

Positional Authority and Influence in Servant Leadership: A Conceptual Model

Kevin J. Hurt

Elliott Long

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl>



Part of the [Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons](#)

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Business at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Values-Based Leadership by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.



KEVIN J. HURT
COLUMBUS, GA, USA



ELLIOTT LONG
COLUMBUS, GA, USA

Positional Authority and Influence in Servant Leadership: A Conceptual Model

Abstract

This conceptual research paper reviews how positional authority affects the servant leadership-organizational performance relationship and provides insight on how servant leadership can be implemented and effective in the absence of positional authority, i.e., through the cultivation and leveraging of influence. A review of servant leadership literature is used to propose that servant leadership is positively associated with increased organizational performance. Through the lens of upper echelon theory as well as research on the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership, we develop a model and make a case that positional authority is an important moderator of the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. Our model also considers the contingency that not all leaders in an organization are in a position of authority. As such, we review the servant leadership example of Jesus Christ to understand how servant leadership can be implemented in the absence of positional authority.

Introduction

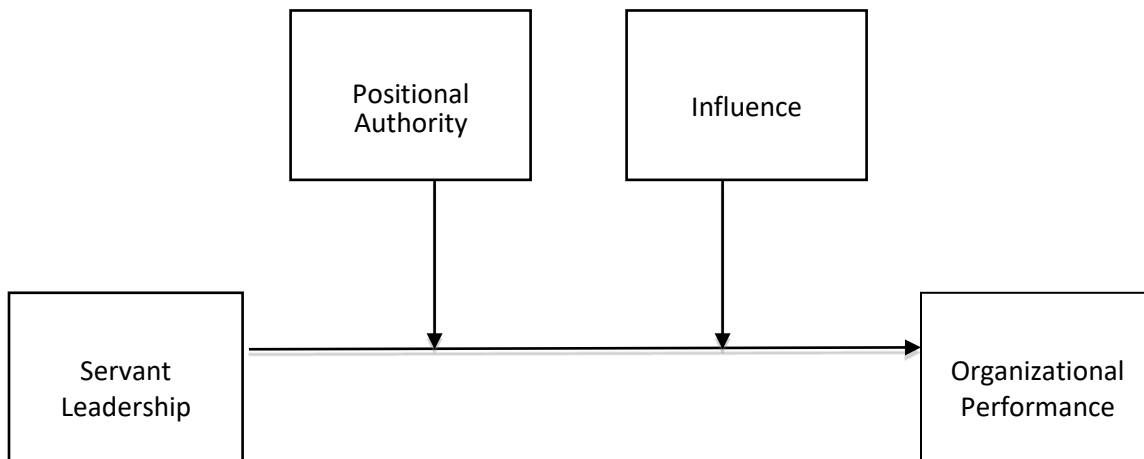
A large portion of servant leadership literature is dedicated to understanding specific characteristics that embody and demonstrate the true essence of servant leadership, objectively measuring these characteristics via models. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, empathy, conceptualization, and a commitment to the growth of other people (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Indeed, models from Laub (1999), Page and Wong

(2000), Russell and Stone (2002), Patterson (2003), Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), Wong and Davey (2007), and Beck (2014), among many others have been posited for this purpose. Some of these models emphasize certain behaviors while others focus more on the servant leader's motivation and identity, as opposed to actions (Van Dierendonck, 2011). While these models are valuable, none account for a contextual factor that has the potential to serve as either a highly impactful tailwind or headwind to unleashing servant leadership's positive effect on organizational performance: the positional authority held by the servant leader. Servant leadership scholars may find this gap in the literature rather surprising, considering the importance of context for leadership. Indeed, certain personal characteristics can contribute to leadership success, but it is often the application of those characteristics within a specific context that define great success (Mayo, 2013).

Therefore, a gap exists in the servant leadership literature regarding how positional authority moderates the servant leadership-organizational performance relationship, and how servant leaders can implement servant leadership principles in the absence of said positional authority. This led to the creation of the two research questions guiding this conceptual paper. First, how does positional authority moderate the servant leadership-organizational performance relationship? Second, how can practitioners implement servant leadership in the absence of positional authority? Accordingly, the purpose of the present manuscript is to address this gap in the servant leadership literature and provide insights about the role that positional authority plays in moderating the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance as well as discuss how cultivating and leveraging influence in the absence of positional authority can moderate this relationship in a similar fashion as possessing positional leadership. To achieve that purpose, this manuscript considers implications from upper echelon theory as well as research on the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership to answer the first research question. To answer the second research question, the servant leadership of Jesus Christ is examined and four principles are mined which can then be applied by modern-day servant leaders when positional authority is lacking.

The remainder of the manuscript is arranged as follows. First, a brief review regarding the current literature on servant leadership and organizational performance is provided to develop a baseline understanding upon which theory-based propositions are developed to link the two constructs. Second, empirical data from upper echelon theory as well as research on the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership is explored to provide theory-based propositions assessing the way positional authority moderates the servant leadership-organizational performance relationship. Third, cultivating and leveraging influence in the absence of positional authority is introduced as a viable alternative to positional authority by studying the servant leadership example of Jesus Christ. Finally, discussion is provided to analyze these propositions and the associated theoretical and practical implications, highlight limitations, and provide a targeted direction for future research in this area. The conceptual model guiding this manuscript is depicted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: Influence of positional authority and influence on the servant leadership – organizational performance relationship



Theory and Development of Propositions

Foundations of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership may be defined as “an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (Laub, 1999; Laub, 2004). A term officially coined by Robert Greenleaf (1970), servant leadership entails deliberate decisions to serve others, putting followers’ needs, interests, and aspirations above one’s own. While Greenleaf coined the term, Jesus Christ first introduced the concept of servant leadership almost two thousand years prior (Matthew 20:25-28). Jesus demonstrated servant leadership through acts such as washing his disciples’ feet, a task typically performed by the lowest level of servants in that culture, and his sacrificial death on the cross. Through his servant leadership, Jesus “redefined the meaning and function of leadership power from ‘power over’ to ‘power to,’ that is power as an enabling factor to choose to serve others” (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 59). The self-concept construct under servant leadership is to view one’s role as a leader akin to servant or steward as opposed to leader or owner (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). When compared to other forms of leadership, servant leadership is marked by a strong knowledge of each follower’s unique characteristics and interests and actions to help each follower reach his or her full potential. This is often achieved through regular one-on-one, individualized communication as part of a long-term relationship (Liden, 2008).

