**Chapter 9**

**Authentic Leadership**

**Description**

Authentic leadership represents one of the newest areas of leadership research. It focuses on whether leadership is genuine and “real.” As the title of this approach implies, authentic leadership is about the *authenticity* of leaders and their leadership. Unlike many of the theories that we have discussed in this book, authentic leadership is still in the formative phase of development. As a result, authentic leadership needs to be considered more tentatively: It is likely to change as new research about the theory is published.

In recent times, upheavals in society have energized a tremendous demand for authentic leadership. The destruction on 9/11, corporate scandals at companies like WorldCom and Enron, and massive failures in the banking industry have all created fear and uncertainty. People feel apprehensive and insecure about what is going on around them, and as a result, they long for bona fide leadership they can trust and for leaders who are honest and good. People’s demands for trustworthy leadership make the study of authentic leadership timely and worthwhile.

In addition to the public’s interest, authentic leadership has been intriguing to researchers: It was identified earlier in transformational leadership research but never fully articulated (Bass, 1990; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Howell & Avolio, 1993). Furthermore, practitioners had developed approaches to authentic leadership that were not evidence based, and so needed further clarification and testing. In attempts to more fully explore authentic leadership, researchers set out to identify the parameters of authentic leadership and more clearly conceptualize it, efforts that continue today.

Authentic Leadership

Character and Purpose

**Authentic Leadership Defined**

On the surface, authentic leadership appears easy to define. In actuality, it is a complex process that is difficult to characterize. Among leadership scholars, there is no single accepted definition of authentic leadership. Instead, there are multiple definitions, each written from a different viewpoint and with a different emphasis (Chan, 2005).

One of those viewpoints is the *intrapersonal* perspective, which focuses closely on the leader and what goes on within the leader. It incorporates the leader’s self-knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept. In Shamir and Eilam’s (2005) description of the intrapersonal approach, they suggest that authentic leaders exhibit genuine leadership, lead from conviction, and are originals, not copies. This perspective emphasizes a leader’s life experiences and the meaning he or she attaches to those experiences as being critical to the development of the authentic leader.

A second way of defining authentic leadership is as an *interpersonal* process. This perspective outlines authentic leadership as relational, created by leaders and followers together (Eagly, 2005). It results not from the leader’s efforts alone, but also from the response of followers. Authenticity emerges from the interactions between leaders and followers. It is a reciprocal process because leaders affect followers and followers affect leaders.

Finally, authentic leadership can be defined from a *developmental* perspective, which is exemplified in the work of Avolio and his associates (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). This perspective, which underpins the approaches to authentic leadership discussed in the following section, views authentic leadership as something that can be nurtured in a leader, rather than as a fixed trait. Authentic leadership develops in people over a lifetime and can be triggered by major life events, such as a severe illness or a new career.

Taking a developmental approach, Walumbwa et al. (2008) conceptualized authentic leadership as a pattern of leader behavior that develops from and is grounded in the leader’s positive psychological qualities and strong ethics. They suggest that authentic leadership is composed of four distinct but related components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Over a lifetime, authentic leaders learn and develop each of these four types of behavior.

Building Authenticity

Vital Leadership

**Approaches to Authentic Leadership**

Formulations about authentic leadership can be differentiated into two areas: (1) the practical approach, which evolved from real-life examples and training and development literature; and (2) the theoretical approach, which is based on findings from social science research. Both approaches offer interesting insights about the complex process of authentic leadership.

**Practical Approach**

Books and programs about authentic leadership are popular today; people are interested in the basics of this type of leadership. Specifically, they want to know the “how to” steps to become an authentic leader. In this section, we will discuss Bill George’s authentic leadership approach (2003).

**Bill George’s Authentic Leadership Approach.**

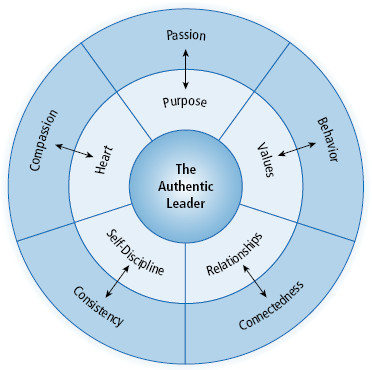
The authentic leadership approach developed by George (2003; George & Sims, 2007) focuses on the characteristics of authentic leaders. George describes, in a practical way, the essential qualities of authentic leadership and how individuals can develop these qualities if they want to become authentic leaders.

Based on his experience as a corporate executive and through interviews with a diverse sample of 125 successful leaders, George found that authentic leaders have a genuine desire to serve others, they know themselves, and they feel free to lead from their core values. Specifically, authentic leaders demonstrate five basic characteristics: (1) They understand their purpose, (2) they have strong values about the right thing to do, (3) they establish trusting relationships with others, (4) they demonstrate self-discipline and act on their values, and (5) they are passionate about their mission (i.e., act from their heart) ([Figure 9.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1971); George, 2003).

[Figure 9.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1971) illustrates five dimensions of authentic leadership identified by George: purpose, values, relationships, self-discipline, and heart. The figure also illustrates each of the related characteristics—passion, behavior, connectedness, consistency, and compassion—that individuals need to develop to become authentic leaders.

In his interviews, George found that authentic leaders have a real sense of *purpose.* They know what they are about and where they are going. In addition to knowing their purpose, authentic leaders are inspired and intrinsically motivated about their goals. They are *passionate* individuals who have a deep-seated interest in what they are doing and truly care about their work.

The Authentic Leader



A good example of an authentic leader who exhibited passion about his goals was Terry Fox, a cancer survivor, whose leg was amputated after it was overcome by bone cancer. Using a special leg prosthesis, Terry attempted to run across Canada, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, to raise awareness and money for cancer research. Although he died before he finished his run, his courage and passion affected the lives of millions of people. He also accomplished his goals to increase cancer awareness and to raise money for cancer research. Today, the Terry Fox Foundation is going strong and has raised more than $400 million (Canadian) for cancer research ([www.terryfox.org](http://www.terryfox.org/)). Of the dimensions and characteristics in [Figure 9.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1971), Terry Fox clearly demonstrated purpose and passion in his leadership.

Figure 9.1 Authentic Leadership Characteristics

SOURCE: From Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value by Bill George, copyright © 2003. Reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Authentic leaders understand their own *values* and *behave* toward others based on these values. Stated another way, George suggests that authentic leaders know their “True North.” They have a clear idea of who they are, where they are going, and what the right thing is to do. When tested in difficult situations, authentic leaders do not compromise their values, but rather use those situations to strengthen their values.

An example of a leader with a strong set of values is Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nelson Mandela. Mandela was a deeply moral man with a strong conscience. While fighting to abolish apartheid in South Africa, he was unyielding in his pursuit of justice and equality for all. When he was in prison and offered early release in exchange for denouncing his viewpoint, he chose to remain incarcerated rather than compromise his position. Nelson Mandela knew who he was at his core. He knew his values, and his leadership reflected those values.

A third characteristic of authentic leadership in the George approach is strong *relationships.* Authentic leaders have the capacity to open themselves up and establish a *connection* with others. They are willing to share their own story with others and listen to others’ stories. Through mutual disclosure, leaders and followers develop a sense of trust and closeness.

George argued that people today want to have access to their leaders and they want their leaders to be open with them. In a sense, people are asking leaders to soften the boundary around their leadership role and to be more transparent. People want to have a trusting relationship with their leaders. In exchange, people are willing to give leaders greater loyalty and commitment.

As we discussed in [Chapter 7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1631.xhtml) (leader–member exchange theory), effective leader–follower relationships are marked by high-quality communication in which leaders and followers demonstrate a high degree of mutual trust, respect, and obligation toward each other. Leaders and followers are tied together in productive ways that go beyond the stereotypical leader–follower relationship. This results in strong leader–member relationships, greater understanding, and higher productivity.

*Self-discipline* is another dimension of authentic leadership, and is the quality that helps leaders to reach their goals. Self-discipline gives leaders focus and determination. When leaders establish objectives and standards of excellence, self-discipline helps them to reach these goals and to keep everyone accountable. Furthermore, self-discipline gives authentic leaders the energy to carry out their work in accordance with their values.

Human Rights Leadership

Like long-distance runners, authentic leaders with self-discipline are able to stay focused on their goals. They are able to listen to their inner compass and can discipline themselves to move forward, even in challenging circumstances. In stressful times, self-discipline allows authentic leaders to remain cool, calm, and *consistent.* Because disciplined leaders are predictable in their behavior, other people know what to expect and find it easier to communicate with them. When the leader is self-directed and “on course,” it gives other people a sense of security.

Last, the George approach identifies *compassion* and *heart* as important aspects of authentic leadership. Compassion refers to being sensitive to the plight of others, opening one’s self to others, and being willing to help them. George (2003, p. 40) argued that as leaders develop compassion, they learn to be authentic. Leaders can develop compassion by getting to know others’ life stories, doing community service projects, being involved with other racial or ethnic groups, or traveling to developing countries (George, 2003). These activities increase the leader’s sensitivity to other cultures, backgrounds, and living situations.

In summary, George’s authentic leadership approach highlights five important features of authentic leaders. Collectively, these features provide a practical picture of what people need to do to become authentic in their leadership. Authentic leadership is a lifelong developmental process, which is formed and informed by each individual’s life story.

**Theoretical Approach**

Although still in its initial stages of development, a theory of authentic leadership is emerging in social science literature. In this section, we identify the basic components of authentic leadership and describe how these components are related to one another.

**Background to the Theoretical Approach.**

Although people’s interest in “authenticity” is probably timeless, research on authentic leadership is very recent, with the first article appearing in 2003. The primary catalyst for this research was a leadership summit at the University of Nebraska. This summit was sponsored by the Gallup Leadership Institute, and focused on the nature of authentic leadership and its development. From the summit, two sets of publications emerged: (1) a special issue of *Leadership Quarterly* in the summer of 2005, and (2) *Monographs in Leadership and Management,* titled “Authentic Leadership Theory and Process: Origins, Effects and Development,” also published in 2005. Prior to the summit, Luthans and Avolio (2003) published an article on authentic leadership development and positive organizational scholarship. The article also helped to ignite this area of research.

Authenticity and Brand

Interest in authentic leadership increased during a time in which there was a great deal of societal upheaval and instability in the United States. The attacks of 9/11, widespread corporate corruption, and a troubled economy all created a sense of uncertainty and anxiety in people about leadership. Widespread unethical and ineffective leadership necessitated the need for more humane, constructive leadership that served the common good (Fry & Whittington, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

In addition, researchers felt the need to extend the work of Bass (1990) and Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) regarding the meaning of authentic transformational leadership. There was a need to operationalize the meaning of authentic leadership and create a theoretical framework to explain it. To develop a theory of authentic leadership, researchers drew from the fields of leadership, positive organizational scholarship, and ethics (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005).

A major challenge confronting researchers in developing a theory was to define the construct and identify its characteristics. As we discussed earlier in the chapter, authentic leadership has been defined in multiple ways, with each definition emphasizing a different aspect of the process. For this chapter, we have selected the definition set forth in an article by Walumbwa et al. (2008), who defined authentic leadership as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (p. 94). Although complex, this definition captures the current thinking of scholars regarding the phenomenon of authentic leadership and how it works.

