

EMBEDDING SPIRITUALITY: SERVANT LEADERSHIP MODEL TOWARDS BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

With the advent of new technology and amidst the growth of global competitive business trends, a new era of longevity of business and resources i.e., Sustainability has become very crucial strategy for transformation of business into success. AS per Brundtland Report “Sustainable development is development that encounters the requirements of the present without surrendering the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs.

It is contended that a there are different kind of leadership which can be used in order to effectively transform strategic decisions into successful business which is more sustainable and for that servant leadership and spiritual approach provide a sound basis to apprise strategic decisions. This study proposes Servant leadership style which revolves around ethical, spiritual and value-based philosophy in our organizations. This conceptual paper explores the role of servant leadership in achieving sustainable business model by the management of an organization. The purpose of this study is to analyze the studies by researches that are presenting servant leadership as a theoretical concept, as a leadership model and as a prophet of spirituality at individual, group and organizational level. The research methodology used was a systematic, organized and replicative technique used for reviewing literature. The studies on servant leadership from 2006 to 2018 were carefully chosen. The paper also delves deeper to extract the concept of servant leadership practiced and preached in “Gita” and punished.

The objective of the paper is:

- *To identify the traits and basic framework of Servant leadership.*
- *The impact of servant leader in managing business sustainability.*
- *How spirituality is embedded in the philosophy of servant leadership.*
- *Impact of spirituality in making responsible organization.*

Finally the paper delve deeper into identifying servant leadership as a holistic and futuristic way to manage our organizations. This paper will propose awareness regarding study and development of servant leadership framework as a philosophy in modern organizations.

Keywords: Leadership, spirituality, sustainability, servant leadership framework, The Servant Leadership Conundrum.

Introduction

Francis Bacon famously wrote, "We must obey the forces we want to command". A good leader is one who listens to his subordinates and carries them along. He is Worker First Manager Next. The term 'Servant Leadership' is becoming very popular worldwide. Robert Greenleaf started this concept in 1976 in America. But now it is catching up all over the world. What is servant leadership? Servant leadership is, not taking the credit as a leader. You inspire your colleagues; you inspire your subordinates, not by preaching, but by your own example and by not mere dictating them.

Swami Vivekananda practiced servant leadership more than 100 years back, when he started Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Vivekananda gave a new, holistic way of converting work into worship. When Swamiji drafted the trust deed of Ramakrishna Math, he made his brother disciple, Swami Brahmananda as the first president. He did not become the first president; he did not take the position and power. Swamiji was not only an inspirational leader, but was also a very pragmatic one. He not only believed in 'Servant-based Leadership' but constantly endeavored to empower all those around him. In dealing with his brother-disciples and followers, he evoked what is today popularly known in the management world as the 'Pygmalion Effect'. Management expert J. Sterling Livingston describes it as the effect of enabling subordinates to excel in response to the leader's expectation of them.¹

Methodology

The research methodology used was a systematic, organized and replicative technique used for reviewing literature. The studies on servant leadership from 2006 to 2018 were carefully chosen. The paper also delves deeper to extract the concept of servant leadership practiced and preached in "Gita". The research has extracted the concept of leadership from publication on Swami Vivekanand teaching. Research papers from journals and open sources written by field experts of secondary data sources were reviewed in the literature. Meta-analysis technique helped to review the sources from academic journals that analyze the findings.

What is sustainability?

The concept of "Sustainability" implies the interconnectedness of social, environment and economic concerns, and the need to accomplish a superior harmony between the three so as to guarantee that future will endure and blossom with Earth.

This is normally alluded to as the "triple primary concern" Profit, people and planet (or: Equity, Economy, Ecology).

"Sustainability" has turned into a main system molding social duty, natural assurance and carbon alleviation endeavors, among different activities inside partnerships, governments, schools and colleges, charities, and different areas.

