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Servant Leadership at ServiceMaster: A Commitment to Love, Development, and Diversity

Helen H. Chung
Seattle Pacific University

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Helen H. Chung

Assistant Professor of Industrial-Organizational Psychology

School of Psychology, Family, and Community

Seattle Pacific University

3307 3rd Ave W, Suite 107, Seattle, WA 98119-1922

Author Bio:

Helen Chung is Assistant Professor of Industrial-Organizational Psychology at Seattle Pacific University. She holds a doctorate in I-O Psychology from Seattle Pacific University and a master's in theological studies from Harvard Divinity School. Her research focuses on inclusive forms of leadership, temporality and leadership, the role of narrative in organizations, and faith and spirituality in the workplace. She is also principal of Pathways Coaching and Consulting, a firm that is committed to helping leaders develop and expand their capacity for building collaborative, inclusive, and service-oriented organizations.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, servant leadership has gained currency as a promising pathway for inclusive organizations, where individuals can experience a sense of belonging and participate in decision-making. Given the framework's significant attitudinal and behavioral demands, potential servant-leaders may need to consider the costs and benefits of the servant leadership mantle. Drawing from a conservation of resources theory, I propose that both individuals and organizations will increasingly need to consider the personal and environmental conditions (i.e., resource caravans) that support servant leader behaviors. Specifically, I examine servant leadership from a critical lens, asking the question of how women and members of underrepresented groups might negotiate their own leadership in organizational cultures where they do not match the leader prototype. Finally, the business case of ServiceMaster, a Fortune 500 service firm that embedded servant leadership into their management praxis, is discussed to illustrate a pathway for how businesses might better cultivate and support their servant-leaders.

Keywords: servant leadership, conservation of resources theory, resource caravans, women, race-ethnicity, ServiceMaster

Introduction

The history of leadership reflects the ways in which human beings of various eras look to leaders to navigate certain challenges and needs. Currently, there is increased focus on the need for caring and inclusive forms of leadership in society and business. An emphasis on control and exchange has shifted to more personalized forms, including but not limited to transformational, authentic, ethical, and spiritual leadership. Servant leadership in particular is gaining traction as a positive practice that potentially facilitates multiple benefits for organizations and individuals.

While servant leadership ideals and practices have resonated with religious, non-profit, and educational institutions, they have also emerged in the for-profit business sector. Interest is burgeoning, and it is particularly noticeable in management scholarship as curiosity about the model, which began in the 1990s, has evolved into an earnest examination of the framework (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013). The empirical research conducted since 2004 suggests that servant leadership is related to positive outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations. On a practical level, the framework holds broad appeal as a model that narrows the presumed hierarchical separation between leaders and followers. The phrase, "servant leader," recognizes that the servant may lead and the leader may serve. While application of these concepts may vary across contexts, the leadership field by and large is moving away from the control and command leader to the collaborative and supportive leader. According to Eva and colleagues (2019), servant leadership is also universally appealing in part because it facilitates belonging in a transactional world where people feel increasingly disconnected from each other.

The management origins of servant leadership harken back to Robert Greenleaf (1998, 1977), a long-time manager at AT&T who was deeply interested in conceptualizing the work of leaders as the development and empowerment of others. Beyond individual leaders, business was also to act as a "serving institution" for its members and customers (Greenleaf, 1966, p. 117).

> The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. 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? (Greenleaf, 1970)

Two principles can be drawn from the passage. First, the servant-leader is motivated by the desire to serve. Second, the servant-leader's efforts can be measured by the development, growth, and well-being of those being served. According to Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), the servant-leader sees him or herself as a steward who serves, as opposed to leading, managing, or controlling. Both this self-concept and intent are evident at ServiceMaster, a Fortune 500 firm differentiated by servant leadership practices informed by the Christian faith of the founder and early leaders. Greenleaf's conceptualization of servant leadership, which was inspired by Hesse's fictional book entitled *Journey to the East*, is markedly absent from the writings and speeches of ServiceMaster's first four leaders. Instead, biblical accounts of service and servanthood (e.g., Jesus washing the disciples' feet and instructing them to do the same for each other, John 13:13-15) shaped the firm's praxis of servant leadership.

Bill Pollard (2011), fourth CEO of the firm, noted in a speech entitled "Redemptive Leadership" that "the subordination of self is always a work in progress with the measure of success coming in the development and changed lives to the people you lead." Subordination is the act of putting oneself at a lower place or rank. The following passage from "A Cross-Eyed View of Leadership" (2006) delivered to the graduating students of Gordon-Conwell Theological

seminary highlights several important themes of servant leadership germane to this paper—
leadership as a means rather than an end, leadership as service rather than position or power, and
leadership as an act of loving the diverse world created by God.

> So, as you assume a leadership role, I encourage you to do so with your eyes fixed on the
> Cross. It is this Cross-Eyed view of leadership that should characterize what you say and
> do. The people you touch and lead will then be able to see beyond you, beyond your
> accomplishments and knowledge, and so to witness the love of God, as you view life and
> the world around you through the Cross, you will grow to understand that leadership is
> only a means, not an end. That it is not about you or our 'leadership characteristics', it's
> about the people who follow and the direction you are leading them. It's about an
> opportunity to serve, not a title or position of privilege and power. An opportunity to
> serve as Jesus did, with a towel and a basin of water….The often too-human distinctions,
> labels, and titles we place upon people are never a basis for preference when we serve as
> ambassadors of God's love. It is the world that He so loved with all of its differences and
> diversity.