In the research literature, different models have been developed to illustrate the process of authentic leadership. Gardner et al. (2005) created a model that frames authentic leadership around the developmental processes of leader and follower self-awareness and self-regulation. Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005) constructed a multicomponent model that discusses the impact of authenticity on leaders’ and followers’ happiness and well-being. In contrast, Luthans and Avolio (2003) formulated a model that explains authentic leadership as a developmental process. In this chapter, we will present a basic model of authentic leadership that is derived from the research literature that focuses on the core components of authentic leadership. Our discussion will focus on authentic leadership as a process.

Fostering Authenticity

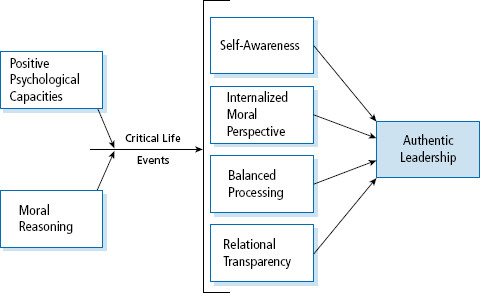
CEOs and Positive Psychology

**Components of Authentic Leadership.**

In an effort to further our understanding of authentic leadership, Walumbwa and associates (2008) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature and interviewed groups of content experts in the field to determine what components constituted authentic leadership and to develop a valid measure of this construct. Their research identified four components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency ([Figure 9.2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1990)). Together, these four components form the foundation for a theory of authentic leadership.

*Self-awareness* refers to the personal insights of the leader. It is not an end in itself but a process in which individuals understand themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses, and the impact they have on others. Self-awareness includes reflecting on your core values, identity, emotions, motives, and goals, and coming to grips with who you really are at the deepest level. In addition, it includes being aware of and trusting your own feelings (Kernis, 2003). When leaders know themselves and have a clear sense of who they are and what they stand for, they have a strong anchor for their decisions and actions (Gardner et al., 2005). Other people see leaders who have greater self-awareness as more authentic.

Figure 9.2 Authentic Leadership



SOURCE: Adapted from Luthans, F., & Avolio, B. J. (2003). Authentic leadership development. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), Positive organizational scholarship (pp. 241–258). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler; and Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B. J., Luthans, F., May, D. R., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2005). “Can you see the real me?” A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. Leadership Quarterly, 16, 343–372.

Authenticity and Identity

*Internalized moral perspective* refers to a self-regulatory process whereby individuals use their internal moral standards and values to guide their behavior rather than allow outside pressures to control them (e.g., group or societal pressure). It is a self-regulatory process because people have control over the extent to which they allow others to influence them. Others see leaders with an internalized moral perspective as authentic because their actions are consistent with their expressed beliefs and morals.

*Balanced processing* is also a self-regulatory behavior. It refers to an individual’s ability to analyze information objectively and explore other people’s opinions before making a decision. It also means avoiding favoritism about certain issues and remaining unbiased. Balanced processing includes soliciting viewpoints from those who disagree with you and fully considering their positions before taking your own action. Leaders with balanced processing are seen as authentic because they are open about their own perspectives, but are also objective in considering others’ perspectives.

*Relational transparency* refers to being open and honest in presenting one’s true self to others. It is self-regulatory because individuals can control their transparency with others. Relational transparency occurs when individuals share their core feelings, motives, and inclinations with others in an appropriate manner (Kernis, 2003). It includes the individuals showing both positive and negative aspects of themselves to others. In short, relational transparency is about communicating openly and being real in relationships with others.

Fundamentally, authentic leadership comprises the above four factors—self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. These factors form the basis for authentic leadership.

**Factors That Influence Authentic Leadership.**

There are other factors such as positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning, and critical life events that influence authentic leadership ([Figure 9.2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1990)).

Leadership from Within

The four key *positive psychological attributes* that have an impact on authentic leadership—confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience—have been drawn from the fields of positive psychology and positive organizational behavior ([Table 9.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2001); Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Positive attributes predispose or enhance a leader’s capacity to develop the components of authentic leadership discussed in the previous section. Each of these attributes has a trait-like and a state-like quality. They are trait-like because they may characterize a relatively fixed aspect of someone’s personality that has been evident throughout his or her life (e.g., extraversion), and they are state-like because, with training or coaching, individuals are capable of developing or changing their characteristics.

SOURCE: Luthans, F., & Avolio, B. J. (2003). Authentic leadership development. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 241–258). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

*Confidence* refers to having self-efficacy—the belief that one has the ability to successfully accomplish a specified task. Leaders who have confidence are more likely to be motivated to succeed, to be persistent when obstacles arise, and to welcome a challenge (Bandura, 1997; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). *Hope* is a positive motivational state based on willpower and goal planning (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Authentic leaders with hope have goals they know can be accomplished; their hope inspires followers to trust them and believe in their goals. *Optimism* refers to the cognitive process of viewing situations from a positive light and having favorable expectations about the future. Leaders with optimism are positive about their capabilities and the outcomes they can achieve. They approach life with a sense of abundance rather than scarcity (Covey, 1990). *Resilience* is the capacity to recover from and adjust to adverse situations. It includes the ability to positively adapt to hardships and suffering. During difficult times, resilient people are able to bounce back from challenging situations and feel strengthened and more resourceful as a result of them (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003).

Authentic Leadership

*Moral reasoning* is another factor that can influence authentic leadership ([Figure 9.2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1990)). It is the capacity to make ethical decisions about issues of right or wrong and good or bad. Developing the capacity for moral reasoning is a lifelong process. Higher levels of moral reasoning make it possible for the authentic leader to make decisions that transcend individual differences and align individuals toward a common goal. They enable leaders to be selfless and make judgments that serve the greater good of the group, organization, or community. Moral reasoning capacity also enables authentic leaders to use this ability to promote justice and achieve what is right for a community.

A final factor related to authentic leadership is *critical life events* ([Figure 9.2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml#s9781483398013.i1990)). Critical events are major events that shape people’s lives. They can be positive events, like receiving an unexpected promotion, having a child, or reading an important book; or they can be negative events, like being diagnosed with cancer, getting a negative year-end evaluation, or having a loved one die. Critical life events act as catalysts for change. Shamir and Eilam (2005) argued that authentic leadership rests heavily on the insights people attach to their life experiences. When leaders tell their life stories, they gain greater self-knowledge, more clarity about who they are, and a better understanding of their role. By understanding their own life experiences, leaders become more authentic.

Critical life events also stimulate growth in individuals and help them become stronger leaders (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). For example, Howard Schultz (founder and CEO of Starbucks) tells a story about when he was little: His father, who was a delivery driver, fell and was hurt on the job. His father did not have health insurance or worker’s compensation. Seeing the problems that resulted from his father’s difficulties, when Schultz built Starbucks he provided comprehensive health insurance for employees who worked as few as 20 hours a week. Schultz’s style of leadership was triggered by his childhood experience.

As the theory of authentic leadership develops further, other antecedent factors that influence the process may be identified. To date, however, it is positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning capacities, and critical life events that have been identified as factors that are influential in a person’s ability to become an authentic leader.

**How Does Authentic Leadership Theory Work?**

In this chapter, we have discussed authentic leadership from a practical and theoretical perspective. Both perspectives describe authentic leadership as a developmental process that forms in leaders over time; however, both perspectives provide different descriptions for how authentic leadership works.

Authenticity

The practical approach provides prescriptions for how to be authentic and how to develop authentic leadership. For example, the George approach (2003) focuses on five characteristics leaders should develop to become authentic leaders. More specifically, George advocates that leaders become more *purposeful, value centered, relational, self-disciplined,* and *compassionate.* The essence of authentic leadership is being a leader who strongly demonstrates these five qualities.

Rather than simple prescriptions, the theoretical approach describes what authentic leadership is and what accounts for it. From this perspective, authentic leadership works because leaders demonstrate *self-awareness,* an *internalized moral perspective, balanced processing,* and *relational transparency.* Leaders develop these attributes through a lifelong process that is often influenced by critical life events. In addition, the literature suggests that positive psychological characteristics and moral reasoning have a significant impact on authentic leaders.

Authentic leadership is a complex process that emphasizes the development of qualities that help leaders to be perceived as trustworthy and believable by their followers. The leader’s job is to learn to develop these qualities and apply them to the common good as he or she serves others.

**Strengths**

Although it is in its early stages of development, the authentic leadership approach has several strengths. First, it fulfills an expressed need for trustworthy leadership in society. During the past 20 years, failures in public and private leadership have created distrust in people. Authentic leadership helps to fill a void and provides an answer to people who are searching for good and sound leadership in an uncertain world.

Second, authentic leadership provides broad guidelines for individuals who want to become authentic leaders. Both the practical and theoretical approaches clearly point to what leaders should do to become authentic leaders. Social science literature emphasizes that it is important for leaders to have self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency to be authentic. Taken together, these approaches provide a map for becoming an authentic leader.

Third, similar to transformational and servant leadership, authentic leadership has an explicit moral dimension. Underlying both the practical and theoretical approaches is the idea that authenticity requires leaders to do what is “right” and “good” for their followers and society. Authentic leaders understand their own values, place followers’ needs above their own, and work with followers to align their interests in order to create a greater common good.

Authenticity Framework

Fourth, authentic leadership emphasizes that authentic values and behaviors can be developed in leaders over time. Authentic leadership is not an attribute that only some people exhibit: Everyone can develop authenticity and learn to be more authentic. For example, leaders can learn to become more aware and transparent, or they can learn to be more relational and other-directed. Leaders can also develop moral reasoning capacities. Furthermore, Luthans and Avolio (2003) contended that leaders could learn to develop positive psychological capacities such as confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience, and could use these to create a positive organizational climate. They contended that there are many ways that leaders can learn to become authentic leaders over a lifetime.

Finally, authentic leadership can be measured using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). The ALQ is a validated, theory-based instrument comprising 16 items that measure four factors of authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2008). As research moves forward in refining authentic leadership theory, it is valuable to have an established instrument of this construct that is theory-based and can be used to measure authentic leadership in future research.

**Criticisms**

Authentic leadership is still in the formative stages of development, and a number of questions still need to be addressed about the theory. First, the concepts and ideas presented in George’s practical approach are not fully substantiated. While the practical approach is interesting and offers insight on authentic leadership, it is not built on a broad empirical base, nor has it been tested for validity. Without research support, the ideas set forth in the practical approach should be treated cautiously as explanations of the authentic leadership process.

Second, the moral component of authentic leadership is not fully explained. Whereas authentic leadership implies that leaders are motivated by higher-order end values such as justice and community, the way that these values function to influence authentic leadership is not clear. For example, how are a leader’s values related to a leader’s self-awareness? Or, what is the path or underlying process through which moral values affect other components of authentic leadership? In its present form, authentic leadership does not offer thorough answers to these questions.

Authentic Leadership Questionnaire

Third, researchers have questioned whether positive psychological capacities should be included as components of authentic leadership. Although there is an interest in the social sciences to study positive human potential and the best of the human condition (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), the rationale for including positive psychological capacities as an inherent part of authentic leadership has not been clearly explained by researchers. In addition, some have argued that the inclusion of positive leader capacities in authentic leadership broadens the construct of authentic leadership too much and makes it difficult to measure (Cooper et al., 2005). At this point in the development of research on authentic leadership, the role of positive psychological capacities in authentic leadership theory needs further clarification.

Finally, it is not clear how authentic leadership results in positive organizational outcomes. Given that it is a new area of research, it is not unexpected that there are few data on outcomes, but these data are necessary to substantiate the value of the theory. Although authentic leadership is intuitively appealing on the surface, questions remain about whether this approach is effective, in what contexts it is effective, and whether authentic leadership results in productive outcomes. Relatedly, it is also not clear in the research whether authentic leadership is sufficient to achieve organizational goals. For example, can an authentic leader who is disorganized and lacking in technical competence be an effective leader? Authenticity is important and valuable to good leadership, but how authenticity relates to effective leadership is unknown. Clearly, future research should be conducted to explore how authentic leadership is related to organizational outcomes.

