

Title:

Is Servant Leadership Effective in Motivating Volunteers?

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Introduction

Christian leaders typically acknowledge the example of Jesus the servant leader as being pertinent to their own leadership roles. He represents an ideal of serving and acting in the best interests of others and of engaging in personal sacrifice. While acknowledging that the example of Jesus is a noble ideal, the question arises as to whether it represents leadership that is effective in achieving desired organisational outcomes. Most churches and related organisations have visions and missions and related outcomes that they are seeking to bring to fruition. Christian leaders normally face the challenge of motivating volunteers, and a minority of paid employees, to achieve such desired outcomes.

The question that this study addresses is whether servant leadership is an effective style for motivating volunteers to higher levels of commitment and performance in order to bring about desired organisational outcomes. The study compares the impact of servant leadership on volunteer motivation within church congregations with the impact of transformational leadership and transactional leadership. It also compares the impact of the three leadership styles on volunteer trust in and value congruence with the leader.

Jesus the Servant Leader

The example of Jesus as a servant leader should be a core consideration in any understanding of a Christian leadership style. A key biblical text relating to the servant leadership of Jesus is the Christological Hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, which is used by the apostle Paul to encourage his Philippian readers to maintain unity within the church. In Philippians 2:1-4 Paul appeals to his readers to act to avoid division and divisiveness within the community. It seems that in the face of external persecution (1:27-30) internal dissension was occurring within the church. The apostle recognises that the church can only survive external pressure when its members are “standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel” (1:27). He therefore urges them to “be of the same mind, having the same love, being in one accord and of one mind” (2:2). Practically, this means that each member should “look not to your own interests, but to the interests

of others” (2:3). Barth (1962) comments that “each is to climb down from the throne on which he sits, and to mind and seek after the one end, which is then also that of the others and in which all must find their way to unity” (p. 50). Unity is produced through practicing mutuality. Paul refers to such behaviour as “humility” which regards “others as better than yourselves” (2:3). The supreme example of such behaviour is Jesus Christ who is the subject of Philippians 2:5-11.

Paul uses the life of Jesus Christ as the model for Christian behaviour and community. As Thurston and Ryan (2005) point out, “our wholeness and unity as a community come through renunciation of the natural, selfish state and the appropriation of Jesus’ self-giving, to which God responded positively” (p. 90). Paul apparently felt that the Philippians were engaging in behaviour that was selfish and ambitious. Such behaviour has no place in the Christian community. Thurston and Ryan (2005) suggest that “it is only through chosen acts of self-emptying, only through looking to others’ welfare as well as our own (2:4) that we are brought into the sphere of Jesus, his life and his power” (p. 91). Witherington (1994) suggests that “Christ becomes the ultimate example of one who did not pursue his own interests or selfishly take advantage of rights, privileges, or status that were properly his, but rather “emptied himself”” (p. 66). To live as a follower of Jesus is to act in status-rejecting ways and to be prepared to suffer for others.

Witherington (1994) points out that Paul’s advice to the Philippians has social implications because it cuts across “the distinction usually made between those of greater and lesser status” (p. 63). Such social hierarchies are undermined by everyone serving and considering the interests of others. All human thoughts of the exaltation of self are critiqued by Jesus Christ. Leaders become “at most exemplary or head servants” (Witherington, 1994, p. 65). When one has as a model a servant leader one willingly takes on a much lower status and undertakes servile roles. Fee (1995) points out that Christ’s actions reveal the character of God: “Here is the epitome of God-likeness: the pre-existent Christ was not a “grasping, selfish” being, but one whose love for others found its consummate expression in “pouring himself out,” in taking the role of a slave, in humbling himself to the point of death on behalf of those so loved” (p. 197). God is not an acquisitive being, but self-

giving for the sake of others. To follow Christ is therefore to engage in servant-hood and self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

Jesus epitomizes the servant leader and Paul presents him as an example for the Philippians. Jesus set aside his own rights for the sake of others to the point of laying down his life (c.f. John 15:13). Peter, reflecting later on the example of Jesus, writes “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Paul uses the example of Jesus in the same way as Peter in an effort to inspire his readers to become servant leaders themselves.

Servant Leadership

While the concept of servant leadership has a long tradition in Christian thinking, it has been introduced to business and organisational theory in recent decades through the work of Robert Greenleaf and subsequent writers. Greenleaf (1977) coined the term “servant leadership” which he thought commenced “with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.” He posited that service to followers is the primary responsibility of leaders and the essence of ethical leadership. His test of leadership effectiveness was: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they ... become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?”

