

Conceptualizing Servant Leadership for Societal Impact; A literature Review

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Abstract

For the past decade, literature on leadership has accorded much attention to servant leadership, and literature on various aspect of the construct has evolved significantly. Despite the construct gaining much among practitioners and scholars, most organizations have not wholly applied servant leadership at the practical level. This research reviews existing literature on servant leadership and highlights several issues that make it necessary to develop a new theoretical model that is essential for the expansion of the servant leadership construct to include the positive societal impact social phenomenon. To develop a mechanism through which the servant leadership model can be propagated to create positive impact at the societal level, the author proposes the development of a new theory on the construct known as the Agape-other centered model.

Keywords: servant leadership, Leadership, societal impact, rapid change, engagement

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I. INTRODUCTION

The most significant decisions and policies that affect the vast number of people are made and formulated at the senior most level of organizations. Beehner (2020) notes that corporate leaders, in both for-profit and not-for-profit sector, have the potential to make decisions that affect most people than other individuals. The leadership concept has evolved over the years both in its definition, application and approach. Currently, Northouse (2021) notes that both the definition and application of leadership revolve around vision, ideas, direction and inspiration; it motivates others and establishes direction. However, most of the existing approaches on leadership focus on influencing followers to attain organizational goals with minimal focus on personal integrity and personal responsibility (Northouse, 2021). Regardless, Van Dierendonck (2011) the servant leadership concept has emerged as an alternative approach to leadership that enables leaders to make informed decisions based on moral and ethical consideration and driven by personal values like integrity and honesty.

The servant leadership concept holds that leaders are mainly driven by empathy, altruism and stewardship (Greenleaf, 1998); with this ethical and moral imperative driving their unfathomable and steadfast commitment towards, building relationships, creating a compelling vision and prioritizing the well-being, growth and empowerment of followers. The servant leadership concept contends that firms can only attain their long-term organizational goals by prioritizing the fulfilment of the personal ambitions of followers (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). The concept also contends that by encouraging higher moral reasoning levels in followers, and by acting in a way that prioritizes their needs rather self-interest of the leader or organization, the well-being and sense of growth of workers is enhanced. Resultantly, followers reciprocate by demonstrating the servant leader attitude towards others, particularly customers and members of the society (Liden, Wayne, Liao, & Meuser, 2014). Therefore, servant leadership facilitates the development of employees at the team as well as individual level and facilitates their involvement in the community.

II. THE LITERATURE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

A systematic desktop review of the relevant journal articles was conducted by searching for the key constructs such as Servant leadership, leadership and societal impact. Only journals that are relevant to these search terms were included. Similar to the current study, this approach was successfully used by Eva et al. (2019) in their literature review. The commonly searched journals were JSTOR, Emerald, Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Wiley Interscience with the aid of the publish or perish software among others. The sufficiency recommendation by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007) was adhered to so that reading was done up to the point where further reading, including the references from initial search results, pointed to the already read references.

Critical review was used to scrutinize and elicit any gaps based on the methodology, conceptualization, theories, and contexts used while appraising the strengths of the studies considered. The focus was paid on recent publications, especially the previous five years and the classical sources in servant leadership, and societal impact (Figure 1).

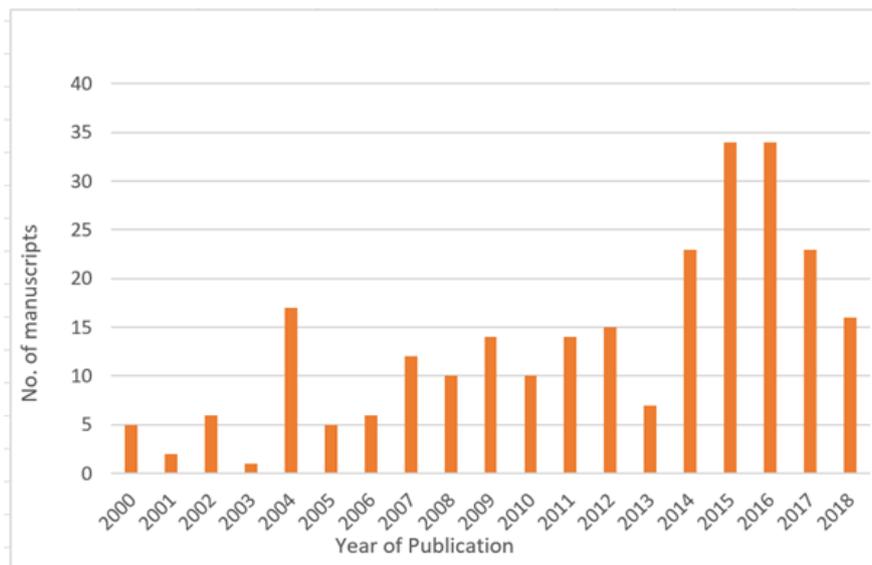


Figure 1. Servant leadership publications by year and type.