**Application**

Because authentic leadership is still in the early phase of its development, there has been little research on strategies that people can use to develop or enhance authentic leadership behaviors. While there are prescriptions set forth in the practical approach, there is little evidence-based research on whether these prescriptions or how-to strategies actually increase authentic leadership behavior.

Teaching Authentic Leadership

In spite of the lack of intervention research, there are common themes from the authentic leadership literature that may be applicable to organizational or practice settings. One theme common to all of the formulations of authentic leadership is that people have the capacity to learn to be authentic leaders. In their original work on authentic leadership, Luthans and Avolio (2003) constructed a model of authentic leadership development. Conceptualizing it as a lifelong learning process, they argued that authentic leadership is a process that can be developed over time. This suggests that human resource departments may be able to foster authentic leadership behaviors in employees who move into leadership positions.

Another theme that can be applied to organizations is the overriding goal of authentic leaders to try to do the “right” thing, to be honest with themselves and others, and to work for the common good. Authentic leadership can have a positive impact in organizations. For example, Cianci, Hannah, Roberts, and Tsakumis (2014) investigated the impact of authentic leadership on followers’ morality. Based on the responses of 118 MBA students, they found that authentic leaders significantly inhibited followers from making unethical choices in the face of temptation. Authentic leadership appears to be a critical contextual factor that morally strengthens followers. Cianci et al. suggest that the four components of authentic leadership (i.e., self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency) should be developed in organizational leadership to increase ethical organizational behavior.

Last, authentic leadership is shaped and reformed by critical life events that act as triggers to growth and greater authenticity. Being sensitive to these events and using them as springboards to growth may be relevant to many people who are interested in becoming leaders who are more authentic.

**Case Studies**

The following section provides three case studies (Cases 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3) of individuals who demonstrate authentic leadership. The first case is about Sally Helgesen, author of *The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership* (1990). The second case is about Greg Mortenson and how his mission to promote schools and peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan came under fire when he was accused of lying and financial impropriety. The final case is about Betty Ford, former First Lady of the United States, and her work in the areas of breast cancer awareness and substance abuse treatment. At the end of each of the cases, questions are provided to help you analyze the case using ideas from authentic leadership.

**Case 9.1**

**Am I Really a Leader?**

Sally Helgesen was born in the small Midwestern town of Saint Cloud, Minnesota. Her mother was a housewife who later taught English, and her father was a college professor of speech. After attending a local state college, where she majored in English and comparative religion, Sally spread her wings and moved to New York, inspired by the classic film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s.*

Sally found work as a writer, first in advertising and then as an assistant to a columnist at the then-influential *Village Voice*. She contributed freelance articles to magazines such as *Harper’s, Glamour, Vogue, Fortune,* and *Inside Sports*. She also returned to school, completing a degree in classics at Hunter College and taking language courses at the city graduate center in preparation for a PhD in comparative religion. She envisioned herself as a college professor, but also enjoyed freelancing. She felt a strong dichotomy within her, part quiet scholar and part footloose dreamer. The conflict bothered her, and she wondered how she would resolve it. Choosing to be a writer—actually declaring herself to be one—seemed scary, grandiose, and fraudulent.

Then one day, while walking on a New York side street in the rain, Sally saw an adventuresome black cat running beside her. It reminded her of Holly Golightly’s cat in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, an emblem in the movie for Holly’s dreamy temperament and rootlessness. It made her realize how much the freedom and independence offered by her “temporary” career as a writer suited her temperament. Sally told the cat she was a writer—she’d never been able to say the words before—and decided she was going to commit to full-time writing, at least for a time. When she saw the opportunity to cover a prominent murder trial in Fort Worth, Texas, she took it.

While covering the trial, Sally became intrigued with the culture of Texas, and decided she wanted to write a book on the role of independent oil producers in shaping the region. Doing so required a huge expenditure of time and money, and for almost a year Sally lived out of the trunk of her car, staying with friends in remote regions all over Texas. It was lonely and hard and exhilarating, but Sally was determined to see the project through. When the book, *Wildcatters* (1981), was published, it achieved little recognition, but Sally felt an enormous increase in confidence and commitment as a result of having finished the book. It strengthened her conviction that, for better or worse, she was a writer.

Sally moved back to New York and continued to write articles and search around for another book. She also began writing speeches for the CEO at a Fortune 500 company. She loved the work, and particularly enjoyed being an observer of office politics, even though she did not perceive herself to be a part of them. Sally viewed her role as being an “outsider looking in,” an observer of the culture. She sometimes felt like an actor in a play about an office, but this detachment made her feel professional rather than fraudulent.

As a speechwriter, Sally spent a lot of time interviewing people in the companies she worked for. Doing so made her realize that men and women often approach their work in fundamentally different ways. She also became convinced that many of the skills and attitudes women brought to their work were increasingly appropriate for the ways in which organizations were changing, and that women had certain advantages as a result. She also noticed that the unique perspectives of women were seldom valued by CEOs or other organizational leaders, who could have benefited if they had better understood and been more attentive to what women had to offer.

These observations inspired Sally to write another book. In 1988, she signed a contract with a major publisher to write a book on what women had to contribute to organizations. Until then, almost everything written about women at work focused on how they needed to change and adapt. Sally felt strongly that if women were encouraged to emphasize the negative, they would miss a historic opportunity to help lead organizations in a time of change. The time was right for this message, and *The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership* (1990) became very successful, topping a number of best-seller charts and remaining steadily in print for nearly 20 years. The book’s prominence resulted in numerous speaking and consulting opportunities, and Sally began traveling the world delivering seminars and working with a variety of clients.

This acclaim and visibility were somewhat daunting to Sally. While she recognized the value of her book, she also knew that she was not a social scientist with a body of theoretical data on women’s issues. She saw herself as an author rather than an expert, and the old questions about fraudulence that she had dealt with in her early years in New York began to reassert themselves in a different form. Was she really being authentic? Could she take on the mantle of leadership and all it entailed? In short, she wondered if she could be the leader that people seemed to expect.

The path Sally took to answer these questions was simply to present herself for who she was. She was Sally Helgesen, an outsider looking in, a skilled and imaginative observer of current issues. For Sally, the path to leadership did not manifest itself in a step-by-step process. Sally’s leadership began with her own journey of finding herself and accepting her personal authenticity. Through this self-awareness, she grew to trust her own expertise as a writer with a keen eye for current trends in organizational life.

Sally continues to be an internationally recognized consultant and speaker on contemporary issues, and has published five books. She remains uncertain about whether she will finish her degree in comparative religion and become a college professor, but always keeps in mind the career of I. F. Stone, an influential political writer in the 1950s and 1960s who went back to school and got an advanced degree in classics at the age of 75.

**Questions**

1. Learning about one’s self is an essential step in becoming an authentic leader. What role did self-awareness play in Sally Helgesen’s story of leadership?
2. How would you describe the authenticity of Sally Helgesen’s leadership?
3. At the end of the case, Sally Helgesen is described as taking on the “mantle of leadership.” Was this important for her leadership? How is taking on the mantle of leadership related to a leader’s authenticity? Does every leader reach a point in his or her career where embracing the leadership role is essential?

**Case 9.2**

**A Leader Under Fire**

*(The previous edition of this book includes a case study outlining Greg Mortenson’s creation of the Central Asia Institute and highlighting his authentic leadership qualities in more detail. For an additional perspective on Mortenson, you can access the original case study at* [*www.sagepub.com/northouse6e*](http://www.sagepub.com/northouse6e)*.)*

By 2011, there were few people who had never heard of Greg Mortenson. He was the subject of two best-selling books, *Three Cups of Tea* (2006, with David O. Relin) and *Stones Into Schools* (2009), which told how the former emergency trauma room nurse had become a hero who built schools in rural areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

His story was phenomenal: Lost and sick after attempting to scale K2, Greg was nursed back to health by the villagers of remote Korphe, Afghanistan. Greg promised to build the village a school, a monumental effort that took him three years as he learned to raise money, navigate the foreign culture, and build a bridge above a 60-foot-deep chasm. His success led him to create the Central Asia Institute (CAI), a nonprofit organization that “empowers communities of Central Asia through literacy and education, especially for girls, promotes peace through education, and conveys the importance of these activities globally.” By 2011, the CAI had successfully established or supported more than 170 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and helped to educate more than 68,000 students (CAI, 2011a).

Greg’s story seemed too good to be true. In April 2011, television news show *60 Minutes* and author Jon Krakauer alleged that it was. *60 Minutes* accused Greg of misusing money and benefitting excessively from the CAI. The show’s reporter visited schools the CAI had built overseas and claimed that he could not find six of the schools and that others were abandoned. The show featured an interview with Krakauer, who claimed Greg had fabricated parts of his best-selling book, *Three Cups of Tea.* When *60 Minutes* approached Greg for comment at a book signing, he refused to talk to the program.

The next day, Krakauer (*Into Thin Air* [1997] and *Under the Banner of Heaven* [2003]) published a short online book, *Three Cups of Deceit* (2011), in which he claimed Greg lied many times in *Three Cups of Tea,* starting with his initial tale of being in Korphe.

Greg and the CAI were caught in a firestorm of media and public scrutiny. An investigation into the alleged financial improprieties was launched by Montana’s attorney general (the CAI is based in Bozeman), and two Montana legislators filed a $5 million class action lawsuit claiming Greg fooled 4 million people into buying his books.

Greg withdrew from the public eye. The day the *60 Minutes* program aired, he posted a letter on the CAI website saying he stood by his books and claiming the news show “paints a distorted picture using inaccurate information, innuendo and a microscopic focus on one year’s (2009) IRS 990 financial, and a few points in the book *Three Cups of Tea* that occurred almost 18 years ago” (CAI, 2011b). Many criticized the organization’s founder for not more aggressively defending himself.

What many people did not know, however, was that two days before the *60 Minutes* segment appeared, Greg had been diagnosed with a hole and a large aneurysm in his heart and was scheduled for open-heart surgery in the next few months. Meanwhile, the CAI worked to ensure its transparency by posting its tax returns and a master list of projects and their status. The report documented 210 schools, with 17 of those receiving “full support” from the CAI, which includes teachers’ salaries, supplies, books, and furniture and monitoring by CAI contractors (Flandro, 2011).

The attorney general investigation concluded in 2012 and determined that Greg as well as CAI board members had mismanaged the CAI, and that Greg had personally profited from it. In a settlement, Greg agreed to pay $1 million to the CAI for expenses he incurred that were deemed as personal. The attorney general’s conclusions did not address the allegations that Mortenson fabricated parts of his book. While he continues to be a CAI employee, Greg is not allowed to have any financial oversight for the organization or sit on its board of directors (Flandro, 2012).

Despite the controversy and subsequent finding of wrongdoing, former CAI board member Andrew Marcus hopes the public will consider what Greg and the organization have accomplished.

“It’s hard to imagine anyone who’s done more for education in that part of the world,” Marcus has said. “It took a real human being to do that” (Flandro, 2011).

**Questions**

1. Would you describe Greg Mortenson as an authentic leader? Explain your answer.
2. In the chapter, we discussed moral reasoning and transparency as components of authentic leadership. Do you think Greg exhibited these components as part his leadership?
3. How was Greg’s response to the allegations against him characteristic of an authentic leader?
4. How did the outcome of the investigation affect the authenticity of Greg Mortenson’s leadership?