Servant leadership encompasses nurturing, defending, and empowering followers. A servant leader is concerned for the needs of his or her followers and seeks their well-being along with the well-being of the organization. A servant leader empowers followers rather than dominating them. Such empowerment occurs directly through the leader mentoring and training followers, and indirectly by providing support and concern as well as an ethical and transparent working environment (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Winston & Fields, 2015).

Winston and Fields (2015) have devised a reliable measurable set of servant leadership behaviours (Table 1). The 10 item Essential Servant Leadership Behaviours is the result of extensive testing and refinement of previous sets of servant leadership behaviours.

Table 1: Servant Leadership Behaviours

A Servant Leader:	
1	Practices what s/he preaches
2	Serves people without regard to their nationality, gender, or race
3	Sees serving as a mission of responsibility to others
4	Is genuinely interested in followers as people
5	Understands that serving others is most important
6	Is willing to make sacrifices to help others
7	Seeks to instil trust rather than fear or insecurity
8	Is always honest
9	Is driven by a sense of higher calling
10	Promotes values that transcend self-interest and material success

Greenleaf believed that followers of servant leaders are inspired to become servant leaders themselves. The results of servant leadership include higher ethical standards within organizations, safe and strong working relationships, and greater value placed on human worth. Social injustice and inequality are opposed and the weak and marginal members of society are treated with respect and appreciation (Patterson, 2003; Liden, et al, 2008; Andersen, 2009; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Servant Leadership and Transformational Leadership

Servant leadership is similar to and often contrasted with transformational leadership. Both approaches to leadership are viewed as being ethical and focused on the well-being of those impacted by leadership behaviour. Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008) maintain that servant leadership is conceptually distinct from transformational leadership for two reasons.

First, servant leaders are more likely than transformational leaders to demonstrate the natural inclination to serve marginalized people. Bass (1985) argued that transformational leaders seek to empower and elevate followers rather than keep followers weak and dependent. However the effects of that increased motivation and commitment will not necessarily benefit followers, as ‘there is nothing in the transformational leadership model that says leaders should serve followers for the good of followers’ (Graham, 1991, p. 110). On the other hand, servant leadership requires that leaders lead followers for the followers’ own ultimate good.

Second, servant leaders are more likely than transformational leaders to prioritise their leadership focus as followers first, organization second, and their own needs last (Graham, 1991). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) point out that the role of servant leaders is to serve followers, whereas the role of transformational leaders is to inspire followers to pursue organizational goals. Hence, the focus of servant leadership, first and foremost, is on individual followers, and takes precedence over organizational objectives. The rationale behind this deliberate focus on followers is well summarized by Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004, p. 355) who assert that ‘organizational goals will be achieved on a long-term basis only by first facilitating the growth, development, and general well-being of the individuals who comprise the organization’.

The difference in emphasis between servant and transformational leadership is demonstrated by comparing the servant leadership behaviours in Table 1 with the transformational leadership behaviours from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire in Table 2.

Table 2: Transformational Leadership Behaviours

A Transformational Leader:	
1	Goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group
2	Acts in ways that build followers’ respect
3	Talks about their most important values and beliefs
4	Specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose

5	Talks optimistically about the future
6	Articulates a compelling vision of the future
7	Re-examines critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate
8	Seeks differing perspectives when solving problems
9	Spends time teaching and coaching
10	Treats people as individuals rather than just as members of a group

Transformational leadership is focused on inspiring others to perform beyond expected levels of commitment and contribution. Transformational leaders inspire followers by serving as idealised role models, by providing a clear and attractive vision of the organisation's future, by encouraging innovation and creative problem solving, and by coaching and mentoring (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Judge and Bono, 2000; Riggio et al., 2004). Whereas the primary focus of transformational leadership is inspiring followers to performance beyond expectations, the sine qua non of servant leadership is followers' holistic moral and ethical development.

Servant Leadership and Transactional Leadership

Both servant leadership and transformational leadership focus on motivating followers through inspiration. In contrast, transactional leadership seeks to motivate followers through a process of exchange (Bass, 1985; Riggio et al., 2004). Transactional leaders seek to motivate followers by providing an adequate exchange of valued resources for follower support and by monitoring performance and taking corrective action.

The difference in emphasis between servant and transactional leadership is demonstrated by comparing the servant leadership behaviours in Table 1 with the transactional leadership behaviours from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire in Table 3.