Pollard's speech illustrates a theologically rooted model of the servant leader who is motivated to
serve first, which counters most modern conceptualizations of the leader who is energized by the
foremost desire to lead. If servant leadership requires an act of subordinating oneself, as Pollard
proposes in the above passage, what might this mean for business leaders? What is often missing
in a discussion of servant leadership is legitimacy in context. Individuals do not share the same
baseline or starting place for leading. People tend to hold implicit concepts of the prototypical or
ideal leader (Northouse, 2016), which are shaped by their experience, personality, and cultural
values (Lord & Emrich, 2000). In every society, the dominant culture will often inform notions
of the leader prototype for majority and minority groups. Specifically, the Euro American male is
consciously or unconsciously regarded as the ideal leader in the broader U.S. society, resulting in
his enjoying a potential advantage of subordinating himself without risking a net loss of status or
power. In contrast, women and minorities may risk perceived legitimacy, without reaping the
same benefits as their White male counterparts. Researchers and practitioners must address
possible implications of the leader prototype mismatch. Investigating this question necessitates
an exploration of the costs and benefits related to adopting a servant leadership framework.
Although servant leadership is ultimately about outcomes for those who are served, there is a
substantial demand on personal leadership, and organizations could work to bolster their support
of leaders so that positive benefits are maximized and negative costs are mitigated.

The purpose of this paper is to examine servant leadership from a critical perspective,
proposing a conceptual framework for investigating the potential costs and benefits to
individuals who adopt servant leadership in their organizations. I begin by highlighting the
salient benefits of servant leadership and the current literature gap in addressing issues of identity
related to gender, race, and ethnicity. I will also propose possible pathways for organizations to
support servant leaders from minority groups, extrapolated from the stories and practices of
ServiceMaster, a business firm that pursued servant leadership over multiple generations.

Benefits of Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf (1998, 1977), an early proponent of servant leadership, was deeply
interested in expounding upon the work of leaders who sought to develop and empower others.
Beyond individual leaders, business was to act as a "serving institution" for its members and

customers (Greenleaf, 1966, p. 117). Thus, Greenleaf's vision of servant leadership is other-centered at both the individual and organizational levels. What Greenleaf originally identified as the key behaviors expressive of servant leadership, Spears and van Dierendonck formalized. Building on Greenleaf's initial work, Spears (2004) conceptualized servant leadership to include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, a commitment to followers' growth, and building community. This ten-factor model was simplified by Van Dierendonck (2011), who identified six categories: empowering and developing others, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, direction, and stewardship. Over several decades, servant leadership has come to represent an ethical and moral form of leadership where leaders are motivated to approach work as stewardship of the people and resources entrusted to their care (Eva et al., 2019).

Expanding on the conceptual richness and appeal of servant leadership, researchers are pointing to several beneficial outcomes related to servant leadership at both individual and organizational levels. While additional empirical research is needed to further bolster findings, there is a strong sense of optimism that a commitment to servant leadership potentially strengthens an organization's climate of inclusion. At the behavioral level, servant leadership appears to be positively related to a virtuous cycle of service (Liden, Wayne, Kioa, & Meuser, 2014; Hunter, Neubert, Perry, Witt, Penney, & Weinberger, 2013), evidenced in part by an increase in employees engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010). Servant leadership is associated with lower turnover intentions (Hunter et al., 2013), suggesting that employees' attitudes of organizational commitment depends in part on the quality of leadership present in the workplace. In a study of nurses and patients, for example, Neubert, Hunter, and Tolention (2016) found that servant leadership is positively related to the extent to which nurses demonstrated helping and creative behaviors, resulting in greater satisfaction of care among patients. At the macro level, servant leadership predicted firm performance above and beyond transformational leadership (Peterson, Glavin, & Lange, 2012). Servant leadership also appears to foster inclusive work environments, characterized by employees' perceptions of fairness, the integration of individual differences, and decision-making informed by diverse perspectives (Nishii, 2013). Less studied than micro- or macro-level outcomes, team performance (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015) and efficacy (Yang, Liu, & Gu, 2017) also increased in the presence of servant leadership behaviors.

While additional research is needed, empirical findings thus far point to servant leaders fostering several key benefits. In today's organizational environment, the work of managing human capital requires effective strategies for acknowledging and leveraging the diversity of individual differences that exist in the workforce. The work of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is ongoing, dynamic, and systemic. The overarching strategy for managing human capital is to acknowledge, appreciate, and leverage the diversity of individual differences; enact equitable practices and policies that provide access to members of all groups, especially those who have been historically underrepresented or disadvantaged; and foster work environments where members can exercise their agency in shaping organizational outcomes. Leaders in organizations have an opportunity to foster inclusive work environments, and servant leadership in particular is a potentially rich pathway. An inclusive climate can help nurture openness and appreciation for diversity (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016), along with increased visibility of minority groups (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011). Inclusive leaders seek to enhance the benefits of a diverse workforce while simultaneously mitigating challenges. One of the persistent difficulties that women and minorities can experience is the power differential that exists

between them and other organizational members. Inclusive leaders recognize and actively seek to diminish differences in power and status based on gender, race, and ethnicity (Gotsis & Grimani, 2015), as well as other minoritized identities.