**Case 9.3**

**The Reluctant First Lady**

Betty Ford admits that August 9, 1974, the day her husband was sworn in as the 38th President of the United States, was “the saddest day of my life” (Ford, 1978, p. 1).

Elizabeth Bloomer Ford was many things—a former professional dancer and dance teacher, the mother of four nearly grown children, the wife of 13-term U.S. Congressman Gerald “Jerry” R. Ford who was looking forward to their retirement—but she never saw being the country’s First Lady as her destiny.

As she held the Bible her husband’s hand rested on while he took the oath of office, Betty began a journey in which she would become many more things: a breast cancer survivor, an outspoken advocate of women’s rights, a recovering alcoholic and addict, and cofounder and president of the Betty Ford Center, a nonprofit treatment center for substance abuse.

The Fords’ path to the White House began in October 1973, when Jerry was tapped to replace then-U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew who had resigned. After only 9 months in that role, Jerry became the U.S. President after Richard M. Nixon left office amidst the Watergate scandal.

In her first days as the First Lady, Betty became known for her openness and candor. At the time, women were actively fighting for equal rights in the workplace and in society. Less than half of American women were employed outside the home, and women’s earnings were only 38% of their male counterparts’ (Spraggins, 2005). Betty raised a number of eyebrows in her first press conference, when she spoke out in support of abortion rights, women in politics, and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Betty hadn’t even been in the White House a month when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She again broke with social conventions and spoke openly about the diagnosis and treatment for a disease that was not widely discussed in public. With her cooperation, *Newsweek* magazine printed a complete account of her surgery and treatment, which included a radical mastectomy. This openness helped raise awareness of breast cancer screening and treatment options and created an atmosphere of support and comfort for other women fighting the disease.

“Lying in the hospital, thinking of all those women going for cancer checkups because of me, I’d come to recognize more clearly the power of the woman in the White House,” she said in her first autobiography, *The Times of My Life.* “Not my power, but the power of the position, a power which could be used to help” (Ford, 1978, p. 194).

After her recuperation, Betty made good use of that newfound power. She openly supported and lobbied for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, a bill that would ensure that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” (Francis, 2009).

In an interview with *60 Minutes*, Betty drew the ire of many conservatives when she candidly shared her views on the provocative issues of abortion rights, premarital sex, and marijuana use. After the interview aired, public opinion of Betty plummeted, but her popularity quickly rebounded, and within months her approval rating had climbed to 75%.

At the same time, Betty was busy with the duties of First Lady, entertaining dignitaries and heads of state from countries across the globe. In 1975 she began actively campaigning for her husband for the 1976 presidential election, inspiring buttons that read “Vote for Betty’s Husband.” Ford lost the election to Jimmy Carter and, because he was suffering from laryngitis, Betty stepped into the spotlight to read Jerry’s concession speech to the country, congratulating Carter on his victory. Betty’s time as First Lady ended in January 1977, and the Fords retired to Rancho Mirage, California, and Vail, Colorado.

A little more than a year later, at the age of 60, Betty began another personal battle: overcoming alcoholism and an addiction to prescription medicine. Betty had a 14-year dependence on painkillers for chronic neck spasms, arthritis, and a pinched nerve, but refused to admit she was addicted to alcohol. After checking into the Long Beach Naval Hospital’s Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Service, she found the strength to face her demons and, again, went public with her struggles.

“I have found that I am not only addicted to the medications I’ve been taking for my arthritis, but also to alcohol,” she wrote in a statement released to the public. “I expect this treatment and fellowship to be a solution for my problems and I embrace it not only for me but for all the others who are here to participate” (Ford, 1978, p. 285).

Betty Ford found recovering from addiction was particularly daunting at a time when most treatment centers were geared toward treating men. “The female alcoholic has more emotional problems, more health problems, more parenting problems, makes more suicide attempts, than the alcoholic man,” Betty explained in her second autobiography, *Betty, a Glad Awakening* (Ford, 1987, p. 129).

For this reason, Betty helped to establish the nonprofit Betty Ford Center in 1982 in Rancho Mirage. The center splits its space equally between male and female patients, but the treatment is gender specific with programs for the entire family system affected by addiction. The center’s success has attracted celebrities as well as everyday people including middle-class moms, executives, college students, and laborers. Betty’s activism in the field of recovery earned her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1991 and the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1999.

Speaking at an alumni reunion of Betty Ford Center patients, Betty said, “I’m really proud of this center. And I’m really grateful for my own recovery, because with my recovery, I was able to help some other people come forward and address their own addictions. And I don’t think there’s anything as wonderful in life as being able to help someone else” (Ford, 1987, p. 217).

**Questions**

1. How would you describe Betty Ford’s leadership? In what ways could her leadership be described as authentic?
2. How did critical life events play a role in the development of her leadership?
3. Is there a clear moral dimension to Betty Ford’s leadership? In what way is her leadership about serving the common good? Discuss.
4. As we discussed in the chapter, self-awareness and transparency are associated with authentic leadership. How does Betty Ford exhibit these qualities?

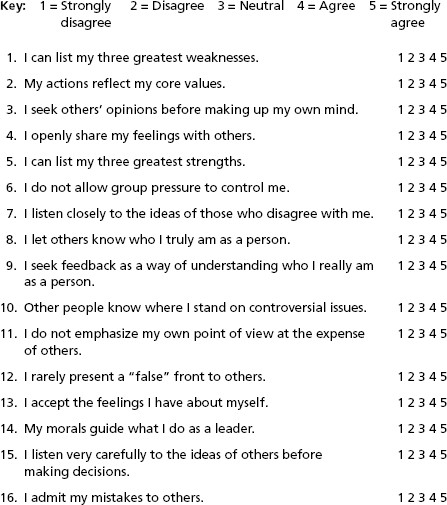
**Leadership Instrument**

Although still in its early phases of development, the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) was created by Walumbwa and associates (2008) to explore and validate the assumptions of authentic leadership. It is a 16-item instrument that measures four factors of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Based on samples in China, Kenya, and the United States, Walumbwa and associates validated the dimensions of the instrument and found it positively related to outcomes such as organizational citizenship, organizational commitment, and satisfaction with supervisor and performance. To obtain this instrument, contact Mind Garden, Inc., in Menlo Park, California, or visit [www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com/).

In this section, we provide an authentic leadership self-assessment to help you determine your own level of authentic leadership. This questionnaire will help you understand how authentic leadership is measured and provide you with your own scores on items that characterize authentic leadership. The questionnaire includes 16 questions that assess the four major components of authentic leadership discussed earlier in this chapter: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Your results on this self-assessment questionnaire will give you information about your level of authentic leadership on these underlying dimensions of authentic leadership. This questionnaire is intended for practical applications to help you understand the complexities of authentic leadership. It is not designed for research purposes.

**Authentic Leadership Self-Assessment Questionnaire**

*Instructions:* This questionnaire contains items about different dimensions of authentic leadership. There are no right or wrong responses, so please answer honestly. Use the following scale when responding to each statement by writing the number from the scale below that you feel most accurately characterizes your response to the statement.



**Scoring**

1. Sum the responses on items 1, 5, 9, and 13 (self-awareness).
2. Sum the responses on items 2, 6, 10, and 14 (internalized moral perspective).
3. Sum the responses on items 3, 7, 11, and 15 (balanced processing).
4. Sum the responses on items 4, 8, 12, and 16 (relational transparency).

**Total Scores**

Self-Awareness: \_\_\_\_\_\_

Internalized Moral Perspective: \_\_\_\_\_

Balanced Processing: \_\_\_\_\_

Relational Transparency: \_\_\_\_\_

**Scoring Interpretation**

This self-assessment questionnaire is designed to measure your authentic leadership by assessing four components of the process: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. By comparing your scores on each of these components, you can determine which are your stronger and which are your weaker components in each category. You can interpret your authentic leadership scores using the following guideline: high = 16–20 and low = 15 and below. Scores in the upper range indicate stronger authentic leadership, whereas scores in the lower range indicate weaker authentic leadership.

**Summary**

As a result of leadership failures in the public and private sectors, authentic leadership is emerging in response to societal demands for genuine, trustworthy, and good leadership. Authentic leadership describes leadership that is transparent, morally grounded, and responsive to people’s needs and values. Even though authentic leadership is still in the early stages of development, the study of authentic leadership is timely and worthwhile, offering hope to people who long for true leadership.

Although there is no single accepted definition of authentic leadership, it can be conceptualized intrapersonally, developmentally, and interpersonally. The intrapersonal perspective focuses on the leader and the leader’s knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept. The interpersonal perspective claims that authentic leadership is a collective process, created by leaders and followers together. The developmental perspective emphasizes major components of authentic leadership that develop over a lifetime and are triggered by major life events.

The practical approach to authentic leadership provides basic “how to” steps to become an authentic leader. George’s approach (2003) identifies five basic dimensions of authentic leadership and the corresponding behavioral characteristics individuals need to develop to become authentic leaders.

In the social science literature, a theoretical approach to authentic leadership is emerging. Drawing from the fields of leadership, positive organizational scholarship, and ethics, researchers have identified four major components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency.

In addition, researchers have found that authentic leadership is influenced by a leader’s positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning, and critical life events.

Authentic leadership has several positive features. First, it provides an answer to people who are searching for good and sound leadership in an uncertain world. Second, authentic leadership is prescriptive and provides a great deal of information about how leaders can learn to become authentic. Third, it has an explicit moral dimension that asserts that leaders need to do what is “right” and “good” for their followers and society. Fourth, it is framed as a process that is developed by leaders over time rather than as a fixed trait. Last, authentic leadership can be measured with a theory-based instrument.

There are also negative features to authentic leadership. First, the ideas set forth in the practical approach need to be treated cautiously because they have not been fully substantiated by research. Second, the moral component of authentic leadership is not fully explained. For example, it does not describe how values such as justice and community are related to authentic leadership. Third, the rationale for including positive psychological capacities as an inherent part of a model of authentic leadership has not been fully explicated. Finally, there is a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of authentic leadership and how it is related to positive organizational outcomes.

In summary, authentic leadership is a new and exciting area of research, which holds a great deal of promise. As more research is conducted on authentic leadership, a clearer picture will emerge about the true nature of the process and the assumptions and principles that it encompasses.

Chapter 10

**Servant Leadership**

**Description**

Servant leadership is a paradox—an approach to leadership that runs counter to common sense. Our everyday images of leadership do not coincide with leaders being servants. Leaders influence, and servants follow. How can leadership be both service *and* influence? How can a person be a leader *and* a servant at the same time? Although servant leadership seems contradictory and challenges our traditional beliefs about leadership, it is an approach that offers a unique perspective.

Servant leadership, which originated in the writings of Greenleaf (1970, 1972, 1977), has been of interest to leadership scholars for more than 40 years. Until recently, little empirical research on servant leadership has appeared in established peer-reviewed journals. Most of the academic and nonacademic writing on the topic has been prescriptive, focusing on how servant leadership should ideally be, rather than descriptive, focusing on what servant leadership actually is in practice (van Dierendonck, 2011). However, in the past 10 years, multiple publications have helped to clarify servant leadership and substantiate its basic assumptions.

Servant Leadership

Everyday Servant Leadership

Similar to earlier leadership theories discussed in this book (e.g., skills approach and behavioral approach), servant leadership is an approach focusing on leadership from the point of view of the leader and his or her behaviors. Servant leadership emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Servant leaders put followers *first,* empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities. Furthermore, servant leaders are ethical (see [Chapter 13](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2593.xhtml), “Leadership Ethics,” for an extended discussion of this topic) and lead in ways that serve the greater good of the organization, community, and society at large.