Table 3: Transactional Leadership Behaviours

A Transactional Leader:	
1	Provides followers with assistance in exchange for their efforts
2	Discusses in specific terms who is responsible for achieving performance targets
3	Makes clear what can be expected when performance goals are achieved
4	Expresses satisfaction when expectations are met
5	Focuses attention on irregularities, mistakes, and deviations from standards
6	Concentrates on dealing with mistakes, complaints, and failures
7	Keeps track of all mistakes
8	Directs followers' attention toward failures to meet standards

Transactional leadership focuses on followers' performance to expectation in exchange for adequate reward, and lacks the emphasis of servant leadership on followers' well-being and development

Volunteer Motivation

Volunteers are individuals who provide unpaid help in an organised manner to parties with regard to whom the volunteer has no obligations (Millette and Gagné, 2008; Snyder and Omoto, 2004; Wilson and Janoski, 1995). They are eagerly sought after because they add value to organisations and endeavours (Wilson and Musick, 1997), and are typically employed in non-profit organisations including churches and charities (Phillips and Phillips, 2010, 2011). Because volunteers do not receive direct personal tangible gains such as a salary, non-profit organisations must find other ways to motivate volunteers to work well and to continue in volunteer activity, and by doing so retain the knowledge and skill resources of the organisation (Millette and Gagné, 2008). Maintaining volunteer motivation at levels that result in sustained and productive voluntary service is critical to the effectiveness of non-profit organisations in fulfilling their stated missions.

Volunteer motivation can be conceptualised using self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2008), which posits that people are motivated to satisfy their innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the desire to control one's own behaviour and activities in order to experience personal integration and freedom. Competence is one's propensity to be effective in dealing with the environment while attaining valued outcomes within it. Relatedness refers to one's desire to be connected to others. According to Deci and Ryan, the satisfaction of all three of these needs is "essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being" (2000, p. 229).

Self-determination theory connects the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to levels of motivation, from extrinsic to intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for instrumental reasons, such as acquiring a reward or avoiding a penalty, where the primary motivators are external to the volunteer. By contrast, intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its own sake, because one finds it enjoyable and interesting, where the primary motivators are internal to the volunteer as s/he seeks to fulfil the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Extrinsic motivation has been demonstrated to predict lower quality task performance and shorter volunteer tenure whereas intrinsic motivation predicts higher quality task performance and longer volunteer tenure (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Millette and Gagné, 2008).

It is advantageous to churches and non-profit organisations if they are able to stimulate and maintain intrinsic motivation within volunteers.

Leadership Style and Volunteer Motivation

Fogarty (2013) found that transactional leadership predicted extrinsic motivation, whereas transformational leadership predicted intrinsic motivation. Similarly to transformational leadership, servant leadership is likely to produce intrinsic motivation in volunteers as they are motivated by their personal identification with the leader and their accompanying commitment to the mission of the organisation articulated by the leader (Winston & Fields, 2015). This personal identification and commitment is internally driven and volunteers are

likely to sense that they are satisfying the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, a leader's exercise of servant leadership behaviours is likely to stimulate volunteer intrinsic motivation.

Leadership Style and Volunteer Trust and Value Congruence

The effective exercise of leadership is based upon leader–follower relationships that incorporate followers' trust in and value congruence with the leader (Yukl, 2006). Trust in a leader is “faith in and loyalty to the leader” (Podsakoff et al., 1990, p. 113). Value congruence with a leader is belief that the follower's personal values are congruent with and aligned with those of the leader (Posner, 2010). Fogarty (2013) found that transformational leadership predicted trust and value congruence, but that transactional leadership did not.

Similarly to transformational leadership, servant leaders are likely to increase followers' trust and value congruence by developing their skills and confidence to perform tasks and assume responsibility, by providing support and encouragement when necessary in the face of obstacles, difficulties, and fatigue, and through their own role modelling of desirable behaviour and willingness to engage in sacrifice in order to achieve the organisational vision (Winston & Fields, 2015; Bass and Avolio, 1990; Yukl, 2006). Therefore, the practice of servant leadership behaviours is likely to increase volunteers' trust in the character and competence of the leader and to produce change in volunteers' values and to increase their value congruence with the leader.

Study Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

- H₁: The servant leadership behaviours of senior pastors will be positively related to volunteer intrinsic motivation.
- H₂: The servant leadership behaviours of senior pastors will be positively related to volunteer trust in and value congruence with the leader.

Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from volunteers attending and participating in 28 different Australian Christian Churches (ACC) congregations in Australia. The sample consisted of 790 subjects who served in a voluntary capacity within their congregation and who rated the leadership behaviours of their senior pastor. The selection of 28 different ACC congregations was designed to provide responses from volunteers within each of five congregational size categories that ACC recognises. ACC, also known as the Assemblies of God in Australia, is a fellowship of autonomous churches which had 1,087 registered churches throughout Australia as of May 17, 2010 (ACC, 2010). The 28 congregations represent 2.6% of the total number of ACC congregations. ACC conducts an annual census of all congregations in May. The census collects data on various church activities, including weekend attendance which is measured as the total number of attendees at all services from Friday evening to Sunday evening on one weekend in May each year. ACC categorises congregational sizes into five categories: (a) under 100 attendees, (b) 100-199 attendees, (c) 200-499 attendees, (d) 500-999 attendees, and (e) 1000 and more attendees. In 2010, the average size of an ACC congregation was 208 attendees.

Measures

The survey questionnaire employed 66 items to measure: (a) volunteers' assessment of the senior pastor's practice of servant, transformational, and transactional leadership behaviours, (b) volunteers' self-assessment of their motivation, and (c) volunteers' self-assessment of their trust in and value congruence with the senior pastor. The 66 items consisted of the 10 item Essential Behaviours of Servant Leaders scale (Winston & Fields, 2015) to measure volunteers' assessment of the senior pastor's practice of servant leadership behaviours (scale reliability $\alpha = .63$), 20 items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X; Bass and Avolio, 2000) to measure volunteers' assessment of the senior pastor's practice of transformational leadership behaviours (scale reliability $\alpha = .86$), 12 items adapted from the Multifactor

Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X; Bass and Avolio, 2000) to measure volunteers' assessment of the senior pastor's practice of transactional leadership behaviours (scale reliability $\alpha = .69$), 6 items adapted from Millette and Gagné (2008) to measure volunteers' intrinsic motivation (scale reliability $\alpha = .74$), 6 items adapted from Millette and Gagné (2008) to measure volunteers' extrinsic motivation (scale reliability $\alpha = .76$), 6 items adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990) to measure volunteers' trust in the senior pastor (scale reliability $\alpha = .76$), and 6 items adapted from Posner (1992, 2010) and Posner et al. (1985) to measure volunteers' value congruence with the senior pastor (scale reliability $\alpha = .78$).

Results

Correlation analysis was used to detect one to one correlations between the independent and dependent variables. The mean scores and standard deviations of the independent and dependent variables and correlations among the variables are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables ($N = 790$)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Volunteer tenure	2.51	.65	-									
2. Senior pastor tenure	2.51	.71	.15**	-								
3. Congregational size	3.13	1.34	.06	.53**	-							
4. Servant leadership	3.57	.44	-.04	-.04	.04	-						
5. Transformational leadership	3.28	.47	-.07	-.08	.05	.65**	-					
6. Transactional leadership	1.70	.58	.00	.08*	-.03	-.02	.13**	-				
7. Trust	3.07	.36	-.04	-.07	-.05	.52**	.63**	.08*	-			
8. Value congruence	3.10	.34	-.06	-.07	-.01	.48**	.60**	.08*	.66**	-		
9. Extrinsic motivation	1.27	.78	-.03	.01	-.04	-.05	.02	.25**	-.01	-.03	-	
10. Intrinsic motivation	3.24	.57	.03	.03	.13*	.26**	.35**	.09*	.29**	.26**	.18**	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Leadership Style

Volunteers perceived senior pastors to more typically exercise servant and transformational behaviours than transactional behaviours. This is evident in the high mean scores for servant leadership ($M = 3.57$) and transformational leadership ($M = 3.28$), compared with the low mean score for transactional leadership ($M = 1.70$). It is also evident in the large ($r > .50$; Pallant, 2011) positive correlation between servant and transformational leadership ($r = .65$) which represents 42.25% of the variance in each variable. By contrast, transformational leadership had only had a small ($r < .25$; Pallant, 2011) positive correlation with transactional leadership ($r = .13$) representing 1.69% of variance, and servant leadership had no significant correlation with transactional leadership.

Volunteer Motivation

Volunteers typically believed that they were intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated. This is evident in the high mean score for intrinsic motivation ($M = 3.24$) and the low mean score for extrinsic motivation ($M = 1.27$). There was a small positive correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation ($r = .18$) representing 3.24% of variance.

Leadership Style and Volunteer Motivation

Servant leadership had a medium ($r = .25 - .50$; Pallant, 2011) positive correlation with intrinsic motivation ($r = .26$) representing 6.76% of variance. Transformational leadership also had a medium positive correlation with intrinsic motivation ($r = .35$) representing 12.25% of variance. Transactional leadership had a very small positive correlation with intrinsic motivation ($r = .09$) representing .81% of variance. Both transformational and servant leadership behaviours inspire intrinsic motivation in volunteers. The larger effect of transformational leadership is likely linked to the intentional focus of transformational leaders on inspiring followers to performance beyond expectation by engaging in exemplary and visionary leadership behaviours.

