

Servant Leadership and Constructive Development Theory: How Servant Leaders Make Meaning of Service

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Abstract

A connection between servant leadership and constructive developmental theory is proposed. A theoretical framework is offered that examines the subject and object relationship for servant leaders at progressive stages of meaning making, showing how the way leaders make meaning of service evolves with their constructive development. The framework also proposes a threshold on the ability to adopt servant leadership. This understanding suggests that leadership educators who wish to promote servant leadership should first focus their energies on helping younger students reach the developmental stage required for servant leadership.

Introduction

Servant leaders are those who view themselves first as servants, putting the needs of others before their own, making a deliberate choice to serve others (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). This approach to leadership has been described as “a long-term, transformational approach to life and work, in essence, a way of being” (Spears, 1995, p. 4). Despite more than 40 years since it was introduced to the field of leadership by Robert Greenleaf (1970), servant leadership has experienced a resurgence of interest in the academic literature recently. This renewed interest has included the introduction of several new constructs and instruments for measuring servant leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Linden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2009; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008).

Despite the attention servant literature has received, little has been done to explore the developmental process of servant leadership. Such an exploration is key to integrating servant leadership into leadership curriculum. This article attempts to understand the development of servant leadership through the lens of an established developmental theory – constructive developmental theory. It is

intended that proposing a progression in the way servant leaders make meaning of service will provide insight into how servant leadership should be presented and taught, particularly to younger leaders.

Literature Review

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership was first introduced into the leadership field by Robert Greenleaf (1970). However, Greenleaf's writings were mostly narrative in form and lacked an operational definition of servant leadership. Since that time several authors have attempted to define and refine the attributes of servant leadership. Graham (1991) described servant leadership as the most moral form of charismatic leadership and argued that the elements consisted of humility, relational power, autonomy, moral development of followers, and emulation of the leader's orientation toward service. Spears (1995) saw servant leadership not as a sub-theory, but as a unique theory of leadership itself consisting of 10 attributes: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. These elements were drawn largely from a review of Greenleaf's writings rather than from any empirical research.

Others too have offered definitions of servant leadership drawn from the conceptual literature on the topic. Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) proposed a five factor model comprised of vision, influence, credibility, trust, and service. Interestingly, they also proposed a developmental understanding of servant leadership. The developmental theory proposed, however, related exclusively to servant leadership and did not rely upon or correlate with any established cognitive or developmental model.

More recent work on servant leadership has focused on developing instruments for the measurement of servant leadership. Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) research empirically tested 11 elements drawn from the writings of Greenleaf (1970) and others. Their research yielded five elements of servant leadership including altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship.

Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008) used both qualitative and quantitative studies to develop a six-dimension measure of servant leadership. Those dimensions are voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality, and transforming influence. They

asserted that their model of servant leadership extended prior work on servant leadership by emphasizing service, followers, and moral-spiritual dimensions. Linden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) reviewed existing taxonomies of servant leaders, and developed an instrument using nine dimensions: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, relationships, and servanthood. Their research found that servant leadership made a unique contribution beyond transformational leadership and LMX to community citizenship behaviors, in-role performance, and organizational commitment.

Consistent across all of these constructs is some element of self-perception as a servant. This approach is consistent with prior work on the topic. Spears (1995) described servant leadership as a transformational approach to life and work, a way of being. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) have proposed that the distinctive characteristic of a servant leader is his or her intent and self concept. They suggest that the action of a servant leader may emanate from their self concept as a moral, altruistic person. They also acknowledge, however, that many unanswered research questions remain, including the precursors of servant leadership, and whether certain types of people more likely to become servant leaders. Understanding servant leadership as an orientation or way of being is the first hint of a connection between servant leadership and a leader's stage of constructive development. If servant leadership is connected to identity, how does a servant leader's identity develop? The current paper attempts to explore that question by drawing on an established theory of human development. This paper proposes that a servant leader's stage of constructive development shapes the way a leader understands and makes meaning of service.

Constructive Development

Building on the theory of constructivism (the idea that "reality" is constructed by the individual); Kegan (1982) proposed that the method by which individuals construct reality develops or evolves over time. He asserted that this evolution occurs as the relationship between subject and object changes, allowing individuals to process their surroundings and experiences in new ways. Kegan used the term *subject* to refer to that from which the individual cannot differentiate him or herself. He sometimes referred to an individual as embedded in that to which they are subject. Because the individual cannot differentiate self from subject, the subject also serves as the framework through which the individual makes meaning of experiences (Kegan, 1982, 1994). For example, a young child cannot separate herself from her immediate needs and feelings. In this way, she is embedded or subject to her needs.

