

The background of the cover is an abstract, textured composition of blue and white. It features a central circular motif that resembles a vortex or a stylized eye, with swirling, brushstroke-like patterns radiating outwards. The colors range from deep, dark blues to bright, almost white highlights, creating a sense of depth and movement.

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Moriah Olmstead, a student at Toccoa Falls College, created the cover artwork. She explains that a wave is like a Servant Leader. Both are constantly changing with new tides of influence and resurfacing from depths that life passionately brings forth. Always seeking new horizons and growing in strength, Servant Leaders empower others by setting the example of what it looks like to remember hope. In the same way, a wave is powerful and graceful by its gesture of drawing its onlooker into its beauty. Life can become overwhelming when focused on the ever-present waves of chaos, but the very essence of becoming a Servant Leader is to hold fast and stand firm while focusing on, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, and whatever is admirable” (Php 4:8). There is a horizon to every ocean and there is a God whose greatness calms the sea. It is in this center of chaos that the Servant Leader displays a calm in the midst of the storm.

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# SERVANT LEADERSHIP THROUGH A CULTURAL LENS

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In the world of post-Enron, post-truth, post-just about any virtue, there is a strong desire for positive forms of leadership, which provide stakeholders with stability and hope for a better future. One of the approaches that is considered by scholars and practitioners is servant leadership. This concept is not new. Robert Greenleaf introduced it in 1970 and defined a servant leader as one who “wants to serve, to serve first.” Since that time, the construct has been further developed and measurements created and tested. Spears (2009), as one example, developed ten characteristics of servant leader. They include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) suggested another list, consisting of emotional healing, creating value, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically. In essence, these two examples are ways to operationalize servant leadership, to outline what it really stands for. It is noteworthy that the servant leadership paradigms have been developed in the context of a Western culture, in particular, the culture of the United States.

This brings me to an important point of transferring concepts to other cultures and languages, which seems to constitute a major problem for leadership research and practice in general, and in our case, for servant leadership in particular. Gardberg (2006) spoke about functional and conceptual equivalence of terms. Functional equivalence refers to “the relationship the focal variable has with its antecedents or consequences” (p. 41), while conceptual equivalence shows the degree to which “the concept or construct is expressed in similar attitudes or behaviors across nations” (p. 41). We need to put servant leadership to the test and see whether it is functionally and conceptually equivalent in other cultures.

I remember how in 2013 when I was teaching leadership in Kenya I had a conversation with a local person about servant leadership. This man told me a story of missionaries who came to his village and started helping the poor people to build huts where they could eventually live, to which this man reacted in an interesting way. He said, “they tried to serve us, but it was a bad service. White people are respected by our chiefs, and instead they should have gone to mingle with our chiefs. This might have helped us more. We can build our huts ourselves.” In the country with high power distance, and paramount paternalism, servant leadership is not about bridging the distance between different strata of society, rather it is about functioning within the cultural contexts and providing help at the level and within the framework of the group to which you belong. After all, Kenyans take pride in their bosses’ wealth and prestige, and they expect their superiors to maintain their level of significance. In light of this dynamic, how does empowering or putting subordinates

first play out in Kenyan culture (granted, there are 42 people groups and each has its own language, and culture)?

As another example, let us take the culture of my home country, Ukraine. It also tends to have high power distance and extensive paternalism. In many instances, subordinates want their leaders to take care of them, to take responsibility in their stead. Once I talked to an American who started a medical business in Ukraine. He ran clinics in the US, and came to Ukraine to do the same. Much to his surprise, leadership dynamics in my country were quite different for him. Striving to promote low power distance, he engaged subordinates in decision-making processes and allowed them to co-lead with him. This resulted in them disrespecting him as a leader and trying to undermine his authority.

This brings forth the question, can we truly speak of a universal understanding of servant leadership? Is it the same in all cultures of the world, and in particular, cultures with high power distance and strong collectivistic inclinations? It seems there is enough warrant to infer that different cultures require us to reconsider how we operationalize the construct and what content we put into it.