The relevant articles to this study were analysed as illustrated in Table 1 to guide the formulation of a holistic and integrative conceptual framework for future empirical research. The articles are categorized based on the aspects discussed by its authors, emerging indicators for the key constructs, results, and discussions arising from the articles.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Though scholars and practitioners have been continuously requesting organizations to embrace the servant leadership concept; the practical application of the philosophy has been faulted for several reasons. First, the approach is an oxymoron; it is so radical that most leaders find it difficult to practice such a concept in its entirety, particularly in organizations whose main emphasis is to maximize profits. Therefore, even when contemporary firms embrace the servant leadership, their primary purpose is to identify a new way of motivating workers, attracting customers and gaining or maintaining approval from the society, and thus continue maximizing profits. However, such an approach is characterized by self-seeking and self-aggrandizement, which is a principle that is at war with the all-for-the-other, non-for-self, self-sacrificing Agape love of the servant leadership concept. Such inconsistencies inhibit the ability of servant leaders to make decision at the corporate level that will ensure servant leadership is conceptualized for positive societal impact. In turn, the not-for-profit sector, which requires a leadership that promotes a social conscience, and thereby emphasizes the mission of organizations rather than the margin (Trastek, Hamilton & Niles, 2014), are unable to balance the needs of all stakeholders including shareholders, customers, workers and members of the society.

Secondary, since popularization of the servant leadership concept by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, the approach has evolved and become one of the most dominant philosophies that are being discussed in the scholarly world today. However, most of the literature on servant leadership focuses on personal reflections and testimonials as well as anecdotal observations (Page & Wong, 2000; Winston & Fields, 2015), thus creating a huge gap between the intellectual understanding of the concept and its operationalization. Besides being described using various dimensions, Van Dierendonck (2011) notes that it is difficult to operationalize the construct because of lack of a clear definition of servant leadership or the mechanism through which it works. Resultantly, it is difficult to determine which descriptions should be used to operationalize servant leadership at the societal level.

Thirdly, despite the proliferation of the servant leadership concept in the 21st century, with over 200 studies focusing on the approach having been published in past five years (Eva et al. (2019), minimal research has been conducted in the not-for-profit sector. Currently, only a single study conducted by Trastek, Hamilton and Niles (2014) directly links the servant leadership with societal impact in the healthcare industry, which is a vital component of the nonprofit sector because of its role in delivering public goods. However, the servant leadership approach is a natural fit for the non-profit sector because of its suitability to humane and caring

organizations, strong emphasis on mission as well as its follower-centric approach in terms of attaining organizational objectives and enabling firms in all sectors to develop a sustainable model (Northouse, 2021).

Finally, to facilitate the operationalization of the servant leadership concept, it is necessary to develop a model on servant leadership. Leadership theories are developed and applied in terms of the source or locus of the leadership phenomenon and the mechanism through which the leadership is transmitted or enacted (Hernandez et al., 2011). In term of locus, Greenleaf (1998) states that servant leadership emanates from the leader's natural feeling that they want to serve, and for that matter, to serve first and always. However, the main challenge facing the concept is the mechanism through which it should be transmitted (Lemoine, Hartnell & Leroy, 2019). According to Winston and Fields (2015), the servant leadership construct is described using as many as twenty-eight different dimensions, thus making it difficult for leaders to determine how to implement this approach. Therefore, it is important to develop a model on servant leadership that will extend its nomological network. The present literature on the servant leadership construct, including the most recent study by Eva et al. (2019), among others, is sufficient to enable scholars to develop measures for quantifying the servant leadership construct and thus develop a model, which in turn will enable practitioners to apply that knowledge to in practice.