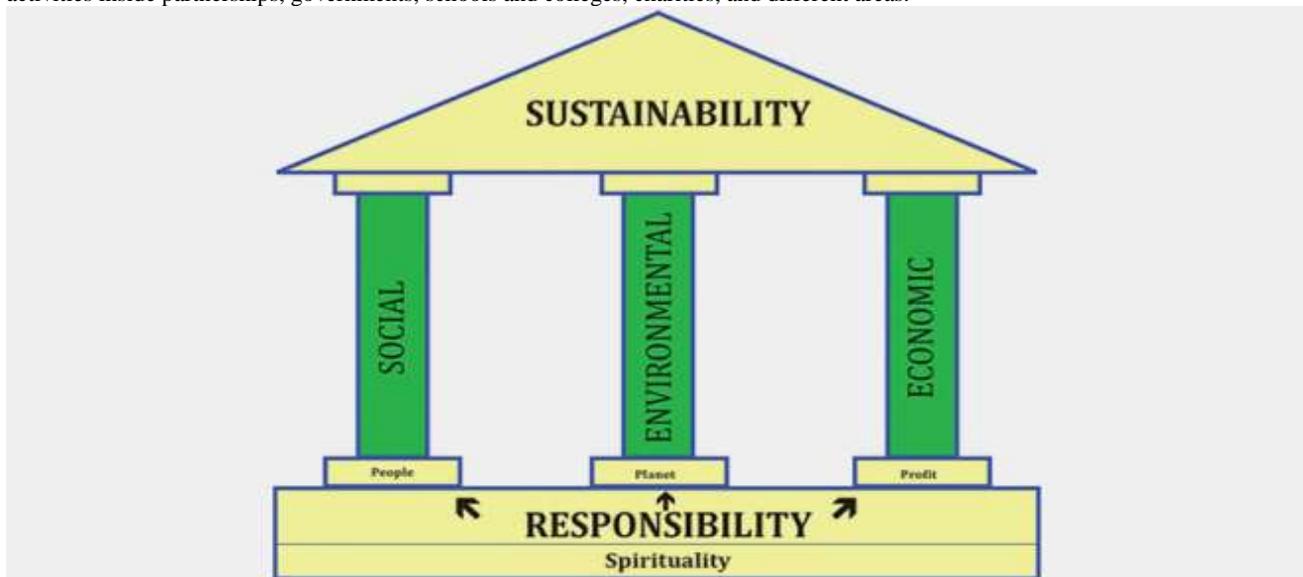


Figure 1: Three pillars of sustainability: source : <http://www.csrvision.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CSR-August-2018-Cover-Story.jpg>

Spirituality: Essential For Building Responsible Organization

With the rise in incident related to ethical issues and global corporate scandals, many organizations are focusing on SQ (spiritual quotient) also with IQ and EQ. These organisations seem to be more concerned about the ethical standard of the employee and are interested in the concept of spirituality with the hope that it could address ethical issues manipulating their businesses.

Sustainable businesses are those which creates profit for its shareholders while shielding the environment and refining the lives of

those with whom it interrelates. Today business sustainability also include Spirituality and ethics which are core values that have shaped human life from time immemorial. Ethics and spirituality are interconnected but different as ethics is about customs and conducts, while spirituality is all about personal meaningful experiences and varies from person to person, making it hard to define.

Our country India is known in the world as a land of spiritual guru like Swami Vivekananda, having answers to all the evolving challenges of the world, because of its strength of spirituality and ancient knowledge system such as Bhagavad Gita.

According to Verse 4 of chapter 8 of Gita, it says:

“The physical nature is endlessly mutable, the universe is the cosmic form of the supreme lord and I am that lord represented as the super soul dwelling in the heart of every embodied being.”

It suggest that it is only the spiritual bondage among all living beings which will make the human beings responsible to not only to the human being/ society but also to the Plants and animals.

Spirituality and Leadership

A leader is one who leads people and his organisation towards achieving their goals and realisation of its visions and practice of its values. Leadership has been described as "a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task"² The leader should lead, guide, execute and prove to his/or her management as well as the stakeholders ability of their leadership.

