SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN THE MILITARY

An Investigation of Servant-Leadership Among Technical Sergeants in the United States Air Force

— Tracey M. Richardson, Matthew P. Earnhardt, Tori Morris, and Steven M. Walker

The United States Air Force (USAF) is currently involved in more global reach programs than at any other time in history. The Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welch III defined global reach as the Air Force’s ability to respond to global problems in the world. This encompasses a wide range of missions including employing combat power, conducting sustained operations in different parts of the world, executing precision airstrikes on hostile targets, and delivering pallets of food, water, and blankets to families suffering from large-scale disasters (Welch, 2013). In these global reach environments, cultural diversity is required of all leaders, as well as a solid leadership foundation and a prioritization of caring for others.

The Air Force expects its leaders to stay involved with their Airmen, a collective term used for Air Force service members. The leader’s daily involvement requires interactions such as mentorship, guidance, and instruction. In addition, the leader should provide career counseling concerning benefits, entitlements, and opportunities. Finally, leaders must promote a culture of Airmen who are capable of mastering multiple tasks and promote professional military schools and continued civilian education (Air Force Instruction 36-2618, 2009). Each of these
expectations falls directly in line with the Air Force Core Values: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do (USAF Core Values, 1997).

As part of the continuing training for Airmen, the Air Force offers enlisted members, especially those in leadership ranks, several avenues for training and development. Training and development is a comprehensive education experience that aligns its many elements under the Air Force’s accredited higher education component, Air University. The Air Force teaches a variety of different leadership theories, known as Full Range Leadership Development (Thomas N. Barnes Center for Enlisted Education, 2014). The explicit purpose of the Full Range Leadership Development framework is to build leaders that exhibit and implement the USAF core values within their leadership framework. The theories taught are Trait, Psychodynamic, Skills, Style, Situational Leadership, Contingency, Path-Goal, Leader-Member Exchange, and Authentic Leadership (Thomas N. Barnes Center for Enlisted Education, 2014). Despite the comprehensive nature of teaching leadership concepts within the Air Force Core Values framework, there is a gap within the curriculum. Servant-Leadership, the theory that correlates most to the Air Force Core Values, is absent (See Table 1). The second core value is Service Before Self, and is nearly by definition Servant-Leadership. By including Servant-Leadership in the curriculum, teaching concepts, and illustrating the correlation with the Air Force Core Values, leaders can continue to develop themselves and their subordinates.
Table 1 *Connection between Air Force (AF) Core Values and Patterson’s Servant-Leadership Model*

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Servant-Leadership is a concept originally conceptualized by Greenleaf (1970/2008) in which a leader puts the follower first. Greenleaf (1977/2002) postulated that a change to society can occur with leaders serving first. The goal is for Servant-Leadership to produce enough individual leaders to cause a societal change. Many problems today are due to human failure, and real change requires one individual’s action at a time (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Patterson (2003) created a more contemporary model and built upon Greenleaf’s Servant-Leadership theory. Patterson’s Servant-Leadership theory identified seven attributes of a servant-leader, including: (a) agapao love, (b) empowerment, (c) altruism, (d) humility, (e) service, (f) trust, and (g) vision. Patterson’s study described the Servant-Leader’s behaviors as well as influential factors on the followers. Though Patterson’s work called for testing in a variety of different industries and organizations, there is a dearth of Servant-Leadership testing in the military context, and specifically in the Air Force. In fact, Berry (2015), Gain and Bryant (2020), Craig (2014), Farmer (2009), Jordan (2015), Myers (2017), Sloan (2009), Vadell and Ewing (2011), and Earnhardt (2008) are the only studies to specifically address Servant-Leadership in the military context. Gain and Bryant (2020), Berry (2015), and Myers (2017) discussed Servant-Leadership as a solution to U.S. Army leadership, Craig (2014) and Jordan (2015)
investigated Servant-Leadership and career satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, Farmer (2009) referenced the U.S. Army’s leadership manual to show a connection with Servant-Leadership, and Earnhardt’s (2008) seminal work showed that Servant-Leadership concepts as identified by Patterson (2003) do exist within the military. To address the literature gap, it is important to investigate and build a theoretical understanding of the connection between the USAF Core Values and Patterson’s Servant-Leadership construct.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant-Leadership

Greenleaf (1970/2008) coined the term servant-leader, the concept in which a leader serves first. Greenleaf (1970/2008) identified ten characteristics of Servant-Leadership that include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people’s development, and building community. According to Keith (2012), Greenleaf wanted the leader to have a desire to serve and a servant’s heart. A servant’s heart does not mean that the leader is beholden to the will of others but possesses a desire to help others which requires the leader to identify and meet the needs of others (Keith, 2012). Serving others does not come without difficulty and requires the careful balance of organizational and follower priorities. The military is hierarchical in nature. This hierarchical construct may foster the mentality of “rank has its privileges,” which flies in the face of being a servant-leader. Another potential challenge is the notion of “servant” as tied to a religious concept, which could cause potential issues with its acceptance. Keith (2012) postulated that Greenleaf (1970/2008) never tied the concept of servant-leader to a specific deity nor alluded to a religious principle. Despite the lack of a religious principle, the idea of serving a higher purpose is a complex idea
that not all leaders understand (Keith, 2012).

