

## SKILLS THAT ENACT THE BEHAVIORS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore the ideas of servant-leadership, demonstrating that the values that underpin it are aligned closely to those of humanistic psychology, person-centred counselling and relationship-centred counselling. Our examination reveals a critical gap in the servant-leadership literature, namely, the failure to describe specifically the behaviors and actions of servant leaders. The paper concludes by identifying a set of behaviors that enact the core servant-leadership values and practices identified in the literature.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the notion of servant-leadership has attracted increasing attention (Keichel, 1992; Polleys, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Whilst advocates assert that it is more than hype and has “staying power” (Spears, 1996), researchers have yet to identify the key behaviors that enact servant-leadership principles (Russell & Stone, 2002).

Servant-leadership is based on values, ideals and beliefs born from the spiritual readings of its Quakker founder (See Greenleaf, 1970, 1977 for the writings of Herman Hesse). The values enveloped by Greenleaf’s spiritual dimension of leadership reflect an ethical, humanistic values base. In this respect, the servant-leadership movement offers new hope in an era where management and leadership seems to be devoid of ethics (Zandstra, 2002).. Without action that enacts those principles and beliefs, however, the notion of a principle based leadership such as servant-leadership is vacuous and becomes a target of cynicism and disappointment (Russell, 2001).

In this paper, we explore the ideas of servant-leadership, demonstrating that the values that underpin it are aligned closely to those of humanistic psychology, person-centred counselling and relationship-centred counselling. Further, we argue that the enactment of these values can be achieved using the behaviors associated with the intelligent management of emotions (Härtel, Kibby & Pizer, 2003; Kibby & Härtel, 2002).

### **SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: WHAT IS IT AND WHAT ARE ITS PRINCIPLES?**

“The term servant-leadership was first coined in the 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf entitled, *The Servant as Leader*” (Spears, 1996) and has been espoused in writings by Greenleaf (1970, 1977). It has been expanded, or included, in various considerations of leadership ranging from military applications (Braye, 2002) to broader community relevance (Wheatley, 2002). Servant-leadership, as proposed by Greenleaf, has ten central characteristics: Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the Growth of People and Building Community (Spears, 2003; Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

The servant-leader practices described in the literature are designed to enact the core servant-leadership ethics or values, which are to share decision-making, to be caring and to enhance the lives of workers and the quality of organizational life (Spears, 2003). Based on these values, servant-leadership is a type, or expression, of transformational leadership. “Servant leadership is certainly congruent with transformational, moral leadership, and antithetical to the more commonly practiced transactional style” (Poleys, 2002).

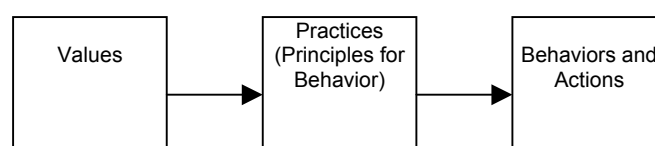
In contrast to servant-leadership, charismatic and transformational models of leadership “...do not address issues of personal or moral accountability” (Sarkus, 1996). Further, some suggest that servant-leaders love and care for their followers (Pollard, 1997). Servant-leadership is different from other forms of leadership in that it imposes upon the leader a moral accountability for the well-being and development of followers. This moral accountability for others is the servant-leader’s cause. In other words, the moral and ethical cause is the master and the servant-leader follows this cause.

Servant-leadership appears to take many forms or, perhaps alternatively, various types of leadership fall under the servant-leadership banner. For example, Covey (2002), DePree (2002) and McGee-Cooper and Trammell (2002) all discuss leadership in a way which, according to Spears and Lawrence (2002), is embraced by, or representative of, servant-leadership.

Such descriptions make it apparent that servant-leadership practices as described by Spears (2003) are based on a set of values. In fact, servant-leadership might best be described as a type of moral leadership where, “Moral leadership is not preaching or the uttering of pieties. It is, however, always concerned with the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers” (Polleys, 2002). Servant-leadership is, therefore, a type of transformational leadership (Polleys, 2002).