Management needs Heroes who practice what they preach. In the Bhagavad Gita Chapter 3 Karma Yoga verse 21,

yad yad ācarati śrēḥas tat tad evetaro jaṇa

sa yat pramāṇā kurute lokas tad anuvartate

This means that, whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues. People in general always require a leader who can teach the public by practical behavior. A leader cannot teach the public to stop

To most people, someone in a powerful position of authority is automatically a leader. Consequently, leadership is seen simply as the ability to get people to do what the ‘leader’ wants them to do, often with the help of the powerful position he occupies. We find that all great leaders have two things in common:

1. A burning desire to create a better future
2. The ability to stay the course even in the face of the most formidable of resistance

It is the strength of these two elements that attracts willing followers to them, rather than their position of authority. Gandhi and Mandela in the political/social arena, and Howard Schultz, Steve Jobs, Jack Ma and many others in the business arena were considered great leaders not because of their position, authority, appearance, personality, management techniques or heredity, but because they created better futures for people around them.

While uncovering the three sources of leadership energy may not be the holy grail of leadership development, one thing is clear—there is more to the power of the human mind than is widely understood. As science and spirituality start to converge, the evidence for the universal connectivity of people and things is growing by the day. Our ongoing interactions with great leaders continue to confirm that those who prevail over stubborn resistance to create a better future, believe strongly in their purpose and values, and often also use the power of their mind to influence reality.¹³

Servant Leadership

The servant-leader is servant first. The best test is: do those served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?¹⁴

Max De Pree, former CEO of Herman Miller wrote in his book, *Leadership is an Art*, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant."¹⁵ Hermann Hesse's Journey to the East, in this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably also Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They

cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the parties, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader. Robert Greenleaf states that, this story clearly states that the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness. Leo was actually the leader all of the time, but he was servant first because that was what he was, deep down inside.¹⁶

Every person has buried treasure waiting to be discovered. You also have buried treasure in you. There isn't one of us that don't have value. In order to find that treasure and unlock the individual potential, leaders have to deeply care about those they lead, exercise patience and have the courage to give difficult and timely feedback. As Swami Vivekananda Says, "each Soul is potentially divine to manifest divinity within and everything will be harmoniously arranged about it."¹⁷

Richard Murphy was such a leader, he is a role model for a more selfless than self-aggrandizing leadership, and the lessons we learn from his example are good for every leader to reflect upon.

- 1. Scale ideas, not just programs and organizations.**
- 2. The first job of leaders is to build and support other leaders.**
- 3. Take chances on people.**
- 4. Advocate for social change, and stay grounded in service.¹⁸**

The single characteristic of the servant-leader that stands out in Greenleaf's essay, it is the *desire to serve*. A walk through *The Servant as Leader* by Robert Greenleaf provides a fairly long list of additional characteristics that are important. They include listening and understanding; acceptance and empathy; foresight; awareness and perception; persuasion; conceptualization; self-healing; and rebuilding community. Greenleaf describes servant-leaders as people who initiate action, are goal-oriented, are dreamers of great dreams are good communicators, are able to withdraw and re-orient themselves, and are dependable, trusted, creative, intuitive, and situational.¹⁹

There is a great deal of the emphasis on empathy and mutual respect on the part of the servant leader. The followers, likewise make a conscious choice to follow leaders," because they are proven and trusted as servants". The servant leadership is more about ones character rather than on style. According to Robert Greenleaf, Servant hood means a leader helping people remove the obstacles on their path and helping them acquire the skills they need to do their jobs better.²⁰

Herb Kelleher chairman emeritus and co-founder, and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, a highly successful U.S. Corporation thought process is very similar to Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of Servant Leadership though he ran a business for profit. The employees of South West Airlines think that their company exists to serve a purpose, not just to make a profit. It takes an unusual leader to inculcate that type of belief in people. His justification for that view is rather simple: Treat your employees well, and they in turn will treat your customers well. It is then hardly surprising that the company probably the most unionized airlines in the US airline industry, rarely face any problem with organised labour.²¹

Servant-Leadership Framework

1. **Service to Others.** Servant-leadership begins when a leader assumes the position of servant in their interactions with followers. Authentic, legitimate leadership arises not from the exercise of power or self-interested actions, but from a fundamental desire to first help others. Greenleaf wrote that this “simple fact is the key to [a leader’s] greatness”²³

2. **Holistic Approach to Work.** Servant-leadership holds that “The work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work”²⁴It challenges organizations to rethink the relationships that exist between people, organizations and society as a whole.