**Servant Leadership Defined**

What is servant leadership? Scholars have addressed this approach from many different perspectives resulting in a variety of definitions of servant leadership. Greenleaf (1970) provides the most frequently referenced definition:

[Servant leadership] begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first.* Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test . . . is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served,* become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And,* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived? (p. 15)

Although complex, this definition sets forth the basic ideas of servant leadership that have been highlighted by current scholars. Servant leaders place the good of followers over their own self-interests and emphasize follower development (Hale & Fields, 2007). They demonstrate strong moral behavior toward followers (Graham, 1991; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010), the organization, and other stakeholders (Ehrhart, 2004). Practicing servant leadership comes more naturally for some than others, but everyone can learn to be a servant leader (Spears, 2010). Although servant leadership is sometimes treated by others as a trait, in our discussion, servant leadership is viewed as a behavior.

**Historical Basis of Servant Leadership**

Robert K. Greenleaf coined the term *servant leadership* and is the author of the seminal works on the subject. Greenleaf’s persona and writings have significantly influenced how servant leadership has developed on the practical and theoretical level. He founded the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964, now the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, which provides a clearinghouse and focal point for research and writing on servant leadership.

Being a Servant Leader

Serving on Southwest

Greenleaf worked for 40 years at AT&T and, after retiring, began exploring how institutions function and how they could better serve society. He was intrigued by issues of power and authority and how individuals in organizations could creatively support each other. Decidedly against coercive leadership, Greenleaf advocated using communication to build consensus in groups.

Greenleaf credits his formulation of servant leadership to Hermann Hesse’s (1956) novel *The Journey to the East.* It tells the story of a group of travelers on a mythical journey who are accompanied by a servant who does menial chores for the travelers but also sustains them with his spirits and song. The servant’s presence has an extraordinary impact on the group. When the servant becomes lost and disappears from the group, the travelers fall into disarray and abandon the journey. Without the servant, they are unable to carry on. It was the servant who was ultimately leading the group, emerging as a leader through his selfless care of the travelers.

In addition to serving, Greenleaf states that a servant leader has a social responsibility to be concerned about the “have-nots” and those less privileged. If inequalities and social injustices exist, a servant leader tries to remove them (Graham, 1991). In becoming a servant leader, a leader uses less institutional power and control while shifting authority to those who are being led. Servant leadership values community because it provides a face-to-face opportunity for individuals to experience interdependence, respect, trust, and individual growth (Greenleaf, 1970).

**Ten Characteristics of a Servant Leader**

In an attempt to clarify servant leadership for practitioners, Spears (2002) identified 10 characteristics in Greenleaf’s writings that are central to the development of servant leadership. Together, these characteristics comprise the first model or conceptualization of servant leadership.

1. *Listening.* Communication between leaders and followers is an interactive process that includes sending and receiving messages (i.e., talking and listening). Servant leaders communicate by listening first. They recognize that listening is a learned discipline that involves hearing and being receptive to what others have to say. Through listening, servant leaders acknowledge the viewpoint of followers and validate these perspectives.
2. *Empathy.* Empathy is “standing in the shoes” of another person and attempting to see the world from that person’s point of view. Empathetic servant leaders demonstrate that they truly understand what followers are thinking and feeling. When a servant leader shows empathy, it is confirming and validating for the follower. It makes the follower feel unique.

Unexpected Servant Leaders

1. *Healing.* To heal means to make whole. Servant leaders care about the personal well-being of their followers. They support followers by helping them overcome personal problems. Greenleaf argues that the process of healing is a two-way street—in helping followers become whole, servant leaders themselves are healed.
2. *Awareness.* For Greenleaf, awareness is a quality within servant leaders that makes them acutely attuned and receptive to their physical, social, and political environments. It includes understanding oneself and the impact one has on others. With awareness, servant leaders are able to step aside and view themselves and their own perspectives in the greater context of the situation.
3. *Persuasion.* Persuasion is clear and persistent communication that convinces others to change. As opposed to coercion, which utilizes positional authority to force compliance, persuasion creates change through the use of gentle nonjudgmental argument. According to Spears (2002), Greenleaf’s emphasis on persuasion over coercion is perhaps related to his denominational affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).
4. *Conceptualization.* Conceptualization refers to an individual’s ability to be a visionary for an organization, providing a clear sense of its goals and direction. This characteristic goes beyond day-to-day operational thinking to focus on the “big picture.” Conceptualization also equips servant leaders to respond to complex organizational problems in creative ways, enabling them to deal with the intricacies of the organization in relationship to its long-term goals.
5. *Foresight.* Foresight encompasses a servant leader’s ability to know the future. It is an ability to predict what is coming based on what is occurring in the present and what has happened in the past. For Greenleaf, foresight has an ethical dimension because he believes leaders should be held accountable for any failures to anticipate what reasonably could be foreseen and to act on that understanding.
6. *Stewardship.* Stewardship is about taking responsibility for the leadership role entrusted to the leader. Servant leaders accept the responsibility to carefully manage the people and organization they have been given to lead. In addition, they hold the organization in trust for the greater good of society.

Stewardship

1. *Commitment to the growth of people.* Greenleaf’s conceptualization of servant leadership places a premium on treating each follower as a unique person with intrinsic value that goes beyond his or her tangible contributions to the organization. Servant leaders are committed to helping each person in the organization grow personally and professionally. Commitment can take many forms, including providing followers with opportunities for career development, helping them develop new work skills, taking a personal interest in the their ideas, and involving them in decision making (Spears, 2002).
2. *Building community.* Servant leadership fosters the development of community. A community is a collection of individuals who have shared interests and pursuits and feel a sense of unity and relatedness. Community allows followers to identify with something greater than themselves that they value. Servant leaders build community to provide a place where people can feel safe and connected with others, but are still allowed to express their own individuality.

These 10 characteristics of servant leadership represent Greenleaf’s seminal work on the servant as leader. They provide a creative lens from which to view the complexities of servant leadership.

**Building a Theory About Servant Leadership**

For more than three decades after Greenleaf’s original writings, servant leadership remained a set of loosely defined characteristics and normative principles. In this form it was widely accepted as a leadership approach, rather than a theory, that has strong heuristic and practical value. Praise for servant leadership came from a wide range of well-known leadership writers, including Bennis (2002), Blanchard and Hodges (2003), Covey (2002), DePree (2002), Senge (2002), and Wheatley (2002). At the same time, servant leadership was adopted as a guiding philosophy in many well-known organizations such as The Toro Company, Herman Miller, Synovus Financial Corporation, ServiceMaster, Men’s Wearhouse, Southwest Airlines, and TDIndustries (Spears, 2002). Although novel and paradoxical, the basic ideas and prescriptions of servant leadership resonated with many as an ideal way to run an organization.

More recently, researchers have begun to examine the conceptual underpinnings of servant leadership in an effort to build a theory about it. These studies have resulted in a wide array of models that describe servant leadership using a multitude of variables. For example, Russell and Stone (2002) developed a practical model of servant leadership that contained 20 attributes, nine functional characteristics (distinctive behaviors observed in the workplace), and 11 accompanying characteristics that augment these behaviors. Similarly, Patterson (2003) created a value-based model of servant leadership that distinguished seven constructs that characterize the virtues and shape the behaviors of servant leaders.

Dave Ramsey

Servant Leadership Framework

SOURCE: Adapted from van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and syntheses. *Journal of Management, 37*(4), 1228–1261.

Other conceptualizations of servant leadership have emerged from researchers’ efforts to develop and validate instruments to measure the core dimensions of the servant leadership process. [Table 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2125) provides a summary of some of these studies, illustrating clearly the extensiveness of characteristics related to servant leadership. This table also exhibits the lack of agreement among researchers on what specific characteristics define servant leadership. While some of the studies include common characteristics, such as humility or empowerment, none of the studies conceptualize servant leadership in exactly the same way. In addition, [Table 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2125) demonstrates how servant leadership is treated as a trait phenomenon (e.g., courage, humility) in some studies while other researchers regard it as a behavioral process (e.g., serving and developing others). Although scholars are not in agreement regarding the primary attributes of servant leadership, these studies provide the groundwork necessary for the development of a refined model of servant leadership.

**Model of Servant Leadership**

This chapter presents a servant leadership model based on Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) and Liden, Panaccio, Hu, and Meuser (2014) that has three main components: *antecedent conditions, servant leader behaviors,* and *leadership outcomes* ([Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135)). The model is intended to clarify the phenomenon of servant leadership and provide a framework for understanding its complexities.

**Antecedent Conditions**

As shown on the left side of [Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135), three antecedent, or existing, conditions have an impact on servant leadership*: context and culture, leader attributes,* and *follower receptivity.* These conditions are not inclusive of all the conditions that affect servant leadership, but do represent some factors likely to influence the leadership process.

**Context and Culture.**

Servant leadership does not occur in a vacuum but occurs within a given organizational context and a particular culture. The nature of each of these affects the way servant leadership is carried out. For example, in health care and nonprofit settings, the norm of caring is more prevalent, while for Wall Street corporations it is more common to have competition as an operative norm. Because the norms differ, the ways servant leadership is performed may vary.

Dimensions of culture (see [Chapter 16](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i3192.xhtml), “Culture and Leadership”) will also influence servant leadership. For example, in cultures where power distance is low (e.g., Nordic Europe) and power is shared equally among people at all levels of society, servant leadership may be more common. In cultures with low humane orientation (e.g., Germanic Europe), servant leadership may present more of a challenge. The point is that cultures influence the way servant leadership is able to be achieved.

Figure 10.1 Model of Servant Leadership

SOURCE: Adapted from Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., & Meuser, J. D. (2014). Servant leadership: Antecedents, consequences, and contextual moderators. In D. V. Day (Ed.), The Oxford handbook of leadership and organizations. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press; and van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and syntheses. Journal of Management, 37(4), 1228–1261.

**Leader Attributes.**

As in any leadership situation, the qualities and disposition of the leader influence the servant leadership process. Individuals bring their own traits and ideas about leading to leadership situations. Some may feel a deep desire to serve or are strongly motivated to lead. Others may be driven by a sense of higher calling (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). These dispositions shape how individuals demonstrate servant leadership. In addition, people differ in areas such as moral development, emotional intelligence, and self-determinedness, and these traits interact with their ability to engage in servant leadership.

The Ripple Effect

Antecedents of Servant Leadership

**Follower Receptivity.**

The receptivity of followers is a factor that appears to influence the impact of servant leadership on outcomes such as personal and organizational job performance. Follower receptivity concerns the question “Do all followers show a desire for servant leadership?” Research suggests the answer may be no. Some followers do not want to work with servant leaders. They equate servant leadership with micromanagement, and report that they do not want their leader to get to know them or try to help, develop, or guide them (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2008). Similarly, Meuser, Liden, Wayne, and Henderson (2011) found empirical evidence showing that when servant leadership was matched with followers who desired it, this type of leadership had a positive impact on performance and organizational citizenship behavior. The opposite was seen when there was no match between servant leadership and the desire of followers for it. It appears that, for some followers, servant leadership has a positive impact and, for others, servant leadership is not effective.

**Servant Leader Behaviors**

The middle component of [Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135) identifies seven *servant leader behaviors* that are the core of the servant leadership process. These behaviors emerged from Liden, Wayne, et al.’s (2008) vigorous efforts to develop and validate a measure of servant leadership. The findings from their research provide evidence for the soundness of viewing servant leadership as a multidimensional process. Collectively, these behaviors are the central focus of servant leadership. Individually, each behavior makes a unique contribution.

