Servant Leadership Model As Panacea For Growing A Healthy Church And Organization

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ABSTRACT
The church and society can experience better and stable growth with significant development if our leaders will employ the servant leadership lifestyle. The aim of this study was to investigate and thoroughly examine the effects of servant leadership concept on the overall growth and development of a church organization in our contemporary society. The churches whose leaders are servant-leaders appear more stable, healthier, peaceful and fast growing than those who are not. Followers in the servant leadership model have the role of motivating and co-operating with their servant leaders in assisting them fulfill their responsibility without compromise and pressure. The contribution of this study to knowledge is overwhelming, though many scholars have carried out studies concerning servant leadership, however, this study is a follow up to look at other grey areas in leadership, which only servant –leadership approach is the answer. This paper also serves as a challenge and correction to many pastors and leaders in the contemporary society that to exercise undue authority, using force to exert dominion on the people of God is wrong and ungodly. It was recommended that if Church leaders employ the use of this servant leadership concept, it will reduce drastically the level of disunity, crisis and confusion we see in many churches and society today. Leaders should avoid the attitude of using threat and force as motivation to lead the people of God. Servant leadership concept should be continuously taught and emphasized in all our theological institutions and leadership conferences where leaders are produced and empowered for our churches and nations at large.

Keywords: Servant, Leadership, Panacea, Church

INTRODUCTION
Leadership in our modern day society is mostly characterized by titles, offices, positions and their carriages. In Africa, leadership is known by the authority exerted on the led or the followers. Majority of such leaders serve their purpose, interest, exercise - ego, crave appetite for fame rather than serve the interest of the people they lead. Leadership in the world often emphasizes class and status at the expense of relationship and service. Leadership in Nigeria especially and mostly African countries have been characterized by selfishness, greed and strong desire for more power. Kumuyi (2007: 18-19) notes that:

What Africa needs for its redemption is servant leadership,
instead of the self-serving governance that the continent is famed for.
Our leaders should add the servanthood attitude to their attributes
and demonstrate that their primary motivation for seeking
to lead the people is rooted in a deep desire to serve and help out. (18)

The quotation above suggests that leadership is the solution to the numerous problems in our world today. It is only when the leaders consciously accept to serve and become concerned for the followers that the nation can forge ahead. Servant leadership therefore is expected to be seen in the school, the church or other religious bodies, the communities and Africa as a whole. (Ayandokun, 2009: 8). The
above scenario further suggests that the present dispensation is in dire need of servant leaders who are to occupy strategic positions in the church, corporate establishments and government parastatals. We need leaders with credibility who have modeled their lives after the teachings and principles of Christ. Africa and churches of Christ in Nigeria need such kind of God-fearing leadership to pilot effectively her affairs; leaders who are ready to emulate Christ and are committed to living up to the standards laid down by Christ. These are leaders who have identified their positions they occupy as a means of God’s call upon their lives and have been tested, trusted, approved, ordained and empowered by God to serve humanity. Adetunji (2010) quoting Ordway Tead, defines leadership as “the activity of influencing people to co-operate towards some goals, which they come to find desirable” (2). He emphasizes that the distinctive task of leadership is to guide by drawing along or going before his or her people, which is done by instruction or counsel. (2). This definition carries the traces of servanthood as it applies to this paper. Leadership therefore, for the purpose of this presentation is an act that involves the task of a leader in leading, guiding, directing and influencing those who work with him or her to achieve a common objective. He or she exercises authority within the confines of his responsibility in such a way that goals set are accomplished without jeopardizing the unity and health of the body and thereafter records outstanding progress as by-product of the leadership act. This paper therefore, will examine and evaluate the concept and principles of servant – leadership in church, the biblical basis for servant – leadership, and its implications as a model for contemporary church and organization as well as the society at large.

**Definition of Operational Terms**

**Servant:** servant is a person who works for another person or in an organization. It has an idea of service rendered for a person with or without pay.

**Leadership:** This is the state or position of being a leader. Wright defines leadership as a “relationship in which one person seeks to influence the thoughts, behaviours, beliefs and values of another person.” (2000: 2).