Servant leadership theory posits that true servant leaders’ behaviors stem from their genuine altruistic motives as opposed to a desire for power (Greenleaf, 1970). Indeed, the source of motivation lies in a servant leader’s principles, values, and beliefs — not selfish needs or material desires (Farling, 1999). According to Greenleaf, servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, thus the servant leader is a servant – not a leader – first and foremost. Later, a conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead because it is viewed as a vehicle to serve with greater impact on the wellbeing of others (Greenleaf, 1970). Because of this, servant leaders consider themselves stewards of their followers, and willingly accept responsibility and accountability for the well-being of those under their care (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Such stewardship entails empowerment of followers and garners trust (Russel, 2002). Indeed, servant leadership is positively

correlated with trust because of heightened communicative and supportive behaviors, whereby information is shared, and followers are empowered (Joseph & Winston, 2005; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

The byproduct of servant leadership is leading other people to be what they are capable of becoming which often manifests itself through the leader's followers engaging in self-sacrificial behaviors as well (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Indeed, servant leadership catalyzes both personal and organizational metamorphoses that are evidenced by outward behaviors (Russell & Stone, 2002). These outward behaviors include, but are not limited to, those being led becoming "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, [and] more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1970). The result of all of this is higher organizational performance, which has been observed in both the public and private sector (Chappel, 2000; Polleys, 2002).

Servant Leadership and Organizational Performance

Servant leadership and organizational performance are not mutually exclusive; rather, the two concepts can strengthen and reinforce one another when approached correctly. It is noted that the definition of the term servant leadership given by Laub (1999; 2004) that is described in the preceding section, mentions that the needs of followers are placed above those of the leader; it does not, however, mention or imply that the needs of the follower should disregard the vision, direction, or goals of the organization. Rather, a focus on organizational performance is a prerequisite for servant leadership, as vision, direction, and goals are much needed context for the exact way servant leadership is to be implemented. Indeed, "the servant aspect of leadership only begins when the vision, direction, and goals are clear" (Blanchard, 1998, p. 216). In other words, servant leadership does not neglect the vision, direction, or goals of an organization in order to foster growth in the individual persons being led, nor is it tolerant of poor organizational performance for the sake of follower development at all costs (Hunter, 2004). In fact, servant leaders at times refuse to accept someone's effort or performance as good enough, particularly when someone is capable of achieving more (Greenleaf, 1970). As one example, Jesus Christ refused to accept his disciples' effort as good enough after they carelessly fell asleep when he asked them to help him keep watch while he went to go pray prior to his arrest; Jesus scolded them, indicating – in no uncertain terms – that while their intentions may have been pure, their performance was simply not good enough, given the circumstances (Matthew 26:36-46). Servant leadership enables better organizational performance through its attention given to the vision, direction, and goals of the organization (Blanchard, 1998) as well as through the trust that is built among followers when practicing servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Yang, Liu, & Gu, 2017).

Through the attention given to the vision, direction, and goals of the organization coupled with attentiveness of the followers' needs, servant leadership drives better organizational performance (Blanchard, 1998; Page & Wong, 2000; Liden, 2008). In practice, servant leaders are not only driven by character and values, but also by a focus on the performance of the organization in relation to its vision, direction, and goals, as well as the specific processes performed to achieve those goals (Page & Wong, 2000). This drive often manifests itself via regular one-on-one communication with each follower during which the interests and goals of the follower can be discussed in detail in the context of organizational vision, direction, and goals. As a result, problems are identified and

resolved proactively. Further, these behaviors by servant leaders imply excellent conceptual skills, which can also be applied to emphasize clarity around goals, strategic direction, and problems, all of which help the followers understand what is needed to achieve success (Liden, 2008). Because of this, as compared to other leaders, servant leaders are “functionally superior because they are closer to the ground – they hear things, see things, know things, and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are dependable and trusted” (Greenleaf, 1970).

Empirical data supports this conceptual research regarding servant leaders driving better organizational performance due to the focus on the organization’s vision, direction, and goals. As one example, Hu and Liden (2011) performed a study on staff level employees and senior management in the banking sector and found that exhibiting high levels of servant leadership helped enable goal clarity and process clarity, which then led to better organizational performance. Through a heightened awareness and understanding of one’s individual goals and the goals of one’s teammates, how those goals fit into broader organizational goals, and the processes needed and deployed to accomplish said goals, barriers to collaboration and communication and opportunities for social loafing due to ambiguous guidance are removed and replaced with information sharing and rising confidence levels in team members. The study found that one specific way servant leaders put this into practice was through deliberate matching of staff skill sets with organizational needs as it related to fulfilling the organization’s vision, direction, and goals (Hu & Liden, 2011). Because of the high emphasis placed on individuals’ growth and development (Greenleaf, 1977), servant leaders have the intimate knowledge of each person’s skills, interests, dispositions, and passions, and are thus well-equipped to assign responsibilities to team members in a manner commensurate with the organization’s needs (Hu & Liden, 2011). This gives team members meaningfulness in their work, which then triggers increased levels of creativity and performance (Cohen-Meitar, Carmeli & Waldman, 2009).