While organizational members negotiate power as part of their daily work, this reality is not integrated in the mainstream research on leadership and servant leadership in particular. This is incongruent with recent work in the field that points to potential gains for an inclusive organizational climate and the integration of individual differences. In the next section, I will illumine this significant gap in the current servant leadership literature and discourse.

A Gap in Servant Leadership Literature

Germane to the ongoing advancement of the study of servant leadership are issues of power and identity. However, scant attention is paid to power differentials between genders and majority-minority groups. In the most recent literature reviews on servant leadership published in mainstream journals, two types of questions related to identity emerge. First, are there differences across female and male servant leaders? The question of sex is typically understood to be a leader-centered moderator of leadership behaviors. Specifically, studies investigating sex as a moderator for leadership expression indicate that women are associated with communal leadership, while men are associated with a directive, assertive form of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and gender norms can often prescribe behavioral expectations (Heilman & Chen, 2005). In the servant leadership context, specifically, Hogue (2015) found that while female leaders were expected to exhibit more servant behaviors in comparison to their male counterparts, these women experienced less gender bias when the organizational context normalized communal forms of leadership.

A second question that tends to emerge in the mainstream servant leadership literature related to context is national and organizational culture. This question is typically understood as an organization-centered moderator (Eva et al., 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013). But, recent critique of servant and other leadership models suggests that leadership is not a neutral concept but rather one laden with implicit ideas and values. In her qualitative study using intersectionality and critical race theory, Liu (2019) problematizes servant leadership, exploring participants' descriptions of their Asian male manager. These subordinates perceived the manager, who held a formal leadership role, as more servant than leader. Liu shares examples of employees' narratives that attribute passivity and a strong work ethic to their leader, which is congruent with stereotypes about the Asian male and the model minority.

Broadly speaking, the literature on servant leadership does not address issues of power or resource availability for women and people of color within organizational contexts. Nearly three decades ago, Nkomo's (1992) clarion call for researchers to acknowledge and consider racial differences, including those of the White majority, has gone largely ignored, and an incomplete narrative continues to be perpetuated. Ignoring implicit concepts of leadership that are potentially normalized by the dominant culture in any particular context perpetuates false notions of identity-neutral leadership. While some leadership scholars are considering gender to a greater degree, few explore constructs of race and ethnicity and their relationship with leadership. Therefore, the study of gender and race-ethnicity occurs in the margins, and because recent systematic reviews do not include this emerging research, a limited nomological network ensues.

This should not be the case in any area of leadership, least of all servant leadership. In this paper, I set out to explore several questions. To what extent can women and people of color

successfully adopt servant leadership behaviors? What are some key considerations that individuals might make with regard to investment costs and resource availability as they seek to develop others? How might organizations help mitigate the costs to individual servant leaders? Taking a cue from Eva and colleagues' (2019) comprehensive literature review on servant leadership, I adopt a conservation of resources theory (COR) as a lens through which to examine the aforementioned questions. Using COR, I aim to explore the individual's consideration of the resources available to them and the potential costs and net gains. This work potentially advances our understanding of leadership as a resource-driven process, in which access to and use of critical resources and conditions can vary across organizations.

Conservation of Resources Theory Applied to Servant Leadership

The conservation of resources theory is a potentially rich framework with which to explore the contextual conditions that enable leaders to successfully adopt servant leader behaviors. Hobfoll's (2011) COR model is an integrative theory of stress that considers both environment and the person, highlighting the experience of stress as a process influenced by the extent to which individuals gain or lose resources over time. These resources can be objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies that individuals both value and seek to gain, preserve, or accentuate. When individuals perceive a threat to these resources, experience actual diminishment or loss, or fail to ascertain resources after personal effort is expended, they can experience emotional, psychological, and physiological stress (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018). In contrast to appraisal theory, an alternative framework for understanding stress, COR does not assume that people's appraisals of resources are idiographic or individual. Instead, people's understanding of resources is embedded and informed by the social and cultural contexts in which they live (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989). This is a key aspect of the theory. Applied to leadership, it facilitates an understanding of the potential relationship between a leader's behaviors and the broader context of the organization's leadership norms and values.

Further, COR provides a taxonomy of resources that can be applied to servant leadership as well as other leadership models. Leadership scholars in the field largely focus on defining the nomological network of a leadership framework—the antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes. Yet, the broad study of leadership does not systematically address the experience of stress among individual leaders. Part of the experiential reality of leading is the net effect (gains and losses) that the individual may or may not realize in the process of leading. While individuals may not be cognizant of the costs, they are nonetheless bound to experience them. COR also enables researchers and practitioners to pay closer attention to the conditions that facilitate or hamper leadership success, thereby advancing a discussion that conceptualizes leadership as contextually informed and embedded in a larger system of leader, follower, and organizational processes. Such an approach to leadership moves our perspective away from a singular and narrow view of leaders as drivers of organizational outcomes and toward a more holistic view of the leading system, which includes the constituents, practices, and policies animating the ecology of the organization.