**Servant Leadership:** This is a biblical concept and style of leadership wherein a leader accepts to serve and empower others even when occupying exalted position of authority. Greenleaf described servant – leadership as a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations and ultimately creates a more just and caring world. (1998: 18)

**Model:** Model in this work is described to mean an example and a pattern to copy or emulate by other people because it is considered to be an excellent one.

**Biblical Model:** This means following after the pattern of the Bible in the leadership pattern that is adopted by the leaders.

**Healthy Church:** It is defined as a state in which the church is free from rancor, acrimony and any form of relationship crisis or power tussles that hinder growth and development

**The Concept of Servant – Leadership**

Servant leadership as a timeless concept and as leadership style was a practice first initiated and propounded by Robert K. Greenleaf who lived between 1904- 1990. It was first recorded in his essay titled, “The Servant as a Leader” in 1970 (1998: 28). This concept has spread and has been practiced by many organizations including churches who appreciate the values attached to this style of leadership. The great leader is first experienced as a servant to others, and that this simple fact is central to the leader’s greatness. True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help and service others. (Spear, 2004: 7-11). A servant – leader focusses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. The servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.

The concept of servant – leader denotes that the leader is one “who enters into a relationship with another person to influence their behavior, values and attitudes” (Wright, 2000: 2). Wright claims that servant- leader’s identity is that of one who is loved by God and is willing to show that same degree of love to others. He pictures love among other things as being key to leadership especially for Christian leaders. He emphasized that Christian leadership must be rooted on relationship with God (6-7). Servant – leaders must always be characterized with love, mercy and compassion to the people being led. Servant – leaders are called and must recognize that they are accountable to God and the
people. They must be conscious of their responsibility to lead the people towards God and influence them to make a difference in the world full of darkness with their leadership act and position.

In addition, Wright (2000) gave some principles to strengthen the idea of concept of servant-leadership. These serve as pillars and bedrock upon which leadership are built. They can be summarized, below as follows: Leadership is about influence and service; Leadership is about vision and hope; Leadership is about character and trust; Leadership is about relationship and giving away power; Leadership is about dependency and accountability (7-8).

The implication of the above principles of leadership is that those who want to serve as laid down by the scriptures and modeled by Jesus Christ with other disciples must aspire to make a difference in the lives of those they lead as leaders. This calls for using one’s education, resources, spiritual gifts, and training to nurture those they lead by caring for them, encouraging and motivating them and not to enslave the people. Servant-leaders are expected to be shepherds. They are servants assigned to care for the sheep. Servant leaders must treat people with dignity, offer hope and model exemplary Christian life and virtue. (Ayandokun 2009: 10).

Furthermore, servant – leadership concepts and principles should not only be taught and discussed but absorbed for use among all leaders in the religious circle as well as in secular organizations. No person who is self – serving, proud, lazy, power crazy, hypocritical can appropriately fit into this style of leadership concept. Adetunji (2010) affirms that no leader is great except he is first a servant of all (3). The greatest leader of men, our Lord Jesus Christ expressed the idea of servant leadership this way: “and whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant”.

Servant leaders lead, but with a style not reflective of the popular culture. Jesus instructed his followers to avoid prevailing Gentile and Jewish models of prideful leadership, where dominance (lording it over), coercion, titles and public recognition were the goals, “not so with you: Jesus exclaimed in Matthew 20:26. Jesus instead spoke of leaders who serve. Servant leaders still do the things leaders do, such as to direct, organize, envision, which are the characteristics that can be found when a servant – leader is in place in the church or any secular organization (Berkley, 1994: 151).

Servant leaders are secure, knowing God values every man (John 13:24). Servant leaders also find joy in encouraging and supporting staff and team members. They don’t need credit for their ideas and vision and they are high on relationships and low in control and coercion. Servant leaders shut the trappings of authority and status and base their authority on character, not the position they occupy (Adetunji, 3).

