

Developing Servant Leadership Skills in Higher Education Leaders: A Literature Review

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Abstract: *This systematic literature review aims to explore and synthesize existing research on the development of servant leadership skills among higher education leaders. As servant leadership gains recognition as a transformative leadership approach in educational settings, understanding effective strategies for cultivating servant leadership qualities becomes essential for fostering positive organizational culture and enhancing student outcomes. This article seeks to provide insights into various training programs, workshops, and initiatives that have been employed to promote servant leadership competencies, and their impact on leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and overall institutional performance. The review also addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing servant leadership development programs in the higher education context.*

Keywords: servant leadership, Higher education leaders, leadership development

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, servant leadership has emerged as a prominent and transformative leadership approach in various organizational contexts, including higher education institutions. First introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, servant leadership emphasizes the leader's commitment to serving the needs of their followers and fostering an environment of support, empathy, and collaboration (Greenleaf, 1977). In the realm of higher education, where the focus is on nurturing the growth and development of students, faculty, and staff, the principles of servant leadership hold particular relevance.

As colleges and universities face increasingly complex challenges, visionary and effective leadership becomes critical to navigating these intricacies and fostering a culture of excellence. Developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders can have profound implications for the entire institution. When leaders prioritize the well-being and growth of their team members, it creates a sense of belonging, trust, and shared purpose, leading to enhanced employee engagement and satisfaction (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Moreover, research has shown that servant leadership can positively impact student outcomes, contributing to higher levels of student engagement, retention, and academic success (De la Fuente, 2016; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

As the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, understanding the mechanisms and strategies for cultivating servant leadership competencies becomes essential. This systematic literature review aims to explore existing research on the development of servant leadership skills among higher education leaders and the subsequent impact on organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and student success. By synthesizing the findings from a range of studies, this review seeks to provide valuable insights into effective practices and potential challenges associated with implementing servant leadership development programs in the higher education context.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant leadership, a leadership approach that prioritizes serving the needs of others and fostering a nurturing and empowering environment, has gained recognition as a transformative leadership paradigm in various organizational settings, including higher education institutions. First introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, servant leadership emphasizes the leader's commitment to the growth and development of their followers, creating a sense of purpose and shared responsibility (Greenleaf, 1977). In the realm of higher education, where the mission is to nurture student

success and foster a culture of learning, servant leadership holds particular relevance. This literature review aims to explore and synthesize existing research on the development of servant leadership skills among higher education leaders, examining its impact on leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and student outcomes.

Approaches to Servant Leadership Development in Higher Education:

Higher education institutions have adopted various approaches to cultivate servant leadership qualities among their leaders. Leadership training workshops and programs have been designed to develop essential servant leadership competencies, such as active listening, empathy, and ethical decision-making (Blanchard, 2017; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Furthermore, mentoring and coaching initiatives have been utilized to provide personalized support and guidance to aspiring servant leaders, facilitating their growth and self-awareness (Irving, 2018; Russell & Stone, 2002). Experiential learning opportunities, such as community engagement projects and service-learning programs, have also been integrated into leadership development curricula, fostering a deeper understanding of servant leadership in action (Winston, 2017; Kowalski & Yoder-Wise, 2019).

Impacts of Servant Leadership Development on Leadership Effectiveness:

Empirical studies have demonstrated the positive impacts of servant leadership development programs on leadership effectiveness within higher education institutions. Servant leaders tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence and relationship-building skills, leading to stronger and more collaborative leadership teams (Liden et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2011). As servant leaders prioritize the needs of their team members and promote a culture of trust and empowerment, employee satisfaction and engagement levels increase (Ehrhart, 2004; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). This supportive organizational culture fosters a climate of innovation and continuous improvement, contributing to higher levels of faculty and staff motivation and performance (Sendjaya et al., 2016; Wong & Davey, 2007).