In the context of the issues highlighted above, the research seeks to extend and augment the present state of knowledge on the servant leadership concept by exploring how the competencies of servant leadership create individual, team and organizational outcomes in the context of positive societal impact. Because of the intrinsic inconsistencies and the scanty nature of literature on conceptualization of servant leadership for societal impact, this research has identified the need to merge the existing literature with a view of recommending a pertinent model that will demonstrate how the use of servant leadership in a value creation system that creates desirable outcomes for all stakeholders, particularly members of the society who are often marginalized through other leadership approaches. Accordingly, the study focuses on four objectives: reviewing extant conceptual literature on the contrast of servant leadership in the context of a society; reviewing extant theoretical literature on the construct of servant leadership in the context of society; reviewing extant empirical literature on the construct of servant leadership in the context of a society; and proposing a suitable conceptual framework for guiding research for the impact of servant leadership in the society. Conducting this research is of great significant to servant leadership literature. Notably, this will be the first study that directly focuses on the conceptualization of servant leadership for societal impact. Resultantly, the research will create a new pool of knowledge on how leaders in the not-for profit sector can practically deploy the servant leadership construct. Moreover, numerous organizations in both for-profit and not-for-profit sector are increasingly adopting the servant leadership construct, particularly in the face of the rapidly changing business landscape that is characterized by various unethical practices in the form of corporate scandals. With this latest development, literature is required to inform all sectors on how the construct can be incorporated in their highest level of decision making based on a proper understating of servant leadership in the context of positive societal impact. Accordingly, the research will create numerous benefits to researchers, theorists and practitioners who are interested in identifying and addressing the apparent inconsistencies in the practical application of the servant leadership construct.

IV. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

To address the objectives of this research, the study conducted a review of the existing conceptual literature on the servant leadership construct so as to demonstrate its dimensions and the outcomes emanating from its deployment in organizations. The paper begins by reviewing literature on the servant leadership construct and its relation to the positive societal impact phenomenon.

4.1 Servant Leadership

To realize the objectives of this research, the prominent concepts explaining the servant leadership construct are discussed. In particular, the research will begin by defining the servant leadership construct. While Greenleaf (1977) and other subsequent scholars failed to provide a comprehensive definition of the concept, Eva et al. (2019) describe servant leadership notion as an other-oriented leadership approach that is manifested through a one-on-one prioritization of the interests and needs of individual followers. This description also states that servant leadership is manifested through the reorientation of the concern of leaders' towards the concern of others within an organization and in the larger community. Based on existing literature, servant leadership can be discussed using various dimensions including the characteristics and competencies of servant leadership. The author focused on the competencies rather than the characteristics of servant leadership. Unlike characteristics which refer to the traits that regulate the way individuals behave, think and feel, competencies are a combination of technical and cognitive skills, knowledge, habits and traits that are applied to attain a specified standardized outcome (Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017). The competencies of servant leadership that

enable servant leaders to attain the standardized outcome of positive societal impact include empowerment, stewardship, building relationship and compelling vision.

Empowerment is a competency-based dimension of the construct that enables servant leaders to encourage followers to become active in their community through their conceptual skills. Empowerment involves activating and aligning talent, creating a work environment that is effective, developing others, transforming followers, transferring responsibility and sharing information (Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017). Through empowerment, servant leaders, therefore, understand individual passion, talent and align it with the purpose of an organization and the requirements of a given position. The stewardship competency enables servant leaders to promote positive societal impact by taking accountability for the common interest of individuals, organizations and the society (Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017). Stewardship strengthens the relationship between servant leadership and societal impact by enabling leaders to constantly implement positive change interventions and modify procedures and systems to improve employee and customer satisfaction.

At the heart of servant leadership is the need to build relationships with others, both in the organization and society. Building relationships involves understanding the potential, aspirations, need and mental model of others. It also entails creating an environment of support, care, acknowledgement and encouragement as well as developing trustful relationship with customers, individuals and the community (Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017). The building relationship concept is demonstrated through affective and cognitive trust, which is shown through the long-term maturation of the relationship among the interacting groups like the leader being admired by employees. Compelling vision is the conceptualization of a higher vision, connecting the past activities with present trends and with probable future scenarios as well as creating value for the community (Coetzer, Bussin and Geldenhuys, 2017). Vision according to Coetzer, Bussin and Geldenhuys (2017) contains three main components: creation of value for the community, a higher purpose and linking the past, present as well as the future.