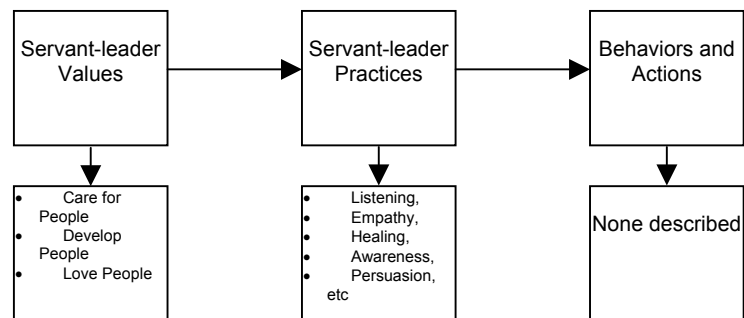
Understanding the values of servant-leadership is important as it is from them, Spears (1996, 2003) suggests, that the practices of servant-leadership evolve. Hence, Russell (2001) proposes a model of leadership behaviors wherein actions follow from beliefs. This model is congruent with the contention of Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood (1999, p. 4) who define leaders in terms of “who leaders *ARE* (values, motives, personal traits, character); what leaders *KNOW* (skills, abilities, traits); and what leaders *DO* (behaviors, habits, styles, competence)”. Based on the contentions of these authors, we represent the link between values and behaviors as the relationship between Values, Practices and Behaviors. This representation, coined Values Action Theory, is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Values Action Theory (VAT)\***



When applying VAT to what is identified in the servant-leadership literature, we can see that the gap in the servant-leadership literature is the failure to specifically describe the behaviors and actions of servant leaders (See Figure 2). This is a critical issue as we have shown that idealism is not enough to ensure that the outcomes promised by the servant-leadership movement will be achieved (Russell & Stone, 2002). The aim of this paper is to suggest a set of behaviors that will enact the core servant-leadership values and practices identified in the literature.

**Figure 2: Mapping the servant-leadership literature using Values Action Theory**



### **VALUES, BEHAVIORS AND PRACTICES: COMPARING SERVANT-LEADERSHIP TO HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY?**

Servant-leadership has been described as humanistic (King, 1994; Graham 1991). We accept this supposition and look to the humanistic school of thought for guidance on behaviors and actions that can be said to represent servant-leadership in practice. In particular, we focus on three key humanistic theorists and practitioners: Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis and Victor Frankl. We select these figures because all three can be argued to have practiced servant-leadership in that they endeavoured to action their values of caring for people and believing in the potential of people and their ability to shape and control their own destinies (Ellis, 1973; Frankl, 1963; Rogers, 1989).

Rogers (1989) proposed non-judgemental, empathic listening as a key action for creating awareness and leading to health and well-being. Frankl's (1963) Logotherapy emphasizes behavior driven by the values of listening, non-judgement, empowerment, caring, and a belief in the individual. Frankl (1963) asserted that actions congruent with these values were the enablers of well-being and noetic (spiritual) harmony.

Ellis (1973), who developed Rational Emotive Therapy, advocated being non-judgemental about the worth of a person, while making values-based judgements regarding

their acts. Whilst Ellis’ techniques differed from those of Rogers and Frankl, the underpinning values were common.

Table 1 presents the core values and practices of humanistic psychology that can be extracted and categorized within a Servant-Leadership framework.

**Table 1: Values and Practices of Servant-Leadership: A Humanistic Perspective**

Humanistic Psychology Values	Humanistic Psychology Practices
Care for People  Develop People  Liberate potential  Empower people	Listening
	Empathy
	Healing
	Awareness
	Conceptualization
	Future (Foresight)
	Commitment to the growth of people
	Non-judgement
	Empowerment
	Values Commitment

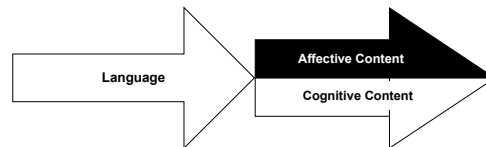
The final section of this paper argues that emotion management skills are required to enact the values and principles shown in Table 1.