Servant leadership also improves organizational performance through the increased levels of trust that it breeds. Multi-directional trust among leaders and followers is necessary for these relationships to yield byproducts that improve the performance of individual tasks and organizational goals (Dirks, 1999). Trust in the leader influences both the psychological states of team members and overall team performance (Schaubroeck, 2011). Pragmatically speaking, this trust is often earned by demonstrating hallmark servant leadership traits such as empathy, integrity, and listening, all of which exude genuine care and concern for the wellbeing of the other party (Liden, 2014; McAllister, 1995). As a result, a psychologically safe environment is created where employees feel comfortable taking risks and trying new ideas and approaches because there is no fear of being rejected or ridiculed. Once earned, this trust creates a sense of community and powers performance. Indeed, a study on 191 teams at an international financial services institution found that such trust helps unlock the potential of team members. In this environment of trust, employees have more self-confidence in their abilities and perform better. Additionally, conflict and areas of disagreement among team members are addressed in a much more collaborative fashion whereby team members feel comfortable challenging ideas, generating constructive dialogue regarding the best strategy and tasks to deploy, and enabling learning experiences for the entire team. More notably, the extent of psychological safety on the team – as created by servant leaders earning the trust of team members – explained nearly twice the variance in overall team performance than

team potency, which is a measurement of how strongly the team members believe the strategy itself will work (Schaubroeck, 2011). The implications of this study suggest that the extent of trust earned by servant leaders can actually be more impactful to team performance than the objective credibility of the tactical strategies developed by the leader.

In summary, it is argued that servant leadership increases organizational performance by focusing on the performance of the organization in relation to its vision, direction, and goals as well as through breeding increased levels of trust that later create psychologically safe environments that ultimately power performance. As such, the following proposition is put forth:

Proposition 1: *Servant leadership is positively associated with increased organizational performance.*

The Impact of Positional Authority on the Servant Leadership-Organizational Performance Relationship

Positional authority alone is not an assurance of effective leadership in organizations (Jones & York, 2016). However, positional authority in the hands of the right leader may yield optimal organizational results. The impact of positional authority on the servant leadership-organizational performance relationship can be better understood by analyzing upper echelon theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) as well as research on the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership, both of which focus on individuals who possess the highest degree of positional authority. By analyzing these two topics, it can be deduced that possessing positional authority can positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. Upper echelon theory posits that organizational performance is disproportionately driven by the actions of its executive team. Similarly, research on the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership suggests that positional authority can amplify the positive effect that servant leadership has on organizational performance.

According to upper echelon theory, organizational performance is highly impacted by the actions of the organization's executive team (i.e., those who hold an extremely high amount of positional authority). Indeed, Hambrick, who first set forth upper echelon theory in 1984, further clarified 10 years later that "the top group leader has a disproportionate, sometimes nearly dominating influence, on the group's various characteristics and outputs" (Hambrick, 1994, p. 180). Therefore, organizational performance — measured by metrics such as profitability, growth, and survival — can be predicted to a certain extent by studying the characteristics, backgrounds, and skill sets of the executive team since those factors affect those same executives' strategic actions and decisions, which then greatly affect organizational outcomes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick, 2007). Empirical data across a variety of industries has supported this. One study at multiple firms within the Canadian plastics manufacturing industry found that the innovation level of firms was positively linked to the personality traits of firm executives (Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 1992). More specifically, these personality traits of executives manifested through the strategic actions taken by the executives. These actions and supporting behaviors were then repeated by the lower-ranking employees. As these actions permeated throughout the firm, a culture resembling the mindsets of the executives became prevalent and

pervasive among the employee base (Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 1992). Similar results were found in another study in the banking industry. Indeed, in a study of 199 banks, researchers found that innovation levels of banks were also positively linked to the personality traits of executives (Bantel & Jackson, 1989). These findings seem to suggest that the actions and characteristics of executives (i.e., those with the absolute highest levels of authority) have a contagion effect on the actions and characteristics of those within the rest of the organization.

In synthesizing the results from such studies on upper echelon theory and its implications, it can be deduced that possessing positional authority can positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. More specifically, it becomes clear that the values, actions, and strategic choices of executives and those possessing a high degree of positional authority can play a significant role in driving organizational performance (Carpenter, 2004). Pragmatically speaking, these individuals have the authority to implement their own ideas and have relatively few obstacles inhibiting them from mobilizing others in the organization to execute those ideas. Additionally, because of said positional authority – oftentimes derived from a job title – reciprocation from subordinates tends to follow. Indeed, these executives may be viewed as role models considering their positional authority, which can cause lower-ranked individuals to mimic their behavior (Yukl, 2010; Yaffe & Kark, 2011). Thus, the executive team seems to ultimately set the tone for organizational performance via the vision they cast, the strategic actions and decisions they make (e.g., merger and acquisition activity, entering new markets, etc.), the policies they implement (e.g., those related to talent management, employee code of conduct, etc.), and the behaviors they pay attention to, measure, and reward (e.g., service to others) (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001).

In light of this deduction that those with a high degree of positional authority have a *disproportionate* (Hambrick, 1994) impact on organizational performance, researchers have explored how organizational performance is affected when executives practice servant leadership. This adjacent research on the influence of executives' servant leadership behaviors has on organizational performance tells a similar narrative as the implications from upper echelon theory. That is, the behaviors and decisions of executives greatly influence the extent to which servant leadership is embraced. In other words, a servant leadership culture does not surface unless those in positions of authority embrace servant leadership (Schein, 1990). The rewards for organizations whose executive team – and, in turn, the lower-ranking employees – embraces servant leadership are plentiful, not the least of which is increased organizational performance. Empirical data supports this theoretical proposition. Indeed, in a study of 126 CEOs at predominately small to medium-sized enterprises in the technology sector, CEO servant leadership positively predicted organizational performance, as measured by return on assets (Peterson, 2012).

Several factors drive this positive effect of positional authority on the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. By putting subordinates first and empowering them to grow and succeed as persons – which Greenleaf (1970) describes as the ultimate measure of servant leadership – executives practicing servant leadership can trigger a healthy reciprocal exchange whereby the lower-ranking team members mimic the focus on other people's needs that is modeled by the executives. Similarly, the

emphasis on personal integrity and honesty is typically well received by subordinates and thus, reciprocated (Peterson, 2012). Additionally, the natural emphasis of clarity regarding the organization's goals, strategic direction, and potential threats to success that ensues when servant leadership is practiced can help drive this increase in organizational performance. When coupled with the aforementioned healthy and reciprocal exchange, employees at varying levels collaborate with one another and build a stronger commitment to organizational success (Liden, 2008; Peterson 2012). In other words, setting a personal example of noble behavior can promote similar contributions from lower-ranking individuals, and this is especially amplified by positional authority (Yukl, 2010; Yaffe & Kark, 2011).