A central concept to military motivation is commitment which is in direct contrast to the oft cited concept in the military of compliance through obedience. Metscher et al. (2011) indicated that leaders must strive to be the best leader they can be if they want commitment from their junior members—one of the hardest attributes for a leader to earn. To earn commitment, Metscher et al. indicated that providing junior members with visible and binding choices ensures congruence between the leader and follower.

Servant-Leadership is a philosophy in which leaders concern themselves with the development and fulfillment of their followers (Melchar & Bosco, 2010). Khan and Anjum (2013) suggested that servant-leaders provide a compelling vision, encourage with confidence, have original thoughts, have faith in their subordinates, and help them reach their goals. To gain some additional insight into how servant-leaders motivate and gain the commitment of their subordinates, researchers Politis and Politis (2012) assessed the Big Five personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness as related to Servant-Leadership. The results revealed that agreeableness had the highest correlation to Servant-Leadership, while conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness were identified as strong, positive, and significant predictors of servant-leaders (Politis & Politis, 2012). The study’s conclusion suggested that organizations desiring to move towards a Servant-Leadership culture can utilize the Big Five personality traits to assist in appointing the appropriate individuals to leadership positions, thus enhancing organizational effectiveness and ethical behavior (Politis & Politis, 2012). Hunter et al. (2013) assessed two traits from the Big Five personality traits regarding Servant-Leadership—agreeableness and extraversion. Their research concluded that these two traits may be the underlying values that influence the
extent to which leaders exhibit and model servant behavior and how followers view their leader as a servant-leader (Hunter et al., 2013).

Patterson (2003) presented Servant-Leadership as a logical extension of Transformational Leadership theory. She defined and developed the component constructs underlying the practice of Servant-Leadership, defining servant-leaders as “those leaders who lead an organization by focusing on their followers, such that the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral” (p. 5). One key component of Patterson’s theory is the construct of agapao love in that the leader focuses on the entirety of the junior member first, talents of the junior member second, and benefit to the organization third (Waddell, 2006).

Carroll and Patterson (2014) stated that “Servant-Leadership offers a unique perspective to the leadership literature, as it is the one theory that is centered on the leader as a servant; this goes beyond the focus on the organization with the focus on the needs of followers” (p. 16). Vidic and Burton (2011) suggested that leadership is a complex skill and should be enhanced through teaching and practice. Deans (2011) stated that major change in human behavior requires training and potential mentoring.

**Patterson’s Servant-Leadership Virtues**

Patterson’s (2003) study added clarity to Greenleaf’s (1970/2008) original work. Patterson addressed the question of whether Servant-Leadership should be considered a different leadership style, or just a concept within another framework. Patterson did not just rely on Transformational Leadership to explain the concepts of Servant-Leadership, as there were limitations in Transformational Leadership theory, such as a lack of explanation of different leadership phenomena as altruism or humility. This paucity opened a door for a new theoretical study concerning Servant-Leadership (Patterson, 2003).

Patterson (2003) identified seven attributes of the servant-leader: (a)
agapao love, (b) humility, (c) altruism, (d) vision, (e) trust, (f) empowerment, and (g) service. Central to Patterson’s theory is the concept of love. Servant-leaders exhibit love in numerous ways. Servant-leaders show more care for the people than the organization’s bottom line, are genuine and real without pretense, show appreciation, celebrate milestones, are sympathetic, listen actively, communicate, and are empathetic (Patterson, 2003). King-Guffey (2012) suggested that when people are having fun they are more genuine, relaxed, and bring creativity and energy to shared tasks. Fun engages the mind, heart, and spirit and can create long-lasting bonds. King-Guffey indicated that to create this type of environment, leaders should actively and carefully listen, accept people graciously, and refrain from being judgmental. This leads to empowerment which is the goal of Servant-Leadership (Patterson, 2003). Leaders empower their junior members by giving up control and letting others take charge. Through empowerment, the servant-leader helps the follower.

Works on Servant-Leadership and the Military

The key works on Servant-Leadership in the military are Berry (2015), Gain and Bryant (2020), Craig (2014), Farmer (2009), Jordan (2015), Myers (2017), Sloan (2009), Vadell and Ewing (2011), and Earnhardt (2008). Patterson’s (2003) work focused on the principle that service is at the core of Servant-Leadership and occurs as the leader serves others, mainly the followers (Patterson, 2003). Winston (2003) further revised Patterson’s (2003) work, indicating that the servant-leader provides the follower with the necessary resources to accomplish their tasks, visions, or goals. Earnhardt (2008) tested the causal relationship of Patterson’s Servant-Leadership model and validated the constructs of Servant-Leadership in a military setting.

