

# Servant Leadership: A New Paradigm

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Servant leadership is systematically undefined (Russell & Stone, 2002) but a theoretical framework might be developed for appraising the attributes of servant leadership that can be used in practice. Malakyan (2014) described leadership as a monopolized discipline that teaches how to influence people and assist leaders in reaching organizational and personal goals through success, effectiveness, and productivity. The leadership emphasis has mostly been on how to be a leader rather than a follower (International Leadership Association, 2013). According to van Dierendonck (2010), the emphasis of servant leadership is on developing and empowering people; expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship; and providing direction. Given that 80% of people identify as followers, their perspectives have been neglected (Malakyan, 2014). Ribeiro (2016) also indicated the lack of relevance given to authenticity of servant leadership as an issue.

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This chapter includes a discussion on the general problem, why the chapter fits into the volume topic, and purpose of the chapter. Included also are relevant research concerning followers' perception of servant leadership and other leadership styles (transformational, ethical, and leader-follower trade [LFT]), the nature of the chapter and research questions. Finally, a discussion of the comparisons among specific leadership styles and servant leadership is provided. A discussion about how servant leadership resonates in terms of learning organizations, knowledge management, innovation, creativity, complex adaptive systems, and spirituality provides a unique perspective on servant leadership in the corporate environment. Conclusions are provided to help in understanding how this chapter has uncovered new paths or research and how followers perceive servant leadership and its contribution to leadership and practice.

## General Problem

The general problem involves the need for a new paradigm in corporate leadership relationships. Leadership and followership are two interdependent pairs (Koonce, Bligh, Carsten, & Hurwitz, 2016) and should be considered from both a leading and following perspective rather than as leader or follower. An understanding of, and appreciation for, followership in the leadership literature can lead to more generative organizational processes (Koonce et al., 2016).

Literature that points to servant leadership's potential for facilitating benefits to an organization indicates the lack of consensus regarding components that distinctly reflects servant leadership (Grisaffe, VanMeter, & Chonko, 2016). Empirical evidence on the outcomes of servant leadership is relatively scarce (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). However, servant leadership has received critical review concerning its overlap with transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership (Chughtai, 2016). In this chapter, servant leadership is offered as a means of a new paradigm in leadership that might impact organizations positively.

## Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the richness and diversity of research on leadership while exploring servant leadership as a new paradigm in corporate leadership and exploring possible alternatives to scholarly research on followers' perspectives on organizational learning (OL). Minimal research exists on the viability of servant leadership in the corporate business form. In the corporate environment, the perceptions of followers about OL provide a unique opportunity to add breath to the leadership discussion. A review of relevant leadership to explore this topic was chosen because it allowed the opportunity to determine the degree of neglect of followers' perceptions there is in the scholarly community and to highlight some of the benefits and concerns specific to the servant leadership-follower paradigm.

## Significance of the Chapter

This chapter is significant because it attempts to uncover the perspective of followers and build on including those perspectives into the leadership discussion. The specific leadership styles include transformational and servant leadership and LFT approach. Factors related to influencing followers and ultimately impacting the organizational environment are presented. The factors include learner-centric organizations, knowledge management, innovation, creativity, complex adaptive systems, and spirituality in the workplace. Fortis, Maon, Frooman, and Reiner (2016) framed OL as a key factor in corporate social responsibility and emphasizes learning from others and learning with others. Servant leadership might have attributes for addressing OL with the followers in mind. Not only has OL become a topic of increased academic research, so has knowledge management.

Knowledge management consists of a systematic and organizationally specific process for acquiring, organizing, and communicating both tacit and explicit knowledge of employees so that other employees may make use of it to be more effective and productive in their work (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). The effective management of an organization's knowledge is likely to provide a source of competitive advantage (Hislop, 2013).

## Significance of the Chapter to the Field of Leadership

The significance of the chapter is to offer servant leadership as an alternative model of organizational leadership that might influence the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations in the corporate, non-profit, and social sectors. Schein (2010) discussed the intimate relationship that exists between organizational culture and leadership in corporate organizations. According to Bass and Bass (2008), “Leadership makes the difference” (p. 3). Leaders can make a difference in whether organizations succeed or fail (Bass & Bass, 2008).

Leadership has the potential to influence innovation within an organization (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) indicated increased interest in the influence of transformational leadership on innovation. As a result of the chapter, a deeper understanding of followers’ views about transformational and servant leadership styles as well as the leader-follower approach to leadership might be understood. The chapter might also spark interest in future empirical research about leadership. Chughtai (2016) noted that no research was found that empirically explored the effect of servant leadership on employee voice and negative feedback seeking behavior.

According to Ayman and Korabik (2010), leaders in a diverse society must understand their preferred styles, behaviors, and circumstances to demonstrate effective leadership. Socio-demographic leadership styles and effectiveness differ based on gender (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Exploring the differences in perspectives regarding culture between leaders and followers within an organization might provide researchers with opportunities for additional research about the impact of servant leaders on the corporate scene.