3. **Promoting a Sense of community.** Greenleaf lamented the loss of community in modern society, calling it “the lost knowledge of these times”.²⁵ Only by establishing this sense of community among followers can an organization succeed in its objectives. Further, the theory posits that this sense of community can arise only from the actions of individual servant-leaders.²⁶

Sharing of Power in Decision-Making. Effective servant-leadership is best evidenced by the cultivation of servant-leadership in others. By nurturing participatory, empowering environments, and encouraging the talents of followers, the servant-leader creates a more effective, motivated workforce and ultimately a more successful organization. As phrased by Russell “Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away”.²⁷ The organizational structure resulting from servant-leadership has sometimes been referred to as an “inverted pyramid”, with employees, clients and other stakeholders at the top, and leader(s) at the bottom. Exemplary followers, a product of delegated decision-making, are a further example of servant-leadership’s inverse nature, “another type of leader turned inside out”.²⁸ Because servant-leadership breaks away from the classic organizational pyramid and promotes flexible, delegated organizational structures, many behavioral scientists see it as a forward-looking, post-industrial paradigm for leadership.²⁹

Traits of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a blend and balance between leader and servant. It can be easy to dismiss servant leadership as offering no direction. But the servant leadership style offers several advantages that you should consider.³⁰

Diversity

The servant leadership approach can be effective in a diverse workplace, as an autocratic style of leadership can cause alienation among employees. A democratic form of leadership can sometimes cause opposing points of view to be lost or distorted to fit the needs of the group. The servant leadership style serves each member of the group. This allows for personalized management for each diverse member of the team and can help to maintain team cohesiveness.

Involvement

A workplace that runs under a servant leadership style can choose to operate for the needs of individual employees or it can operate as a collective where the group makes decisions. Unlike a democratic management style where the majority rules, in a servant leadership setting, all opinions and input matters.

The Servant Leadership Conundrum

The list of traits, characteristics, or virtues attributed to servant leaders is plentiful in the literature, and these vary somewhat with respect to their contents. The aforementioned conundrum is central to the development of servant leaders as proposed by Larry C Spears.³¹

Listening: Committing to listen to other while simultaneously paying attention to one's own inner voice.

Empathy: Striving to understand others from their perspective.

Healing: Repairing peoples broken spirits by making them whole

Awareness: Committing to foster self awareness.

Persuasion: Convincing others, rather than coercing compliance.

Conceptualisation: Looking beyond day to day realities and "dream great dreams".

Foresight: Seeing how the present decisions affect the future.

Stewardship: Holding something in trust for another.

Commitment to the growth of people: Committing top the growth of each individual in the organisation.

Building Community: Seeking to enhance trust and a deep sense of connection toward a common interest.

. A servant leader develops other leaders. The replication factor is so important. It means teaching others to lead, providing opportunities for growth and demonstrating by example. That means the leader is not always leading, but instead giving up power and deputizing others to lead. It's important to offer opportunities for personal development beyond the job. Let's say you run a company program to lose weight, or lower personal debt, or a class on etiquette. None of these may help an immediate corporate need, but each may be important.

Servant Leadership and Present World Management

Servant Leadership though it may seem simple, it's the most profound and difficult style of Leadership. The reason is not for the difficulty in practicing it, but to be a servant leader one needs to have a fundamental shift in attitude and there should be an inner transformation.

Servant hood by itself does not make one a leader. One needs to blend a servant's heart with leadership skills. After an extensive review of the literature on what makes a great leader, Wong has identified twelve defining characteristics of exceptional leaders:³²

1. Great capacity for productive work	2. Great vision for the right direction
3. Great intellect and knowledge	4. Great people skills
5. Great team-builders	6. Great motivators
7. Great heart	8. Great communicators
9. Great optimists	10. Great courage
11. Great self-knowledge	12. Great character

It is self-evident that the best practices of Servant Leadership listed earlier will contribute the development of all the important leadership characteristics, especially in matters related to the heart and character of leadership. The world Economic Forum survey on the global agenda 2014 clearly states that there is a leadership crisis. All crises are thrust on all the world citizens due to caring leadership with a vision. The important skills required for leadership in the present day is to have 1. Global Perspective, 2. Collaboration, 3. Communication, 4. Commitment to social justice, 5. Long term planning; 86% of respondents think there is a leadership crisis³⁴.