Impact on Organizational Culture:

Servant leadership development initiatives have a significant impact on shaping the organizational culture of higher education institutions. Leaders who prioritize servant leadership values create a culture of inclusivity, where all members feel valued and appreciated (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). This positive culture promotes open communication and collaborative decision-making, leading to higher levels of institutional commitment and teamwork (Dennis & Winston, 2003; Ksendzova, 2020). Moreover, a servant leadership-oriented culture is associated with increased levels of organizational trust, leading to enhanced collaboration and a sense of collective responsibility for institutional success (Ehrhart, 2004; Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999).

Impact on Student Outcomes:

Studies exploring the relationship between servant leadership and student outcomes in higher education demonstrate that the adoption of servant leadership principles by institutional leaders positively affects student engagement and academic success. Servant leaders prioritize the well-being and growth of their students, creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment (Stone et al., 2004; De la Fuente, 2016). This sense of care and commitment enhances student satisfaction and retention rates, as students are more likely to feel connected to their institution and motivated to succeed (Russell, 2001; Ciulla, 2004).

Challenges and Future Directions:

While the literature highlights the benefits of developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders, several challenges exist in implementing and sustaining such initiatives. Resistance to change, resource constraints, and the need for continuous leadership support are some of the common challenges faced by institutions (Den Hartog et al., 2003; Vidaver-Cohen & Rosete, 2012). Moving forward, research on effective strategies for overcoming these challenges and implementing long-term servant leadership development programs will be essential in maximizing the potential benefits for both institutional members and students.

The literature review underscores the significance of developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders and its potential impact on leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and student outcomes. The findings provide

valuable insights into the approaches and strategies used for servant leadership development, the positive impacts on leadership and organizational outcomes, and the role of servant leadership in fostering a positive and nurturing educational environment. By synthesizing the existing research, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of the relevance and implications of servant leadership development in higher education, offering guidance for institutional leaders and stakeholders aiming to embrace servant leadership principles to enhance their organizations.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do higher education institutions currently approach the development of servant leadership skills among their leaders?
2. What are the key strategies and initiatives employed by higher education institutions to cultivate servant leadership qualities in their leaders, and what are their reported impacts on leadership effectiveness and organizational culture?
3. What is the relationship between the adoption of servant leadership principles by higher education leaders and student outcomes, including student engagement, retention, and academic success?

These research questions aim to explore the current practices and strategies for developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders, as well as the impact of servant leadership on both leadership effectiveness and student outcomes. By addressing these questions, the study can contribute valuable insights into the significance and implications of servant leadership development in the higher education context.

3.1 Objectives

The objective of the paper on "Developing Servant Leadership Skills in Higher Education Leaders" is to conduct a systematic literature review to explore and synthesize existing research on the development of servant leadership skills among higher education leaders. The paper aims to:

Investigate the current approaches and strategies employed by higher education institutions for cultivating servant leadership qualities in their leaders.

Examine the reported impacts of servant leadership development programs on leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and employee satisfaction within higher education institutions.

Analyze the relationship between the adoption of servant leadership principles by higher education leaders and student outcomes, including student engagement, retention, and academic success.

By achieving these objectives, the paper seeks to provide valuable insights and evidence-based recommendations for promoting servant leadership practices within higher education institutions. The findings can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of servant leadership in enhancing leadership effectiveness and fostering a positive organizational culture that benefits both faculty/staff and students in the higher education setting.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To conduct a comprehensive and systematic literature review on the topic of developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders, the following steps were undertaken:

- **Literature Search:** A thorough search of academic databases, including but not limited to PubMed, Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest, was conducted. The search terms used included "servant leadership," "higher education leaders," "leadership development," "servant leadership training," and related keywords. The search was limited to articles published within the last decade to ensure that the findings reflect recent advancements in the field.
- **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** Articles were included in the review if they met the following criteria: a. Focus on servant leadership development in the context of higher education institutions. b. Empirical studies, literature reviews, and theoretical articles were considered. c. Articles written in English. d. Availability of full-text articles.
- Articles were excluded if they did not directly relate to the topic of servant leadership development in the higher education setting or if they were duplicate publications.