Counting the Cost: Resource Gains and Losses

Leadership puts emotional, cognitive, and psychosocial demands on individuals. Too often, we do not address the investment costs of leading. Across leadership models, a range of skills and competencies are required of individuals as they wrestle with the demands of leadership. For what and for whom are they ultimately responsible? The application of COR to servant leadership provides a means for individuals to consider the resources available to them and, essentially, to count the cost (e.g., What resources are available to me? What am I willing to invest? What are the potential gains and costs?). COR theory proposes that individuals are motivated to retain, gain, or accentuate the resources they value—objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies. Objects are tangible items (e.g., mode of transportation to work), personal characteristics are traits (e.g., extraversion, agreeableness), conditions are resources such as employment and tenure, and energies are that which facilitate procurement of other resources (e.g., time, money, knowledge; Hobfoll, 1989). Although the demands of time and energy required of leaders as they prioritize others' needs are not unique to servant leaders, they are more intensely emphasized in this model. The gains or losses of servant leadership may include legitimacy of the leader in the perspective of followers, increased knowledge sharing among individuals and teams, role load, a greater sense of meaning in work, and enhanced relationships.

With regard to power, individuals can possess varying degrees from differing sources (French & Raven, 1959). In organizations, power may be fluid, where individuals possess power based on their position, role, expertise, knowledge or access to information, and persona. Culture, both national and organizational, can influence perceptions of power. In many cultures, men are regarded as prototypical leaders. This may extend to race, color, ethnicity, and other attributes. Implicit in servant leadership is the notion that one puts aside self-interest for the greater good of the other or the collective organization. Servant leadership demands that individuals pursue higher-order priorities, or outcomes beyond themselves. Although an incisive examination of power and the extent to which it is shared, leveraged, given up, or gained in the process of leadership is outside the scope of this paper, research suggests that while servant leaders may subordinate themselves, they do retain a strong sense of self. Specifically, core self-evaluation is important for servant leaders (Flynn, Smither, & Walker, 2016). Individuals who exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, and internal locus of control but a lower level of neuroticism (Flynn et al., 2016; Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012) may be better suited to adopt servant leader behaviors. This research suggests that servant leaders retain and leverage their own agency and power in the process of leading. Perceived legitimacy, knowledge, competencies, agency and power, among other sources, act as resource networks that can aid servant leaders. I turn my attention to this topic in the next section.

Resource Caravan Passageways: Holding the Organization Accountable

Hobfoll (2011) proposes that resources rarely exist as isolated things but rather in packs or caravans. Further, the context in which the individual is embedded holds "ecological conditions that either foster and nurture or limit and block resource creation and sustenance" (Hobfoll et al., 2018, p. 106). In the world of work, the organization constitutes the system in which the individual is situated. The organization primarily controls and regulates the types of resources available to employees, thereby providing resource caravans and passageways that either enable or hinder them from gaining, preserving, or enhancing their resources. In order to explore the organizational environment as a resource provider, I turn to the archived stories

written and told by several leaders of ServiceMaster, a Fortune 500 company that used servant leadership as a model for leadership practices over a period of 70 years. I propose three resource caravan passageways that could support servant leader behaviors in organizational settings, particularly for women and minorities: (1) an ethic of care and service reflected in the espoused values of the firm, (2) a commitment to the development of employees, and (3) a commitment to diversity and inclusion. While resource caravan passageways need not be limited to these three, I propose that this combination can foster the adoption of servant leader behaviors.

ServiceMaster: Case Study for Resource Caravan Passageways

To explore the values of the firm, I surveyed primary sources written by several of the chief executive officers of the firm. These include Wade's book, *The Lord Is My Counsel: A Businessman's Personal Experiences with the Bible*, Hansen's pamphlet entitled *Reality*, the archived collection of Pollard's speeches and writings in addition to his book, *The Soul of the Firm* (1996), and Carlos Cantu's "Diversity Report" from the 1993 SM Annual Report. In addition to the primary source material, I also relied on an interview conversation with Patricia Asp, who once served as the firm's Senior Vice President. The primary sources reflect the espoused values of the firm's first five chief executive officers and, more importantly, point to a canon of narratives that were told and retold within the organization, establishing and reinforcing an ethic of service that became an integral part of ServiceMaster's identity.

At the heart of servant leadership is the ideal of putting aside one's self-interest in service of others' needs over and beyond the profit goals of the organization. The primary organizing principle for the firm is the concept of agape love, or love in its moral state that focuses on the well-being and flourishing of others (Patterson, 2003). Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) further distinguish the type of love that motivates servant leader behaviors and influences the relationship between leader and follower as that of compassion. Compassion is a deep concern for others' needs that motivates helping behaviors. It is different from empathy, which is the capacity to see another's perspective or put oneself in another's shoes. In organizational life, people have a keen need for belonging. With the evolving structure of family from the nuclear unit to chosen communities, and decreasing levels of formalized religious activity, the workplace is becoming an increasingly important place for human connection and belonging. People experience love in grand and micro moments, and this is no less true in organizational life. With decreasing rates of religiosity in private and public spheres in American and European nations, the need for love, however loosely defined, persists.

As management scholars turn their attention to the subject of love and its relevance or applicability for organizing, it makes sense to explore love as both an observable practice within organizations as well as a theoretical construct. In most organizations, the concept of love is implicit, animating workplace practices including but certainly not limited to inclusive forms of leadership, organizational citizenship behaviors, meaningfulness and belonging, and organizational justice. In other firms, the concept of love is explicitly named and applied to facilitate a more integrated experience of work and mutually affirming relationships.