**Emotion Management Skills**

All the actions identified by the humanistic psychologists Rogers, Ellis and Frankl involve communication. Communication occurs through the use of verbal and nonverbal language. Language has both affective and cognitive content, which means that it contains both a denotative and connotative message (See Figure 3). We argue that emotions management skills comprise the ability to identify and interpret the affective and cognitive content of other’s messages as well as to anticipate the impact of the affective and cognitive content of the messages one sends to others.

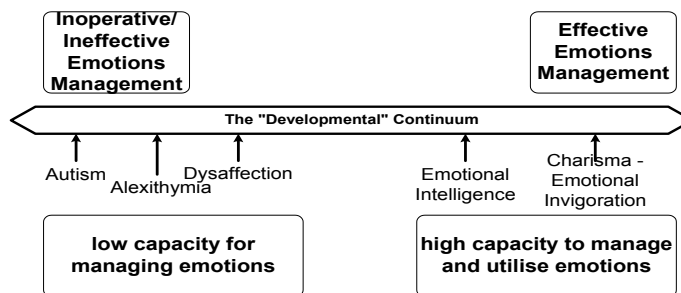
Once an event has triggered an emotional response, individuals tend to need to share this emotion (Pennebaker, Zech & Rimè, 2001). Thus, emotions almost always lead to communication with others, where the purpose of the communication is to have the emotion heard (ie, fulfillment of the need to share the emotion). Servant-leadership, we suggest, is enacted through values-based emotion management skills.

**Figure 3: The Affective-Cognitive Model of Language\***



We suggest an expanded view of emotions management skills, which includes both ineffective and effective emotions management states. What we coin as the “Emotions Management Continuum” demonstrates how widely ability in emotion management actually ranges. Autism and Alexithymia, on the one hand, represent inoperative or ineffective emotion management skills whereas Emotional Intelligence and Charisma, on the other hand, represent the highest emotion management capacity. Figure 4 depicts the proposed continuum and Table 2 provides a description of the traits and abilities that are associated with different emotions management ability levels.

**Figure 4: The Emotions Management Continuum\***



**Table 2: Ineffective and Effective Emotions Management Abilities**

Ineffective Emotions Management	
Trait Name	Trait Description
Autism	Inability to use language related to emotion
Asperger's Syndrome	Inability to use language related to emotion
Dysaffection / Alexithymia	Inability to use language related to emotion and inability to reflect upon (think about) emotion
Effective Emotions Management	
Ability Name	Ability Description

Emotional Intelligence	Emotional Perception and Expression, Emotional Facilitation of Thought Emotional Understanding
Charisma	Ability to use language to create emotions linkage between leader, leader's ideas and action.

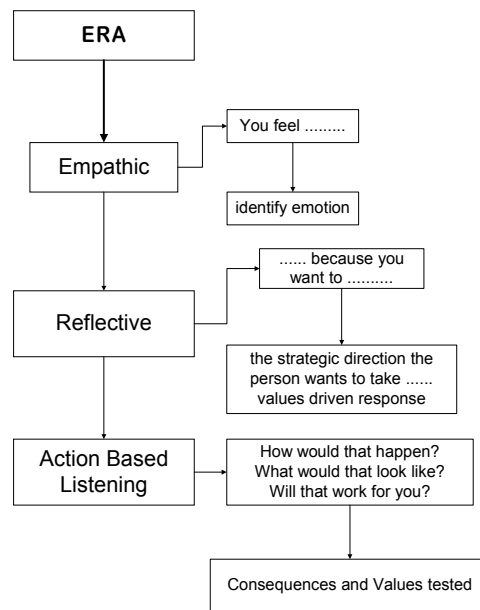
Härtel, Kibby and Pizer (2003) and Kibby and Härtel (2002) offer an emotions management strategy that can help leaders enact humanistic values and principles. Their Empathic, Reflective, Action-based (ERA) communication technique, like servant-leadership (Page, 2000), follows the cause of creating a workplace that helps fulfil human needs. This cause is advocated because, as Fairholm (1996) notes, “People are hungry for this kind of meaning in their lives. They are trying to integrate their spiritual selves with their professional or work lives”.