Attention to factors of culture and gender and the dynamics produced by cultural and gender factors can reduce problems that might exist in the development of future leaders (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). The same concept might apply to followers within a culture that might minimize problems within organizations. An exploration of followers’ perspectives might also uncover factors that provide information about leaders’ focus. The distinction between leaders and followers found in a positive philosophical commitment introduces a disjunction that fosters a

sense of otherness that works against an *affect of intimacy* (Stuke, 2013). The *affect of intimacy* suggests that individuals are not assumed to be separated and isolated from a community as a whole (disjunctive) but are assumed to have a conjunction of relatedness and intimacy to the community (Stuke, 2013). The servant leadership embraces an *affect of intimacy* (Stuke, 2013). Wheatley (1992, 2006) challenged us to move into a universe that calls for an entirely new way of understanding. This chapter helps perpetuate Wheatley's call by focusing on followers' perceptions of leadership and how servant leadership fits into the possibilities of viable alternative styles in the corporate sector.

The research questions narrow the purpose to specific questions that the chapter answers. This research explores and reveals the extent to which servant leadership resonates with specific cross-disciplinary areas and the extent to which the follower's perspectives are included in leadership literature.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How does servant leadership resonate with OL, complex adaptive systems, and spirituality?

RQ2: Has followers' perspective of leadership and their leaders been sufficiently included in the leadership discussion?

## Relevant Literature

The aim of the chapter is to explore and uncover research about followers' perceptions and share the perceptions about the leader-follower paradigm in corporations. The relevant literature begins with the transformational leader and their followers and introduces the LFT approach, explores ethical leadership, ending with servant leadership to get a better understanding of how followers view the leadership concepts and their leaders in general. The chapter involved six factors that might provide some insights into organizations' ability to be efficient and effective. The six factors include learning, knowledge management, innovation, creativity, complex adaptive systems, and spirituality.

Scandals in business, governments, sports, non-profits, and social institutions raise questions regarding the quality of organizational leadership

(Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). The worldwide economic crisis in mid-2008 has shone a light on what is meant by quality leadership and challenged organizational scholars to define new models of leadership that might be more conducive to meeting the demands of an interdependent global society (Reed et al., 2011). A better understanding of subjective perspectives of followers in the literature (gained from qualitative or quantitative means) might provide some new understanding of leadership in the twenty-first century. This section of the chapter is organized by leadership styles and the six factors named above that might resonate with leadership and followers.

OL facilitates individual change and gives corporations a sustainable competitive advantage (Simon, 1991; Weick, 1991). The key to OL includes effective leadership (Jogulu, 2011). Awareness of the learning needs of all employees is crucial to future survival of corporate organization in contemporary situations (Jogulu, 2011).

Knowledge is considered a special type of resource in organizations which increases as it is used rather than decreases (Brajer-Marczak, 2016). Knowledge management refers to “information technologies, human resource management, or financial aspects of intellectual capital” (Jashapara, 2006, p. 27). Knowledge management assumes employee expresses readiness to learn and encourages problem-solving to increase organizational effectiveness (Brajer-Marczak, 2016).

Innovation has been one strategy organizations employ, even in turbulent times (Waite, 2014). Globalization has changed the business landscape, offering more mobility of information, financial capital, and people (Waite, 2014). Innovation is included in the leadership discussion because a corporation’s ability to adapt and innovate is critical to sustainability in an ever-changing environment (Waite, 2014, p. 16). Servant leadership and its impact on innovation should be further explored. Greenleaf had faith that servant-leadership corporations could change the world (n.d., para. 6)

Creative ideas can be used in problem resolution, process improvement, and the development of new products and services (Gupta & Banerjee, 2016). Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin (1993) defined creativity at the organizational level as the creation of values, useful new products, services, ideas, procedures, or processes by which individuals work together in a complex social system. Woodman et al. (1993) suggest that complex adaptive systems are ideal environments for exploring the

effects of leadership. An organization is seen as a complex adaptive system embedded in bureaucratic structures (Elkington & Booyesen, 2015). Leadership effectively serves an enabling function in complex adaptive systems (Elkington & Booyesen, 2015).

Bhasin (2013) indicates true management as identical to spirituality. Through spirituality, managers can gain conviction and develop gratitude to every step toward our vision (Bhasin, 2013). Bhasin (2013) implies that corporate professionals should practice spirituality to awaken the latent leadership potential which becomes a path for service. Spirituality and the other five factors that might impact an organization's efficiency and effectiveness are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Relevant literature includes books, refereed journal articles, and research documents from private and public academic institutions. Peer-reviewed articles, journals, and dissertations obtained through the Internet search engines Business Source Elite, EBSCOhost, ProQuest Digital Dissertations, GoogleScholar, and ProQuest provided additional information. The literature review involved searches for articles using specific keywords and combinations of words. *The keywords included transformational leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership, leader-follower trade approach, organizational learning, leader-followers, knowledge management, innovation, spirituality, and creativity in organizations, and complex adaptive systems.*

## Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership involves vision that inspires others to follow and take on the mantra of the mission, as proposed by James McGregor Burns. Leban and Stone (2008) defined transformational leadership as leader behavior that is futuristic and change oriented. According to Leban and Stone (2008), transformational leaders provide direction and guidance for what needs to be done when facing an uncertain future. Transformation leadership behavior requires the leader to successfully influence the organization for change (Leban & Stone, 2008).

Influence is the essence of leadership, and powerful leaders can have a substantial impact on followers and an organizational as a whole (Yukl, 2010). In the religious context, transformational leadership exemplifies the leadership of Jesus Christ (Fryar, 2007). Fryar (2007) noted that the leadership

offered by Kouzes and Posner (2002) has a similarity to that of Jesus Christ because they both focused on inspiring others by “starting in one place and moving them to someplace—someplace meaningful” (Fryar, 2007, p. 1).