In summary, based on empirical data from upper echelon theory as well as research on the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership, it is reasonable to conclude that positional authority can amplify the positive relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance if implemented appropriately. As such, the following proposition is put forth:

Proposition 2: *Positional authority positively moderates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.*

Cultivating and Leveraging Influence in the Absence of Positional Authority

The discussion in the preceding section regarding the impact of positional authority on the servant leadership-organizational performance relationship induces the second research question of this manuscript: how can practitioners implement servant leadership in the absence of positional authority? Lack of positional authority, whether it stems from company policy, lack of understanding of servant leadership, or organizational culture, constitutes an autonomy gap that is a stern barrier to effective leadership (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007; Savage-Austin & Honeycutt, 2011). Pragmatically speaking, not all servant leadership practitioners possess a position that entails the authority to implement one's own ideas with few obstacles along the way; hence, they must operate within the constraints placed upon them under a wider system (e.g., senior level leaders, board of directors, external agencies) (Heffernan, 2018). Additionally, not all practitioners benefit from the reciprocation from other colleagues that naturally follows for practitioners holding a title such as Chief Executive Officer, President, or an equivalent. One solution that current or aspiring servant leaders who lack positional authority can use to account for this lack of authority is to cultivate influence before positional authority is attained, recognizing that influence is the currency of all forms of leadership. Although influence can positively or negatively modify employee behavior, supervisors who develop influence in a positive manner are likely to achieve positive outcomes (Kovach, 2020). Once positive influence is cultivated, servant leadership practitioners can then leverage that influence (Scroggins, 2017). To move from theory to pragmatism, consider the example of Jesus Christ, who had no positional authority as part of a literal incorporated entity; yet through positive influence became the cornerstone of the (worldwide) Christian faith (Ephesians 2:20; Luke 20:17) and was wildly effective in improving the performance of his followers (Manz, 2011; Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin, 2005). In his case, performance is measured by the extent to which disciples of all nations are made, baptized, and instructed to obey all of Jesus' teachings (Matthew 28:18-20). Followers of Jesus (i.e., the church) operate under the understanding that they are "coworkers in God's service" (1 Corinthians

3:9), building the church under the leadership of Jesus, who is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Over 2,000 years later, many contemporary scholars consider Jesus' life the ultimate example of servant leadership (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Lanctot & Irving; 2020; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Winston, 2004). The leadership exemplarity (Major, 2018) of Jesus has, in effect, had a lasting mimetic impact on his followers who continue to use him as a trusted referent on which to model their own leadership behaviors. The results of Jesus' servant leadership demonstrate improved performance by a team – albeit a less-formal type – and thus, can be used by current or aspiring servant leaders on more formalized teams (e.g., a for-profit corporation, a government entity, a non-profit organization, etc.).

It is helpful to first examine Jesus' overall results and his servant leadership style for context. As the world's first teacher of servant leadership, Jesus Christ exhibited a version of servant leadership so powerful that it is still yielding dividends over 2,000 years later (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Indeed, Christianity is the world's largest religion with over 2.3 billion people identifying as Christians, representing almost one-third of the world's population (Hackett, 2017). His teachings turned societal norms upside down (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). In fact, he specifically instructed his disciples “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...just as [I] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give [my] life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). In other words, “the only way to an upward mobility [in Jesus Christ's leadership model] is a downward mobility” (Akuckie, 1993, p.41). Jesus then lived out this leadership model through his own actions. For example, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:3-15), a task typically reserved for the lowest-ranking servants in that society and one often viewed as degrading (Ford, 1991). Modern-day servant leadership research posits that a defining characteristic of servant leaders is putting the needs of followers above their own (Stone, 2004). Jesus further exemplified this in arguably the most extreme way imaginable by dying a painful, sacrificial death of crucifixion for the benefit of his followers (Matthew 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37).

A carpenter by profession (Mark 6:3), Jesus Christ led a multi-faceted revolution for the ages – the impacts of which are still being felt in business, government, and faith circles all across the world 2,000 years later – despite having no positional authority over those he led. He was not on the executive staff of a literal organization or entity, nor did he hold a position of authority in government. Instead, Jesus Christ “offered a leadership model devoid of positional authority, prestige, and ambition” (Wilson, 2011, p.93). Where he lacked in positional authority, Jesus more than accounted for in the positive influence he cultivated and leveraged. The same four steps Jesus took in his leadership journey can be implemented by modern-day servant leaders who lack positional authority yet desire to positively impact the performance of their organization or less-formalized team: first, clean the mirror image; second, lead others with compassion; third, lead others to be their best selves; and fourth, plant golden mustard seeds (Manz, 2011).

The first step – clean the mirror image – refers to mastering the art of leading oneself first in order to lay the foundation for leading others (Manz, 2011). Indeed, Jesus taught this through a metaphor: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You

hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5). In other words, careful examination of oneself and a sincere commitment to self-improvement provide a foundation for effective leadership. This principle can be fulfilled in a variety of ways and implies a sense of humility (Manz, 2011).

Jesus put this advice into practice through regular solitude, prayer, and study of Scripture as his perhaps most well-known method of his commitment to self-improvement (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 4:42). It was this discipline of his that prepared him to perform great acts (Matthew 26:36-56) – namely his sacrificial death (Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37) and resurrection (Luke 24:1-12) – which then inspired his followers to perform great acts (Matthew 10:16-28) that created more disciples (Acts 6:7), such as speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1-4), preaching compelling messages (Acts 2:14-41), and healing people (Acts 9:32-43), among others.