Earnhardt’s (2008) research was a pioneer study concerning Servant-Leadership in the military. Earnhardt’s study focused on testing
Patterson’s (2003) Servant-Leadership theory constructs of agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Earnhardt conducted a study of 200 participants at a joint forces Department of Defense facility in Colorado. The study revealed there was a significant difference for the visionary construct based on military rank and that constructs of Patterson’s (2003) theory exist in the military context (Earnhardt, 2008). Earnhardt’s study concluded that gender, rank, and military specific service did not impact Patterson’s seven Servant-Leadership attributes.

Farmer’s (2009) quantitative study investigated Servant-Leadership attributes in the military by referencing the U.S. Army’s leadership manual. Farmer pointed out that the U.S. Army manual expected military leaders to earn their followers’ trust, show character, competence, appropriate skills, and have knowledge of their subordinates. Farmer stated that the military and the leaders spend large amounts of money to show agapao love to their soldiers. He also mentioned that the Servant-Leadership concept of humility is not easily found in military leadership, and it appears only once in the U.S. Army leadership manual where General Chamberlain is described as a humble leader, brave in battle, and respectful (Farmer, 2009). In another example, General Ridgway depicted leadership as standing for selflessness, modesty, humility, and a willingness to sacrifice. According to Farmer (2009), General Ridgway understood leadership and he displayed it through his passion for the care of his subordinates, evident through his decision to support his junior members by going against the plans of higher-ranking officers. Farmer’s study also revealed that the attributes of selflessness, trust, empowerment, service, and motivating junior members are keys to success for a military leader.

Craig (2014) focused on the relationship of Patterson’s (2003)
Servant-Leadership virtues and the self-perceived level of career satisfaction in commissioned and noncommissioned black Air Force officers. Craig (2014) identified mentoring as a method to strengthen future leaders, specifically the values of ethics, morals, traditions, and concepts. In addition, teaching, counseling, friendship, and advising are related to the concepts of leadership mentoring. These attributes align with the Air Force and show a clear connection with Servant-Leadership theory. Air Force leaders lead from the front, ensuring the necessary resources are available for their junior members (Sloan, 2009 as cited in Craig, 2014).

Similarly, Vadell and Ewing (2011) discussed that Servant-Leadership in the military was advantageous due to the autonomy-supporting environment servant-leaders created throughout the organization. The autonomy-supporting environments lead to employees that were more likely “to develop the type of intrinsic motivation necessary to become self-motivated servant leaders in their own time. Servant leaders embrace the mission of the organization and realize that through work and sacrifice, they will grow employees who are like-minded” (p. 251). Jordan (2015) also found strong correlations between servant-leadership and job satisfaction in the United States Navy. Jordan’s findings suggested a greater need for servant-leader training, arguing the result would be a more effective and efficient organization.

Berry (2015) pointed out that there was a significant shortage of research on Servant-Leadership in the military, advocating for additional long-term studies on the topic, stating: “the body of evidence available today offers a compelling, if not convincing, conclusion that there is a wealth of positive benefits to be reaped from Servant-Leadership in many various organizations” (p. 128). However, Berry (2015) called out the lack of research connecting Servant-Leadership to military effectiveness. For Berry it wasn’t clear that Servant-Leadership practices
in the military setting would garner the same results as in the civilian contexts. Berry called for further studies to investigate military effectiveness and Servant-Leadership constructs.

Lastly, a study conducted by Myers (2017) used 19 semi-structured, open-ended interviews and small focus groups to gauge the qualitative experience of Servant-Leadership within military contexts. Myers’ qualitative findings indicated that the characteristics of Servant-Leadership were useful in the military setting. The respondents reported the servant-leader characteristics were important in the development of followers, mentorship of future leaders, and successfully achieving goals. Though other studies have purported a relationship between values-based leadership and the military, the studies specifically investigated Servant-Leadership in the military context.

*Technical Sergeants: The Lifeblood of Air Force Core Values*

When considering Servant-Leadership and the connection to Air Force Core Values, it is important to look at the middle management of the organization (See Table 1). In the Air Force, the Technical Sergeants are the middle management and the lifeblood of the Air Force. Typically, Technical Sergeants are responsible for the management of junior enlisted and the “care and feeding” of those enlisted members. The Technical Sergeants also are the chief executors of the mission that is developed by senior enlisted and officers, serving as a conduit between officers and senior enlisted ranks. Therefore, they are a good bridge in looking at Servant-Leadership characteristics and offer a unique focus from other published work on the military and Servant-Leadership.

Enlisted members make up approximately 80% of the Air Force, are the first line supervisors, and are directly responsible for junior members (Military one source, 2021). In 1993, promotion rates to NCO (non-commissioned officer) held steady at approximately 16%, with members promoting to leadership positions after approximately seven years in the
military. In 2002, that rate increased to a record high of nearly 63%; if all other requirements were met, promotion to NCO was possible after only three years. Because of this rapid promotion rate, airmen promoted in the early 1990s had more than twice as much Air Force experience and could focus more on developing their leadership skills than those promoted in 2002.