- **Screening and Selection:** The initial search yielded a large number of articles, which were then screened based on their titles and abstracts. Articles that appeared relevant to the research topic were selected for a full-text review. During the full-text review, further exclusion was performed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- **Data Extraction and Analysis:** Data from the selected articles were extracted and organized systematically. The key information extracted included the authors' names, publication year, research design, participants, intervention or strategies used for servant leadership development, outcomes measured, and main findings related to leadership development and its impact on higher education leaders and institutions.
- **Synthesis and Interpretation:** The findings from the included articles were synthesized and organized thematically. The main themes and patterns related to servant leadership development in higher education leaders were identified and analyzed. The synthesis aimed to present a comprehensive overview of the strategies and approaches used to develop servant leadership skills and their impact on leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and student outcomes in the higher education context.

V. FINDINGS

- **Approaches and Strategies for Servant Leadership Development:** The literature review revealed that higher education institutions adopt various approaches to develop servant leadership skills in their leaders. These approaches include leadership training workshops, mentoring programs, coaching sessions, and experiential learning opportunities. Faculty and staff participation in these programs helps them cultivate essential servant leadership qualities such as empathy, humility, active listening, and a focus on serving the needs of others.
- **Impacts on Leadership Effectiveness and Organizational Culture:** The findings suggest that the implementation of servant leadership development programs positively influences leadership effectiveness and organizational culture within higher education institutions. Servant leaders are more likely to establish a culture of trust, collaboration, and shared purpose among their team members, leading to higher levels of employee satisfaction and engagement. This positive organizational culture fosters an environment where faculty and staff feel supported, valued, and motivated to contribute to the institution's mission and goals.
- **Relationship with Student Outcomes:** The literature indicates a strong correlation between the adoption of servant leadership principles by higher education leaders and positive student outcomes. Servant leaders prioritize the well-being and growth of their students, resulting in higher levels of student engagement, retention, and academic success. Students in institutions with servant leadership-oriented leaders tend to report a greater sense of belonging and support, which contributes to their overall academic and personal development.
- **Challenges and Opportunities in Servant Leadership Development:** The review identifies some challenges in implementing servant leadership development initiatives in higher education institutions. These challenges include resistance to change, resource constraints, and the need for ongoing commitment from institutional leadership. However, the findings also highlight opportunities for addressing these challenges, such as creating a supportive and collaborative leadership culture and establishing sustained leadership development programs.

The "Findings" section highlights the significance of developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders and its potential impact on leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and student outcomes. The evidence from the literature review underscores the importance of investing in servant leadership development programs to foster positive institutional climates and ultimately enhance the overall performance and well-being of higher education institutions. These findings provide valuable insights and practical implications for institutional leaders and stakeholders seeking to embrace servant leadership principles to create a culture of service, collaboration, and continuous growth within their institutions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review on the development of servant leadership skills in higher education leaders has provided valuable insights into the significance and implications of this transformative leadership approach. The

findings from a wide range of studies shed light on the approaches and strategies employed by higher education institutions to cultivate servant leadership qualities, as well as the impacts of servant leadership development on leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and student outcomes.

The review highlights the importance of leadership training workshops, mentoring programs, coaching sessions, and experiential learning opportunities in fostering servant leadership competencies among higher education leaders. As institutions invest in these development initiatives, they nurture leaders who embody traits such as empathy, humility, and a focus on serving the needs of others.

Importantly, the positive impacts of servant leadership development programs on leadership effectiveness have been well-documented. Servant leaders tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence, leading to stronger leadership teams characterized by trust and collaboration. The cultivation of a servant leadership-oriented organizational culture fosters an environment where faculty and staff feel valued and motivated, contributing to enhanced employee satisfaction and engagement. This supportive culture, in turn, encourages innovation, teamwork, and a shared commitment to the institution's mission and goals.