The term *object* is used by Kegan to describe that which has been differentiated from the self, and which therefore can be treated as *other*. An individual who sees a concept as other is able to think critically about it, and is aware of personal choices regarding it. Thus, when a child is able to hold her needs as object, she is able to differentiate between the self and her immediate needs or feelings. What was subject has now become object.

Central to Kegan's theory of constructive development is the idea that the evolution in the subject and object relationship occurs in five measurable stages. The characteristics of each stage are defined by the shift that has occurred, moving the former subject (source out of which meaning is made) into the realm of object (ideas about which the individual can think critically). This change in the subject and object relationship is brought about by life events, crises, or other precipitating events. (Kegan, 1982, 1994)

In other words, what was formerly the framework out of which meaning was constructed becomes separate from the self, and the individual is now capable of thinking critically about it.

From the relationship between the particular subjects and objects in transition, Kegan is able to describe the outlook and common characteristics typical in each developmental stage (see Table 1). In Stage 1 (Impulsive Balance) the child has differentiated him- or herself from reflexes, but is unable to differentiate between his or her perceptions and reality. In other words, if the perception of something changes, the object itself is understood to have changed. (Kegan, 1982, 1994)

The shift to Stage 2 (Imperial Balance) usually occurs between the ages of five and seven years of age. Stage 2 is characterized by the emergence of a self-concept and a private world. As the child is able to separate from perceptions and immediate needs, the child develops an awareness that he or she has something to do with what happens. As the self-concept develops, so too does a conscience together with guilt. Not yet able to see their needs as object, others are seen through the needs of the perceiver, and thus others may be evaluated according to their ability to meet those needs. (Kegan, 1982, 1994)

Table 1: Stages of Constructive Development

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>
1 – Impulsive Balance	Perceptions, immediate needs, feelings	Reflexes
2 – Imperial Balance	Personal goals and agendas	Perceptions, immediate needs, feelings
3 – Interpersonal Balance	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations	Personal goals and agendas
4 – Institutional Balance	Personal standards and value system	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations
5 – Interindividual Balance	Interpenetration of systems	Personal standards and value system

Portions of this table are adapted from Kuhnert and Lewis (1987), with additional information from Kegan (1982).

With the emergence of Stage 3 (Interpersonal Balance), the individual moves from “being” a need to “having” a need. This emergence from embeddedness in personal goals and agendas allows the coordination of multiple perspectives and the capacity for subjectivity. This allows the development of mutuality, empathy, and reciprocal social obligation. While there is an emergence of self, that self is embedded in the “social matrix” (Kegan, 1982, p. 96). It now becomes possible to experience feelings as such, rather than as negotiations for the meeting of needs. An individual in Stage 3 may not, however, experience or express anger because of its inherent threat to the social matrix out of which the individual forms self-identity. Likewise, conflict results in the individual feeling “torn” since it presents a challenge to the identity rooted in others. (Kegan, 1982, 1994)

Stage 4 (Institutional Balance) brings the emergence of a true sense of self-authored identity. The interpersonal connections that defined the self in Stage 3 are now able to be reflected upon, and the individual is able to create a consistent self-system. Where knowing others once meant identity was formed through them, now knowing others means the self image is reinforced through those relationships. The self becomes a system or organization of personal standards and values that create consistency across circumstances, including an internally

constructed system for judging and resolving conflict. The creation of this self-system can result, at times, in an ideological orientation. (Kegan, 1982, 1994)

In the final Stage 5, reached by very few people, the self system or organization becomes subject, and the individual is no longer synonymous with the ideological self-system. The distinction between self and ideology allows for a change in how criticism is received, since a critique of the organization or self-system is no longer a critique of the self. There emerges an ability to move between internal psychic systems, and an ability to recognize not just the existence but the validity of multiple perspectives. At this stage the individual may now experience others as individuals, rather than sources of identity or affirmation, and is thus now able to move beyond the independence of Stage 4 to interdependence. Inner emotional conflict is now tolerable and seen as part of the diversity of perspectives that can be valid. (Kegan, 1982, 1994)

While the stages occur in a sequential order, the later stages are not linked to chronological age, nor will all adults necessarily reach the later stages. In fact, research indicates that only 20-30% of adults will reach Stage 4 (Eriksen, 2006). For reasons that will be discussed hereinafter, Stages 3 through 5 are most relevant to the current theory. Accordingly, Stages 0 through 2 will not be examined in detail. Furthermore, Kegan's examination of the transitions between stages is also beyond the scope of this paper. For a complete discussion of both, see Kegan (1982, 1994).