Taking an inductive approach, I explore the stories of ServiceMaster, a public firm founded in 1929, whose first five leaders served for a cumulative total of 70 years. Their stories, which are rooted in Christian faith and the idea of service to a grand creator, reveal how an ethic of love implicates the process of individual and collective becoming. The early CEOs of ServiceMaster acknowledged God as a starting place for their commitment to help people

develop and realize their potential in the context of day-to-day work. The leaders' systematic application of love illumines a way forward for current organizational leaders who seek to counter the increasingly acute experience of dislocation in life. One hopeful organizational response for this reality of psychosocial fragmentation begins with assuming the sacred nature of work, laden with human potential. The stories of ServiceMaster's early leaders intimate that the workplace is a rich context for sacred living, where engaging in transformation of self and others is the primary work of the firm. In this way, the practice of love contributes to localized identity formation and is necessarily accountable to outcomes of inclusion, whereby organizational members experience belonging and becoming in community.

The stories that organizations tell about themselves serve both functional and symbolic purposes. Stories help shape the identity of the organization and help energize and organize the action of its members. While Pollard, the fourth CEO of the firm, was the primary disseminator of the stories in his writing and speeches, there are several narratives that are told iteratively over time and context. At ServiceMaster, servant leadership was established, embedded, and socialized discursively through storytelling. Several key stories became part of the firm's narrative cannon:

- Shingles on a Roof (Marion Wade)
- Tension of the Four Objectives (Ken Hansen)
- Development of Employees (Bill Pollard)

These stories were recursively shared within the organization, such that employees knew them and could repeat them to others. They were also shared outside of the organization, shaping ServiceMaster's narrative identity and brand. Each of the above stories is further explored within a discussion of the firm's commitments to love, development, and diversity, which are illustrative of the organization's values and constitute the resource caravan passageways I propose as potential pathways for leaders.

Resource Caravan Passageway 1: An Ethic of Love

In 1929, ServiceMaster was founded on the concept of honoring God in business. Under the direction of Marion Wade, Ken Hansen, Ken Wessner, and Bill Pollard, all evangelical Christians, ServiceMaster operated on four basic principles that emerged in the earliest years of the company and were formalized by Wessner. In 1962, the firm expanded its business to include hospital janitorial services, which became a major part of its operations. This development further shaped an ethos of service to customers (hospital patients) and employees. Over time, the leaders of ServiceMaster developed the firm's objectives. During Wade's oversight, one principle ("To honor God in the marketplace") was expanded to three ("To honor God in the market place, to provide a good living for many people, and to help people grow"; Erisman, 2019, p. 75). Under Hansen's leadership, the three were expanded to six (Honor God, Good Corporate Citizen, Market Oriented, Results Oriented, People Oriented, Growth Oriented"; Erisman, 2019, p. 75). Finally, in 1973, Wessner formalized these six points into four specific objectives, which endured as the guiding compass of the firm for the next three decades:

- To honor God in all we do
- To help people develop
- To deliver with excellence
- To grow profitably

The leaders discussed these four objectives as a challenging tension. "Ken Wessner and the other leaders would quickly tell you that the leaders, and others in the company, didn't always find the right balance. But they did seek it. And when they found themselves out of balance, they tried to regain that balance" (Erisman, 2019, p. 76). Patricia Asp, a senior leader with the firm for over 20 years, shared this about the objectives: "There is tension…we had to hit all four objectives. If you were leading in ServiceMaster—you were going to live in the tension" (P. Asp, personal communication, June 27, 2019).

Excellent delivery and profitability are the means by which the company intends to honor God and develop the people employed by the firm. There is a clear differentiation between ends and means, with the latter expressly mediating the ultimate goals. Together, the four principles comprise an ethic of love that directs the firm's ethos and behavior. Further, Hansen (1968, p. 14) identifies the demonstration of love as a core ethic for ServiceMaster that is essential to the pursuit of the firm's goals. According to Gabriel (2015, p. 330), an ethic of care demands an investment of time, energy, and effort that is at odds with a "fundamental impersonality, individuality, and insecurity of our times…in consumer choice." For ServiceMaster, the ethic of love has a humane orientation; love for the divine is uniquely expressed in the development of the firm's employees. One of the paradoxes present in service work is that it involves the highest and lowest status levels of society. Low-ranking occupations are dominated by women and racial minorities, and these jobs are often underpaid and undervalued (Gabriel, 2015). The early leaders of ServiceMaster were cognizant of this and interested in reclaiming the inherent dignity and value of service work. In the next section, I point to various ways in which leaders consider this paradox through the lens of development.

Resource Caravan Passageway 2: An Organizational Commitment to Develop Employees

ServiceMaster espoused a commitment to develop its employees. A seminal story in the company's narrative cannon is Wade's *shingles on a roof* analogy. Wade envisioned the people working within the organization as shingles on a roof who overlap and thereby complement, strengthen, and protect one another. Pollard (1993, p. 3) retells the analogy in his "Speech at Laity Lodge Retreat":

> It is only people who have the ability to learn to do and to be. It is this process of becoming that is uniquely human. For many of us, we will spend most of our waking hours in the work environment. It is this environment and the people we work with that have an influence and lasting effect upon just who we are becoming. It is the process of relating within the context of the firm that we learn to develop and build upon individual strengths and also cover individual weaknesses like shingles on a roof. It is those shingles on a roof that bring value to a firm, a compounding multiple overlay of people growing and developing in their individual and combined effort. On the other hand, if there is no order to the shingles, major gaps develop. The roof leaks. The firm has not taken advantage of placing people in areas of their strengths, and the potential value of combined effort is lost.