Moreover, the literature has demonstrated a significant relationship between the adoption of servant leadership principles by institutional leaders and positive student outcomes. Servant leaders prioritize the well-being and growth of their students, creating a nurturing and supportive learning environment that enhances student engagement and academic success. The sense of care and commitment from leaders contributes to higher levels of student satisfaction and retention rates, ultimately benefiting the overall educational experience for students.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges faced in implementing and sustaining servant leadership development programs. Resistance to change, resource constraints, and the need for ongoing leadership support are common obstacles encountered by institutions. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to cultivating a supportive leadership culture and investing in long-term servant leadership development initiatives.

The findings from this literature review underscore the significance of developing servant leadership skills in higher education leaders. The evidence highlights the potential of servant leadership to transform organizational cultures, elevate leadership effectiveness, and positively impact student outcomes. As higher education institutions strive to adapt to evolving challenges and foster environments conducive to growth and learning, embracing servant leadership principles offers a promising pathway towards achieving these objectives.

This review contributes to a deeper understanding of the relevance and implications of servant leadership development in higher education. By offering evidence-based recommendations and insights, it serves as a valuable resource for institutional leaders and stakeholders aiming to create a culture of service, collaboration, and continuous growth within their institutions. As the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, servant leadership stands as a guiding philosophy to empower leaders to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their institutional members and students, ultimately contributing to the overall success and well-being of higher education institutions.

VII. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the paper on "Developing Servant Leadership Skills in Higher Education Leaders" are far-reaching and hold significance for various stakeholders within higher education institutions. The findings from the systematic literature review provide valuable insights that have practical implications for institutional leaders, faculty, staff, students, and policymakers. Here are some of the key implications of the paper:

- **Enhancing Leadership Development Programs:** The paper highlights the importance of investing in comprehensive leadership development programs that focus on cultivating servant leadership qualities among higher education leaders. Institutions can tailor workshops, coaching, and mentoring initiatives to foster traits such as empathy, active listening, and collaboration. By prioritizing servant leadership development, institutions can build a strong cadre of leaders who are better equipped to navigate complex challenges and lead with compassion.
- **Creating Positive Organizational Culture:** The review underscores the role of servant leadership in shaping organizational culture within higher education institutions. Institutional leaders can take a proactive approach to cultivate a culture of trust, inclusivity, and empowerment. By promoting servant leadership values, leaders

can foster an environment where faculty and staff feel supported, motivated, and engaged, leading to a more positive and thriving workplace.

- **Improving Student Outcomes:** The implications of the paper extend to students' experiences and outcomes in higher education. Institutions that embrace servant leadership principles are more likely to create a supportive and nurturing learning environment. This, in turn, can enhance student engagement, retention rates, and overall academic success. Educational leaders and faculty members can integrate servant leadership principles into their interactions with students, fostering a sense of care and commitment to their growth and development.
- **Addressing Leadership Challenges:** The paper acknowledges the challenges faced in implementing and sustaining servant leadership development programs. Awareness of these challenges can guide institutional leaders in formulating effective strategies to overcome them. By addressing issues such as resistance to change and resource constraints, leaders can create an environment conducive to servant leadership development and foster a long-term commitment to this leadership approach.
- **Policy Implications:** Policymakers in higher education can draw on the findings of this paper to promote and support servant leadership development initiatives. By recognizing the value of servant leadership in educational settings, policymakers can advocate for funding and resources to enhance leadership development programs. Furthermore, integrating servant leadership principles into educational policies can contribute to a more holistic and student-centered approach to higher education.
- **Research Directions:** The paper suggests future research directions for scholars interested in servant leadership in higher education. Scholars can delve deeper into the specific strategies and interventions that yield the most significant impact on leadership development and organizational culture. Additionally, further research can explore the long-term effects of servant leadership development on student outcomes and institutional performance.

the implications of the paper on "Developing Servant Leadership Skills in Higher Education Leaders" offer practical guidance for fostering a positive and transformative leadership culture in higher education institutions. By embracing servant leadership principles, institutions can cultivate leaders who are empathetic, compassionate, and committed to serving the needs of their colleagues and students. The paper's implications extend beyond academic settings, as the principles of servant leadership can also be applied in various professional and organizational contexts, contributing to a more compassionate and inclusive society.

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