with difficult people with respect and kindness. French and Raven (1959) identified five bases of social power: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent, and referent power is built on trust and respectful relationships. Greenleaf (2003, p.66) contrasted that “the trouble with coerce power is that it only strengthens resistance. ... Only persuasion and the consequent voluntary acceptance are organic.” With respect and kindness, servant leaders work closely with others and persuade others to grow and make changes.

Finally, the development of habits at personal and relational levels is fundamental to the realization of mature tolerance and fairness—the communal level. Without empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, and kindness, one is not fully capable of authentically tolerating others with major differences in beliefs and perspectives. Servant leaders need to work with people of different personalities and backgrounds. It is hopeful that servant leaders turn tolerance into appreciation and celebration of differences. Indeed, the calling (grand will, as stated by Bradshaw (2010)) of servant leaders is beyond tolerating differences but making a difference in their community to appreciate and celebrate differences. Furthermore, servant leaders build a harmonious community with fairness. Fairness is not about giving the same thing to everyone (i.e., equality) but doing the right thing at the right time in the right way under the right context (i.e., equity and justice). It certainly requires moral wisdom to exercise fairness in decision-making. Greenleaf's best tests highlight issues on social justice. “What is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”

(Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p.27). These issues are tough challenges, and servant leaders require moral intelligence to solve, not bandage, any morality-related problems. Thus, practicing the moral habits as suggested by Borba (2001) supports servant leadership development on personal, relational, and communal levels, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Moral Habits and Servant Leadership Development

	Servant Leadership Development		
	Personal	Relational	Communal
Borba's habits	Empathy Conscience Self-Control	Respect Kindness	Tolerance → Appreciation Fairness

CONCLUSION

Moral intelligence is vital to past and present servant leaders and the making of future servant leaders. Bradshaw (2010) argued that our innate moral intelligence can be developed, and its maturity leads to freedom in making prudent choices. These choices help servant leaders to answer Greenleaf's (1977/2002) best test questions. Lennick and Kiel (2011) believed that moral intelligence aligns one's values, goals and actions to the universal principles of integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness. It should direct the application of all other forms of intelligence for doing something good. Moral intelligence leads to personal and organizational successes. For servant leaders, it leads to the growth and well-being of the people and their community. Borba (2001) provided practical ways to develop moral habits. Building these moral habits nurture the being and becoming of present and future servant leaders at personal, relational, and communal levels.

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