Air Force Technical Sergeants are expected to adhere to the guidance and policies as outlined in The Air Force Core Values, Air Force Instruction 1-1, and Air Force Instruction 36-2618. The USAF Core Values (1997) are the common bond with comrades in arms, unify the Air Force past and present, and define the standards of conduct. The expectation embodied within the USAF Core Values suggested that Technical Sergeants will study, understand, and adhere to the core values while encouraging junior members to do the same. Embedded in the Air Force Core Values is the Core Values Strategy.

According to the USAF Core Values (1997) strategy, the leader of an organization plays a crucial role in maintaining a positive moral climate. Technical Sergeants are expected to assist in this effort, and leaders are expected to set a good example and avoid any appearance of misconduct. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of both top-down and bottom-up leadership in implementing the core values and encourages open communication and dialogue to help members understand, accept, and internalize the values.

Operationalizing the core values requires three coordinated and simultaneous efforts of top-down approach, bottom-up approach, and the back-and-forth approach (USAF Core Values, 1997). The top-down approach includes a sincere public statement of personal commitment to the core values and acceptance of personal responsibility for continuous education of junior members. It also includes an unwavering commitment to enforcement of personal conduct and adherence to
standards. Finally, it requires a commitment to building trust and an openness to creating a culture of conscience for junior members and the organization (USAF Core Values, 1997).

The bottom-up approach allows for junior members to assess policies, processes, and procedures of an organization that could create a culture of compromise (USAF Core Values, 1997). The junior members provide feedback on the situation or circumstances that could prompt lack of adherence to the core values. In conjunction with providing feedback, junior members are given the opportunity to share their findings and identify common patterns for compromise with the organization. Finally, junior members can discuss recurrent situations or patterns of potential compromise for leadership awareness and organizational change (USAF Core Values, 1997). The back-and-forth approach is designed to allow for open dialogue of the best way to incorporate the Air Force Core Values into the culture of the organization. This is accomplished by asking questions such as: how does integrity effect working relationships and processes; what does service before self really mean; and to what extent should excellence in all we do be adhered to (USAF Core Values, 1997)?

The Core Values strategy includes a continuum of learning pertaining to the core values. This is accomplished by embedding the core values into existing professional development courses, which is done by creating short introductory lessons that define and explain the importance of the Air Force Core Values (USAF Core Values, 1997). Planned opportunities are built into the course curriculum by covering how the core values apply to various situations. Unexpected opportunities may arise based on comments or actions taken by individuals and should be taken advantage of as a teaching opportunity. This is where immediate conversation can take place as to the applicability of the core values (USAF Core Values, 1997). Finally, the
core values need to be taught in an active manner to the level of the audience in preparation for the next level of responsibility (USAF Core Values, 1997).

The Air Force Instruction 1-1 (2012) discussed that members must be resilient physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to meet the challenges of deployed and home environments. It outlined the expected conduct of members, including military ethics, which focuses on maintaining the highest level of integrity to mitigate improprieties and set the standard for others to follow. As the first line of defense for their subordinates, Technical Sergeants can spot common signs of trouble and are able to listen and provide needed assistance for junior members (Air Force Instruction 1-1, 2012). Technical Sergeants have direct responsibility to model the way, develop appropriate boundaries and perform their duties as both supervisors and technical experts.

Wong and Davey (2007) stated that servant-leaders can be free and flexible by utilizing different leadership theories to empower and develop their junior members and accomplish organizational goals. Wong and Davey proposed that a leader cannot be a servant-leader if they are motivated by power and pride.

Since the Air Force employs very diverse individuals, developing a common culture is difficult but quintessential to the Air Force’s success (Air Force Instruction 1-1, 2012). The first step to developing the shared culture starts with an introduction to the Air Force Core Values of Integrity, Service-Before-Self, and Excellence while the members are attending basic military training. Developing the culture starts at the top in the military and flows down throughout the organization, in the military. The further a military member is from the top, the more room for misinterpretation. Metscher et al. (2011) suggested that modeling or setting the example is just as important as what the leader says and how the leader manages the work. The Air Force’s viewpoint is that the core
values are universal and unchanging, with Air Force Pamphlet 36-2241 (2015) stated “The Air Force Core Values are the bedrock of leadership in the Air Force” (p. 220). The core values provide the standard and can be utilized to evaluate the ethical climate of all Air Force organizations. When needed in war, the core values provide a path for members to maintain professional conduct and the highest values of integrity, service, and excellence.