4.2 Engagement

Employees are the second most important assets in an organization after customers. It is through employees that the circuit of beneficence of servant leadership flows from the leader to the society, and thus creates a positive societal impact. Basically, human beings, including employees are inherently selfish, and therefore operate under the self-aggrandizement principle that prioritizes one's interest over those of others. Resultantly, servant leaders require time to eliminate the self-seeking principle among workers, and simultaneously inculcate the all-for-the-other, non-for-self, Agape principle among followers. Resultantly, having an engaged workforce (work engagement) enables leaders to fully develop the servant leadership competencies and create positive societal impact using the construct. Work engagement refers to the cognitive connection that employees have to their company or job and involves components such as commitment and satisfaction and their impact on employee performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Work engagement promotes job embeddedness by strengthening the relationship that an individual has with colleagues and the work, creating a work-life balance and enabling individuals to make a sacrifice for their work and the community. In turn engaged employees have higher job embeddedness and thus provide leaders an opportune time to demonstrate and execute servant leadership among followers.

4.3 Rapid Change

Traditionally, the servant leadership originated from the positive philosophy, which was based on finding motivation and satisfaction by serving others and prioritizing their interest (Kumar, 2018). However, because of the rapidly evolving business environment scholars and practitioners are emphasizing on negative terminology for generating background and defining relevance of servant leadership (Donia et al., 2016). One of the most notable rapid changes associated with the negative terminology of servant leadership is the prevalence of unethical practices in most organizations. Most unethical practices, including corporate scandals are facilitated by unsustainable and unethical greed; a drive to maximize profits for the sake of shareholders. The desire and necessity for alternatives to the negative terminology has inspired various individuals and organizations to advocate for sustainable development as a solution to the ongoing overwhelming social, economic and environmental problems. Nonetheless, while the desire to advance sustainable alternatives to existing systems has been admirable, the present sustainable development movement has been at times characterized by fragmented efforts, dis-agreement, and a lack of common leadership. Resultantly, servant leadership is emerging as solution to the rapid changes that individuals and organizations are experiencing in the current business environment.

4.4 Societal Impact

Societal impact is often associated with social impact and entails the impact that a given social enterprise has on communities and people because of an activity, action or inaction, program, project or policy

of the organization (Muhonen, Benneworth, & Olmos-Peñuela, 2019). Societal impact is mostly concerned with intermediate returns such as improved products or services, partnership-based cooperation, or ultimate outcomes such as improved industry competitiveness or ensuring that members of the public can access products at an affordable price. Accordingly, the concept focuses on the long-term rather than the short-term. Societal impact often makes an impact on three stakeholder groups: policy makers at the government or intermediary level; professionals in the for-profit and not-for profit sector, that is, various societal organizations and industries involved in the production of services and goods; and end users, that is, individual target groups or the public at (Spaapen, Dijkstra, and Wamelink, 2007). The servant leadership construct involves the use leadership as the core business activity that can be used to create a positive social impact as well as business benefits (Beal et al., 2017). Resultantly, through the concept, firms can be able to assess the social impact of their actions.

V. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The conceptual discussion above has focused on providing a comprehensive analysis of the servant leadership construct based on its evolution and its application in the societal impact phenomenon. However such a discussion will be incomplete without underpinning it with the relevant academic theories. As such, the research examined the servant leadership construct in the context of the societal impact social phenomenon through three theories: the job embeddedness theory, the top bottom line theory and the stakeholder theory.

5.1 The Job Embeddedness Theory

The job embeddedness theory is a valuable lens that enables leaders in the for-profit and not-for-profit sector to evaluate workers retention in their organizations. Job embeddedness is the level of a worker's enmeshment or stuckness within a larger social system and it emanates from various contextual or external forces that are labeled as fit, links and sacrifices (William Lee, Burch & Mitchell, 2014). Fit focuses on the level to which an individual has a relationship with their work as well as co-workers. Links refer to the extent to which the community and work aspects of an individual match with their life. Sacrifice involves what an individual is willing to give up for the sake of a community and its work. Since embeddedness is a largely a staying contract, the organizational links and fit create a strong leader-member exchange and thus provide worker with more supervisory and job-related support (William Lee, Burch & Mitchell, 2014). The practical implication of job embeddedness is that contexts exists that influence individuals to stay within organizations. Therefore, by influencing such contexts, servant leaders can promote work engagement by influencing individuals to stay within organizations.