The second step – lead others with compassion – refers to treating other people with the upmost respect and empathy. Jesus taught: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12), which is today commonly known as the "Golden Rule" (Manz, 2011). Again, Jesus demonstrated this guidance himself in countless ways, such as healing a leper (Matthew 8:1-4), healing a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:1-2), and weeping with the sisters of a recently deceased man named Lazarus (John 11:35), among countless other examples. This inspired his followers to replicate this behavior, and as a result team performance improved by creating more disciples (Acts 2:42-47). One pragmatic way for contemporary leaders – even non-Christians – to put this theory into practice to cultivate and leverage influence is to exhibit empathy to others going through a difficult season of life, acknowledging, and affirming the other person's negative emotions, and even performing an act of service (e.g., sending a sympathy card after the loss of a loved one) to help the other person out during a challenging time. This aligns with not only Jesus' teachings and lifestyles but also contemporary servant leadership research, which posits that empathy is a hallmark of servant leadership, as one of the top three characteristics used to measure the extent of a servant leader (Spears, 2004).

The third step – lead others to be their best selves – refers to a commitment to unleash the untapped potential in others so that they increase their performance. This stems from a parable Jesus teaches in Matthew 13, where he describes four types of soils upon which a farmer scattered seed. The takeaway of this parable as it pertains to servant leadership is that a given person may not be quite ready to wholeheartedly receive a given piece of advice at a particular time. When this inevitably happens, the servant leader should not fret or worry but rather continue *preparing the soil* – that is, continue to be patient with the other person and continue helping and mentoring them (Manz, 2011).

Jesus did this by giving each disciple an invitation to follow him (Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 6:13-16), then taught them regularly over the course of three years before his death in varying contexts (Luke 9:18-20, Matthew 16:13-20), and loved them all throughout the journey (John 15:9). He also saw potential in them before they saw it in themselves; in fact, he changed Simon's name to Peter, which means "rock" (John 1:40-42), knowing that Peter would be a loyal and fearless leader of the church after Jesus' death (Acts 2:14-41; Acts 10; 1 Peter; 2 Peter). Jesus took the same approach with the other disciples as well. As a result, this approach increased each disciple's level of commitment and level of

performance, as measured by making other disciples (Ephesians 4:11-16), despite the very real dangers of persecution (Acts 5:17-18; 2 Timothy 3:12). For example, after one of the early followers of Jesus, Stephen, was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60) and believers were forced to scatter, they continued making disciples in new cities (Acts 8:1) because Jesus' influence on them drove them to such extraordinarily high levels of commitment and achievement.

The fourth step – plant golden mustard seeds – refers to understanding the power of small “seeds” (e.g., habits, deeds, etc.) because those small seeds can lead to great and powerful results over time. This principle stems from Jesus's parable of the mustard seeds, also found in Matthew 13. “Though [the mustard seed] is the smallest of all seeds, when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree” (Matthew 13:32). In essence, Jesus is teaching the importance of the small, daily tasks and accomplishments that can, over time, compound and amount to extraordinary accomplishments (Manz, 2011). Akin to the way small and regular monetary contributions into a retirement account over the course of one's entire working career can ultimately amount in a great sum of money, small and regular acts and investments in other people by servant leaders can lead to great accomplishments over time.

Jesus followed his own advice in multiple ways. One repeated behavior of Jesus was to regularly eat meals – an everyday activity – which overlooked and ignored people; that is, he specifically kept himself from only associating with well-respected individuals. For example, he ate at the house of Matthew, a tax collector (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). In this society, a tax collector was comparable to a mafia boss or gangster due to their reputation for overcharging ordinary citizens during tax collections so that after giving the Roman government its share, they could keep an exorbitant commission for themselves (Wilkerson, 2018). Through this practice coupled with similar practices of befriending other outcasts of society, such as prostitutes (John 4:1-26; Luke 7:36-50) and lepers (Mark 1:40-45; Luke 17:11-19), Jesus modeled the way for today's servant leaders by showing that little acts can lead to extraordinary results. In the case of Matthew, Jesus's little acts of eating meals together helped Matthew change from his unethical professional ways. Ultimately Matthew led others to salvation, and he authored one of the books of the Bible (Wilkerson, 2018). In following this example, one pragmatic way for contemporary leaders – even non-Christians – to put this theory into practice to cultivate and leverage influence is to befriend individuals at one's organization who may be overlooked, such as an intern or entry-level analyst. Just as Jesus's regular investment into Matthew led to Matthew *growing as a person* (Greenleaf, 1970), investments of time and mentorship into an intern or entry-level analyst can help these lesser experienced colleagues *grow as persons* (Greenleaf, 1970) and later improve their performance.

In summary, positional authority is not an absolute requirement to positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. None of the aforementioned four steps performed by Jesus required positional authority, yet all can improve performance. Indeed, servant leaders can begin demonstrating leadership immediately; there is no need to wait to receive a certain position or job title. Influence can be cultivated and leveraged through relationships to make a positive difference in the lives of others before a position is granted that gives one positional authority (Scroggins, 2017). Therefore, the following proposition is put forth:

Proposition 3: *Cultivating and leveraging influence in the absence of positional authority positively moderates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.*

Discussion

A growing body of empirical data in servant leadership literature continues to suggest that servant leadership is positively associated with increased organizational performance (Laub, 1999; Laub, 2004; Blanchard, 1998; Page & Wong, 2000; Hu & Liden, 2011; Liden, 2014; Peterson, 2012). The current manuscript builds off this literature and provides a theoretical rationale for the positive relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.

A significant amount of existing servant leadership literature is dedicated to understanding specific characteristics that embody and demonstrate the true essence of servant leadership, and objectively measuring these characteristics (Laub, 1999; Page & Wong, 2000; Russell & Stone, 2002; Patterson, 2003; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Wong & Davey, 2007; Beck, 2014; Van Dierendonck, 2011). However, one moderating variable that has not been considered is the positional authority possessed by the servant leader. In this manuscript, a theoretical basis is provided to suggest that positional authority can positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.