The recent Wall Street debacle of 2008 and other corporate scandals are involving companies like Enron, Tyco, Lehman Brothers, AIG, etc., have cast a serious doubt on their leadership and their running of their corporations. These corporations are not known for practicing workplace spirituality. But many corporations do swear by that philosophy. The secret of organisations lies in the CEO's sincerity in setting the tone- how he is perceived. The "Greed over Spirituality" mindset might have been limited to a handful of people, but they were influential enough and their actions were serious enough to cause their employees and investors irreparable harm.³⁵

Three historical figures who changed the worlds in which they lived. John Woolman, an American Quaker, used gentle persuasion to convince Quakers to give up their slaves in eighteenth century America. Thomas Jefferson turned down leadership opportunities during the American Revolutionary War in order to return to his home state and write statutes that were enacted and shaped the future of Virginia as well as the new nation.

Greenleaf In his second essay, *The Institution as Servant*, Greenleaf wrote that "not much will change until the *builders of institutions*, those who have competence and strength, begin to move." He introduced the important role of board members in leading the institution toward distinction as servant. He discussed organizational structures, and argued for a team or "council of equals" instead of a single chief at the top of the organizational pyramid. He described the difference between conceptual and operating talent, and discussed the challenges of large businesses, universities, and growing edge churches.³⁶

Leading by Serving Servant leadership helps ASQ board become a high-performing team one thing is certain about the ASQ Board of Directors (BoD)—it is a passionate and opinionated group dedicated to advancing quality and quality professionals. While having individuals with passion, conviction and commitment at the helm of the society is inarguably a good thing, it can work against harmonization. It implemented a proven leadership style called servant leadership that promotes practices such as listening, asking questions, reflection, using foresight, and contributing to the growth and development of stakeholders.

"Servant leadership definitely made the board more participative. No longer does the BoD just sign off on policies. We jump in and take action on issues our members are concerned with," Crawford said. "Servant leadership blends well within any organization, whether it's a nonprofit or for-profit, because it develops community and empathy." The ASQ BoD is confident servant leadership will provide ASQ with a strong foundation as it builds a society that can leverage global resources and knowledge to make each ASQ member successful. "Servant leadership will get us there because it puts the focus on members and it gives us foresight on member value now and into the future," Timmerman said.³⁷

Conclusion

It is high time to develop a new paradigm of leadership training. All the exercises on team- building and strength-finding will not work without the right kind of leadership. The spirit of the leader as a servant may be just what is needed to implement a strengths-based paradigm.

"The Leader of the Future" write up from the Drucker Foundation, rejected the command-and- control approach; They advocated the importance of learning from the grass roots and leading with a shared vision and a spirit of collaboration. They believed that the challenge facing future leaders is to serve as role models with core values and inspire a diverse work group for long-term common good.³⁸ In "The Leaders of the Future II", reinforce the same themes and emphasize the need for new ideas for leadership training in the post-9/11 world.³⁹ The new leadership is not tied to official positions or roles; rather, it is an informal act which can be performed by all employees.

On the other hand, if you read the ancient Indian wisdom, you come often across the idea of sustainability. Human kind is assumed to be closely inter-related with the other living and non-living things that comprise nature and is expected to work in tandem. A sense of mutual dependence pervaded in most of the actions taken and the manner in which problems were addressed. What we need most are servant leaders with exceptional abilities blended with hearts full of humility and love. Such leaders can make this world a better place and restore people's hope in the future. A harmonious combination of western organisation and eastern spirituality is the need of the hour for an effective leadership.

Dwe Vidya Veditavye Para Cha Eva Aparā Cha states the Mukunda Upanishad, which means a person should have two kinds of learning; one of external excellence and the other of internal excellence.⁴⁰

We need a confluence of the western pragmatism and eastern mysticism to create a new breed of leaders who can practice and take servant leadership to greater heights. Swami Vivekananda Said that, "One must work as a the dictate comes from within, and then if it is right and good society is bound to veer around, perhaps centuries after one is dead and gone";⁴¹ This Vivekananda Effect will take a long time in manifesting itself in all its grandeur and shall be relevant for generations to come.

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