5.2 The Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory forms the basis upon which arguments and propositions of the conceptualization of servant leadership for societal impact is built. This theory focuses on all stakeholders and considers their relationship with an organization as a series of activities that result in outcomes that are implicitly moral and value-laden. Because of its emphasis on all stakeholders, the theory is in line with the servant leadership concept, which exclusively and extensively focuses on people; it serves multiple stakeholders (shareholders, employees, the organization, customers, suppliers and the society as well as the environment). Jones, Harrison and Felps (2018) point out that besides explaining why the interests of stakeholders affect a corporation, it also emphasizes how firms can take into account the interests of stakeholders, evaluating the benefits of impacting the interests of stakeholders and significance of leaders focusing on decision making and relationship management. The stakeholder model also creates the generalized exchange by arguing that all stakeholders ought to be treated equally and thus develop some form of synergy (Tantalo & Priem, 2014). As such, the attitude that an organization has on its clients influences the employees' behavior and attitudes in a firm. Equally, a company's behavior towards the community in its area of operation influences the behavior and attitudes of its customers and suppliers (Tantalo & Priem, 2014). Overall, the stakeholder approach is at the core of all business activities because, just like the servant leadership construct, it enables organizations to cater for the needs of all players and simultaneously create value, including profits.

5.3 The Top-Bottom Line Approach

The top-bottom line or triple bottom line approach is an accounting framework that contends that instead of focusing on profit maximization as a single bottom line, organizations must focus on the three bottom lines: people, profit and planet (Westerman, Rao, Vanka & Gupta, 2020). The framework, therefore, provides a more inclusive and comprehensive outcomes of business activities by enabling leaders to prioritize the interests of people (employees, customers, suppliers and members of the society), the environment and shareholders by recapturing value through profits. In line with the servant leadership construct, the framework holds that the duties and responsibilities of organizations does not just rely on leaders but with all stakeholders, thus leaders must act as conduits that coordinate the needs and interests of all stakeholder while maximizing value for

shareholders. Besides acting as foundation on which the servant leadership construct is built, the top-bottom line frameworks facilitates the creation of positive societal impact by ensuring that the interests and needs of employees, customers and the community, are prioritized. In, turn, the multiple stakeholders enable organization to obtain a competitive edge and develop a sustainable strategy. Accordingly, this research holds that with its emphasis on people, planet and profit, the top-bottom line framework provides an opportunity for examining how the servant leadership contract can be conceptualized for positive societal impact.

VI. DEVELOPING THEORETICAL MODEL FOR SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The literature that has been examined in this research demonstrates that the servant leadership competencies are an integral part of leadership in a rapidly changing business environment that has been shifting from customer-centric to transaction-focused strategies. Despite the extant literature showing that servant leadership is a significant leadership philosophy in the contemporary society such knowledge is not advanced through theoretical models. This premise was made based on a systematic review of literature review as shown in Table 1. The review, as pointed out by Eva et al. (2019), shows that only a third of the existing qualitative studies on servant leadership have been informed by theory. Equally, only a few studies using the mixed method approach are informed by theory. Resultantly, Eva et al. (2019) proposes that research on servant leadership should focus on three theories: conservation of resource theory, situational strength theory and self-determination theory. These theories are instrumental in explaining the locus, antecedents, boundary conditions and effects of servant leadership on leaders. However, as the current author has demonstrated, servant leadership is extending beyond follower outcomes, locus of the construct, antecedents, boundary conditions and its effect on leaders to include positive societal impact of servant leadership. Accordingly, there is a need to advance this social phenomenon of positive societal impact by developing a theoretical model. In particular, there is a need to develop a theoretical model demonstrating the mechanism through which the servant leadership philosophy is dispersed at the societal level.

Table 1

Journal	Number of articles	Impact factor
Leadership & Organization Development Journal	20	0.864
Journal of Business Ethics	17	3.526
The International Journal of Servant Leadership	13	NA
The Leadership Quarterly	12	4.269
Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies	10	1.242
Global Virtue Ethics Review	6	NA
International Journal of Leadership Studies	6	NA
Journal of Applied Psychology	5	6.89
Leadership	5	1.597
Journal of Management Development	5	NA
Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management	5	NA
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	4	3.549
Journal of Managerial Psychology	4	1.844
Administrative Sciences	4	NA
Journal of Management	2	12.213
Personnel Psychology	2	8.176
International Journal of Hospitality Management	2	3.912
Academy of Management Journal	1	11.901
Journal of Management Studies	1	7.236

Table 1 showing list of extant literature on servant leadership
 Adopted from: *Source (Eva et al, 2019: 114)*

VII. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework developed in this research seeks to develop a new model that identifies how servant leadership operates through employees to realize positive social change in the presence of a rapidly changing business environment. The model is based on four constructs of servant leadership, which are in fact, the competencies of the concept. These constructs include empowerment, stewardship, building relationships and compelling vision. The four constructs are integral in conceptualizing servant leadership for societal impact.