Constructive Development and Servant Leadership

The academic literature on servant leadership to this point has not explored the question of servant leader development using an existing developmental theory. Constructive developmental theory was chosen for this exploration because of its focus on the fundamental process whereby individuals make meaning. Such a focus seemed consistent with servant leadership theory which is thought to emanate from the leader's self concept (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

The idea of a connection between the leader's stage of constructive development and the style of leadership displayed was suggested by Kegan himself shortly after introducing constructive developmental theory (Kegan & Lahey, 1984). Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) also proposed a connection between the leader's developmental stage and chosen leadership style. Reasoning that the leader's choice between transactional and transformational leadership would be constrained by the leader's stage of constructive development, they argued that a leader at Stage 2 would be developmentally incapable of engaging in transformational leadership practices by virtue of their method of making

meaning. (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). While instructive on the current issue, their analysis was limited to the difference between transactional and transformational leadership. The present paper extends this consideration of the relationship between constructive development and leadership style, focusing exclusively on servant leadership.

One of the unique contributions of this paper is its orientation toward the question of servant leadership and constructive development. While others have examined the relationship between servant leadership and constructive development (Bugenhagen, 2006), this paper approaches that relationship by focusing on the way leaders make meaning of service. That orientation is one of the unique contributions of this work.

Understanding how a leader makes sense of service requires a systematic look at the subject and object relationship for that leader. A leader who chooses to serve first has made a very specific choice about how to orient the self in relation to others. This choice to orient the self as servant, like any other choice regarding relationships, is connected to the individual's method of meaning making. From an examination of the subject and object relationship found in each stage of development, we can make predictions about the likely meaning of service for a leader at that stage. However, before we can proceed to the effect of constructive development we must first address the question of capacity for servant leadership.

The Capacity for Servant Leadership

The first question in considering the relationship between constructive development and servant leadership is that of capacity. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) proposed that a leader operating at Stage 2 would be incapable of transformational leadership. Using a similar logic, it can be argued that a developmental threshold exists for servant leadership. As discussed above, individuals operating out of Stage 3 are, for the first time, able to exercise empathy. Not until this stage can a leader fully experience mutuality and coordinate multiple perspectives. Instead, individuals operating in Stage 2 are embedded in their own personal goals and agendas.

The state of being embedded in one's own personal goals and agendas would seem to be incompatible with the definition of servant leadership. This incompatibility can be seen in multiple definitions of servant leadership. According to Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008), servant leaders practice voluntary subordination that is attending to the legitimate needs of others. This attribute is contrasted by Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora with "self-seeking leaders who serve others only when it is convenient or personally advantageous" (p. 406).

A similar attribute is described by Linden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008). They asserted servant leaders work to put subordinates first. This author asserts that voluntary subordination would be difficult for an individual who was not yet able to reflect on his or her personal goals and agendas.

Similarly, in Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) construct, servant leaders demonstrate altruistic calling and organizational stewardship. Both of these attributes concern the well-being of others and thus would require an ability to recognize the needs of others and the needs of the community, separate and apart from the needs of the leader. For these reasons, it is proposed that servant leadership is not possible until individuals have reached the third order of constructive development.

Proposition 1: Servant leadership is not possible until the third order of constructive development.

Once an individual has developed the capacity to recognize and coordinate the perspectives of others, and once such a person has chosen to be a servant leader, the question remains, "How does such a person make meaning of service?" Answering this question requires us to return to the various definitions of servant leadership. According to Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008), servant leaders practice voluntary subordination. Linden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson (2008) suggested that servant leaders work to put subordinates first. Hints regarding how servant leaders make meaning of this self-subordination can be found in an examination of the subject and object relationship.

