

# Servant Leadership Development & Impact During the COVID-19 Pandemic



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# Research Question & Objectives

## Research Question

- How did servant leaders manage the sudden pandemic crisis in 2020 within their organizations?

## Research Objectives

Servant leadership is an emerging field and much is still unknown about how individuals develop as servant leaders. Due to the complexity of this topic, my aim in this research is to examine how servant leaders in the field managed the sudden pandemic crisis and pivoted [within] their organizations; use these findings to

1. Understand the process of servant leadership development in students who are studying leadership and engaging in service learning and experiential learning
2. Identify recommendations [leadership experience characteristics/themes that can be applied and/or tools] by students in servant leadership study, aptitude and development

# Literature Review - The Servant as Leader by Robert K. Greenleaf

“It [leadership] was something given, or assumed, that could be taken away. His servant nature was the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away.”

- Servant leaders find life's meaning to be in service and it becomes a part of who they are as people

“They [servant leaders] are challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force.”

- Servant leaders visualize change and a better world. They are hardworking visionaries who believe in service [defined as enacting positive change] and its transformational impact.

“A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader.”

- In matters of justice, servant leaders who uphold justice and value the sanctity of their role and of leading people to forge a brighter tomorrow - this is ethical leadership

# Literature Review

## Servant leadership in action : how you can achieve great relationships and results by Ken Blanchard

“Yet you can, if you understand that there are two parts to servant leadership: a visionary/direction, or strategic, role—the leadership aspect of servant leadership; and an implementation, or operational, role—the servant aspect of servant leadership.”

- **Servant leaders lead by serving others within their organization, as well as, the cause their organization is serving**

“Values provide guidelines for how you should proceed as you pursue your purpose and picture of the future. They answer the questions ‘What do I want to live by?’ and ‘How?’”

- **Servant leaders are compelled to lead and directly serve others by virtue of their vision.**

“Empathy. The servant leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People deserve to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of coworkers and colleagues and does not reject them as people, even when one may be forced to refuse to accept certain behaviors or performance. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.”

- **At the heart of servant leaders is a fundamental positive regard for humanity; they serve others as a natural extension of that positive regard**

# Definition of Servant Leadership as per literature review

In context of this study, the definition of servant leadership is as follows:

**Definition:** Servant leaders are ethical leaders, who motivate others as per their values-driven philosophy of service to others [within the organization, as well as, communities broadly], while also having a transformational impact on communities as per ethical leadership.

# Interview Protocol & Questions

## [Introduction]

- This project will examine servant leadership and how servant leaders managed the sudden pandemic crisis in 2020 within their organizations. Through qualitative interviews with individuals, I will use coding to identify themes and develop recommendations for preparing meaningful leadership learning experiences. The project will be a written research paper and presentation at the Research Symposium on May 11, 2021.
- This research will add to the body of knowledge about the development of servant leadership competencies in students who are engaging in leadership development experiences. This research could potentially assist with a greater awareness of what kinds of experiences are most effective for servant leadership development, and could help educators around the globe prepare students to understand, embrace and practice servant leadership.
- I will be interviewing 10 individuals on the topic of servant leadership using the same questions. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, simply speak from your experience and heart.
- The interview information will be kept anonymous and your personal information will always be protected, but I will be identifying themes across the interviews. If you are interested in reading the transcriptions at any time during this study, I am more than happy to share it with you.
- In a moment I am going to begin asking you questions related to your previous experiences as related to servant leadership. The best thing you can do for me in this conversation is to think about, remember, and tell me details about things you've experienced related to the questions.

# Interviewees

- Protocol: “The interview information will be kept anonymous and your personal information will always be protected, but I will be identifying themes across the interviews.”
- Interviews were recorded
- Professional fields/sectors studied: 5 non-profits with different focus areas

## Round 1 & Round 2 of Coding

- Round 1: Conduct interview and take notes; mark themes you see emerging
  - Create a list of emerging themes
- Round 2: Listen to the interview recordings again; note themes you see emerging
  - Compare the lists and in this case - combine them
  - This round was more detailed but along the same lines

# Interview Protocol & Questions: Formulated based on literature review

## [Questions]

1. Informational Questions about the field within which they serve
2. Opening Question about a groundbreaking service experience that shaped their tendency towards service or if that does not apply, a significant service experience
3. Q1: A question related to their academic experiences as in an “ah-ha” moment in their academic career that critically shaped your development as a servant leader.
4. Q2: A question related to their broader life experiences as related to service or servant leadership in any context and how that critically impacted your tendency towards service. (e.g. pertaining to service learning, volunteerism, civic engagement, experiential learning, etc)
5. Q3&4: A question related to service during the Pandemic and how they pivoted [within their organizations] to serve others during the sudden Pandemic crisis in 2020



# Themes Emerging Across Interviews Round 1 & Round 2

## Definitional (Q1 & Q2)

- Life's meaning: creating a better world through service
- Exemplifying values through action and leading oneself
- Identify as a servant leader or with service to others

## Leadership Development [Objective 1] (Q3 & Q4)

- Collection of experiences
  - Reflecting on it now, college was groundbreaking to my servant leadership development
- Internal/natural progression, not 'aha' moments
  - Servant leaders served me and that inspired me (consciously or unconsciously)
- Developed a passion around transformational impacts
- Community (organizations and people)
- Reflection on one's experiences

## Managing the Sudden Pandemic Crisis [Objective 2] (Q5)

- In context of my journey, serving others during Pandemic was natural
- Leading oneself through reflection on one's experiences and emotions
- Empathy
- Self-care

# Recommendations for servant leadership development

## Definitional (Q1 & Q2)

- Life's meaning: creating a better world through service → Service learning and experiential learning opportunities (e.g. pertaining to service learning, volunteerism, civic engagement, experiential learning, etc)

## Leadership Development [Objective 1] (Q3 & Q4)

- Collection of experiences → Seek experiences that impact the lives of others in some way. Think creatively.
- Community (organizations and people) → Get involved in your community and surround yourself with people who inspire you
- Servant leaders served me and that inspired me (consciously or unconsciously) → Getting involved in your community will help you find servant leaders. They are everywhere!

## Managing the Sudden Pandemic Crisis [Objective 2] (Q5)

- In context of my journey, serving others during Pandemic was natural → Making service a part of your life in any shape/form will enable you to, in times of crisis, do the same
- Leading oneself through reflection on one's experiences and emotions
  - Reflect on your service experiences, that's how you grow as a servant leader
  - Practice self-care and effectively serve your community in a healthy way

# Looking to the future

- Examine more professional sectors/field
- Consider quantitative processes, in addition to, qualitative
- Word-to-word transcriptions/coding as opposed to notes and adding on iterations of rounds

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