As such, the research proposes new model that links servant leadership, work engagement and societal impact against a backdrop of rapid change. The framework is summarized in figure 1.

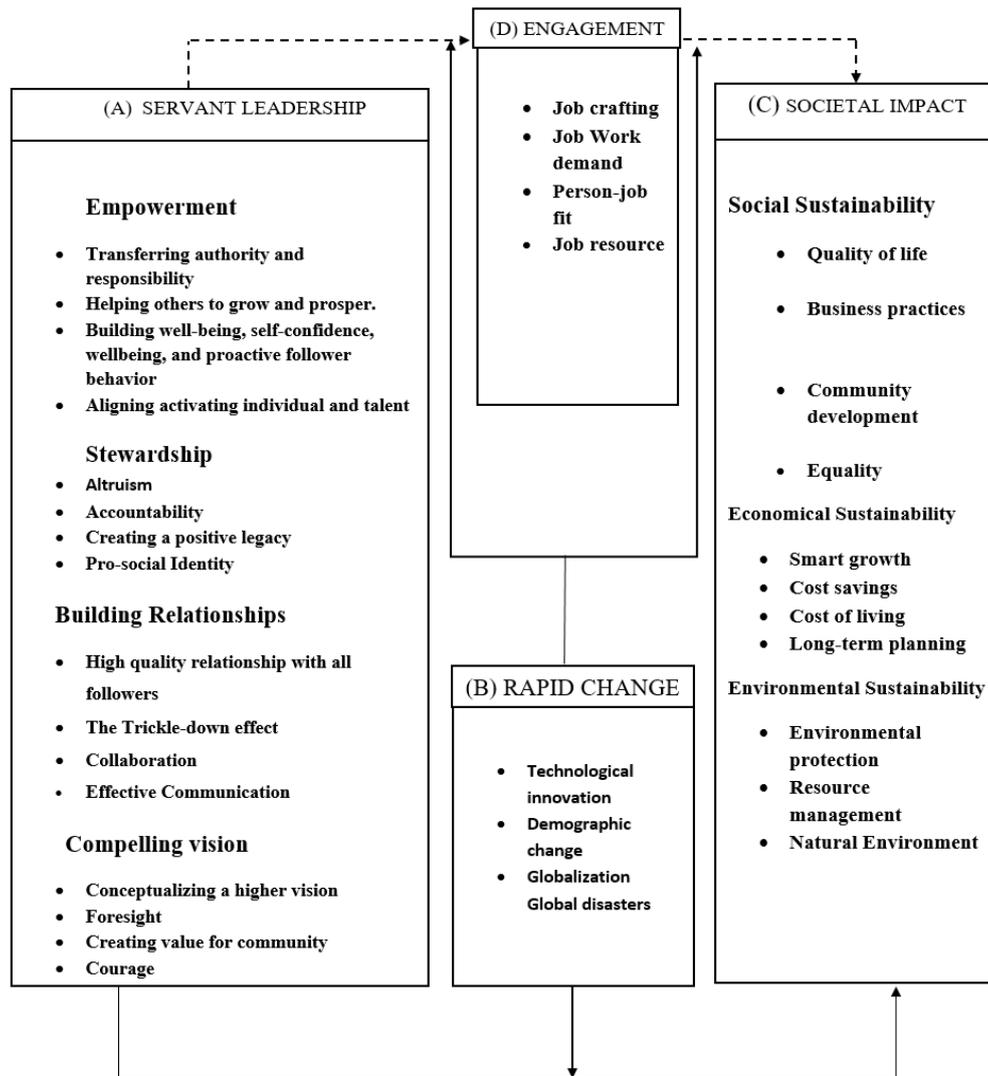


Figure 1. showing the conceptual framework

Adopted from: Source (own creation)