Further, it is also proposed that cultivating and leveraging influence in the absence of positional authority can also positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. More specifically, the following four steps Jesus Christ took in his servant leadership journey can be replicated by modern-day servant leaders who lack positional authority yet desire to positively impact the performance of their organization or less-formalized team: clean the mirror image, lead others with compassion, lead others to be their best selves, and plant golden mustard seeds (Manz, 2011). Even though Jesus was not an executive of a literal incorporated entity, his example can be applied in varying contexts (e.g., a for-profit corporation, a government entity, a non-profit organization, etc.).

While we have argued that positional authority positively moderates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance, we note that its effects may not always be positive. Indeed, it is important to consider that a top-down approach to leadership may be seen as oppressive in certain contexts (Mareus, 2019). Therefore, the *disproportionate* (Hambrick, 1994) impact on organizational performance that those with positional authority have could harm the organization if oppressive behavior is demonstrated or perceived. Just like the positive behaviors modeled by the executives may be reciprocated, negative behaviors could be reciprocated as well. For example, if a disingenuous, self-serving, or otherwise twisted form of servant leadership is demonstrated and lower-ranking employees feel taken advantage of, they could respond by reciprocating self-serving behaviors towards other employees. True servant leadership entails a high degree of cooperation and collaboration during decision-making processes, but real or perceived oppressive behavior from those with positional authority could lead to negative outcomes (Savage-Austin, 2011). Hence, positional authority is not

guaranteed to positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance in all situations.

Theoretical implications of this conceptual research manuscript are at least twofold. First, organizations in highly competitive industries looking for a competitive edge stand to benefit from at least exploring the possibility of finding tangible ways for its executive team to demonstrate servant leadership due to the potential for a positive increase in organizational performance. As discussed earlier, executives who possess the highest levels of positional authority have a *disproportionate* (Hambrick, 1994) impact on organizational outcomes. In other words, a relatively small effort from these individuals could have a relatively large positive effect on organizational performance, suggesting a favorable return on investment. Second, to fortify these propositions with more credibility, empirical data is needed. Recognition of these propositions from academic scholars, as well as adoption and implementation of servant leadership by individuals in organizations, less-formalized teams, and leadership practitioners may face obstacles without empirical evidence.

Practical implications of this conceptual research manuscript are at least twofold. First, the manifestation of the latter two propositions will vary by organization or team setting due to cultural factors. Some organizations and teams value positions and job titles more highly than others do. For example, start-up companies – where one person may be an entire department – are typically far less hierarchical than other organizations (e.g., the military), where rank and experience are more highly valued. Second, key performance indicators for Jesus's four steps related to cultivating and leveraging influence to practice servant leadership and improve performance may not be apparent upfront; thus, success may be hard to measure. For example, when deploying the fourth step (i.e., plant golden mustard seeds) by mentoring a younger, less-experienced protégé – as Jesus did with Matthew, the tax collector – tapping into previously untapped potential could lead to unexpected types of performance. Matthew transformed from the equivalent of a mafia boss or gangster into an author of the Bible, which was beyond surprising (Wilkerson, 2018). As such, measuring success at the beginning of this relationship would have been highly difficult. Similarly, modern-day servant leaders may face difficulties when measuring the extent to which those being served *grow as persons* (Greenleaf, 1970).

One pragmatic way for contemporary leaders – even non-Christians – to put this theory into practice to cultivate and leverage influence and commit to self-improvement is to solicit 360-degree feedback anonymously from peers to understand others' perceptions on one's strengths and weaknesses. This can provide honest and, at times, painful-to-hear feedback that can propel one's ability to lead oneself well. This feedback can be used to create a "Lead Me Plan" (Scroggins, 2017, p. 106) which is a personal growth tool intended to drive accountability and help oneself move from current state to the desired future state as a leader through actionable steps. This discipline enhances one's own skill sets and simultaneously gives one practice and experience in leadership, all of which can enable higher performance (Scroggins, 2017).

Another practical way for contemporary leaders to put this theory into practice in order to cultivate and leverage influence is to spend one-on-one time with others in order to get to know each follower individually. As the leader learns about the unique characteristics, strengths, and areas of potential for each follower through active listening, the leader can

provide foresight to the follower by studying and learning from past mistakes so that mistakes can lead to future improvements instead of barriers that hold the follower back (Spears, 2004). Just like Jesus encouraged and challenged Peter to commit his life to looking after Jesus's followers (John 21:15-22), only days after Peter had arguably hit the lowest point of his faith journey by denying Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-65; John 25:25-27), contemporary servant leaders can lead others to be their best selves through individualized attention, active listening, words of encouragement, and foresight in order to improve performance.

Limitations

The contribution of the present manuscript should be considered in view of its limitations. One limitation – and perhaps the greatest – is that there is very little comparative work on this particular subject matter as it pertains to servant leadership. As such, much of this model rests on theoretical and logical perspectives, as opposed to empirical data.

A second limitation of this model is its applicability to certain areas of the private sector. Much criticism exists in contemporary servant leadership literature regarding servant leadership's applicability in the private sector. The main point of contention is that servant leadership excessively emphasizes prioritizing the needs of followers, especially when compared to the needs of the organization (Andersen, 2009). For example, some theorize that this can actually hurt the effectiveness of secular, for-profit enterprises because organizational goals become periphery (Andersen, 2009). Others theorize that some groups of organizations (e.g., medical institutions) have received less attention from researchers and thus, it is unclear whether these principles would apply in these contexts. As such, further investigation is needed (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Therefore, a limitation of this model could be that Jesus Christ's leadership model may not translate as well to certain areas of the private sector. For example, Jesus's four principles above all require a long-term relationship with followers. Therefore, the applicability may be limited in certain aspects of the private sector notorious for having high turnover rates because the relationship may never fully mature before employees quit.