As explained above, as individuals progress through each stage of constructive development, what was formerly subject to them becomes object. When it was subject they were embedded in it and could not differentiate themselves from it, but once it is object they can reflect upon it in new ways (Kegan, 1982, 1994). This progression of subject to object is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Progression of Subject and Object Relationship

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>
1 – Impulsive Balance	Perceptions, immediate needs, feelings	Reflexes
2 – Imperial Balance	Personal goals and agendas	Perceptions, immediate needs, feelings
3 – Interpersonal Balance	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations	Personal goals and agendas
4 – Institutional Balance	Personal standards and value system	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations
5 – Interindividual Balance	Interpenetration of systems	Personal standards and value system

Portions of this table are adapted from Kuhnert and Lewis (1987), with additional information from Kegan (1982).

From this understanding, we can draw two propositions that will guide our consideration of meaning making and servant leadership. First, when individuals choose to be servant leaders, they can only subordinate that part of the self which they hold as object. In other words, the process of subordinating the self is voluntary, and thus requires them be able to reflect on what they are subordinating. For example, consider the child discussed earlier. Since she is embedded or subject to her own needs and feelings, she cannot reflect critically on them. Similarly, we can argue that, because she sees self and needs as one, she would not be able to subordinate her personal needs in order to serve the needs of others. Thus, we can postulate that when individuals choose to be servant leaders, they will only be able to subordinate that part of the self which they hold as object.

Proposition 2: When individuals choose to be servant leaders, they can only subordinate that part of the self which they hold as “object.”

Similarly, the other side of the subject and object balance can give us clues into how a servant leader makes meaning of service. While the servant leader is subordinating the portion of their self they hold as object, they remain embedded in that to which they are subject. This state of embeddedness means the leader will

not be able to question or reflect upon that to which he or she is subject. Kegan (1982, 1994) explained that what is subject for an individual serves as the framework through which they make meaning of experiences. We can therefore propose that the context of service defined by servant leaders will be that in which they are embedded as subject. Put another way, when servant leaders make meaning of service, their embeddedness defines their context for service.

Proposition 3: When servant leaders define service, the context for that definition will be that to which the leader is “subject.”

Using these principles as guidelines, we can now begin to build a series of propositions concerning how servant leaders will define service in each stage of constructive development.

Servant Leadership in the Third Order

To understand how a servant leader in the third order of constructive development would make meaning of service, we must begin with the subject and object balance for this stage. A leader in this stage has developed the ability to hold as object his or her personal goals and agenda, and is able to think critically about them. Thus a leader in this stage who is subordinating the self would likely subordinate his or her personal needs, goals, and ambitions in order to be in service.

However, since a leader in the third order of constructive development is embedded in interpersonal connections and mutual obligations, he or she would not be subordinating those relationships to be in service. Rather, service will likely be lived out in that context since the leader is not able to think critically about those interpersonal obligations (see Table 3).

Table 3: The Third Order of Constructive Development

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>
3 – Interpersonal Balance	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations	Personal goals and agendas

Thus we can propose that a servant leader in the third order of constructive development will understand service as the subordination of personal goals and agendas in order to serve others through interpersonal connections. In such a stance we can see the leader subordinating that which is held object (personal

goals), and exercising service in the context of that which is subject (interpersonal connections).

Proposition 4: A servant leader in the third order of constructive development will understand service as the subordination of personal goals and agendas in order to serve others through interpersonal connections.

Servant Leadership in the Fourth Order

Again, we begin our examination of how a servant leader would make meaning of service in the fourth order by examining the subject and object balance. An individual in this stage of constructive development has learned to hold interpersonal connections and obligations as object. As such, he or she can now think critically about those obligations, and is no longer bound by them as once was the case. Instead, the person in this stage of constructive development is held subject by his or her personal standards and value systems. This state of embeddedness means he or she cannot examine his or her personal value system critically (see Table 4.)

Table 4: The Fourth Order of Constructive Development

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>
4 – Institutional Balance	Personal standards and value system	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations

Thus, applying Propositions 2 and 3, we can propose that a servant leader in the fourth order of constructive development will understand service as the subordination of interpersonal obligations in order to be in service of a higher ideal. We can see in such a stance that the leader is subordinating the portion of the self which is held object (interpersonal obligations) and exercising service in the context of that which is subject (personal value system).

Proposition 5: A servant leader in the fourth order of constructive development will understand service as the subordination of interpersonal obligations in order to be in service of a higher ideal.