The true leader sees through the eyes of his followers. He assumes that his followers are working with him and not for him. The servant – leader always considers his followers as partners in progress and makes frantic efforts to reproduce himself in them. He does not hold people down but lifts them up. (Berkley, 1994:152). Those with servant heart in the leadership positions must learn to have a sensitive spirit like Jesus who identifies human needs with the intention to serve them. Servant-leaders therefore must be alert and sensitive to respond to the needs and challenges of those they lead. Greenleaf recognized that organization as well as individuals could be servant – leaders. Indeed, he had great faith that servant – leader organizations could change the world (Greenleaf, 1998: 45).

**Biblical Basis for Servanthood as a Model of Leadership**

The bible is very clear about the concept of servant – leadership, which establishes that true and authentic leadership has its model or pattern in the scripture. In the creation account, God made man the ruler of all creation and by that He invested authority and power in him (Gen 1:28). Leadership is deeply rooted in the Bible because of God’s approval of man as a leader of his creation. Man became significant as a carrier of power to rule the world. (Ayandokun, 14). The implication of this is that, no leader emerges without the knowledge and consent of God. Each leader called has specific assignment to be accomplished within a time frame and in a particular locality.

**Old Testament Perspective**

The exposition of Exodus 32:30-32 reveals the leadership attitude of Moses in the office of a priest under the principle of representative leadership called servant leadership. Moses represented the welfare of Israelites and pleaded for their repentance, forgiveness and atonement before the Lord. He served the interest of the Israelites at a time when they were not privileged to plead their case even to the risk of his eternity. The steps and actions of Moses revealed that “leadership involves having concern for the welfare of others and being engrossed in the quest for their wellbeing.” (Ayandokun, 15). The trust placed on Moses was sustained by his action who refused to be the Lord’s own alone. Moses’ desire was to make himself and all that God has placed under him belong to the Lord. All the
actions and attitude of Moses truly exemplified that of a servant – leader. By inference, Moses was not a selfish leader and that quality according to Adetunji (2010) is expected of anyone who adopts servanthood as a model of leadership. Great love, which he had for the people characterized the life of Moses and his leadership model. He exemplified the qualities of humility, meekness, trust, integrity, obedience, enthusiasm, accountability, equipping others so that after leaving, the work could continue. (15).

A true servant - leader should demonstrate deep love towards God and the people he or she is leading in service. Christian leaders are to learn from Moses style of sacrificial leadership, which shows serious concern and deep love for the people. It implies that those who serve or are chosen to serve must not see the opportunity to serve as a self-empowerment but rather as a privilege to serve God’s people. Leadership in The Old Testament revealed that those who emerged as leaders were usually appointed, consecrated and ordained to serve (Numbers 3:3). It was the same attribute that was seen in the life of Joshua who took up the mantle of leadership after Moses. He also epitomized servant – leadership (Josh 1:1-5).

The New Testament Perspective
A critical look in The New Testament reveals that Jesus Christ set forth style and pattern of servant-leadership both in words and actions. He taught his disciples the kind of leaders they should aspire to become. The Lord Jesus Christ identified the contemporary style of leadership to be characterized with status, dominion and control. (Ayandokun, 16). In The New Testament, Jesus vehemently rejected this worldly style of leadership in Mark 9:33-37 and Mark 10:35 – 45. He categorically stated that, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.” This statement accredited to Jesus revealed that whoever wants to be leader among the disciples must not think of leadership in the sense of becoming “foremost prominent or most important” but rather the readiness to minister, attend to the needs of others, serve as waiter or run errand.” (Brown, n.d: 15).

This implies that true greatness is not borne out of a sense of esteem but out of service to others. In other words, leadership in the kingdom must not be position driven. The response of Jesus to the positional request of the two sons of Zebedee in Mark 10:35-40 further revealed that occupying leadership position must meet certain criteria. There is price to be paid as declared by Akanni, which involves a period of processing, training, timing and testing to be qualified for leadership position. (Akanni 2003: 67 – 70). Philippians 2:6-7 also revealed how Jesus emptied himself to take the form of a servant. He solicited that every true Christian should cultivate this kind of mindset. In his ministry on earth, Jesus as a model of servant-leader depended on God as He prayed to God for strength and guidance. Jesus also showed a deep concern for people and accepted them as agents in fulfilling God’s mission. Jesus did not lead by coercion but rather through care and service, which earned him the respect of a master teacher (Ayandokun, 17). The home, the church and the society at large need leaders who would follow after the pattern of Jesus as they lead others in service to God and humanity.