*Integrity and Servant-Leader Attributes of Humility and Trust*

As the basis of trust, integrity is considered the single most important character trait and is at the forefront of the Air Force Core Values and leadership. Without integrity, public trust and self-respect are lost (Air Force Pamphlet 36-2241, 2015). The USAF Core Values (1997) defined integrity as the ability for an individual to hold together and regulate all aspects of one’s personality to include controlling impulses. There are several moral traits that the Air Force associates with integrity, including courage, honesty, responsibility, accountability, justice, openness, self-respect, and humility (USAF Core Values, 1997). General Norman Schwarzkopf, the Commander of US forces in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm, stated “leadership is doing what is right, not what you think higher headquarters wants or what you think will make you look good” (as cited in Kruse, 2012, para. 1).

Quick and Goolsby (2013) discussed that integrity in any organization is designed to create positive behaviors for leaders and followers. Liden et al. (2014) proposed that because servant-leaders tend to be respected and admired by followers, they become motivated to emulate their leaders’ behaviors. In any operating environment, one of the most difficult things to change is the culture. Schein (2010) defined culture as shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration that is considered valid enough to teach new members the correct way to
perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. Those perceptions and thoughts are tied to individual mindsets developed by previous leadership. One of the primary objectives for the leader of any organization is to establish the desired culture. When an individual has been part of an organization for many years, establishing a new culture presents a challenge. Members of an organization need expectations and clarity on their role in the organization. To facilitate this understanding the leader will typically develop a vision, mission, and goals to attain. DeWess et al. (2014) suggested that leaders must actively model ethical behavior, delegate, and openly discuss dilemmas. In the midst of all of this, a culture is being developed and the expectation is that the members of the organization will adhere to the set culture.

Patterson (2003) described humility as the ability to keep personal talents and accomplishments in perspective and to focus on others, rather than yourself. Waterman (2011) suggested that humility is a term that can be taken as a sign of weakness for a leader, potentially causing hardships within the organization. Patterson (2003) viewed humility as servant-leaders realizing they do not have all the answers. Ou et al. (2014) suggested that humility involves a self-view that postulates accepting something greater than the self which manifests in several ways. There are several ways that humility manifests itself such as through self-awareness, openness to feedback, appreciation of others, low self-focus, and self-transcendent pursuit. Ou et al. explained that leaders may exhibit humble behaviors; however, if the leader does not incorporate a transcendent self-view, the leader’s behaviors may be inauthentic or inconsistent over time. Fundamentally, the sole interest of the leader is to develop the individuals they lead and in turn, this understanding will ideally change the culture of the organization (Ou et al., 2014). Ou et al. suggested a leader’s behavior that portrays the characteristic of humility is able to recognize their own weaknesses and
see the strength of their subordinates.

Patterson (2003) viewed trust as a building block for Servant-Leadership. Manz et al. (2015) commented that trust is built through shared leadership where members take a back seat when necessary. Without trust, shared leadership will not happen. Leaders display trust through empowering junior members which leads to increased organizational outcomes.

Service-Before-Self and Servant-Leader Attributes of Service, Altruism, and Agapao Love

Service-Before-Self is a commitment to the military virtue of selfless dedication to duty to include putting one’s life at risk if needed (Air Force Pamphlet 36-2241, 2015). According to the USAF Core Values (1997), Service-Before-Self established the foundation that professional duties supersede personal desires. Attributes associated with Service-Before-Self include rule following, respect for others, faith in the system, discipline, and self-control (USAF Core Values, 1997). The attribute of respect for others clearly states that a good leader places their subordinate ahead of personal comfort and recognizes the fundamental worth of each subordinate (USAF Core Values, 1997). A leader that is not aligned with senior leadership and thinks they know better leads to misalignment and does not promote the Service-Before-Self mentality. This mindset establishes a “Self-Above-Service” mentality and could influence subordinates to follow suit leading to disastrous results (USAF Core Values, 1997). The discipline and self-control attributes focus on the moral obligation of the leader to exude confidence and optimism for their junior subordinates (USAF Core Values, 1997).

Patterson (2003) identified Servant-Leadership as giving of oneself, requiring the leader to be generous in aspects such as time, energy, care, compassion, and maybe even personal belongings. Shek et al. (2015) presented Service Leadership as satisfying needs for self, others,
communities, systems, and environments by providing quality personal service. The service leader is considered an on-the-spot entrepreneur with moral character and a caring disposition (Shek et al., 2015). Shek et al. suggested that Service Leadership goes beyond existing concepts of leadership because the emphasis is on leading self and others. Self-Leadership is critical to authentic leadership and self-serving efforts should focus on ethically improving competencies, abilities, and the willingness to help others. The Service Leadership model focuses on strengths and potentials of organizational members (Shek et al., 2015).