Notably for Pollard and his predecessors, the organization was a place of "becoming." Indeed, the ultimate purpose of the firm was "to train, motivate, and develop these people so that they may do a more effective job, be more productive in their work, and yes, even be better people," and it was incumbent upon leaders to embrace this challenge (Pollard, 1992, p. 15).

The people are the soul of the firm, according to Pollard. "What is happening to the person in the process" (Pollard, 1996) was preeminently important to the organization's leaders. ServiceMaster provides a rich case study for identifying elements in the organizational context that facilitate individuals' adoption of servant leader behaviors. Leadership is itself a means to facilitate others' growth and development; it is decidedly not an end unto itself. In "To Lead Like Jesus, An Awesome Responsibility," Pollard (2014, p. 6) suggests that servant leadership is limited by human constraints, specifically the "ability of people in leadership to exercise the spirit of being humble, to subordinate self, and to become engaged with compassion and love for those they lead." This subordination of self requires that the individual actively participate in a process of becoming (Pollard, 2011a, p. 9):

> For the responsible leader, the subordination of self is always a work in progress with the measure of success coming in the development and changed lives of the people you lead. Redemptive Leadership is an awesome responsibility – a "posture of indebtedness" to the people you are leading.

The contribution of the leader is to "provide the environment for people to learn and grow as they work and share together," which is an expression of "God's love and the potential of His created beings" (Pollard, 1994, p. 7). Expressed as a commitment to "those we lead and those we serve" (Pollard, 1983, p. 1), "the common thread of strength characteristic of these leaders of ServiceMaster can be described in one simple word, commitment." This commitment is tied to nurturing employees, which Pollard (1996) identified as the leader's responsibility. The firm starts with a conviction that "people are special" (Pollard, 1996, p. 53) and this principle serves as a compass for talent management—selection, training, assessment, and recognition (ServiceMaster's STAR program).

As a result of this commitment, the firm created a robust training program for employees at every level of the organization, designed to help employees understand their purpose and contribution "to the well-being of those they serve" (Pollard, 1996, p. 54).

> As we partner with the customer, we also partner with the service workers, and our manager must learn to walk a mile in the service worker's shoes. This requirement is an important standard-setter for our firm. Regardless of title, position or responsibility, every leader in ServiceMaster is expected to undergo training and hands-on experience in one or more of our services. (Pollard, 1996, p. 55)

In its commitment to nurturing employees, ServiceMaster developed and promoted one-fifth of its labor force (Erisman, 2019). Service work can often be invisible work, meaning that other people do not treat service workers with the dignity and respect deserved. One of Pollard's stories highlights this difficult reality. Pollard (1996, p. 56) describes Dave Aldridge, a new recruit and recent college graduate, who experienced invisibility during a "We Serve" experience:

> The hospital was opening a new wing, and I was helping to prepare the birthing suites. I was on my hands and knees cleaning baseboards. An excited group of nurses who would be serving in this new area walked through. As they walked by, I looked up and said hello, and no one responded.

The above passage highlights an interesting paradox in servant leadership. Service-related occupations, in comparison to other types of work, are not always highly esteemed or financially rewarding. With the existing bifurcation of servant leaders and service workers, based on whether one holds position power or not, could an organization's commitment to service across

all levels and positions help alleviate the relative invisibility of the service work sector? To some degree, ServiceMaster may have made some inroads here.

Resource Caravan Passageway 3: An Organizational Commitment to Diversity

In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act mandated employment protections for individuals belonging to protected classes based on the characteristics of religion, national origin, race, color, and sex. Title VII served as an accountability measure for business and organizations to hire, promote, and pay individuals fairly. From a legal standpoint, organizational leaders across industries had to pay greater attention to the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce. Beyond legality, the question of how leaders should consider the overall approach to diversity became particularly salient. The writing, speeches, and communication of ServiceMaster's leaders highlight diversity concerns related to religion, sex, and race. I will explore each of these areas, discussing how individual leaders considered them in relationship to the organization.

At ServiceMaster, religious inclusion was addressed by the company's founder and first CEO. In his book, *The Lord is My Counsel*, Wade (1929, pp. 153-154) shared that he valued differences in religious perspectives. Once, an "associate of another faith" challenged Wade on discussing faith in presentations at regional conferences, to which Wade responded:

> If you find my talks offensive, I won't mind if you leave the room, but if you find the company's' policies offensive maybe you ought to leave the firm. I know you've got your convictions, but remember that I have mine. As long as we both live up to them, we can work together.

Wade's point, in short, was that ServiceMaster is a place where people of differing religious beliefs could work together to achieve common goals. Integrating a personal faith with public and professional interactions at the firm was an expression of Wade's own religious identity, one that shaped the values of the company. He understood that people of differing faiths might disagree with his beliefs, but this divergence did not preclude them from working together.

Pollard (1991a, p. 42) reflected on and described the importance of responding to increasing diversity with tolerance and inclusion in more explicit ways; "A key to your success in developing the soul of your firm is to harness the power of diversity." Pollard (1991b) also stressed a commitment to diversity, highlighting change and choice, increasing women and minorities in the workforce, and the interdependent nature of the economy among differing constituents. For Pollard, diversity was a resource to be leveraged through inclusive practices, which he referred to as fences instead of barriers. A prime example is the firm's hiring of employees who do not have a Christian faith commitment. For the leaders of ServiceMaster, serving with Christian-infused principles was an expression of their devotion and commitment to God, but, as Pollard once put it, he did not define the meaning of God for others. The first principle, "To honor God in all we do," is actually an open statement that invites employees to wrestle with the notion of the divine without demanding shared belief in the Christian God as a condition of employment. Unity across diversity was located in mission and purpose, according to Pollard (1996).