According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership incorporated idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to affect follower behaviors. Idealized influence arouses follower emotions and identification with the leader; intellectual stimulation increases follower awareness of problems and influences followers to view problems from a new perspective; and individualized consideration involves providing support, encouragement, and coaching to followers (Yukl, 2010). Bass (1990) posited transformational leaders lead through inspiration, meeting followers’ emotional needs for intellectual stimulation. These behaviors suggest transformational leadership might be more effective than other leadership styles when organizational change is necessary. The concept of transformational leadership inspires others to follow a vision because they are committed to it rather than employing coercion. The major result of transformational leadership is that followers tend to put in extra effort or perform at higher levels than they state or was expected (Boseman, 2008).

Transformational leadership styles can support increasingly complex environments in institutions. The effectiveness of transformational leadership varies across different contexts (Zagorsek, Dimovski, & Skelavaj, 2009). Transformational leadership directly effects the constructs of acquisition, distribution, interpretation of information and the resulting behavioral, and cognitive changes (Zagorsek et al., 2009). Zagorsek et al. (2009) showed a strong relationship among all four constructs and a direct connection only on information acquisition and behavioral and cognitive changes. Transformational leaders involve followers in problem-solving and strive to create and utilize two-way personalized communications with followers (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004). Furthermore, the reference to the leadership style of Jesus Christ, which many might consider as servant leadership, suggests that transformational leadership and servant leadership might have attributes in common based on their relationship with their followers. The relationship of leaders to followers is evident in transformational leadership; however, new approaches might provide new opportunities for exploring followers’ perceptions in a new leadership paradigm.



## Leader-Follower Trade

Stogdill (1948) concluded that no universally consistent set of traits differentiates leaders from non-leaders and that a leader in one situation may not be a leader in others. This acknowledgment seems to refute the notion that leaders are born and not made. The leadership-followership approach provides an added leadership choice as “an organic method of doing leadership and followership and a new way of integrating followership into practice and research” (Malakyan, 2014, p. 11). According to Malakyan (2014), the organic method involves an exchange between leadership and followership roles which brings about a mutuality of relationship and influence between the leader and follower.

The LFT approach offers that the leadership-followership process occurs in relationships and that leading and following functions are interchangeable to facilitate the development of interpersonal perspectives, foster interpersonal relationships, and maximizing mutual effectiveness (Malakyan, 2014). Malakyan (2014) argued that the mutuality of relationships and influence between the followers and leaders exist. The LFT approach may result in a non-static and organic way to view leadership-followership concept (Malakyan, 2014). The non-static and organic approach offers a new understanding of human behavior functions that may be traded or exchanged by positional leaders and followers in various situations of the organizational environment to foster mutual respect, empowerment, and effectiveness (Malakyan, 2014). Kelley (1992) indicated that we must acknowledge the leader and follow dimensions within us.

Different situations require us to be leaders and followers. Malakyan (2015) suggested a change from the leader and follower roles to the dynamic interrelational of leading and following. The dual role of follower and leader provides an opportunity for performing better in both roles (Chaleff, 2009). Whether leader or follower, it is important to remain consistent in the treatment of others (Chaleff, 2009). To remain consistent, Chaleff (2009) suggested that by maintaining an awareness of our reactions of those we follow, we learn to be more sensitive to the effects on those we lead. Conversely, by maintaining an awareness of those we lead, we learn to be more sensitive in our efforts to support those

we follow (Chaleff, 2009). Chaleff provides additional insights into the mutuality of relationship between followers and leaders such as courage to assume responsibility, serve, challenge, participate in transformation, and leave.

Malakyan (2015) acknowledges the non-existence of the mythical nature of leaders and followers as nouns or separate entities by depersonalizing leadership and followership. Depersonalization means to focus on the functions of leading and following rather than on the person (Malakyan, 2015). Depersonalization emphasizes the relational process between those who lead and those who follow (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010).

Effectiveness continues to be a major consideration in organizations. The LFT approach suggests that leader and follower seek effectiveness together and their attitudes toward each other are viewed as a regulating determinant for effective leadership and followership (Malakyan, 2014). The leader's and follower's effectiveness sets the conditions for maximum effectiveness in organizations and groups (Malakyan, 2014).

## Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership, in its complexities, might be defined by values, traits, and behaviors (Yukl, 2010). Starratt (2004) offered ethics based on three foundational virtues not because they are grounded in natural law or holy writ but they represent an appealing, reasonable, and an uplifting way to conduct business. Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conducts to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (p. 120).

For an employee to perceive ethical leadership, leaders are expected to conduct their personal lives in an ethical manner, to be trustworthy, and treat employees fairly (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016). Morally disengaged leaders would not be perceived as ethical because their language and actions would not be consistent with ethical leadership practices (Bonner et al., 2016). When both supervisors (leaders) and employees

(followers) are low in moral disengagement, the followers likely perceive the leaders as highly ethical (Bonner et al., 2016). Employees high in moral disengagement perceive the leader, whether morally disengaged or not, as being high in ethical leadership (Bonner et al., 2016).