The first phase of ERA, Empathic Listening, is based around the ideas of Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1989) and empathic listening (See Figure 5). The second phase of ERA, Reflective listening, facilitates an exploration of a values-based strategic direction for action. The final stage of ERA is Action-based communication, which focuses on goal attainment through values-based action and behavior.

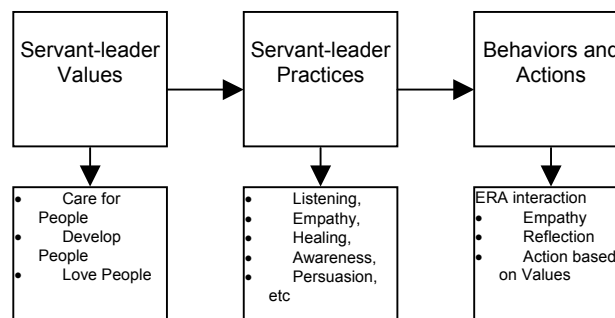
The early phases of the ERA process reflect both the servant-leadership characteristics of listening and empathy and the Rogerian model of empathic listening (Rogers, 1989). “A core element in employee involvement, and the language surrounding it, is that the initiatives or techniques operate first on employee attitudes - they engage or involve the employee - leading to identification and commitment” (April, 1999). The ERA process, which seeks first to respond to the emotional/feeling state of the employee by restating identified feelings (ie, You feel ... ), leads to a commitment to values-based action.

The Reflective phase of ERA involves reviewing the identified emotion in terms of a desired goal, a desired future (i.e., because you want to ... ). However, it is the latter phases of ERA, the Action (i.e., How could that happen? ...) and values-based planning (i.e., Does that match your values of ...) stages, which are particularly important to servant-leadership, because it is in these phases that values and spirituality come to the fore. “Essentially, values serve as blueprints or foundations for making decisions, solving problems, and resolving conflicts” (Russell, 2001). In the Reflective and Action-based phases of the ERA process, discussions of options, actions and outcomes can be tested against a values position. The satisfaction enabled by the Action-based phase should, according to the arguments of Frankl (1963), create a sense of spirit or spiritual expression (See Figure 6).

**Figure 5: The ERA interaction technique\***



**Figure 6: ERA as a reflection of the Values of Servant-leadership**



## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have underscored that servant-leadership has a values and practices base in common with humanistic psychology. We have also shown that one way in which servant-leadership can be enacted is through the ERA emotions management techniques (Härtel, Kibby & Pizer, 2003), a values-based behaviorally specific, interaction process that incorporates Frankl’s logotherapeutic techniques for creating a sense of Noös, the Greek for spirit (Frankl, 1955/1963). As others have noted, emotional intelligence overlaps with spirituality (Tischler, Biberman & McKeage, 2002), and as such, the ERA technique (Härtel, Kibby & Pizer, 2003) can be said to enact spirituality by creating a sense of meaning. Given the spiritual foundations of the servant-leadership dimension, it can be said that the ERA technique, provides one operationalisation of servant-leader behavior. Research into this

technique and other techniques that enact the servant-leadership notion are required in order to better understand this dimension of leadership as well as to develop it.

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\*NOTE - The following were created by the first author, Leigh Kibby  
 Values Action Theory  
 The Affective-Cognitive Model of Language  
 The Emotions Management Continuum  
 The ERA Technique