Servant Leadership in the Fifth Order

In the fifth order, a shift has occurred making it possible for the leader to see personal values as object and capable of change and critical thought. The new subject in which the individual is embedded is the interpenetration of systems. This is admittedly a difficult concept to grasp since, by definition, all humans view themselves as subject to the interpenetration of systems. However, the basic notion is that an individual who enters Stage 5 no longer sees the world as a collection of institutions engaged in either good or bad actions, but rather sees a complex network of individuals engaged in actions that could be either good or bad depending on one's perspective. In this way the individual is no longer embedded in a personal value system, but instead in a larger matrix incorporating all persons (see Table 5).

Table 5: The Fifth Order of Constructive Development

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>
5 – Interindividual Balance	Interpenetration of systems	Personal standards and value system

Thus, it is proposed that a servant leader in the fifth order of constructive development will understand service as the subordination of a personal value system in order to address the interpenetration of systems. We can see in this stance that the leader is subordinating that which is held object (personal value system), and exercising service in the context of that which is subject (interpenetration of systems).

Proposition 6: A servant leader in the fifth order of constructive development will understand service as the subordination of a personal value system in order to address the interpenetration of systems.

Taken in total, this approach shows a progression in the definition of service as servant leaders progress through the stages of constructive development (see Table 6). To illustrate that progression, Table 6 shows the stages of constructive development, together with the proposed definitions of service for each stage.

Table 6: Stages of Constructive Development and Definitions of Service

<i>Stage of Constructive Development</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Definition of Service</i>
2 – Imperial Balance	Personal goals and agendas	Perceptions, immediate needs, feelings	Not Applicable
3 – Interpersonal Balance	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations	Personal goals and agendas	The subordination of personal goals and agendas in order to serve others through interpersonal connections
4 – Institutional Balance	Personal standards and value system	Interpersonal connections, mutual obligations	The subordination of interpersonal obligations in order to be in service of a higher ideal
5 – Interindividual Balance	Interpenetration of systems	Personal standards and value system	The subordination of a personal value system in order to address the interpenetration of systems

Support for This Approach

While this approach is entirely theoretical, there is some prior empirical evidence that seems to provide support for at least the final proposition. That evidence is found in the related field of spirituality and leadership, and concerns human rights leaders.

To understand how internationally renowned human rights leaders responded in exceptional ways to challenging circumstances, Parameshwar (2005) conducted a phenomenological study looking at the autobiographies of ten such leaders. The sample included leaders such as Viktor Frankl, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother

Teresa. While we cannot be certain that each of these leaders was both a servant leader and operating at the fifth order of constructive development, examination of Parameshwar's findings is useful here nonetheless.

The overarching theme emerging from each of their stories was characterized by Parameshwar as "ego-transcendence" (Parameshwar, 2005). Parameshwar described how leaders such as Gandhi transcended ego to produce an extraordinary response in the midst of a challenging time. In describing the experience of ego-transcendence, Parameshwar's description of the human rights leaders' orientation toward institutions is particularly telling for the present purposes. Parameshwar writes, "In responding to challenging circumstances, the leaders uncover what they perceive as the ways in which the human spirit is held hostage within the thick nexuses among institutional structures" (p. 697). We can see in Parameshwar's definition of service an approach that is consistent with the subject/object relationship in the fifth order. The leaders held their personal values as object (transcending ego) in order to address the interpenetration of systems (the subject in which they were embedded). While certainly not proof of the propositions presented here, this similarity provides at least preliminary support for the notion that constructive development offers clues to how servant leaders make meaning of service.

Meaning Making and the Practice of Servant Leadership

It should be noted that the proposals offered above concern the way servant leaders make meaning, not how they might self-describe their service. Many people claim to be servant leaders, and they describe many motivations for doing so. The complex mixture of religious connotation, corporate vocabulary, and social desirability make it unlikely that the relationship between constructive development and servant leadership will be ascertainable simply through self reporting. Much as an individual's stage of constructive development cannot be accurately gauged by simply asking the individual to self report, neither will a self report of servant leadership give a reliable indication of the way a particular leader makes meaning of that term. In practice, this means that an individual may say he or she is a servant leader because it is the right thing to do, or because they are serving a divine being. The framework offered herein does not question the sincerity of such self reported motivations. However, it does propose that the way a leader understands and operationalizes service will be a product of his or her stage of constructive development.