Despite the growing body of research that indicated follower perceptions of ethical leadership are based on beneficial follower outcomes such as leader interactional and follower ethical behavior, Bedi, Alpaslan, and Green (2016) suggested that perceptions of followers relate positively to leadership interactional fairness and follower ethical behavior. According to Bedi et al. (2016), ethical leadership is positively related to transformational leadership. Followers' perceptions of ethical leadership positively relate to cognitive trust in leaders, affective trust in leaders, leader honesty, interactive fairness, leadership effectiveness, and satisfaction with the leader (Bedi et al., 2016). Positive dimensional association between transformational leadership and ethical leadership include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bedi et al., 2016). Ethical behavior is a key component in transformational, servant, and spiritual leadership as acknowledged by Bedi et al. (2016), which seems to indicate that ethical leadership and transformational leadership might be perceived in a similar manner by followers.

## Servant Leadership

The emphasis of servant leadership is on developing and empowering people; expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship; and providing direction (van Dierendonck, 2010). The servant leadership model portrays a service orientation based on a holistic outlook with a moral-spiritual emphasis (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Servant leadership pertains to leaders who serve the internal stakeholder groups as well as the community, the planet, humanity, the future, and life itself (Zohar, 2005). The concept of servant leadership is gaining some interest in churches but its well-known proponent was a businessman (Gallagher, 2009). The concept of servant leadership is more complex than stated in some of the literature. Amour (2014) explains

servant leadership as a *top-down approach* where the leaders put needs of the group before themselves but they are still the leader, not the follower. Amour (2014) provides some nuanced insights into the nature of servant leadership and suggests that followership is taught along with leadership.

Servant leaders serve the members of the congregation in addition to the global church. Jesus Christ is the model for servant leadership (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The servant leader's deliberate choice is to serve others (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Servant leaders focus more on building people up rather than tearing them down and they understand there are rules but sometimes the rules need to be broken in order to do the right thing (Koury, 2013). Based on narrative accounts of his life in the Bible, Sendjaya, and Sarros (2002) posited that Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, first taught the concept. Jesus taught his followers to measure a leader's greatness by the leader's total commitment to serve human beings (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

According to Greenleaf (1977), the chief motive of a servant leader is to serve first, which begins with the natural inclination that one wants to serve first. Greenleaf highlighted the basis of servant leadership in terms of who the servant leader is and what the servant leader does. Autry (2001) noted the features and qualities of servant leadership require development over time. The manifestation of a servant leader's chief motive inspires a conscious choice to lead (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf conceptualized the notion of servant leadership and introduced it into the organizational environment, but he was not the first to introduce the notion of servant leadership to everyday human behavior, it was Jesus Christ (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

The model of servant leadership shifted the concept of leadership from the old autocratic model to one that emphasizes teamwork and community, involvement of others in decision-making, ethical, and caring behavior, and enhancing the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of organizations (Greenleaf & Spears, 1998). Spears (1998) identified listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building communities as characteristics common

to servant leaders. According to Spears (1998), servant leadership qualities begin with the internal action of listening. The following list describes the qualities of servant leadership:

- *Listening*—the leader’s capacity for a deep commitment to listening to others
- *Empathy*—striving to understand and empathize with others
- *Healing*—the potential to heal themselves and others
- *Awareness*—ability to develop self-awareness through self-reflection, listening, to being continually open to learning and making the connection from what we know and believe to what we say or do
- *Persuasion*—seeking to convince others rather than coerce compliance
- *Conceptualization*—ability to see the whole in the perspective of history—past and future—to state and adjust goals, evaluating, analyzing, and foresee contingencies in the long term showing the way rather than operating in the short term. Conceptualization involves comparing instant moment events constantly and comparing them with a series of past projections and predicting future events with diminishing certainty; accountability without control or compliance; committing to the growth of human beings and doing everything they can to nurture others; and seeking to identify some means for building communities
- *Foresight*—the ability to see or know the likely outcome of a situation
- *Stewardship*—service without any pressure and not in response to someone’s request
- *Commitment to the growth of people*—commitment to doing everything they can to nurture others
- *Building community*—service that seeks to identify means for building community (Spears, 1998)

The four leadership approaches for the chapter have several similarities that might suggest identical perspectives for followers. The similarities include vision, awareness, and empowering people. The differences may demonstrate the divergent trending of followers’ perspectives more profoundly than the similarities.

## Comparisons of the Leadership Styles

A comparison of the leadership styles in this chapter provides a unique way to make some distinctions about the styles and provide additional insights into the similarities and differences of the styles. The comparisons also provide some insights about other leadership models and how followers might perceive them. The focus of transformational leaders is on the organization while the servant leader focus is on the followers with goal achievement of the organization as a secondary concern (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Transformational leadership should be considered as a leadership style with benefits and limitations rather than an attempt to define how leaders should behave. According to Stone et al. (2004), transformational leaders rely on charisma to direct and influence followers, while servant leaders rely on service to stimulate and influence the behavior of followers.

Transformational leadership involves four components that may or may not exist in servant, LFT, or ethical styles. The components include (1) charisma or idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration (McCrimmon, 2008). Servant leadership suggests acting in service to others might provide some benefits for practice.

Scuderi (2010) compared servant leadership and transformational leadership in the church environment. When considered together, servant and transformational leadership demonstrate independent positive relationship with leader effectiveness, perceptions of church health, trust in leader and organization, and follower satisfaction (Scuderi, 2010). Despite the positive relationship mentioned above, neither leadership styles translated significantly into follower giving, church health statistics, or changes in church size and finances over time (Scuderi, 2010).