7.1 Servant Leadership and Societal Impact

The servant leadership concept is integral in facilitating societal impact, which is one of its main outcomes. In particular, the servant leadership process relies on service to workers to influence the society (Andersen, 2018). The goals and process of servant leadership is expounded through the definition provided by (Eva et al., 2018), which contends that the servant leadership concept is made manifest through the one-on-one prioritization of the followers’ individual needs and interests that are linked to the well-being of others internally within the organization and externally in the larger community. Servant leadership creates positive societal impact through its four competencies: empowerment, stewardship, building relationships and compelling vision. Empowerment involves the transfer of responsibility and authority to followers, thus enabling them to grow and prosper, gain confidence and become proactive as they make decisions that create prioritize the well-being of others and promote positive societal impact. The stewardship component promotes accountability and the creation of a positive legacy and accountability enables leaders to act as stewards of an organization who seek to develop all resources that have been entrusted to them. Building Relationships involves developing high-quality relationships with all followers and thus enabling members of an organization to develop trustful relationship with leaders, colleagues, customers and the community. Compelling vision creates the sustainability mindset by enabling leaders to link past activities with present trends and probable future scenarios, and defocus from the

profit motif to prioritizing the interests of all members. Overall, existing literature demonstrates the existence of a relationship between the competencies of servant leadership and various components of societal impact such as sustainability (Beehner, 2020), resultantly, the study proposes that:

Proposition 1: Embracing Servant Leadership in an organization influences different dimensions of Societal Impact

Despite servant leadership influencing different dimensions of societal impact, it is important to determine the conditions under which the influence occurs and is maintained. Based on the job embeddedness theory, work engagement is one of the reasons why employee stay in organization Huning, Hurt and Frieder (2020), and thus influence the long-term activities and outcomes of an organization. The servant leadership is a holistic leadership approach that ensures followers are engaged in multiple dimensions including the spiritual, ethical, rational and emotional perspectives, and thus ensures that they are empowered to realize their full potential. Organizations accomplish their role through employee; therefore, a group of engaged workers is integral in enabling firms to fulfil their mandate as outlined in the job embeddedness approach. The engaged employee stay long in an organizations and are thus able to assimilate both the short and long-term strategies of an organization, including servant leadership which requires time to be applied and practiced. Generally, contemporary private and public organizations must have engaged workers because engagement often coincides with high levels of task performance and creativity, client satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior. This is accomplished through job crafting, job demand, job resource and job person fit. Overall, servant leadership enhances job embeddedness, which in turn creates engagement, and thus the authors propose that:

Proposition 2: There is correlation between servant leadership and engagement

7.2 The Role of Rapid Change

The world, according to Artuso and Guijt (2020) is evolving at a dizzying speed; therefore, making sense of the rapid changes across the globe is important in determining effective strategies. The ability of organizations, and by extension leaders, to navigate the complex and rapid changes emerging in the environment and adapt to various situations determines their ability to execute strategies and attain the desired goals. Globalization is one the megatrends in the 21st century that is compelling contemporary leaders to navigate through a culturally diverse labor and customer base. Leaders are also required to embrace the rapidly evolving technological changes such as the massive adoption of mobile technology and thus manage the changes associated with such shifts among both customers and followers. Moreover, the world is currently experiencing an intensive demographic change, with the millenials becoming the key decision makers both at the organizational and household level. The external environment is characterized by emerging risks in the form of emerging disasters such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Such situations are determining the role of servant leaders in creating positive social change. In line with the findings of previous researchers that demonstrate the existence of a relationship between rapid change, servant leadership and societal impact, the authors therefore propose that:

Proposition 4: The relationship between servant leadership and societal impact is moderated by Rapid Change

Proposition 5: Rapid change moderates the relationship between servant leadership and societal impact

Proposition 6: The mediated effect of engagement on the relationship between servant leadership and societal impact is moderated by Rapid

VIII. CONCLUSION

This research purposed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the servant leadership construct in the context of positive societal impact by reviewing existing conceptual, empirical and theoretical literature. The servant leadership construct is an appropriate leadership approach for creating positive societal impact in a rapidly changing business environment because it promotes work engagement through empowerment, building relationships, stewardship and creating a compelling vision. Overall, the paper argues that servant leadership creates positive societal impact by re-orienting the emphasis of organizations from increasing shareholder value and maximizing profits to prioritizing the interests of all stakeholders.

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