At a larger scale, we may speak about culture as an operating system in which all other constructs (as apps) function. The culture determines the design of a construct, as an operating system requires specific programming of an app. You cannot run Mac apps in Windows environment and vice versa. Similarly, in a given culture, the reality of servant leadership is “constructed through social processes in which meanings are negotiated, consensus is formed, and contestation is possible” (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 174).

However, from a Christian perspective, we can speak of the culture of the Kingdom of God. This is the culture that produced and defined the concept of servanthood. Robert Greenleaf was not original with this idea. Still, the Christian church and its teaching also exist in a cultural environment and resemble the culture in which they were developed. Orthodox Christianity resembles more of oriental culture with its emphasis on mystery of God, Catholicism is characterized by strict hierarchical structure, and Protestantism is based on individual responsibility of each member of human race before God; and this is just a tip of an iceberg of how cultural paradigm shapes Christian practices.

As we can see, there are number of important contributing factors to understanding servant leadership and we invite you to join us in exploration of praxis of servanthood in different cultural contexts.

The first publication in our series takes Paul as an example of a cross-cultural leader. Indeed, it was he, who wrote,

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Cor. 9:19-23, ESV)

His ministry spanned nations, languages, and subgroups, and our first author, Kevin Hall, explores how Paul engaged other cultures and met them where they were. The author develops cross-cultural leadership methods from Paul's life and ministry.

The second author, Alina Wreczycky, explores viability of Servant leadership in Poland. As a country that emerged from Soviet Eastern bloc, it represents dynamics, which, if not similar, still resemble those found in many post-Soviet states. Alina studied servant leadership in Poland in the context of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and described what needs to be done in the Polish context in order for servant leadership to take hold and develop in that country. This research addresses the very problem I have mentioned in my introductory comments: transferability of servant leadership across the globe. It is an intriguing and informative report.

Norlan Josué Hernández takes us to Latin America and considers servant leadership through the lens of culture and gender. The author draws on the historical context of Latin America and states that leadership is associated with "so-called rebels, revolutionaries, and social visionaries" (p. 50). The article suggests that each culture fills the construct of servant leadership with its own content, and then the cultural background informs male and female leadership by identifying a set of values that characterize each gender. The sociocultural scripts discussed by the author present specific barriers to the practice of servant leadership in Latino culture. Ultimately, if servant leadership to be effectively used in this culture's context, it must be applied with cultural sensitivity. This article is a great read for anyone who wants to serve other nations in any capacity. Good intentions may be misunderstood and one may misrepresent her or his intentions by being ignorant of cultural underpinnings of servanthood.

Mark Bell approaches the topic of servant leadership from a different perspective. He asks the question, "what Christian leadership is not?" In other words, if we consider Jesus' leadership as an example and basis for servant leadership, then it is worthy of our attention to consider leadership praxis that Jesus did not condone. The author uses the examples of Jewish leaders, who "have seated themselves in the chair of Moses" (Mt. 23:2). Using the passage in Matthew, the author derives six practices of toxic leaders. However, Mark also suggests practices of healthy leadership, that are concerned with "the well-being of followers and organizations" (p. 70). They are presented as opposites to the six practices of toxic leaders. This may become one of the operationalizations of servant leadership that is worth further exploration in cross-cultural contexts.

Mark Atterson continues exploration of toxic vs healthy leadership using inner-textual analysis of John 10:1-21. In his discourse, the author goes further and considers toxic followership that may occur under toxic leaders, and then discusses the way followers can operate from the position of strength when dealing with toxic leaders. One of the important parts of the discussion for me were the four principles of recovery from toxic environment. In the world where toxic leadership is taking hold (Veldsman, 2014) these practices are very important.

Joshua Broward provides an excellent discussion on leader development through the lens of Trinitarian theology. This outlook brings into focus relational aspects of leadership, mutual interdependence and diversity, and it is within this paradigm, as the author suggests, leadership training must take place. It implies a safe and relational environment, investment into a leader as a person (identity development), and humility in dealing with others around a leader. This discussion provides rich biblical data to inform servant leadership practice.

As you can see from brief summary of the content, this volume of *Theology of Leadership Journal* contains crucial insights regarding servant leadership, and I would like to invite you to join the intellectual and spiritual feast that will challenge and stretch your understanding of what it means to be a servant leader on a global scale.

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