Given that transformational leaders inspire followers to share a vision, this style of leadership empowers them to achieve the vision by providing the needed resources (Smith et al., 2004). On the other hand, servant leaders place the interest of followers before their self-interest emphasizing personal development and empowerment of followers (Smith et al., 2004). The common denominator of transformational and servant leadership is empowerment of followers. In Robert Greenleaf's vision of servant

leadership, the leader is first seen as a servant to other from the followers' perspective (Smith et al., 2004). According to Smith et al. (2004), servant leaders view leadership not as a status. This concept further distinguishes servant leaders from transformational leaders. Although servant leaders might have a vision and other presuppositions, the focus continues to be the service to others.

Transformational leadership's distinct elements as provided by McCrimmon contrast with the components of servant leadership, valuing people, developing people, building community, developing authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership (Laub, 1999), in that there is a distinct difference in focus that might change the paradigm of leader-follower. Transformational leadership places less emphasis on valuing individuals on an emotional level and on learning from others (Smith et al., 2004). Transformational leadership and followership transcends human limitations and embraces a vision that is always bigger and higher than the leaders' and followers' abilities (Malakyan, 2015).

The LFT approach fits the servant leadership philosophy because both bring the servant (follower) and leader roles together into one person (Malakyan, 2015). Malakyan referred to servant leadership as a leadership of followers which opens new opportunities for followers to lead and leaders to follow. One distinct difference between transformational leadership and servant leadership, from the perspective of LFT, is that in servant leadership one may not always be viewed as a leader and the other as a follower but rather viewed as an interchangeable function of leading and following (Malakyan, 2015).

As we compare LFT to ethical leadership, again we do not recommend studying leadership and followership in a vacuum as they are viewed as interchangeable functions. Ethics results from communication and the relationship between the leader and the follower and the follower's response to the leader's behavior or actions (Malakyan, 2015). In this sense, leaders and followers are responsible for corporate ethics, the leader's ethics, and their own ethics. This suggests that an awareness of ethical behavior is needed throughout the organizational culture.

The comparisons of the leadership styles provide a better understanding of the similarities and differences that informs our understanding of leadership. In the following sections, OL, knowledge management,

innovation, creativity, complex adaptive systems, and spirituality are concepts to further inform our understanding of leadership, specifically transformational, LFT, ethical, and servant leadership. In the next section, a discussion of the factors provided some context as to the level of follower perceptions.

## Followers' Perceptions of Leadership

In the context of changes in worldwide business practices, technologies, information systems, and concerns for the environment, leadership training needs considerable rethinking (Ridley, Chatterjee, & Soutar, 1998). As leaders are increasingly called up to be facilitators and idea coordinators rather than idea generators, *hard* and *soft* competencies must be a significant part of the leadership paradigm (Ridley et al., 1998). Hard competencies include technologies, information systems, and environmental concerns, while soft competencies include the leader's ability to envision the organization and sell the vision to frontline management and employees (Ridley et al., 1998). As do leaders, followers have a significant impact on the success of the organization, and their perceptions should become part of the leadership discussion.

According to Ridley et al. (1998), followers needed to focus little attention on tasks but felt ideal leaders should possess significant interpersonal and team-building skills combined with honesty and integrity. Followers tend to assess leaders on their internal rather than external point of view (Ridley et al., 1998). In a comparison of actual and ideal leaders, followers found leaders to be less than ideal because the leaders were perceived to be too achievement oriented and too independent (Ridley et al., 1998). As organizations and society continue to provide more insights into the leadership phenomenon, followers' perceptions provide an indicator that may or may not correlate with the success of an organization (Ridley et al., 1998).

Gabriel (2015) indicated that followers judge their leaders by standards of morality more than they would of others. Followers expect leaders to be competent and ethical (Gabriel, 2015). Highest among followers' expectations are ethics of care, indicating leaders should love their fol-



lowers, offer personalized attention and empathy, as well as support and help them to flourish (Gabriel, 2015). Ethics of judgment also rated high on followers' perceptions. Without these standards of morality, followers were less likely to view their leaders as moral, trustworthy, affectionate, and with respect (Gabriel, 2015).

Frew (1977) developed a questionnaire to measure followers' preferred patterns of their leaders. Epitropaki and Martin (2005) conducted a longitudinal study about followers' perceptions of the relationship between ideal and actual manager profiles and perceived quality of relationship. Sensitivity, dynamic, and intellectual traits were used to create leadership profiles (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). Epitropaki and Martin (2005) found that followers' perceptions of quality of relationship improved the closer the perceived actual manager profile was to the ideal manager profile.

Vecchio and Boatwright (2002) also used a questionnaire to measure followers' preferences for leadership styles. They found that followers with higher levels of education and length of job tenure preferred a leadership that was less structured, while females preferred leaders who demonstrate a higher level of consideration. This indicates that leaders might want to consider the demographics of followers to help them decide on what type of leadership traits would best inspire their followers.