**Conceptualizing.**

Conceptualizing refers to the servant leader’s thorough understanding of the organization—its purposes, complexities, and mission. This capacity allows servant leaders to think through multifaceted problems, to know if something is going wrong, and to address problems creatively in accordance with the overall goals of the organization.

For example, Kate Simpson, a senior nursing supervisor in an emergency room of a large hospital, uses conceptualizing to lead her department. She fully understands the mission of the hospital and, at the same time, knows how to effectively manage staff on a day-to-day basis. Her staff members say Kate has a sixth sense about what is best for people. She is known for her wisdom in dealing with difficult patients and helping staff diagnose complex medical problems. Her abilities, competency, and value as a servant leader earned her the hospital’s Caregiver of the Year Award.

Servant Leader Beginnings

**Emotional Healing.**

Emotional healing involves being sensitive to the personal concerns and well-being of others. It includes recognizing others’ problems and being willing to take the time to address them. Servant leaders who exhibit emotional healing make themselves available to others, stand by them, and provide them with support.

Emotional healing is apparent in the work of Father John, a much sought-after hospice priest on Chicago’s South Side. Father John has a unique approach to hospice patients: He doesn’t encourage, give advice, or read Scripture. Instead he simply listens to them. “When you face death, the only important thing in life is relationships,” he says. “I practice the art of standing by. I think it is more important to come just to be there than to do anything else.”

**Putting Followers First.**

Putting others first is the sine qua non of servant leadership—the defining characteristic. It means using actions and words that clearly demonstrate to followers that their concerns are a priority, including placing followers’ interests and success ahead of those of the leader. It may mean a leader breaks from his or her own tasks to assist followers with theirs.

Dr. Autumn Klein, a widely published health education professor at a major research university, is responsible for several ongoing large interdisciplinary public health studies. Although she is the principal investigator on these studies, when multiauthored articles are submitted for publication, Dr. Klein puts the names of other researchers before her own. She chooses to let others be recognized because she knows it will benefit them in their annual performance reviews. She puts the success of her colleagues ahead of her own interests.

**Helping Followers Grow and Succeed.**

This behavior refers to knowing followers’ professional or personal goals and helping them to accomplish those aspirations. Servant leaders make followers’ career development a priority, including mentoring followers and providing them with support. At its core, helping followers grow and succeed is about aiding these individuals to become self-actualized, reaching their fullest human potential.

Community Health Nursing

An example of how a leader helps others grow and succeed is Mr. Yon Kim, a high school orchestra teacher who consistently receives praise from parents for his outstanding work with students. Mr. Kim is a skilled violinist with high musical standards, but he does not let that get in the way of helping each student, from the most highly accomplished to the least capable. Students like Mr. Kim because he listens to them and treats them as adults. He gives feedback without being judgmental. Many of his former students have gone on to become music majors. They often visit Mr. Kim to let him know how important he was to them. Yon Kim is a servant leader who helps students grow through his teaching and guidance.

**Behaving Ethically.**

Behaving ethically is doing the right thing in the right way. It is holding to strong ethical standards, including being open, honest, and fair with followers. Servant leaders do not compromise their ethical principles in order to achieve success.

An example of ethical behavior is how CEO Elizabeth Angliss responded when one of her employees brought her a copy of a leaked document from their company’s chief competitor, outlining its plans to go after some of Angliss’s largest customers. Although she knew the document undoubtedly had valuable information, she shredded it instead of reading it. She then called the rival CEO and told him she had received the document and wanted him to be aware that he might have a security issue within his company. “I didn’t know if what I received was real or not,” she explains. “But it didn’t matter. If it was the real thing, someone on his end did something wrong, and my company wasn’t going to capitalize on that.”

**Empowering.**

Empowering refers to allowing followers the freedom to be independent, make decisions on their own, and be self-sufficient. It is a way for leaders to share power with followers by allowing them to have control. Empowerment builds followers’ confidence in their own capacities to think and act on their own because they are given the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best.

For example, a college professor teaching a large lecture class empowers two teaching assistants assigned to him by letting them set their own office hours, independently grade student papers, and practice teaching by giving one of the weekly class lectures. They become confident in their teaching abilities and bring new ideas to the professor to try in the classroom.

**Creating Value for the Community.**

Servant leaders create value for the community by consciously and intentionally giving back to the community. They are involved in local activities and encourage followers to also volunteer for community service. Creating value for the community is one way for leaders to link the purposes and goals of an organization with the broader purposes of the community.

Community Building

An example of creating value for the community can be seen in the leadership of Mercedes Urbanez, principal of Alger High School. Alger is an alternative high school in a midsize community with three other high schools. Mercedes’s care and concern for students at Alger is remarkable. Ten percent of Alger’s students have children, so the school provides on-site day care. Fifteen percent of the students are on probation, and Alger is often their last stop before dropping out entirely and resuming criminal activities. While the other schools in town foster competition and push advanced placement courses, Alger focuses on removing the barriers that keep its students from excelling and offers courses that provide what its students need including multimedia skills, reading remediation, and parenting.

Under Mercedes, Alger High School is a model alternative school appreciated at every level in the community. Students, who have failed in other schools, find they have a safe place to go where they are accepted and adults try to help them solve their problems. Law enforcement supports the school’s efforts to help these students get back into the mainstream of society and away from crime. The other high schools in the community know that Alger provides services they find difficult to provide. Mercedes Urbanez serves the have-nots in the community, and the whole community reaps the benefits.

**Outcomes**

Although servant leadership focuses primarily on leader behaviors, it is also important to examine the potential outcomes of servant leadership. The outcomes of servant leadership are *follower performance and growth, organizational performance,* and *societal impact* (see [Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135)). As Greenleaf highlighted in his original work (1970), the central goal of servant leadership is to create healthy organizations that nurture individual growth, strengthen organizational performance, and, in the end, produce a positive impact on society.

**Follower Performance and Growth.**

In the model of servant leadership, most of the servant leader behaviors focus directly on recognizing followers’ contributions and helping them realize their human potential. The expected outcome for followers is greater self-actualization. That is, followers will realize their full capabilities when leaders nurture them, help them with their personal goals, and give them control.

Servant Leadership Review

Another outcome of servant leadership, suggested by Meuser et al. (2011), is that it will have a favorable impact on follower in-role performance—the way followers do their assigned work. When servant leaders were matched with followers who were open to this type of leadership, the results were positive. Followers became more effective at accomplishing their jobs and fulfilling their job descriptions.

Finally, another expected result of servant leadership is that followers themselves may become servant leaders. Greenleaf’s conceptualization of servant leadership hypothesizes that when followers receive caring and empowerment from ethical leaders they, in turn, will likely begin treating others in this way. Servant leadership would produce a ripple effect in which servant leaders create more servant leaders. Further research is needed, however, to test this hypothesis.

**Organizational Performance.**

In addition to positively affecting followers and their performance, initial research has shown that servant leadership has an influence on organizational performance. Several studies have found a positive relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), which are follower behaviors that go beyond the basic requirements of their duties and help the overall functioning of the organization (Ehrhart, 2004; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2008; Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, & Roberts, 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Servant leadership also affects the way organizational teams function. Hu and Liden (2011) found that servant leadership enhanced team effectiveness by increasing the members’ shared confidence that they could be effective as a work group. Furthermore, their results showed that servant leadership contributed positively to team potency by enhancing group process and clarity. However, when servant leadership was absent, team potency decreased, despite clearer goals. In essence, it frustrates people to know exactly what the goal is, but not get the support needed to accomplish the goal.

Current research on organizational outcomes is in its initial stages. Further study is needed to substantiate the direct and indirect ways that servant leadership is related to organizational performance.

Cultural Servant Leadership

**Societal Impact.**

Another outcome expected of servant leadership is that it is likely to have a positive impact on society. Although societal impact is not commonly measured in studies of servant leadership, there are examples of servant leadership’s impact that are highly visible. One example we are all familiar with is the work of Mother Teresa whose years of service for the hungry, homeless, and unwanted resulted in the creation of a new religious order, the Missionaries of Charity. This order now has more than 1 million workers in over 40 countries that operate hospitals, schools, and hospices for the poor. Mother Teresa’s servant leadership has had an extraordinary impact on society throughout the world.

In the business world, an example of the societal impact of servant leadership can be observed at Southwest Airlines (see Case 10.3). Leaders at Southwest instituted an “others first” organizational philosophy in the management of the company, which starts with how it treats its employees. This philosophy is adhered to by those employees who themselves become servant leaders in regards to the airline’s customers. Because the company thrives, it impacts society by providing jobs in the communities it serves and, to a lesser extent, by providing the customers who rely on it with transportation.

In his conceptualization of servant leadership, Greenleaf did not frame the process as one that was intended to directly change society. Rather, he visualizes leaders who become servants first and listen to others and help them grow. As a result, their organizations are healthier, ultimately benefiting society. In this way, the long-term outcomes of putting others first include positive social change and helping society flourish.

**Summary of the Model of Servant Leadership**

In summary, the model of servant leadership consists of three components: antecedent conditions, servant leader behaviors, and outcomes. The central focus of the model is the seven behaviors of leaders that foster servant leadership: conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community. These behaviors are influenced by context and culture, the leader’s attributes, and the followers’ receptivity to this kind of leadership. When individuals engage in servant leadership, it is likely to improve outcomes at the individual, organizational, and societal levels.

Servant Leaders

Iron Man Helps the Homeless

**How Does Servant Leadership Work?**

The servant leadership approach works differently than many of the prior theories we have discussed in this book. For example, it is unlike the trait approach ([Chapter 2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i964.xhtml)), which emphasizes that leaders should have certain specific traits. It is also unlike path–goal theory ([Chapter 6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1504.xhtml)), which lays out principles regarding what style of leadership is needed in various situations. Instead, servant leadership focuses on the behaviors leaders should exhibit to put followers first and to support followers’ personal development. It is concerned with how leaders treat followers and the outcomes that are likely to emerge.

So what is the mechanism that explains how servant leadership works? It begins when leaders commit themselves to putting their followers first, being honest with them, and treating them fairly. Servant leaders make it a priority to listen to their followers and develop strong long-term relationships with them. This allows leaders to understand the abilities, needs, and goals of followers, which, in turn, allows these followers to achieve their full potential. When many leaders in an organization adopt a servant leadership orientation, a culture of serving others within and outside the organization is created (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2008).

Servant leadership works best when leaders are altruistic and have a strong motivation and deep-seated interest in helping others. In addition, for successful servant leadership to occur, it is important that followers are open and receptive to servant leaders who want to empower them and help them grow.

It should be noted that in much of the writing on servant leadership there is an underlying philosophical position, originally set forth by Greenleaf (1970), that leaders should be altruistic and humanistic. Rather than using their power to dominate others, leaders should make every attempt to share their power and enable others to grow and become autonomous. Leadership framed from this perspective downplays competition in the organization and promotes egalitarianism.

Finally, in an ideal world, servant leadership results in community and societal change. Individuals within an organization who care for each other become committed to developing an organization that cares for the community. Organizations that adopt a servant leadership culture are committed to helping those in need who operate outside of the organization. Servant leadership extends to serving the “have-nots” in society (Graham, 1991). Case 10.2 in this chapter provides a striking example of how one servant leader’s work led to positive outcomes for many throughout the world.