Farrell (2014) indicated that service workers bring strong passion and commitment to the organization. Passion can be inspiring and energizing but that passion can also cause hardships with the organization (Farrell, 2014). Farrell stated that working in a service environment contributes to developing leadership skills and learning to respect multiple perspectives. These skills are developed through understanding the needs and passions of others, learning how to build consensus, and fostering relationships within the organization or community (Farrell, 2014). The ability to work with diverse individuals is a critical leadership component and the catalyst of forward progress within the organization (Farrell, 2014). Shek et al. (2015) asserted there are three realms of service leadership: individual, group, and system. The individual realm is the interpersonal relationship with self while the group realm addresses interpersonal relationships with individuals and groups. The system realm of Service Leadership addresses relationships with the environment (Shek et al., 2015). A group of individuals with diverse interests, intentions, and habits can only survive and reach an optimum state of living with each other through the development of morality and a service tendency (Shek et al., 2015).

Shek et al. (2015) suggested the Service Leadership model should incorporate both the “top-down” and “bottom-up” leadership approaches.
The top-down leadership approach allows for efficiency of decision making, task accomplishment, maximized use of resources, and effectiveness in group mobilization. The negative for the top-down leadership approach may frustrate junior members’ motivation, suppress creative ideas, and create fear and resentment (Shek et al., 2015). The bottom-up leadership approach produces higher motivation and less stress, stimulates creativity and innovation, and empowers followers. However, the bottom-up leadership approach may cause a loss of strategic focus, leaders capable of evading responsibility, and inconsistent policy application (Shek et al., 2015).

Reinke (2004) discussed the need for supervisors to place the needs of the employee before their own personal needs. Each person is motivated differently and if the leader cannot figure out how to motivate and gain the commitment of junior members, productivity and retention of personnel could suffer. Metscher et al. (2011) characterized commitment as “a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values; willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization” (p. 127). Additionally, Metscher et al. acknowledged that commitment is a powerful motivator and the backbone of the military profession. Commitment will continue to occur as long as the leader sets the example for their followers to emulate. Grannan (2014) discussed that a highly motivated volunteer was lost from the Air Force due to poor leadership within the organization. Commitment levels vary for individuals with factors such as whether it is peacetime or war playing a role. It is the senior leadership of the government and military that must understand what impacts the commitment of the junior members (Metscher et al, 2011).

Altruism within the leadership context has been defined as behavior that seeks to fulfill others and is directed toward their benefit (Cameron
Patterson (2003) highlighted altruism as an imperative approach to the Servant-Leadership mentality where an individual ultimately seeks what is best for others rather than for self. However, Feigin et al. (2014) suggested that altruism can be viewed in two different facets: altruistic and pseudo-altruistic.

The altruistic approach is an intentional and voluntary act performed to benefit another person where the primary motivation is without conscious expectation of reward (Feigin et al., 2014). The pseudo-altruistic approach is different only in that the primary motivation could be with the conscious or unconscious expectation of reward (Feigin et al., 2014). Feigin et al. discussed that the essential feature of altruism is that it is a voluntary and intentional act performed with the sole purpose of benefitting another person and it is the motivation behind the act that segregates altruistic from pseudo-altruistic behaviors. Leaders are faced with choices daily and the motivation behind their decisions is based on a conscious decision. If a leader has a servant heart, altruism could be considered high risk and high cost to the leader (Feigin et al., 2014).

Patterson (2003) identified agapao love as being consistent with Servant-Leadership. The premise is that servant-leaders must have this type of love to learn the talents and gifts of their junior members. Leaders displaying agapao love focus on the junior member first, then the talents of the individual, and then how the efforts taken by the leader best benefit the organization (Patterson, 2003). Patterson (2003) suggested that agapao love leads to serving the best interest of others, illuminates the organizational culture, and frees the leader from self-doubt, self-criticism, and self-imposed limitations. Patterson highlighted that agapao love starts with the servant-leader’s personal values, and that the servant-leader inspires hope and courage for their junior members.


Excellence in All We Do and Servant-Leader Attributes of Vision and Empowerment

The Excellence Core Value requires the member to strive to exceed standards and to search for new innovative ways to accomplish the mission without destroying morale and loyalty (Air Force Pamphlet 36-2241, 2015). As the third USAF Core Value (1997), Excellence in All We Do is a catalyst for continued improvement, innovation, sustained passion, and implemented policies for best cradle-to-grave management of all resources. Attributes associated with Excellence In All We Do include service, personnel, community, resource and organizational excellence (USAF Core Values, 1997). The attribute of service excellence focuses on providing service and generating products to anticipate and satisfy customer demands (USAF Core Values, 1997).

The attribute of personnel excellence clearly outlines that leaders must complete professional military education, stay in physical and mental shape, and continue to support their junior members in the same fashion (USAF Core Values, 1997). Concerning community excellence, all members work together to reach a common goal while sustaining an atmosphere free of fear that maintains individual self-respect, mutual respect, and benefit of the doubt. (USAF Core Values, 1997). Leaders should be aware of any conflicts that may detract from the ability of the organization to reinforce individual self-respect, mutual respect, and giving the benefit of the doubt. Ideally, leaders who model these attributes reinforce the Core Values for junior members to emulate and follow.