Future Research

The current manuscript suggests the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance is positively moderated by positional authority. In order to validate the claims made in this manuscript, empirical studies are required in order to close the gap between theory and practice. While research exists as it pertains to upper echelon theory and the performance of organizations whose executive team practices servant leadership, no specific studies have been performed specifically targeted towards the gap addressed in this manuscript. Therefore, a longitudinal study comparing servant leaders with positional authority and without positional authority across comparable organizations or team settings would be extremely valuable to the field of servant leadership. Further, studies directed at objectively measuring the success and identifying best practices with regards to the four steps referenced above that Jesus Christ implemented in order to leverage and cultivate influence in the absence of positional authority would help to further legitimize the third proposition in this manuscript.

This manuscript has focused on the direct relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance, and how positional authority and influence may impact this

relationship. It is noted that far more antecedents to organizational performance exist beyond leadership style. Examples include but are certainly not limited to efficiency of operational processes, caliber of talent, firm location, customer dynamics, cohesiveness of the management team, and the regulatory environment (Beatson, 2008; Zhou, 2006; Van Egeren, 1998). Thus, to isolate the effect of servant leadership on organizational performance, these additional variables would need to be controlled in an empirical study.

Conclusion

Individuals with a high degree of positional authority have a disproportionate impact on organizational performance (Hambrick, 1994). Similarly, when executives implement servant leadership, organizational performance is positively impacted (Peterson, 2012). Pragmatically speaking, these individuals have extremely high levels of authority to implement their own ideas, do not face as many internal obstacles from executing their ideas, and lower-ranked individuals often mimic their behavior (Yukl, 2010; Yaffe & Kark, 2011). As such, positional authority can positively moderate the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance, and thus is an important consideration when evaluating this relationship.

Servant leaders add value to organizations and less-formalized teams by helping increase organizational performance. While positional authority can help servant leaders, it should not be considered a necessity. Using the example of Jesus Christ, influence can be cultivated and leveraged in the absence of positional authority to demonstrate servant leadership and, in doing so, help increase organizational performance.

References

- Adamowski, S., Therriault, S.B., & Cavanna, A.P. (2007). *The autonomy gap*. Fordham Institute, Washington, DC.
- Akuckie, N. D. (1993). The servants and the superstars: An examination of servant leadership in light of Matthew 20: 20-28. *Christian Education Journal*, 16(1), 39-47.
- Andersen, J. A. (2009). When a servant-leader comes knocking . . . *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 30: 4-15
- Bantel, K. A., & Jackson, S. E. (1989). Top management and innovations in banking: Does the composition of the top team make a difference? *Strategic management journal*, 10(S1), 107-124.
- Barbuto, J. E., Jr., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group and Organizational Management*, 31: 300-326.
- Beatson, A., Lings, I., & Gudergan, S. (2008). Service staff attitudes, organisational practices and performance drivers. *Journal of Management and organization*, 14(2), 168-179.
- Beck, C. D. (2014). Antecedents of servant leadership: A mixed methods study. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21(3), 299-314.
- Blanchard, K. (1998). Servant-leadership revisited. *Insights on leadership: Service, stewardship, spirit, and servant-leadership*, 21-28.

- Boal, K. B. & Hooijberg, R. (2001). Strategic leadership research: moving on. *Leadership Quarterly*, 11, 515–549.
- Carpenter, M. A., Geletkanycz, M. A., & Sanders, W. G. (2004). Upper echelons research revisited: Antecedents, elements, and consequences of top management team composition. *Journal of Management*, 30(6), 749-778.
- Chappel, D. (2000). Fortune's "Best Companies to Work For" embrace servant leadership. *The Servant Leader*, Spring, 5.
- Cohen-Meitar, R., Carmeli, A., & Waldman, D. A. (2009). Linking meaningfulness in the workplace to employee creativity: The intervening role of organizational identification and positive psychological experiences. *Creativity Research Journal*, 21(4), 361-375.
- Dirks, K. T. (1999). The effects of interpersonal trust on work group performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84: 445-455.
- Ebener, D. R., & O'Connell, D. J. (2010). How might servant leadership work? *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 20(3), 315–335.
- Farling, M. L., Stone, A. G., & Winston, B. E. (1999). Servant leadership: Setting the stage for empirical research. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 6(1-2), 49-72.
- Finkelstein, S., Cannella, S. F. B., Hambrick, D. C., & Cannella, A. A. (2009). *Strategic leadership: Theory and research on executives, top management teams, and boards*. Oxford University Press.
- Ford, L. (1991). *Transforming leadership: Jesus' way of creating vision, shaping values & empowering change*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Indianapolis: The Robert Greenleaf Center.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York, NY: Paulist.
- Hackett, C., Stonawski, M., & McClendon, D. (2017). The changing global religious landscape. *Pew Research Center*.
- Hambrick D.C. (1994). Top management groups: A conceptual integration and reconsideration of the "team" label. In Staw BM, Cummings LL (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 16, pp. 171–214). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Hambrick D.C., Mason PA. (1984). Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. *Academy of Management Review*, 9, 193–206.
- Heffernan, A. (2018). Power and the 'autonomous' principal: Autonomy, teacher development, and school leaders' work. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 50(4), 379-396.
- Hu, J., & Liden, R. C. (2011). Antecedents of team potency and team effectiveness: An examination of goal and process clarity and servant leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(4), 851.
- Hunter, J. C. (2004). *The world's most powerful leadership principle: How to become a servant leader*. New York: Crown Business.