Service Leadership

**Strengths**

In its current stage of development, research on servant leadership has made several positive contributions to the field of leadership. First, while there are other leadership approaches such as transformational and authentic leadership that include an ethical dimension, servant leadership is unique in the way it makes altruism the central component of the leadership process. Servant leadership argues unabashedly that leaders should put followers first, share control with followers, and embrace their growth. It is the only leadership approach that frames the leadership process around the principle of caring for others.

Second, servant leadership provides a counterintuitive and provocative approach to the use of influence, or power, in leadership. Nearly all other theories of leadership treat influence as a positive factor in the leadership process, but servant leadership does just the opposite. It argues that leaders should not dominate, direct, or control; but rather, leaders should share control and influence. To give up control rather than seek control is the goal of servant leadership. Servant leadership is an influence process that does not incorporate influence in a traditional way.

Third, rather than imply that servant leadership is a panacea, research on servant leadership has shown there are conditions under which servant leadership is not a preferred kind of leadership. Findings indicate that servant leadership may not be effective in contexts where followers are not open to being guided, supported, and empowered. Followers’ readiness to receive servant leadership moderates the potential usefulness of leading from this approach (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2008).

Fourth, recent research has resulted in a sound measure of servant leadership. Using a rigorous methodology, Liden, Wayne, et al. (2008) developed and validated the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ), which appears at the end of the chapter. It comprises 28 items that identify seven distinct dimensions of servant leadership. Studies show that the SLQ is unique and measures aspects of leadership that are different from those measured by the transformational and leader–member exchange theories (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2008; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011). The SLQ has proved to be a suitable instrument for use in future research on servant leadership.

**Criticisms**

In addition to the positive features of servant leadership, this approach has several limitations. First, the paradoxical nature of the title “servant leadership” creates semantic noise that diminishes the potential value of the approach. Because the name appears contradictory, servant leadership is prone to be perceived as fanciful or whimsical. In addition, being a servant leader implies following, and following is viewed as the opposite of leading. Although servant leadership incorporates influence, the mechanism of how influence functions as a part of servant leadership is not fully explicated in the approach.

Second, there is debate among servant leadership scholars regarding the core dimensions of the process. As illustrated in [Table 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2125), servant leadership is hypothesized to include a multitude of abilities, traits, and behaviors. To date, researchers have been unable to reach consensus on a common definition or theoretical framework for servant leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011). Until a larger body of findings is published on servant leadership, the robustness of theoretical formulations about it will remain limited.

Third, a large segment of the writing on servant leadership has a prescriptive overtone that implies that good leaders “put others first.” While advocating an altruistic approach to leadership is commendable, it has a utopian ring because it conflicts with individual autonomy and other principles of leadership such as directing, concern for production, goal setting, and creating a vision (Gergen, 2006). Furthermore, along with the “value-push” prescriptive quality, there is an almost moralistic nature that seems to surround servant leadership. As a result, many practitioners of servant leadership are not necessarily researchers who want to conduct studies to test the validity of servant leadership theory.

Finally, it is unclear why “conceptualizing” is included as one of the servant leadership behaviors in the model of servant leadership (see [Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135)). Is conceptualizing actually a behavior, or is it a cognitive ability? Furthermore, what is the rationale for identifying conceptualizing as a determinant of servant leadership? Being able to conceptualize is undoubtedly an important cognitive capacity in all kinds of leadership, but why is it a defining characteristic of servant leadership? A clearer explanation for its central role in servant leadership needs to be addressed in future research.

**Application**

Servant leadership can be applied at all levels of management and in all types of organizations. Within a philosophical framework of caring for others, servant leadership sets forth a list of behaviors that individuals can engage in if they want to be servant leaders. The prescribed behaviors of servant leadership are not esoteric; they are easily understood and generally applicable to a variety of leadership situations.

Unlike leader–member exchange theory ([Chapter 7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1631.xhtml)) or authentic leadership ([Chapter 9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i1942.xhtml)), which are not widely used in training and development, servant leadership has been used extensively in a variety of organizations for more than 30 years. Many organizations in the Fortune 500 (e.g., Starbucks, AT&T, Southwest Airlines, and Vanguard Group) employ ideas from servant leadership. Training in servant leadership typically involves self-assessment exercises, educational sessions, and goal setting. The content of servant leadership is straightforward and accessible to followers at every level within the organization.

Liden, Wayne, et al. (2008) suggest that organizations that want to build a culture of servant leadership should be careful to select people who are interested in and capable of building long-term relationships with followers. Furthermore, because “behaving ethically” is positively related to job performance, organizations should focus on selecting people who have high integrity and strong ethics. In addition, organizations should develop training programs that spend time helping leaders develop their emotional intelligence, ethical decision making, and skills for empowering others. Behaviors such as these will help leaders nurture followers to their full potential.

Servant leadership is taught at many colleges and universities around the world and is the focus of numerous independent coaches, trainers, and consultants. In the United States, Gonzaga University and Regent University are recognized as prominent leaders in this area because of the academic attention they have given to servant leadership. Overall, the most recognized and comprehensive center for training in servant leadership is the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership ([www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org/)).

In summary, servant leadership provides a philosophy and set of behaviors that individuals in the organizational setting can learn and develop. The following section features cases illustrating how servant leadership has been manifested in different ways.

Emotional Intelligence in Servant Leaders

**Case Studies**

This section provides three case studies (Cases 10.1, 10.2, and 10.3) that illustrate different facets of servant leadership. The first case describes the servant leadership of a high school secretary. The second case is about Dr. Paul Farmer and his efforts to stop disease in Haiti and other parts of the world. The third case is about the leaders of Southwest Airlines who created a servant leadership culture that permeates the company. At the end of each case, several questions are provided to help you analyze the case from the perspective of servant leadership.

**Case 10.1**

**Everyone Loves Mrs. Noble**

Sharon Noble is in charge of the main office at Essex High School, a position she has held for nearly 30 years. She does not have a college degree, but that does not seem to hinder her work as “secretary” for the school. She is an extravert, and people say her jokes are corny, but she runs the office efficiently and well, getting along with teachers and students and dealing with the rules and procedures that govern day-to-day Essex school life.

When people describe Sharon, they say that she is wise and seems to know just about everything there is to know about the school. She understands the core curriculum, testing, dress code, skip policy, after-school programs, helicopter parents, and much more. If students want to have a bake sale, she tells them the best way to do it. If they want to take Advanced Placement courses, she tells them which ones to take. The list of what she knows is endless. For years parents have told one another, “If you want to know anything about the school, go to Mrs. Noble—she *is* Essex High School.”

There is nothing pretentious about Mrs. Noble. She drives an old car and wears simple clothes. Students say they’ve never seen her wear makeup. But nevertheless, she is still “with it” when it comes to student fads and eccentricities. When students had long hair and fringed vests in the 1970s, Sharon was cool with it. She never mocks students who are “way out” and seems to even enjoy these students. When students wear clothes to get attention because they feel ostracized, Sharon is accepting and even acknowledges the “uniqueness” of their act, unless it violates the dress code. In those cases, she talks nonjudgmentally with students about their clothing, guiding them to make different choices to stay out of trouble.

Even though it isn’t technically in her job description, Mrs. Noble excels at helping juniors prepare applications for college. She knows all the requirements and deadlines and the materials required by the different universities. She spends hours pushing, nudging, and convincing students to stay on task and get their applications submitted. She doesn’t care if students go to Ivy League schools, state schools, or community colleges; but she does care if they go on to school. Mrs. Noble regrets not having been able to attend college, so it is important to her that “her” students do everything they can to go.

At times her job is challenging. For example, the principal made teaching assignments that the faculty did not like, and Sharon was the one they shared their concerns with. She was a great listener and helped them see the differing perspectives of the situation. One year, when a student was in a car accident and unable to come to school for several months, Sharon personally worked with each one of the student’s teachers to get her assignments, delivered them to the student’s home, and picked them up when they were complete. When the seniors held a dance marathon to raise money for cancer research, it was Sharon who pledged the most, even though she didn’t make very much as the school’s secretary. She wanted to make sure each senior participating had at least one pledge on his or her roster; in most cases it was Sharon’s.

In 2010, the class of 1989 had its 25-year reunion, and of all the memories shared, the most were about Sharon Noble. Essex High School had a wonderful principal, many good teachers, and great coaches, but when alumni were asked, who runs the school? The answer was always “Mrs. Noble.”

**Questions**

1. What servant leader behaviors would you say Mrs. Noble demonstrates?
2. Who are Mrs. Noble’s followers?
3. Based on the model of servant leadership ([Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135)), what outcomes has Mrs. Noble’s servant leadership attained?
4. Can you think of someone at a school or organization you were part of who acted like Mrs. Noble? Describe what this person did and how it affected you and the school or organization.

**Case 10.2**

**Doctor to the Poor**

*“Education wasn’t what he wanted to perform on the world . . . He was after transformation.”*

—Kidder (2003, p. 44)

When Paul Farmer graduated from Duke University at 22, he was unsure whether he wanted to be an anthropologist or a doctor. So he went to Haiti. As a student, Paul had become obsessed with the island nation after meeting many Haitians at local migrant camps. Paul was used to the grittier side of life; he had grown up in a family of eight that lived in a converted school bus and later on a houseboat moored in a bayou. But what he observed at the migrant camps and learned from his discussions with Haitian immigrants made his childhood seem idyllic.

In Haiti, he volunteered for a small charity called Eye Care Haiti, which conducted outreach clinics in rural areas. He was drawn in by the deplorable conditions and lives of the Haitian people and determined to use his time there to learn everything he could about illness and disease afflicting the poor. Before long, Paul realized that he had found his life’s purpose: He’d be a doctor to poor people, and he’d start in Haiti.

Paul entered Harvard University in 1984 and, for the first two years, traveled back and forth to Haiti where he conducted a health census in the village of Cange. During that time he conceived of a plan to fight disease in Haiti by developing a public health system that included vaccination programs and clean water and sanitation. The heart of this program, however, would be a cadre of people from the villages who were trained to administer medicines, teach health classes, treat minor ailments, and recognize the symptoms of grave illnesses such as HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria.

His vision became reality in 1987, thanks to a wealthy donor who gave $1 million to help Paul create Partners In Health (PIH). At first it wasn’t much of an organization—no staff, a small advisory board, and three committed volunteers. But its work was impressive: PIH began building schools and clinics in and around Cange. Soon PIH established a training program for health outreach workers and organized a mobile unit to screen residents of area villages for preventable diseases.

In 1990, Paul finished his medical studies and became a fellow in infectious diseases at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. He was able to remain in Haiti for most of each year, returning to Boston to work at Brigham for a few months at a time, sleeping in the basement of PIH headquarters.

It wasn’t long before PIH’s successes started gaining attention outside of Haiti. Because of its success treating the disease in Haiti, the World Health Organization appointed Paul and PIH staffer Jim Yong Kim to spearhead pilot treatment programs for multiple-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). Paul’s attention was now diverted to the slums of Peru and Russia where cases of MDR-TB were on the rise. In Peru, Paul and PIH encountered barriers in treating MDR-TB that had nothing to do with the disease. They ran headlong into governmental resistance and had to battle to obtain expensive medications. Paul learned to gently navigate governmental obstacles, while the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation stepped in with a $44.7 million grant to help fund the program.

In 2005, PIH turned its attention to another part of the world: Africa, the epicenter of the global AIDS pandemic. Beginning its efforts in Rwanda, where few people had been tested or were receiving treatment, PIH tested 30,000 people in 8 months and enrolled nearly 700 in drug therapy to treat the disease. Soon, the organization expanded its efforts to the African nations of Lesotho and Malawi (Partners In Health, 2011).