Obviously, the key to understanding Christian leadership is learning to lead like Christ. In the dramatic eleventh chapter of Matthew verses 25 -30, Jesus describes his leadership as gentle and humble. In the chapter that follows, he quotes from Isaiah 42 to describe the chosen servant as one who “will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Mat 12:19-20). The way and manner our Lord Jesus work out and relate with his disciples gives us a pattern of a true servant leader indeed. James is another valuable leadership character to study in The New Testament. He was the moderator and senior pastor of Jerusalem Church. James was Jesus’ half-brother and author of the Epistle of James. James models a participatory leadership style, able to moderate a public assembly with a broad view to the greatest possible benefit of the body of Christ. He is able to allow all viewpoints to be appropriately aired, summarizing the consensus of the assembly and preserving the unity of the saints (Berkely, 154).

Another personality who demonstrated Christ –like leadership style in the New Testament was Barnabas. He rises from an apparent layman’s role in Jerusalem to become leader of the second New Testament Church in Antioch (Berkely, 155). He affords a brilliant example of unthreatened, secure leadership, being a person who is willing to trust others to exercise the greatest potential of their gifts and calling. He provided a very good platform for Paul to begin his Christian leadership journey and later step down for him as a true servant leader. As the apostles demonstrated the practical outworking of Christ’s teachings in the Book of Acts as regard to leadership affair without lording it over other people, Paul also did excellent work in the New Testament when considering the nature of biblical
leadership. His constant activities of modeling and mentoring, encouraging and exhorting, teaching and training exemplifies New Testament leadership at its zenith (Berkely, 156). He described his own leadership approach in 1Thessalonians, offering a contrast to first century pagan understanding (1Thess 2:1-6).

Also worthy of note is the group that we call “The Ephesian elders” in the New Testament whose dramatic appearance in Acts 20 demonstrates for us what God expects of lay leaders in local congregations. We often link Acts 20 with Ephesians 4:11-16 to see precisely how the kind of leadership creates strength in the unified body of any given congregation. However, the leadership principle gleans from the New Testament approach, which are very fundamental to servant - leadership concept, can be summarized as follows: (a) Leadership is servanthood (b) Leadership is stewardship (c) Leadership is sharing power/empowering others (d) Leadership is ministry (e) Leadership is modeling behavior (f) Leadership is membership in the body (Osei-Mensah 2001: 9).

This suggests the way and manner every true New Treatment leader should see and view biblical leadership that is transparent and based on New Testament principle or model. This is truly Jesus model of servant leadership.

Traits of Servant – Leaders
Having established the concept and biblical basis of servanthood as a model of leadership, this paper intends to examine briefly the pre-requisites, traits, parameters, qualities and models of leadership that those who employ and aspire servanthood style of leadership should manifest. Servant – Leader is therefore characterized by the following as found in Greenleaf’s original writings by Spears. Such character traits of a servant - leader include: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community (Spears, 8-10). Adetunji (2010) corroborated this servanthood traits in which he called elements of effective leadership style to grow a healthy church is a complete paradigm shift from treating workers as tools or machines that are overworked until they break down. In other words, he presents a leader as someone who cares and has the interest of others at heart and willing to sacrifice (12).

Osei-Mensah (2001) identified the need for genuine conversion experience, a renewed mind and exemplary obedience to God’s leading as characteristic traits of a servant – leader. In addition, he emphasizes that such leaders are to be characterized with godly vision, ability to inspire others, discipline, ability to disciple the followers and restore people into the fold of God by their act of leadership (9). Akanni (2002) emphasizes that the men that fit into God’s work are men of impeccable character who do not jump here and there but find out what exactly is God’s plan for their lives and ministries. They are men who are conscious of God’s judgment on every man’s work. They are men who surrender themselves for inner cleansing whose lives are not ordinary or common but transformed and renewed in God. Leaders after God’s heart are those who recognize the favour of God upon their lives and respect the honour / dignity of God that lifted them from lowly estate or background into a position of honour to serve God’s people.