The importance of understanding followers in their words about leaders helps to discover what followers are thinking (Lord & Emrich, 2001). Notgrass (2010) found that followers' preference for transformational leadership behavior positively correlated with the followers' perception of a quality relationship. In addition, followers' preference for transactional leadership and transformational leadership factor of contingent reward had the highest positive correlation to the follower's perception of quality of relationship (Notgrass, 2010). While research on followers' preferences for leadership styles exists, the study of followers' perceptions is minimal when the focus is on their present leader. Additional research on followers' perceptions of leaders might reduce the compartmentalization of leaders and followers and provide a more informed view of the impact on the organizational environment. The followers' perceptions might provide some insights into structure, culture, customers, competition, technology, and market changes relative to the typical corporate organization.

## Learner-Centered (Learning)

Organizational effectiveness will require leaders to develop and sustain a culture of learning for the successful response to changes in a rapidly changing global environment (Earl-Lewis, 1999). OL refers to the insights and knowledge needed to guide future actions which are captured, shaped, and incorporated in an organization's strategy, systems, and routines (Gephart, Marsick, Novak, Reinhart, & Schwandt, 1998). Learning organizations allow space for generative conversation and concerted actions whereby organizational members inquire into systematic consequences of individual and group-level actions (Kofman & Senge, 1993). When organizational members have the ability to integrate new concepts of meaning and understanding into existing work systems, OL occurs (Earl-Lewis, 1999). An organization that adopts a learning posture allows them to function more effectively while sharing the new insights with other members of the organization (Earl-Lewis, 1999).

Although leadership is necessary in learning application for organizational change (Beverly, Marilyn, & Santana, 2008), leadership research has not addressed the relationship between leadership and OL, but leadership studies have focused on leaders, followers, or the interrelationships between leaders and followers (Lu, 2010). Potosky (2010) indicated people (followers) need their leaders' support in order to learn and perform in a new organizational environment. Even though employees (followers) might want to make changes happen, they face inadequate resources and leadership support which in turn hinders organizations from making major changes (Kotter, 1995). Lu (2010) posited that transformational leadership behavior has stronger positive influence with OL than transactional leadership. Future research about servant leadership and followers' perceptions might produce new insights about how the leader-follower relationship resonates with OL. The chapter considers concepts such as knowledge management, innovation, creativity, understanding complex adaptive systems, and spirituality which might enhance organization learning. These concepts might provide avenues for additional research which measures followers' perceptions of leaders relative to achieving organizational goals.

## Knowledge Management

Knowledge management represents the activities and systematic process for acquiring, organizing, and communicating tacit and explicit knowledge of employees so that other employees may make use of it to be more effective and productive in their work (Jantarajaturapath, Imsuwan, & Wongsim, 2016). Superior business performance and competitive advantage can be achieved through knowledge, the new wealth of organizations (Jantarajaturapath et al., 2016). The four aspects of knowledge management include knowledge creation, knowledge storage and retrieval, knowledge transfer, and knowledge application (Jantarajaturapath et al., 2016).

Social relationship forms the organizational world and knowledge (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). Nonaka and Nishiguchi indicated that care characterizes organizational relationships that enable effective knowledge development. Care characterizes a process of interaction between receiver and provider (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). The concept of care in organizational relationships has been associated with providers and receivers but care organizations can entail concrete action in ways of helping others. Care can be sufficient for helping others (Egan, 1986). Care is important in organizations because individuals in organizations may develop new products or services and ideas through creative thinking but care should not be understood in terms of roles and functions but in organizational relationships (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). Nonaka and Nishiguchi posited that organizational knowledge development starts from individual experiences and should be shared by other organizational members of that organization so that organizational knowledge can be developed from individual observances and thinking. From Nonaka and Nishiguchi's perspective, care plays a pivotal role in organizational knowledge development through individuals discovering sources of innovation and respecting individual experiences of colleagues.

In respect to organizational knowledge, servant leadership as a new paradigm of leadership might improve and help development of an organizational structure conducive to care, adaptability, and minimizing self. Competitive pressures and the rapid changes in technologies

have encouraged organizations to use knowledge as a strategic factor for creating innovativeness and competitiveness (Mehrddad & Abdolrahim, 2010). Some believe that knowledge is an enduring source of competitive advantage (Nonaka, 1991), while others believe knowledge to be the most valuable and important resource of organizations and critical to organizational success (Chang & Lee, 2007; Alavi & Leidner, 2001). This discussion about knowledge management and care might provide additional scholarship for discussing followers' perceptions of leaders.

## Innovation

Gunday, Ulusoy, Kilic, and Alkpan (2011) described innovation as an essential component embedded in the organizational structures, processes, products, and services within an organization for competitiveness and survival. Garcia-Morales, Matias-Reche, and Hurtado-Torres (2008) recognized leadership style as one of the most important factors influencing innovation because leaders have authority to set specific goals and encourage innovative initiatives from subordinates (followers). According to Sethibe and Steyn (2015), transformational leadership is more positively related to organizational performance, while transactional leadership is more appropriate when the goal is innovation. Transactional leadership resides on the opposite side of the leadership continuum from transformational leadership (Washington, 2007). According to Bass (1985), transactional leadership describes an exchange process in which leaders recognize the needs of followers and then define the appropriate exchange processes to meet the needs of the followers and leader's expectations. However, transactional leadership is not likely to generate great enthusiasm and commitment among followers (Bass, 1985).