The Resource Excellence attribute focuses on material and human resources. Leaders are challenged to enact policy for effective utilization of material resources, reduce waste, and to be good stewards of the financial funds available for weapon system parts procurement (USAF Core Values, 1997). Additionally, leaders are expected to recruit, train,
promote, and retain the best junior members (USAF Core Values, 1997). The Air Force has a handful of specialty jobs that require a leader to be able to recruit junior members. To recruit the correct members, the leader should be able to identify the attributes of the Air Force Core Values in each of the members selected for consideration of the specialty job. Once the junior member has been selected, training becomes the next priority. After the appropriate training occurs and the member is qualified for their specialty job, the junior member is eligible for promotion consideration. The leader must clearly articulate in writing why this particular junior member should be considered for promotion over another junior member. The leader must exercise their adherence to the Core Values, not potential relationships, to fairly assess each member (Air Force Instruction 1-1, 2012). The assessments are utilized for promotion consideration and continued retention in the Air Force.

Patterson (2003) noted that the Vision aspect of Servant-Leadership is about how the leader views the junior member as a viable and worthy person in the organization. Not only does the leader recognize the abilities of the junior member, but they also assist the junior member in attaining their goals, which in turn elevates the organizational capabilities (Patterson, 2003). Patterson suggested that the visionary aspect lends toward empowerment of junior members by a leader. The visionary process (Patterson, 2003) includes understanding each junior member’s gifts and may influence the leader’s decisions. The leader can recognize what is needed and why, helping followers develop a plan for the future (Patterson, 2003).

Graen and Schieman (2013) posited that traditional management practices are outdated. Organizations will find it difficult to keep up with the new global market if leaders don’t change how they manage their employees. Graen and Schieman also asserted that millennials are accustomed to an “entitled” socialization and have never truly
experienced command and control from anyone in a position of power. Millennials value job engagement and enrichment, expect it to be central to their jobs, and find it extremely difficult when leaders do not share the same values (Graen & Schieman, 2013). The military is comprised of members from the same civilian workforce and could experience some of the same problems if leadership does not adjust their leadership styles.

Waterman (2011) concluded that even though most leaders are full of initiatives, mission statements, and organizational goals, they do not all possess a vision or a sense of service to the community. Visionary Leadership has the potential to produce long-lasting positive outcomes (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014). Not only is it important for the leader to be a servant, but also that the organization become servant as well. Visionary leaders set the example, motivate, encourage, and guide their junior members (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014). Excellence for a leader sets the foundation for their employees regarding operational and organizational success. This foundation allows the employee to view the commitment and motivation of the leader (Waterman, 2011). The servant-leader possesses a vision, and with that vision, can create a direction for subordinates and bring them together to work towards a higher purpose. This potentially increases standards and integrity while providing unparalleled rewards for self and the organization (Keith, 2012). Pappas (2011) highlighted those individuals who strive for excellence are skilled in more than one area. Dillon et al. (2014) asserted visionary leaders should have a genuine interest at heart for employees and community and should be a role model to lead and inspire others to follow.

Leaders with a vision may utilize a form of change management to move the organization forward and empower junior members. Latham (2013) introduced a framework with five forces and facilitators of change: tension, resistance, alignment, criteria for performance
excellence, and internal and external subject matter experts. Latham argued that first an organization must experience some type of “tension” or external force to drive change. Without this force, it is hard to overcome the status quo. The driving forces could be discrimination, sexual harassment, or age discrimination just to name a few. The Air Force had experiences with sexual harassment cases, was driven to make a change, and has implemented a “zero tolerance” policy. Once an organization experiences the tension for change, the next experience is resistance to the change (Latham, 2013). When an employee is resistant to change, the member is typically defensive and can experience a myriad of emotions. After the emotions have been worked through and acceptance has occurred, learning takes place and improvements are made. As trust and communication increase, resistance will decrease (Balogun et al., 2011; Latham, 2013).

Patterson (2003) presented the idea that leaders empower junior members by trusting them and giving up control, giving the junior member the freedom to pursue their own goals. Through this process, the leader guides the junior member, balances their growth, and remains aware of what is best for the junior member while developing them through empowerment (Patterson, 2003). Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2014) contended the first Servant-Leadership behavior is empowerment. Empowerment gives autonomy for the junior members to perform tasks, develop their talent, and engage in Self-Leadership. By doing so, the leader creates an environment for growth and provides junior members the ability to use organizational resources to improve performance (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2014). Murari and Gupta (2012) advocated that servant-leaders can bring positive change to an organization through empowerment. However, the researchers also suggested that the level of empowerment given to a junior member hinge on the type of leadership style within the organization (Murari & Gupta, 2012).
Ou et al. (2014) suggested that acknowledging the strength of the subordinate and allowing for participation in decision making within the organization not only empowers the employee, but also improves individual and organizational excellence. Leaders that can question the status quo and appeal to the intelligence of their employees are able to create an environment that allows for creativity and innovation (Cavazotte et al., 2012). Leaders who consider the individual create an environment of personal support for the entire team, yet understand that each employee has distinctive characteristics, needs, and desires (Cavazotte, et al., 2012). Latham (2013) referred to alignment as the congruency between the leaders’ behaviors and the junior members’ actions relative to the organization’s mission, vision, values, and goals. Establishing the congruency between the individual, group, and organization sets the foundation for the criteria for performance excellence indicators (Latham, 2013).