The scripture has a long list of such people who could not have been noticed if not for God who graciously brought them to limelight. Few of such list include Rahab, the harlot (Heb 11:31) and Uriah, the Hittite who refused pleasure while others were in the war front (2Sam 11:6-11). Others like Saul, David and Solomon were made honourable and popular by God, yet they still failed God in some areas of their leadership. Akanni (2004) buttressing the idea above reiterates that: “gens that attract God’s heart towards a man are not decorations that a man wears occasionally. They are character traits, learnt and built over the years of personal growth in His presence” (250). Leaders who would win the heart of God must learn to be absolved in humility and service to God and mankind.

Adopting the concept and model of servanthood in leadership means that, the leader is ready to elevate people into growth and development. It means the readiness to serve others without considering personal gains. Servant – leadership puts into consideration the needs and aspirations of the people they lead. The led in return identifies the servant – leaders and would oftentimes be committed to the goals and visions of such leaders. Servant – leaders therefore involves “setting the vision, defining and modeling the operating values, structure and behaviour, norms, creating the follower environment with partners in the vision and moving to the bottom of the hierarchy with service in mind” (Blanchard and Hodges, 2004: 59). The biblical model of leadership, which portrays the traits, qualities and models of servanthood can further be explained in the provision for successors,
the way and manner people are empowered to grow, how decisions are taken, vision casting, facilitating change process, leading by acts of submission and wise selection in the use of leadership styles. The servant – leaders strive to understand and empathize with others. They are traditionally been involved for their communication and decision making skills.

Implications of Servanthood as Biblical Model of Leadership

The servant leadership philosophy and practices have been expressed in many ways and applied in many contexts. Some of the most well -known advocates of servant leadership include Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Peter Senge, Larry Spear (Greenleaf, 2016: 52). The extensive dimension on the basis and concept of servant leadership by the writer has made it imperative to present this leadership lifestyle as a model for church and business organizations. The idea of servant leadership is therefore, not without some basic implications and challenges, which can be carefully presented in this segment. The first implication of this model of leadership is to see leadership as service to God and humanity. God calls people to leadership position; it is not just about individual’s aspiration because such places have been divinely prepared even before the person aspires to attain such. Leadership position is a platform for service and not for self - projection or self - aggrandizement. It is not about occupying position but taking responsibility to affect people’s lives positively. Leadership position (place of authority) should not be used to measure greatness but the service rendered or impact made when in that office or position. Maxwell submits that leadership position should be used to allow potential leaders to shape and define their leadership (Maxwell, n.d. 25).

Leadership service that is expected in the kingdom of God is selfless and sacrificial in all its ramifications. Leadership service rendered in the kingdom of God must be in total humility and absolute submission to the will of God, knowing fully well that God is the ultimate rewarder, not mortal men. Leadership that is acceptable to God must be rendered without expecting “kick back” or compensation or reward from those receiving the service (Idowu 2008, 1-7). Servant leadership promotes the idea that one should be willing to support the greater good even if it means temporarily sacrificing one’s self or ideas. It embraces the concept that meeting the needs of others is what allows communities and business to reach their full potentials.

The second implication of this model of leadership is the sacrificial and challenging nature of servant leadership. It is indeed very challenging in all ramifications. It takes time to build relationship with people before leadership can influence them positively in the direction of vision and purpose. There could be many disgusting and unpleasant experiences in being a servant leader, which somehow may not be palatable. A leader must be prepared to weather all storms with positive mindset and large heart. Another implication has to do with developing and cultivating Christ – like nature. This type of leadership makes it possible and practicable to mould the true nature of Christ in leadership responsibility and position of authority. It frees leaders from arrogating too much power and authority to one’s self at the expense of the congregation. The true nature and likeness of Christ becomes more visible in a leader who practices this model of leadership.