Innovation can be a risk for transformational leaders because the burden of competition and the race for higher profits and relevance could force transformational leaders to exhibit pseudo-transformational behaviors (Hughes & Harris, 2015). Pseudo-transformational leaders make changes for self and not the organization (Hughes & Harris, 2015). It is important to have the right type of leadership to drive organizational innovation (Oke, Munshi, & Walumbwa, 2009). Transformational lead-

ership behaviors are held to be more effective in enhancing organizational innovation than other leadership styles (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Hsiao, Chang, & Tu, 2009; Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003, 2008; Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008). Empirical studies have found that transformational leaders are more capable in supporting values and norms of followers and fostering organizational and personal changes (Jung et al., 2003). The charisma, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation components of transformational leaders positively and significantly related to organizational innovation (Mokhber, Wan Ismail, & Vakilbashi, 2015).

Servant leadership theory contends that followers experience increased growth and well-being and adopts a serving others posture when leaders' attitudes manifest a desire to serve the interest of all stakeholders rather than serving self-interest (Greenleaf, 1977). Panaccio, Henderson, Liden, Wayne, and Cao (2015) used psychological contract (PC) as a mediating mechanism with innovative behavior. Panaccio et al. (2015) considered how servant leadership influences followers' perceptions of PC fulfillment by putting followers first and helping them grow and succeed and found that putting followers first speaks directly to the fulfillment of followers' needs that compromise PC. Panaccio et al., 2015 found the PC fulfillment process influences followers' engagement in innovative behaviors. Additional research is needed to determine how corporate innovation affects the perceptions of their leaders.

## Creativity

Organizations need to consider employee creativity and proactivity as critical determinants of organizational outcomes (Grant, 2008). Amabile (1996) defined creativity as the production of novel and useful ideas concerning products, services, and procedures of the organization. According to Gilson and Shalley (2004), leaders should develop and maintain a work environment that fosters, encourages, and supports creativity and provide employees with opportunities to take risks with new and potentially better approaches. Byun, Dai, Lee, and Kang (2016) offered empowering leadership as a means of creating a creative work environment.

Empowering leadership involves providing decision-making autonomy, expressing confidence in employees' abilities, and removing restraints to performance (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). Leaders' empowering behavior can encourage employees to think beyond their comfort zone and explore new and creative alternatives (Byun et al., 2016).

Wu and Cormican (2016) confirmed shared leadership network had a positive association with team creativity. Pearce and Sims (2002) defined shared leadership as leadership emanating from members of teams and not simply from the team leader. Shared leadership occurs when all team members fully engage in the leadership process instead of being led by one designated leader (Seers, Keller, & Wilkerson, 2003). Wu and Cormican (2016) suggested that team creativity increases where high levels of density in shared leadership networks exist.

According to Qui, Janssen, & Shi (2015), followers' relational identification of transformational leaders mediates creativity. Baublits (2014) posited that developing creativity in followership education programs can better equip students to influence the business world with innovative thinking skills that enhance problem-solving in an increasingly competitive work environment

## Complex Adaptive Systems

Complex systems consist of a large number of relatively independent parts that are interconnected and interactive (Kochugovindan & Vriend, 1998). The adaptive nature of complex systems occurs when they change their actions as a result of events occurring in the process of interaction (Kochugovindan & Vriend, 1998). Elkington and Booysen (2015) indicated that leadership that flourished in a stable environment must adapt to support striving in a new globalized era. That adaptation might be expressed through leadership as an enabling function within the organization as a complex adaptive system (Elkington & Booysen, 2015).

Public and private organizations might be thought of as complex adaptive systems (CAS). CAS include subsystems within a supra-system (Minas, 2005). CAS share open boundaries, multiple levels of organization, control parameters that determine the state of the system, adaptation

and structural coupling, self-organization, emergence, and non-linear causality (Minas, 2005). CAS require leadership at all levels of the system (Minas, 2005). The concept of complexity in business provides an opportunity for “thinking creatively about leadership for, and management of change” (Minas, 2005, p. 38).

Lichtenstein et al. (2006) offers two additional leadership approaches to the literature: complexity leadership and adaptive leadership. Lichtenstein et al. (2006) indicated a need for leadership theory to transition to new perspectives that addresses the complex adaptive nature of organizations. Complexity leadership provides a new perspective for leadership research by considering leadership with the framework of ideas of a complex adaptive system (Marion, 1999). Lichtenstein et al. (2006) defined adaptive leadership as an interactive event in which knowledge, action preferences, and behavioral changes provoke organizations to be more adaptive. Lichtenstein et al. (2006) further informed that leadership occurs when interacting agents generate adaptive outcomes rather than getting followers to follow the wishes of the leader. Two drivers in CAS include collective identity formation and tension where the interactions of agents can produce tensions that might generate new ideas, innovations, and embodies the essence of adaptive leadership (Lichtenstein et al., 2006).

Painter-Morland (2009) suggested adopting a systemic perspective of leadership for complex adaptive systems involving the following elements:

- Eliciting and appreciation contention
- Fostering collaboration
- Building relationships of trust
- Developing wisdom and humility
- Celebrating diversity
- Embracing interdependence

Through their systematic approach to leadership, Painter-Morland (2009) suggested that agents in an organization continually take responsibility for the proper and efficient conduct of business, maintain trust and organizational purpose, respect differences, and form creative tensions. The tensions challenge organizational members to reevaluate how organizations

and their agents interpret moral challenges and take accountability for the emergence of corporate ethos (Painter-Morland, 2009).