Once the criteria for performance excellence has been established, subject matter experts can be called on to help facilitate the necessary change (Latham, 2013). Subject matter experts can be internal or external depending on the organizational need. When the Air Force embraced the F-35, Lockheed Martin provided the necessary training for supply and maintenance of the aircraft. This was a major paradigm shift for the military. Typically, military train military without contractor influence. In this case, it was necessary for contractors who built and maintained the F-35 to train military members on the appropriate supply and maintenance practices needed to sustain the new weapon system (B. Amos, personal interview, January 10, 2017). Dillon et al. (2014) asserted that empowerment has positive advantages if there is equal focus on the organization and the outcomes for junior members.

Liu (2015) pointed out that business models are changing due to technology and the business revolution. The hierarchical model of
business is moving towards a flat design that is flexible and customer oriented with a focus on quality and efficiency (Liu, 2015). Liu suggested that with such changes in business, the empowerment leadership style is born. Liu contended that empowering leaders set the example, provide information and resources, encourage self-reinforcement, and build trust with their junior members. The leader would also need to reinforce training in empowering leadership behaviors such as support and encouragement, decentralized and participative decision-making, and the responsibility of an empowering leader (Liu, 2015). An empowered team provides junior members with the ability to be more autonomous, embrace self-leadership, and have more control of the work environment (Liu, 2015). Liu highlighted that organizations embracing empowering leadership are more poised to work through business changes due to global competition, transform the business into a service-orientated organization, and can meet customer expectations for higher quality products.

CONCLUSION

As indicated by previous studies (Craig, 2014; Earnhardt, 2008; Farmer, 2009), Patterson’s (2003) Servant-Leadership model has applicability in the United States military. Though these studies have established the precedence of a connection, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding whether a branch of the United States military should embrace Servant-Leadership as a theory taught to the workforce and practiced among leaders. Additionally, do the values of a military organization align with the Servant-Leadership framework? The establishment of a direct connection between Servant-Leadership and the United States Air Force Core Values has broader implications for military leadership training. As indicated by the Air Force Personnel Center (2014), Technical Sergeants are the first line supervisors for 80% of enlisted members. Given the formal leadership training and the
emphasis on the Air Force Core Values, finding alignment with a leadership theory and the Core Values could revolutionize the leadership structure of the Air Force. A serving-others attitude strikes at the heart of the value service before self, and is a key component of United States Air Force training.

References


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Tracey Richardson is a tenured, Associate Professor of Project Management at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. She has a Doctorate of Organizational Leadership and is a certified Project Management Professional and a Project Management Institute (PMI)-Risk Management Professional. Tracey is a retired United States Air Force Aircraft Maintenance Officer.

Matthew Earnhardt is an Associate Dean and Associate Professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Prior to his career in higher education, he served in the United States Navy and worked for a Fortune 100 company as a technical advisor to the military.

Tori R. Morris retired as a Chief Master Sergeant from the United States Air Force after 29 years of service. During that time, she was a champion
for Professional Military Education and focused her attention on ensuring new Air Force Reserve members were successful in completing technical training schools. Additionally, she developed the project management roadmap for successful transition of the F-35 program from contractor led to military logistics management. Tori has a Master’s Degree in Operations Management.

Dr. Steven Mitchell Walker, Ph.D., is a distinguished educator and researcher with a profound interest in leadership, psychology, and sustainability. With a rich educational background, he currently serves as a Full Professor in the School of Professional Studies at National University, taking on the role of Academic Program Director for the Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership. Dr. Walker's teaching expertise extends to both online and on-ground instruction, enriching the academic experiences of graduate and undergraduate students. His expertise in educational platforms, accreditation, committee involvement, podcast production, and ongoing dialogue hosting illustrates his unwavering commitment to academic rigor. Dr. Walker's contributions to academia extend globally through conference presentations, addressing topics from crisis leadership to toxic leadership and information literacy. His passion for leadership extends to community enrichment efforts, where he imparts valuable life skills as an assistant coach for Carmel Mountain Ranch Little League and actively engages in Haitian relief and volunteer camp counseling. His dedication to research and publication has yielded a wealth of knowledge for the academic community and practitioners, evident in an extensive list of publications that span leadership, crisis management, and sustainability. Dr. Steven Mitchell Walker's multifaceted journey in academia and unwavering commitment to teaching, research, and community service make him a notable figure in the field of leadership studies.