But Paul’s efforts weren’t just in far-flung reaches of the world. From his work with patients at Brigham, Paul observed the needs of the impoverished in Boston. The Prevention and Access to Care and Treatment (PACT) project was created to offer drug therapy for HIV and diabetes for the poor residents of the Roxbury and Dorchester districts. PIH has since sent PACT project teams across the United States to provide support to other community health programs.

By 2009, Partners in Health had grown to 13,600 employees working in health centers and hospitals in 8 countries (Partners In Health, 2013), including the Dominican Republic, Peru, Mexico, Rwanda, Lesotho, Malawi, Navajo Nation (U.S.), and Russia. Each year the organization increases the number of facilities and personnel that provide health care to the residents of some of the most impoverished and diseased places in the world. Paul continues to travel around the world, monitoring programs and raising funds for PIH in addition to leading the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

**Questions**

1. Would you characterize Paul Farmer as a servant leader? Explain your answer.
2. Putting others first is the essence of servant leadership. In what way does Paul Farmer put others first?
3. Another characteristic of a servant leader is getting followers to serve. Who are Paul’s followers, and how did they become servants to his vision?
4. What role do you think Paul’s childhood had in his development as a servant leader?

**Case 10.3**

**Servant Leadership Takes Flight**

A young mother traveling with a toddler on a long cross-country flight approached the flight attendant looking rather frantic. Because of weather and an hour-and-a-half wait on the runway to take off, the plane would arrive at its destination several hours late. The plane had made an intermediate stop in Denver to pick up passengers but not long enough for travelers to disembark. The mother told the attendant that with the delays and the long flight, her child had already eaten all the food she brought and if she didn’t feed him soon he was bound to have a total meltdown. “Can I get off for five minutes just to run and get something for him to eat?” she pleaded.

“I have to recommend strongly that you stay on the plane,” the attendant said, sternly. But then, with a smile, she added, “But I can get off. The plane won’t leave without me. What can I get your son to eat?”

Turns out that flight attendant not only got the little boy a meal, but brought four other children on board meals as well. Anyone who has traveled in a plane with screaming children knows that this flight attendant not only took care of some hungry children and frantic parents, but also indirectly saw to the comfort of a planeload of other passengers.

This story doesn’t surprise anyone familiar with Southwest Airlines. The airline’s mission statement is posted every 3 feet at all Southwest locations: Follow the Golden Rule—treat people the way you want to be treated.

It’s a philosophy that the company takes to heart and begins with how it treats employees. Colleen Barrett, the former president of Southwest Airlines, says the company’s cofounder and her mentor, Herb Kelleher, was adamant that “a happy and motivated workforce will essentially extend that goodwill to Southwest’s customers” (Knowledge@Wharton, 2008). If the airline took care of its employees, the employees would take care of the customers, and the shareholders would win, too.

From the first days of Southwest Airlines, Herb resisted establishing traditional hierarchies within the company. He focused on finding employees with substance, willing to say what they thought and committed to doing things differently. Described as “an egalitarian spirit,” he employed a collaborative approach to management that involved his associates at every step.

Colleen, who went from working as Herb’s legal secretary to being the president of the airline, is living proof of his philosophy. A poor girl from rural Vermont who got the opportunity of a lifetime to work for Herb when he was still just a lawyer, she rose from his aide to become vice president of administration, then executive vice president of customers, and then president and chief operating officer in 2001 (which she stepped down from in 2008). She had no formal training in aviation, but that didn’t matter. Herb “always treated me as a complete equal to him,” she says.

It was Colleen who instituted the Golden Rule as the company motto and developed a model that focuses on employee satisfaction and issues first, followed by the needs of the passengers. The company hired employees for their touchy-feely attitudes and trained them for skill. Southwest Airlines developed a culture that celebrated and encouraged humor. The example of being themselves on the job started at the top with Herb and Colleen.

This attitude has paid off. Southwest Airlines posted a profit for 35 consecutive years and continues to make money while other airlines’ profits are crashing. Colleen says the most important numbers on the balance sheet, however, are those that indicate how many millions of people have become frequent flyers of the airline, a number that grows every year.

**Questions**

1. What type of servant leader behaviors did Herb Kelleher exhibit in starting the airline? What about Colleen Barrett?
2. How do the leaders of Southwest Airlines serve others? What others are they serving?
3. Southwest Airlines emphasizes the Golden Rule. What role does the Golden Rule play in servant leadership? Is it always a part of servant leadership? Discuss.
4. Based on [Figure 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2135), describe the outcomes of servant leadership at Southwest Airlines, and how follower receptivity may have influenced those outcomes.

**Leadership Instrument**

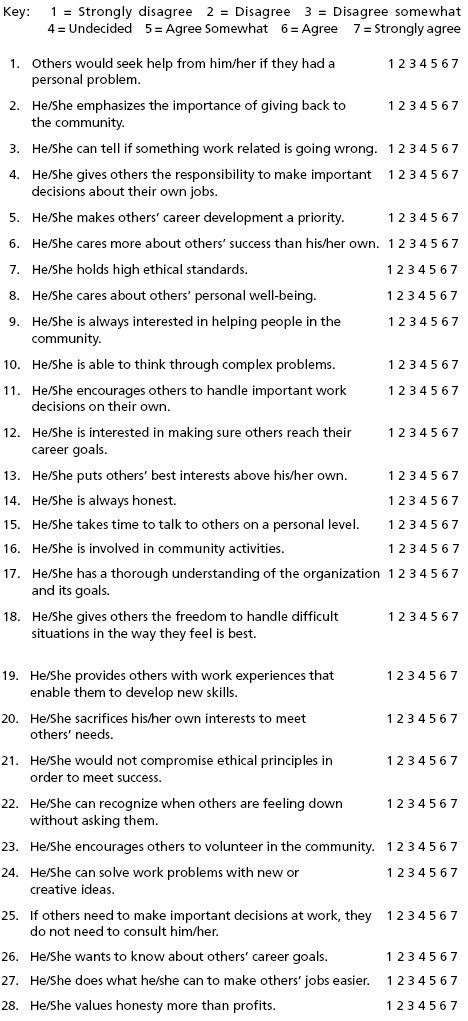
Many questionnaires have been used to measure servant leadership (see [Table 10.1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781483317540/epub/OEBPS/s9781483398013.i2089.xhtml#s9781483398013.i2125)). Because of its relevance to the content, the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) by Liden, Wayne, et al. (2008) was chosen for inclusion in this chapter. It is a 28-item scale that measures seven major dimensions of servant leadership: conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community. Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, Liden, Wayne, et al. established the multiple dimensions of this scale and described how it is uniquely different from other leadership measures.

By completing the SLQ you will gain an understanding of how servant leadership is measured and explore where you stand on the different dimensions of servant leadership. Servant leadership is a complex process, and taking the SLQ is one way to discover the dynamics of how it works.

**Servant Leadership Questionnaire**

*Instructions:* Select two people who know you in a leadership capacity such as a coworker, fellow group member, or follower. Make two copies of this questionnaire and give a copy to each individual you have chosen. Using the following 7-point scale, ask them to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements as they pertain to your leadership. In these statements, “He/She” is referring to you in a leadership capacity.

SOURCE: Reprinted (adapted version) from “Servant Leadership: Development of a Multidimensional Measure and Multi-Level Assessment,” by R. C. Liden, S. J. Wayne, H. Zhao, and D. Henderson, 2008, *The Leadership Quarterly, 19,* 161–177. Copyright © Reprinted with permission from Elsevier Science.



**Scoring**

Using the questionnaires on which others assessed your leadership, take the separate scores for each item, add them together, and divide that sum by two. This will give you the average score for that item. For example, if Person A assessed you at 4 for Item 2, and Person B marked you as a 6, your score for Item 2 would be 5.

Once you have averaged each item’s scores, use the following steps to complete the scoring of the questionnaire:

1. Add up the scores on 1, 8, 15, and 22. This is your score for emotional healing.
2. Add up the scores for 2, 9, 16, and 23. This is your score for creating value for the community.
3. Add up the scores for 3, 10, 17, and 24. This is your score for conceptual skills.
4. Add up the scores for 4, 11, 18, and 25. This is your score for empowering.
5. Add up the scores for 5, 12, 19, and 26. This is your score for helping followers grow and succeed.
6. Add up the scores for 6, 13, 20, and 27. This is your score for putting followers first.
7. Add up the scores for 7, 14, 21, and 28. This is your score for behaving ethically.

**Scoring Interpretation**

* *High range:* A score between 23 and 28 means you strongly exhibit this servant leadership behavior.
* *Moderate range:* A score between 14 and 22 means you tend to exhibit this behavior in an average way.
* *Low range:* A score between 8 and 13 means you exhibit this leadership below the average or expected degree.
* *Extremely low range:* A score between 0 and 7 means you are not inclined to exhibit this leadership behavior at all.

The scores you received on the Servant Leadership Questionnaire indicate the degree to which you exhibit the seven behaviors characteristic of a servant leader. You can use the results to assess areas in which you have strong servant leadership behaviors and areas in which you may strive to improve.

**Summary**

Originating in the seminal work of Greenleaf (1970), servant leadership is a paradoxical approach to leadership that challenges our traditional beliefs about leadership and influence. Servant leadership emphasizes that leaders should be attentive to the needs of followers, empower them, and help them develop their full human capacities.

Servant leaders make a conscious choice to *serve first*—to place the good of followers over the leaders’ self-interests. They build strong relationships with others, are empathic and ethical, and lead in ways that serve the greater good of followers, the organization, the community, and society at large.

Based on an idea from Hermann Hesse’s (1956) novel *The Journey to the East,* Greenleaf argued that the selfless servant in a group has an extraordinary impact on the other members. Servant leaders attend fully to the needs of followers, are concerned with the less privileged, and aim to remove inequalities and social injustices. Because servant leaders shift authority to those who are being led, they exercise less institutional power and control.

Scholars have conceptualized servant leadership in multiple ways. According to Spears (2002), there are 10 major characteristics of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Additional efforts by social science researchers to develop and validate measures of servant leadership have resulted in an extensive list of other servant leadership attributes.

Liden, Panaccio, et al. (2014) have created a promising model of servant leadership that has three main components: antecedent conditions, servant leader behaviors, and leadership outcomes. *Antecedent conditions* that are likely to impact servant leaders include context and culture, leader attributes, and follower receptivity. Central to the servant leader process are the seven *servant leader behaviors:* conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community. The *outcomes* of servant leadership are follower performance and growth, organizational performance, and societal impact.

Research on servant leadership has several strengths. First, it is unique because it makes altruism the main component of the leadership process. Second, servant leadership provides a counterintuitive and provocative approach to the use of influence wherein leaders give up control rather than seek control. Third, rather than a panacea, research has shown that there are conditions under which servant leadership is not a preferred kind of leadership. Last, recent research has resulted in a sound measure of servant leadership (Servant Leadership Questionnaire) that identifies seven distinct dimensions of the process.

The servant leadership approach also has limitations. First, the paradoxical nature of the title “servant leadership” creates semantic noise that diminishes the potential value of the approach. Second, no consensus exists on a common theoretical framework for servant leadership. Third, servant leadership has a utopian ring that conflicts with traditional approaches to leadership. Last, it is not clear why “conceptualizing” is a defining characteristic of servant leadership.

Despite the limitations, servant leadership continues to be an engaging approach to leadership that holds much promise. As more research is done to test the substance and assumptions of servant leadership, a better understanding of the complexities of the process will emerge.