## Spirituality

Spirituality can be described as opening of one's self to a purpose or meaning (Vaill, 1996). According to Fry (2003), spirituality refers to the concern with or connection to transcendent being which also includes an individual's search for an ultimate purpose in life. Salas-Amaro (2014) focused on spirituality as a special talent or gift to positively influence others to fulfill the mission, vision, and strategic objectives of a business organization. The nature of spirituality in leadership is observed in business, politics, legal, technological, and cultural climates (Salas-Amaro, 2014). Skeptics of spirituality at work see it as dangerous and imperious intrusion, an invitation to inefficiency and unaccountability in private sector economic activity. The symptoms of teleopathy include fixation, rationalization, and detachment of which the root cause lies in adopting counterfeit sources of moral legitimacy. Spirituality is not a matter of replacing one set of surrogates with another set but rather cultivating virtues, policies, and practices reflecting a balanced mind-set.

Spirituality as an ingredient in effective leadership can contribute to making the leader-follower relationship positive and enduring (Salas-Amaro, 2014). According to Fairholm (1997), spiritual leaders demonstrate relevance in business environment by possessing elements and characteristics of community, competence, continuous improvement, higher moral standards, servant leadership, stewardship, visioning, and living out deeply held personal values or a presence greater than self. Because effective leaders need followers that trust and believe in their mission, spirituality in a business educational context focuses on the leader's personality and approach to influencing followers (Salas-Amaro, 2014). Adding a sense of spirituality to business programs will contribute to educating the next generation of leaders to care for their employees, encourage them, motivate them, and show them respect (Salas-Amaro, 2014). Phipps (2012) proposed that a strategic leader's spiritual belief



acts as a chema to filter or frame information the leader considers and the spiritual belief provides an understanding of how the leader's personal beliefs effect decision-making.

## Conclusions and Comments

The purpose of this chapter was to reveal the richness and diversity of research on leadership while attempting to identify new avenues of research followers' perceptions. A better understanding of followers' views about leaders is needed if leaders are to think differently about their leadership roles. The literature included peer-reviewed articles, books, magazines, and symposiums.

More studies are needed to help leaders understand more fully how leadership style can inform their decision-making and how followers view their leaders' styles. Servant leadership could significantly improve organizational effectiveness and efficiencies because of its focus on service. The literature does not explain in detail how followers view their leaders or their leadership styles in terms of OL. The chapter does present a plethora of research that addresses the leadership styles and followers' perceptions of their leaders. However, the discussion of followers' perceptions has focused primarily on employee satisfaction (Aina, 2013).

The findings of this chapter illustrate the degree to which follower perceptions are integrated into the literature on leadership. Results from the chapter also indicate a cross-disciplinary approach. Two research questions for the chapter were:

RQ1: How does servant leadership resonate with OL?

RQ2: Has follower perspective of leadership and their leaders been sufficiently included in the leadership discussion?

To accomplish the missions and vision of an organization, leaders and followers are needed and they are expected to collaborate through challenging and successful times. Skills of leaders and followers are critical to the success of missions and success of the organization.

The relevant literature indicates a lack of research that investigates servant leadership as an alternative style for learner-centric organizations, knowledge management, innovation, creativity, complex adaptive systems, and spirituality. There was minimal research found about followers' perceptions of leaders and the leaders' contribution to OL. However, there is no shortage of research investigating transformational leadership and its ability to provide vision for organizations to compete on the global landscape.

In accessing the keywords used, it can be concluded that scholars mostly focus on transformational leadership when investigating the relationships between different constructs. According to Ispas and Teberian (2012), Lee (2016), and Malakyan (2014), servant leadership has elements that aligns with transformational, ethical, and LFT leadership. In RQ1, the rationale was to attempt showing how servant leadership resonates with OL. The literature does provide evidence that servant leadership resonates with OL through the interrelation of leaders and followers and establishing and supporting new environments where followers can integrate new concepts of meaning and understanding into existing work systems (Earl-Lewis, 1999).

OL occurs when the interrelationship of leaders and followers allows them to function more effectively while sharing the new insights with other members of the organization (Earl-Lewis, 1999). Private and public organizations might be considered as CAS and as we acknowledge the record number of corporate mergers in 2016, these organizations become even more complex. Servant leadership's attribute of influence through vision, trust, credibility, communication, learning, and active listening provides some level of empowerment as identified in transformational leadership. In return, servant leadership provides a possibility for corporate success through flexibility which might increase organizational performance. Spirituality resonates with servant leadership in terms of *meaning purpose* (Vaill, 1996), caring (Salas-Amaro, 2014), and collaboration, virtues, policies, and practices. Therefore, servant leadership might become a preferred model in the ever-changing global environment.

In answering RQ2, the rationale was to uncover research that lends itself more to followers' perspectives of leaders and leadership rather than leaders. There continues to be limited research on the followers' perspective without providing concepts or words. The importance of understanding

followers' perceptions of leaders, in their words, helps in discovering what followers are thinking (Lord & Emrich, 2001). I would recommend a qualitative approach that asks no more than ten questions in which followers can respond to and the researcher can analyze the trends that come forward rather than providing keywords for them to make sense of from the researcher. This can be accomplished through a mixed methodology. Sharing the results of this chapter may provide an impetus for new research related to follower and leadership practice.

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