Transactional leadership had a medium positive correlation with extrinsic motivation ($r = .25$) representing 6.25% of variance. Neither servant nor transformational leadership had a significant correlation with extrinsic motivation. Transactional leadership behaviours produce extrinsic motivation, but servant and transformational leadership behaviours do not.

Hypothesis 1 was supported, with the servant leadership behaviours of senior pastors being positively related to volunteer intrinsic motivation.

Leadership Style and Volunteer Trust and Value Congruence

The mean scores for trust ($M = 3.07$) and value congruence ($M = 3.10$) were high, indicating that volunteers typically trusted senior pastors and believed that their values aligned. Servant leadership had a large positive correlation with trust ($r = .52$) representing 27% of variance, and also with value congruence ($r = .48$) representing 23% of variance. Transformational leadership also had large positive correlations with trust ($r = .63$) representing 39.7% of variance, and with value congruence ($r = .60$) representing 36% of variance. Transactional leadership had a small positive correlation with trust ($r = .08$) representing 0.6% of variance, and with value congruence ($r = .08$) representing 0.6% of variance. Servant and transformational leadership behaviours inspire trust and value congruence in volunteers. The larger effect of transformational leadership is likely linked to the intentional focus of transformational leaders on inspiring followers to performance beyond expectation by engaging in exemplary and visionary leadership behaviours.

Hypothesis 2 was supported, with the servant leadership behaviours of senior pastors being positively related to volunteer trust in and value congruence with the leader.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the relationships between the servant leadership behaviours of senior pastors and the levels of motivation, trust, and value congruence experienced by volunteers. The study found that servant leadership is significantly positively related to volunteer intrinsic motivation, trust, and value congruence. These results are similar to those found by Fogarty (2013) in relation to the impact of transformational leadership on volunteer motivation, trust, and value congruence. Study findings are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of Correlation Analysis Results

Variable	Trust	Value Congruence	Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation
Servant	++	++	++	-
Transformational	++	++	++	-
Transactional	+	+	+	++

Note. ++ large or medium positive relationship; + small positive relationship; – no relationship.

The significant positive correlations between servant and transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation are consistent with servant and transformational leadership theories which posit that such leadership styles establish moral and inspirational relationships with followers and motivate them to work for transcendental goals and for aroused higher-level needs for self-actualisation (Winston & Fields, 2015; Bass, 1985). They are also consistent with self-determination theory which connects intrinsic motivation to internal motivators to fulfil the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2008). The practice of servant and transformational behaviours by non-profit leaders is likely to reinforce intrinsic motivation among volunteers.

The significant positive correlation between transactional leadership and extrinsic motivation is consistent with transactional leadership theory which posits that such leadership establishes an exchange relationship with followers offering rewards for services rendered (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). It is also consistent with self-determination theory which connects extrinsic motivation to external and instrumental motivators (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2008). The practice of transactional behaviours by non-profit leaders is likely to reinforce extrinsic motivation among volunteers.

The significant positive correlations between servant and transformational leadership and trust and value congruence are also consistent with previous findings (Winston & Fields, 2015; Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Podsakoff et al. 1990). The practice of servant and transformational behaviours by non-profit leaders is likely to reinforce trust and value congruence among volunteers.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributed to the leadership and motivation literature by: (a) connecting servant leadership theory with self-determination theory in order to examine the relationship between leadership behaviour and volunteer motivation in non-profit organisations, and thereby demonstrating (b) positive relationships between servant leadership and intrinsic motivation, trust, and value congruence in volunteers. Fogarty (2013) had identified similar relationships between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation, trust, and value congruence. The findings of this study indicate that servant leadership has similar impacts to transformational leadership, and is therefore an effective leadership style for leading volunteers.

Practical Implications

Non-profit organisations that depend on volunteer workers require leaders who can inspire intrinsic motivation in volunteers (Larsson and Ronnmark, 1996; Riggio et al., 2004). The organisational problems of shorter tenure and poorer task performance are less likely to occur among volunteers in non-profit organisations where leaders exercise servant leadership behaviours directed towards the enhancement of volunteer intrinsic motivation, trust, and value congruence. Therefore, this study provides the following practical implications for non-profit organisations: (a) leader selection criteria should incorporate evidence of effective demonstration of servant leadership behaviours; (b) leader training should incorporate instruction on and guidance in servant leadership behaviours; and (c) leadership strategies should incorporate the goal of building volunteer intrinsic motivation.

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