- Jones A.M., & York, S.L. (2016). The fragile balance of power and leadership. *The Journal of Values Based Leadership*, (9)2, Article 11. DOI: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl/vol9/iss2/11>.
- Joseph, E., & Winston, B. (2005). A correlation of servant leadership, leader trust and organizational trust. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 6-22.
- Kovach, M. (2020). Leader influence: A research review of French & Raven's (1959) power dynamics. *The Journal of Values Based Leadership*, (13)2, Article 15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22543/0733.132.1312>
- Lanctot, J. D., & Irving, J. A. (2010). Character and leadership: Situating servant leadership in a proposed virtues framework. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 6(1), 28-50.
- Laub, J. A. (1999). Assessing the servant organization; Development of the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) model. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 60 (02): 308A (UMI No. 9921922).
- Laub, J. (2004). Defining servant leadership. *A recommended typology for servant leadership studies. Proceedings of the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable. Retrieved October, 5, 2004.*
- Lefebvre, E., & Lefebvre, L. A. (1992). Firm innovativeness and CEO characteristics in small manufacturing firms. *Journal of Engineering and Technology Management*, 9(3-4), 243-277.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161-177.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Liao, C., & Meuser, J. D. (2014). Servant leadership and serving culture: Influence on individual and unit performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(5), 1434-1452.
- Major, R. L. (2018). In quest of exemplarity: Virtue ethics as a source of transformation for leaders and organizations. In J. Neal (Ed.), *Handbook of Personal and Organizational Transformation*, (pp. 443-464). Springer.
- Manz, C. C. (2011). *The leadership wisdom of Jesus: Practical lessons for today*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Mareus, Roosevelt; Patterson, Kathleen; Firestone, Steve; & Winston, Bruce E. (2019). Exploring Servant Leadership in a Top-Down Environment. *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice*, 6(1), Article 4. Available at <https://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/slt/vol6/iss1/4>.
- Mayo, T., & Nohria, N. (2007). Context-based leadership. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.hbr.org/2007/07/contextbased-leadership-1/>.
- McAllister, D. J. (1995). Affect- and cognition-based trust as foundations for interpersonal cooperation in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(1), 24-59.

- Page, D., & Wong, T. P. (2000). A conceptual framework for measuring servant leadership. *The human factor in shaping the course of history and development*, 69-110.
- Patterson, K. A. (2003). *Servant leadership: A theoretical model*. Doctoral dissertation, Regent University. ATT No. 3082719.
- Polleys, M. S. (2002). One university's response to the anti-leadership vaccine: Developing servant leaders. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 8(3), 117-130.
- Russell, R. F., & Stone, A. G. (2002). A review of servant leadership attributes: Developing a practical model. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 23: 145-157.
- Savage-Austin, A. R., & Honeycutt, A. (2011). Servant leadership: A phenomenological study of practices, experiences, organizational effectiveness, and barriers. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, 9(1).
- Schaubroeck, J., Lam, S. S., & Peng, A. C. (2011). Cognition-based and affect-based trust as mediators of leader behavior influences on team performance. *Journal of applied psychology*, 96(4), 863.
- Schein, E. H. (1990). *Organizational culture* (Vol. 45, No. 2, p. 109). American Psychological Association.
- Scroggins, C. (2017). *How to Lead when You're Not in Charge: Leveraging Influence when You Lack Authority*. Zondervan.
- Sendjaya, S., & Sarros, J. C. (2002). Servant leadership: Its origin, development, and application in organizations. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(2), 57-64.
- Spears, L. C. (2004). Practicing servant leadership. *Leader to Leader*, 34, 7-11.
- Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25, 349-361.
- Van Egeren, M., & O'Connor, S. (1998). Drivers of market orientation and performance in service firms. *Journal of Services Marketing*.
- Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of management*, 37(4), 1228-1261.
- Whittington, J.L., Pitts, T.M., Kageler, W.V., & Goodwin, V.L. (2005). Legacy leadership: The leadership wisdom of the Apostle Paul. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(5), 749-770.
- Wilkerson, R. (2018). *Friend of Sinners: Why Jesus cares more about relationship than perfection*. Nelson Books.
- Wilson, J. H. (2011). The serving organization: Jesus vs. hierarchy in Matthew 20: 20-28. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, 3(2), 91-98.
- Winston, B. E. (2004). Servant leadership at Heritage Bible College: A single case study. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(7), 600-617.

- Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007). *Best practices in servant leadership*. Paper presented at the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.
- Yaffe, T., & Kark, R. (2011). Leading by example: the case of leader OCB. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*(4), 806.
- Yang, J., Liu, H., & Gu, J. (2017). A multi-level study of servant leadership on creativity. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 38*, 610-629.
- Yukl, G., & Mahsud, R. (2010). Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential. *Consulting Psychology Journal: practice and research, 62*(2), 81.
- Zhou, K. Z., David, K. T., & Li, J. J. (2006). Organizational changes in emerging economies: Drivers and consequences. *Journal of International Business Studies, 37*(2), 248-263.
-

About the Authors

Kevin J. Hurt, PhD

Kevin J. Hurt, PhD (University of Texas-Pan American) is an Associate Professor of Management in the Turner College of Business at Columbus State University. His primary research interests include servant leadership, conflict, and human resource management. His work has been published in the *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, *Human Resources Development International*, the *International Journal of Servant Leadership*, *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, and the *Journal of Applied Management & Entrepreneurship*. He has presented his research at the Academy of Management, European Academy of Management, Southern Management Association, and various regional conferences. He has been recognized as an Outstanding Reviewer by the Academy of Management OB division and is a recipient of the Graduate Faculty of the Year award at CSU. Prior to Academics, he worked for 15 years with two Fortune 500 companies in the fields of banking and manufacturing. Finally, he served 6 years in the United States Marine Corps, 4th Marine Division, where he was nationally recognized for his leadership.

Dr. Hurt can be contacted at hurt_kevin@columbusstate.edu.

Elliott Long

Elliott Long received his BBA in Finance from the University of Georgia, his MS in Organizational Leadership from Columbus State University, and is a graduate of the Chief Risk Officer Executive Development program at George Mason University. He is currently a Senior Principal at Gartner, Inc. in its Enterprise Risk Management Advisory practice, where he serves as the Risk Management in Financial Services Advisory Lead. Prior to Gartner, Elliott was a Consultant at Deloitte and then an Enterprise Risk Manager at Aflac. Elliott has received numerous international industry awards, including the Risk Management Society's Rising Star Award. Additionally, Elliott has delivered conference presentations and written thought leadership on topics including integrating risk into strategy, risk reporting, soft skills for ERM leaders, and servant leadership.

Mr. Long can be contacted at Elliott.Long@gartner.com