Similarly, while the understanding of servant leadership is proposed to evolve, the specific actions of a servant leader do not necessarily indicate the level of constructive development. A single expression of servant leadership (e.g.

organizing a workplace charitable giving program) could be an expression of helping others, an expression of the leader's value system, or an attempt to address the interpenetration of systems. While the action remains the same, the motivation and meaning ascribed to the act differs greatly. Through this example we can see that the above propositions concern the leader's understanding of service, but they do not necessarily predict behavior. How a leader makes meaning of service will certainly inform how he or she lives out servant leadership, but the expressions that emerge from each stage will not be mutually exclusive.

It should also be noted that nothing about the leader's stage of constructive development is hypothesized to compel servant leadership. Rather it is proposed that servant leadership becomes possible, not inevitable, through evolution in the leader's constructive development. Once servant leadership is chosen as an orientation, service is defined in ways consistent with that leader's constructive development. In other words, constructive development affects servant leadership but does not cause servant leadership.

Implications

While recent writing on servant leadership has focused on identifying and defining the elements of the construct, no work has yet conceptualized the connection between servant leadership and the constructive developmental process. The approach to servant leadership proposed herein produces a three dimensional picture of servant leadership, with definitions of service evolving as leaders advance in their constructive development. Such an approach has profound implications for leadership educators who wish to instill servant leadership as a preferred model of leadership.

The first implication for educators is a challenge to the notion that servant leadership can be taught to young leaders who have not yet reached the third stage of constructive development. While such leaders can certainly be taught that servant leadership is a desirable societal norm, the proposals offered herein question whether the adoption of those norms genuinely constitutes servant leadership. Since acting as a servant leader requires the subordination of personal goals and agendas, it would not appear that true servant leadership would be possible until students have reached the third order of meaning making.

This conclusion has important implications for leadership educators teaching servant leadership to young leaders. Since the adoption of servant leadership seems to require a capacity to make meaning in the third order, leadership

educators should focus less on instilling servant leadership in young leaders, and instead focus their energies on helping students reach the third order. The strategies for doing the latter may resemble the former, but the overall objective differs. Leadership development efforts aimed at servant leadership among young leaders should start not by instilling the values of service, but by using servant leadership as a way of helping students see beyond their own goals and agendas. In other words, service to others can be used by leadership educators as a way to nudge those students who are beginning to transition from the second stage of meaning making to the third. In doing so, teaching about servant leadership may be an effective tool in helping young leaders make the important transition between the second and third order of meaning making.

Second, these propositions have implications for how servant leadership is promoted for all leaders, regardless of age. Since crises or life events precipitate the transition between stages of constructive development, programs that promote servant leadership should place primary focus on supporting leaders through that transition to both establish and expand capacity for servant leadership. A fundamental premise of constructive developmental theory is that greater organizational and societal complexity requires leaders able to make meaning at higher levels. When the societal demands exceed the leader's capacity to make meaning, leaders are left feeling in over our heads (Kegan, 1994). Thus the challenge for those who wish to advance servant leadership is not only getting leaders to adopt such a posture, but assuring that the way they make meaning of service does not limit their ability to respond to their circumstances. For leadership educators this means attending not only to the promotion of servant leadership, but to helping servant leaders advance in the way they make meaning of service.

Lastly, this theory has profound implications for practitioners of servant leadership. If the civil rights leaders studied by Parameshwar (2005) were in fact servant leaders, their exceptional responses provide a compelling argument for both the power of servant leadership and the need for servant leaders who operate out of higher orders of constructive development. Kegan (1994) himself postulated that the constructive development of many contemporary adults may be insufficient for the complexity of modern society. If in fact servant leadership holds potential for powerful societal change, advancing the constructive development of servant leaders would seem to have the power to amplify that effect.

Future Research

The proposals offered above present several possibilities for future research. In addition to empirical testing of the propositions themselves, research needs to be conducted on the development of servant leadership. Given the understanding of servant leadership described herein, what contributes to the adoption of servant leadership once the leader has the requisite capacity? What types of support or experiences assist servant leaders in the evolution of their constructive development? Further examination of these questions would assist both educators and practitioners in understanding and promoting servant leadership.

Conclusion

The primary contribution made by this paper is a framework for understanding how servant leaders make meaning of service. Through examination of the subject and object relationship, various understandings of service emerge from the leader's method of meaning making. It is hoped that this framework can serve as the basis for future research integrating servant leadership and constructive development. This research can also enhance the understanding of how servant leaders develop, assisting both educators and practitioners of servant leadership.

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