Gender diversity at ServiceMaster during the early years through Cantu's leadership had two trajectories. During Wade and Hansen's years, on the one hand, women were present in the general workforce but absent in leadership. For example, Hansen once wrote about the tension of the four goals. "The struggle to define and reach our business goals was affecting all segments of our lives. We were changing for the good in our attitudes and actions as *husbands, fathers,*

friends, and as businessmen." (Italics are mine and used for emphasis; Erisman, 2019 p. 55). Hansen and Wade's audience of leaders was male. This is consistent with the broader trend in the U.S., where women had begun to enter the workforce in the late nineteenth century (in manufacturing, housekeeping, and clerical jobs) but not significantly until the 1960s with the birth of the feminist movement. At ServiceMaster, while there was much diversity among service employees, this diminished further up the organization chart.

Insight on gender diversity at the firm is gained from Patricia Asp, who entered ServiceMaster in 1978 when the hospital food services company she led was acquired (Erisman, 2019). During her 25-tenure at the company, Asp held a number of senior leadership roles in operations, sales, and human resources. Her leadership prompted the firm to take a harder look at gender diversity. In her early years at the firm, Asp was the only female in Delta Lambda Kappa, the organization's senior leadership group. Asp advocated for increasing the leadership pipeline for women, presenting her Call to Action to the Board, where she gave them a C grade and challenged, "Why be average?" (Personal communication, June 27, 2019). She gave Pollard, then CEO, the names of women in the organization who had leadership capability and should be considered for promotion.

Asp also shared her experiences as a female leader in a historically male-dominated industry. "I had great mentors….Advantage—no alcohol served; I felt safe. Disadvantage—so many of the people came from a conservative background.....Traveling with a woman was outside the realm of possibility." When traveling for business, she often found herself at a hotel reservation desk alone, because the male leaders wanted to avoid negative optics. "Back then, you had to learn how to navigate [the] environment and not be confrontational. I found a way to navigate the culture" (Personal communication, June 27, 2019). ServiceMaster's commitment to servant leadership was not merely an espoused value. Asp discussed the organization's expectation that leaders develop other people; she noted that service leadership, the idea that "we serve our people to become all that God intended and to get results," followed her long after her time with the firm. Asp's reflections point to the organization's ability to create a normative culture of servant leadership for those in management and leadership positions, which underscores that a firm's commitment to diversity can be measured in the attitudes of its leaders and the developmental results of its followers. A commitment to diversity as a resource caravan passageway for women might include several action steps that Asp's stories illustrate.

First, an organization can be intentional in developing and promoting female talent. Second, an organization provides a supportive environment where women enjoy mentoring and sponsorship from other women and men. Third, the behaviors of servant leadership are not attributed to position, title, or social identities such as gender, race, or ethnicity. Instead, these are values and expectations to which women and men are held and developed. In this way, the communal aspects of servant leadership are not associated with women or minority groups who do not fit the assertive and controlling leader prototype. Conversely, the agentic aspects of leadership more broadly are not associated with men. Together, these dynamics can mitigate gender stereotypes (Ellemers, 2019) and the double bind of leadership, where women can be negatively judged for being too dominating or too soft, contrary to male counterparts who are, generally speaking, positively rewarded for both the hard and soft skills of leading (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

Further developing the story of unity and diversity came with Carlos Cantu, a first-generation Hispanic American who was appointed the fifth CEO of ServiceMaster (Erisman, 2019). Cantu's appointment was notable in two important ways with regard to diversity issues.

First, as a Catholic, he was the first CEO who was not from the Protestant evangelical tradition. Second he was the first minority CEO and only one of six Hispanics leading a Fortune500 firm at the time. However, Cantu was not an outsider. He had served as President of Terminix, a company that was acquired by ServiceMaster in 1978. Over the next 15 years, Cantu would learn the philosophy and values driving the firm (Erisman, 2019). There were external factors at play as well. *Workforce 2000* was published in the late 1980s, based on a study commissioned by Secretary of Labor William Brock to explore economic and demographic trends in the U.S. labor force. The publication highlighted that women, minorities, and legal and illegal immigrants would comprise the biggest increase in both the general population and new entrants to the workforce. One of the outcomes of the book was the birth of workplace diversity and diversity initiatives (McCormick, 2007). Responding and adapting to a changing workforce with unique needs was very much on the minds of business leaders in the late 1980s through 1990s.

In 1993, Cantu assumed the CEO role at ServiceMaster and wrote a statement entitled "Unity in Diversity" that appeared in the company's Annual Report. In the statement, Cantu emphasized the values of diversity and integration and the importance of workforce development.

> Diversity in the workforce is not a quest for the future. It is not something that companies seek or should have. It is a reality. And that reality holds opportunity. Statistics show that more than 50-percent of today's work force are women, minorities, and immigrants. That percentage will only increase.

Diversity is valued, and tolerance is acceptable but is not the end goal. For Cantu, integration is a higher goal than either tolerance or assimilation.