Servant leadership model provides rooms for accountability and continuity. Servant leadership model is a transparent form of leadership that gives room for genuine assessment and accountability (Covey 1992: 27). There is nothing shady in this form of leadership to the follower. It is an open system of leadership that creates room for progressive continuity even at the exit of the current leadership. The implication of this is, there is no room for vacuum in servant leadership model. It eliminates confusion and doubt in method and practices of leadership administration. Taking leadership for granted is another implication and challenge. It is very easy and simple for the follower to take their leaders for granted, because he is committed to service and they honour God with their abilities, potentials, talents and various resources they have been endowed with. The privilege of this practice of servant leadership should not be abused or taken for granted by the follower to make leader appear as ‘a fool’ when he or she serves his follower as a chief servant but not a slave. The follower should in turn recognize the roles, office and position of the leadership as ‘the servant, serving among servants’. Slavery and servanthood are not the same, so leadership therefore should not be treated as slavery.

Another implication is that, leadership is not a right but a privilege (Maxwell, 40). This implication suggests that leadership must continually be earned, it should not be a reward or an award for compensation to celebrate good works. So all servant leaders should see leadership as a privilege, not as a right that they are qualified or entitled to. Therefore, exercising leadership as servant should include love, peace and commitments to followership as responsibility and privilege.
Finally, the church, business and government organizations grow stronger and healthier under the watch care of a true servant leader. The church will definitely be united in purpose and love to work and walk together as one indivisible entity. This will strengthen the cord of love and unity among brethren in the body of Christ. It is only a healthy church with good relationship that can grow effectively in the world. There will be no animosity, hatred, ill-fight and disunity that can damage the health of the church under a servant leader. The church and secular organizations grows stronger and healthier when the followers know that their leader has nothing to hide from them. They build trust and confidence more in their servant leader. Maxwell affirms that, the better the leader in an organization, the better everyone in the organization. He further asserts that, when productivity is high, chemistry is good, morale will be high and momentum is stronger (Maxwell, 25). All these are functions of effective and efficient servant leadership. He further concludes that “people naturally follow leaders stronger than themselves” (17). People follow leaders who have the heat that cares, passion to inspire and motivate, willingness to empower and courageous enough to provide direction for others.

CONCLUSION
The leadership in the world has truly been characterized with selfishness, pride and titles among others, as earlier revealed in this paper. Leaders with such attributes do not serve but exploit and expect others to serve them. This is in contrast to what the Bible recommends on acts and practice of leadership. It is for this purpose the writer examines and re-evaluates the concept of servanthood as a leadership strategy and affirms that servanthood as a model of leadership is a shift from treating works or followers as machines that are overworked until they break down. Instead, servanthood treats others with respect and dignity (Ayandokun 2009: 8). The concept indeed considers followers as responsible individuals who can contribute to the progress and policy making of a particular organization. They are therefore to be treated fairly and empowered for the tasks committed into their hands. The paper also underscores the fact that leadership is rooted in the Bible because of God’s approval of man as His creation. The Bible revealed that each leader called was instructed with specific mandate and responsibility by God. The writers examined the perspective of The New Testament in which they pictured Jesus and Paul as examples of leaders who stood against oppression and challenged the power of their time. Jesus and Paul epitomized servant-leadership, which must be made manifest through hard work and service. From The New Testament, they pictured Jesus in his relationship with his disciples when he taught that whosoever wants to be first must be ready to be the very last and the servant of all. This further implies that true greatness is not borne out of a sense of self-esteem but out of service to others. Jesus Christ did not only teach servanthood as a biblical model of leadership, he lived and exemplified it even in his service to mankind and by his sacrificial death on the cross to save mankind. The home, church, society at large and Nigeria as a nation need leaders who would follow after the pattern of Jesus as they lead others. It is hoped that leaders in different positions of responsibility and those who will emerge as leaders tomorrow would be committed to service and honour God with their abilities, potentials, talents and various resources they have been endowed with. Nonetheless, the privileges of the practice of servant-leadership should not be abused or taken for granted by the led or followers to make a leader appear or mean a ‘fool’ when he or she serves his followers as the chief servant. The follower should in turn recognize the rules, office and position of the leadership as that of a servant “serving among the servants”. The leader should therefore be accorded the right and proper honour, respect and dignity that go with his office or responsibilities and service. It is when this is put into consideration that leadership would be selfless and sacrificial in all its ramifications – in the home, church, Nigerian society as a nation and Africa as a whole. The church will be healthy and the society will be sanitized and free from the bondage of mediocrity and self-centered leadership.

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