> Unfortunately, the traditional approach to diversity has too often been one of simple assimilation. Women, minorities, and immigrants have all been absorbed into a previously homogeneous environment, with the burden of change and integrate essentially placed on the newcomers. This has sometimes had a negative effect on the work performance by these culturally diverse groups—which has driven management to conclude that superior performance, productivity, and quality can only be achieved by homogeneous groups. This is not surprising when people of different cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds are talking right past each other, because of lack of training and education in cross-cultural communications.

Cultural competency and sensitivity training can help organizations work towards unity in diversity, but the responsibility of leadership goes beyond this. "Our tasks as leaders is to define and communicate 'belonging" in terms that pertain to specific standards or values, and to a sense of purpose that goes beyond the preferences of any one group." The firm's second objective (to help people develop) "clearly establishes our commitment to the acceptance of diversity as both an opportunity to optimize the potential for contribution from a diverse workforce and to the process of individual development, enablement, and empowerment so that people possess the necessary resources to perform to their full potential." Cantu articulates a core value that previous leaders also championed, but he does so in a more explicit way within the context of the broader diversity movement of the times. Unfortunately, Cantu's time as CEO ended in 1998, when he was diagnosed with stomach cancer (Erisman, 2019). As I bring this section to a conclusion, I quote Pollard (2011b, pp. 6-7) offering a reflective perspective on ServiceMaster's consideration of diversity.

> In a diverse and pluralistic society, some may question whether our first objective - To Honor God in All We Do - belongs as part of a purpose statement of a business; or for

that matter, in our case, of a Fortune 500 public company. But regardless of your starting point, the principal that could be embraced by all is simply where it led us and that was to honor and recognize the dignity and worth of every person and to accept our responsibility to be involved in not only what that person was doing in their work but also who that person was becoming.

Again, we see the theme of honoring the dignity of every employee of the firm in their work and humanity, with growth as the marker of human potential. While the idea of the organization as a place of becoming is not necessarily unique to organizations today, I would suggest that ServiceMaster's sustained efforts to articulate the formational aspect of work in both espoused and enacted values as meriting further study from a broad management perspective.

Limitations and Future Directions

The work of this paper was primarily exploratory and therefore has several limitations. First, I did not have access to human resource data on the firm's demographic diversity. The annual reports that I could access did not publish any diversity data, which is consistent with the reality that most organizations began tracking diversity numbers in the 1990s. Second, I have focused on management themes and principles reflected in the primary source material across the first five leaders of ServiceMaster, with a heavy emphasis on Pollard, who was prolific in his communication of the firm's stories and values. My review of the material is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. Third, I did not focus on explicit elaborations of the concept of power. There is occasional reference to power in Pollard's writings, but not in comprehensive ways. For example, he suggests that leaders must have some power in order to give power to others. In order for people to work together they need to accept the "legitimacy of power, a framework for authority and an avenue for participation and ownership of results" (Pollard, 1996, p. 101). Further, Pollard appealed to the principle of subsidiarity and the importance of honoring a person's right to make their own decisions.

There are several ways to further expand on the work in this paper, the first stemming from the last note, that power is not frequently defined in the writings. A systematic review of power in Pollard's writings might yield the most fruit for conceptualizing this construct within the practice of servant leadership at ServiceMaster. Such a review would need to be conducted with care so as not to apply current understandings of power or power differentials across identity in anachronistic ways. Second, it would be interesting to compare servant leadership at ServiceMaster with practices at other Christian and secular firms. Are there aspects of servant leadership unique to faith-based institutions, for example? What aspects hold across different types of institutions? Third, and perhaps most important, further exploration of the experiences of females and racial minorities when enacting servant leadership is needed to identify the stressors and pressure points, especially from a resource lens. This also requires an examination of followers' perceptions of their leaders for the purpose of studying the consequences of leader legitimacy and effectiveness.

Further, there are practices used by servant leaders that merit deeper exploration and may expand our current understanding of the primary factors of the servant leadership model (i.e., empowering and developing others, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, direction, and stewardship; van Dierendonck, 2011). In a Christian context, forgiveness, for example could be a facet of interpersonal acceptance that cultivates mutuality and reconciliation, virtues in action that are especially needed in these times. Additionally, the surrender of power, modeled

by Jesus washing the disciple's feet and yielding to the death penalty of the cross, complexifies the notion of empowering others, begging the question as to whether a servant leader can simultaneously give up and retain a semblance of power. For individuals from marginalized groups, what power do they wield, such that serving others is not cast as an inevitable reality of their simply being who they were made to be? These and other questions around the praxis of servant leadership need further exploration.

   In conclusion, I set out to explore the model of servant leadership by highlighting a gap in the literature and proposing an alternative way of examining the model through a resource lens. By delving into the stories and values of ServiceMaster, a Fortune 500 firm, I suggested three resource caravan passageways that might support the work of servant leaders, especially those who do not fit the prevailing leader prototype of a particular culture. My hope is that the ideas set forth here will prompt a more earnest discussion of power and identity within the context of servant leadership, since leaders exist in value-laden systems that can advantage or disadvantage certain individuals. To harness and sustain the goods of servant leadership, further work, both conceptual and empirical, is needed. Servant leadership as a model continues to emerge, and so should theory and practice related to understanding the personal and organizational resources available to the broad diversity of leaders.

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