THE BRAINS, BONES AND NERVES OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Sylvia Van de Bunt-Kokhuis

s.vande.bunt@vu.nl

Rajeev Peshawaria

rajeevp@iclif.org

Abstract

This article focuses on the dynamics of leadership in organizations and their leaders in a holistic way. The metaphor of the organization as a living organism with brains, bones and nerves is being used; a living organization in which leaders and followers are strongly interconnected with their environment. Successful leadership means serving the living organization and nurturing the inner growth of people to achieve the envisioned business goals. How do servant-leaders manage to achieve the mission and vision and subsequently reach the business goals of the organization? To answer this question, servant-leadership will be discussed in a historical and international perspective. It is argued that, to achieve profitable and sustainable growth, servant-leaders focus on three interconnected elements of their living organization. First, leaders serve their organization by keeping their strategy updated. This element refers to the mission and vision of an organization, the "brains". The second element is about the people, processes and structure (the "bones"), and the final element refers to the culture (the "nerves") of an organization. It is concluded that leadership with meaning is the most durable service to an organisation, the environment and the growth of the people involved.

Keywords

Social enterprise; Servant-leadership; Strategy; Organizational Architecture; Culture.

Introduction

Servant-leadership. In recent decades, an international knowledge network on servant-leadership has developed. The person who applied the concept of servant-leadership into the world of business in the 1970s is acknowledged as Robert K. Greenleaf (1977). Currently, a growing servant-leadership movement can be found in the business world and academia. Issues such as sustainable growth and ethical leadership are on top of the business agenda. In times of economic crisis business leaders are blamed for their financial and moral mistakes.

Servant-leadership flows against the greed and self-interest of these business leaders, and empowers employees to let their talent grow.

Furthermore, currently there are leadership developments that are not explicitly labelled "servant-leadership" but have a lot in common with the principles of servant-leadership. Thus, for example, Hind and Lenssen (2009) argue that responsible leaders should have the competencies necessary to ensure the sustainability of the company. Responsible leadership employs skill to integrate social and environmental considerations into business. Drawing on the work of Ciulla (2005) and Alexander and Wilson (2005) on "good" and "responsible" leadership, Sultan (2011) demonstrates how ethics and morality underpin the behaviour of responsible and transformational leaders who can make a positive impact on people's lives, not just within their organizations, but in the outside environment as well. According to Alahmad (2010), ethical leadership is about setting the right example and making a difference in people's lives. Alahmad developed an international code of ethics that every leader should follow, including honesty, truth, respect, punctuality, humbleness and dignity. Banerjea (2010) calls for wholesome ethical leadership to create value and true wealth for all in a sustainable way. Ethical leaders establish shared values that influence an ethical code of conduct among employees. More often ethical and sustainable leadership go hand in hand. Miller and Parker (2013) show how some of today's leaders of multinational firms are succeeding by having a purpose broader than making a profit. These global leaders argue that sustainable value should benefit not only customers and employees, but also neighbours and the wider world.

Why Servant-Leadership?

On a worldwide scale billions are spent on leadership development each year (Leonard & Loew, 2012). However, many organizations report having only a handful of good leaders in their midst, if at all (Hsieh & Yik, 2005). While the good news is that the world is paying attention to and acknowledging the importance of leadership development, unfortunately the investment of time and money seems not to be paying off. We believe that it is because of flawed assumptions about what leadership is. To most people, leadership is a formal position or title. If someone is a CEO, President or Prime Minister, this person is automatically considered a leader. We argue that someone with a big title and position of authority does not make that person automatically a leader. Perhaps that person is entitled a boss, but needs to work hard to earn the leadership status.

So what is servant-leadership? First and foremost it is the art of creating a better future for others. It is this pursuit (of creating a better future for others) that makes someone a leader, not his formal position or title (*Wall Street Journal*, 2012).The dilemma is, creating a better future for others often involves countering a lot of resistance. The servant-leader may take huge personal risk and may make sacrifices and be willing to take such hardship upon him/herself in order to improve the future for others.

According to Trompenaars and Voerman (2009) servant-leadership is multi-dimensional and enhances more than ever before the human and ethical factor in organizations. Traditional leaders tend to be focused on tasks, control and processes in organizations whereas servant-leaders are connected with people in an ethical way, reconciling dilemmas and empowering them as team members, employees, customers, students or citizens. The servant-leader often is not a single operating leader; compare the post-heroic leader (*Wall Street Journal,* 2012) or the Great Man Theory (Hirsch, 2002). Moreover, the servant-leader will rather co-create in a

leadership-team; such a team is keen to contribute value to other people to let their talents grow. The served people become healthier and more autonomous. They are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility to others. Servant-leaders are no holy saints, and will learn from their mistakes for the sake of the organization and their people. Major positive attributes of servant-leadership can be found across cultures and moreover, contain an ethical and sustainable dimension. These major attributes are not limited to, but can be summarized as follows (see also Keith, 2011, Nuijten 2009, Spears 2000, Thakore 2013, Trompenaars and Voerman 2009, Yasin Khalaf Sarayrah 2004, Vargas and Hanlon 2007):

1. *Listening*. Unbiased listening to the other to also get in touch with one's inner voice and the desire to know what the other is thinking; being flexible and adaptive and exercising caution in the act of listening before speaking, or, as Peter Senge formulated it "We are unable to talk productively about complex issues because we are unable to listen" (foreword in Kahane, 2004).
2. *Empathy*. Understanding others, accepting and recognizing their special and unique behaviours.
3. *Healing of relationships*. He/she genuinely cares about other people and their welfare; healing is a powerful ethical force for transformation and integration.
4. *Awareness*. Achieving mindfulness through reflection. General as well as self-awareness creates a better understanding of power, ethics and values in groups. The leader knows what is going on in the living organization, the team or the situation and adjusts accordingly.
5. *Persuasion*. Convincing rather than coercing others, effectively building consensus within groups and helping other people to understand and learn.
6. *Conceptualization*. Thinking beyond day-to-day realities, seeking a delicate balance with conceptual thinking; helping others to see the bigger picture and how everything relates.
7. *Foresight*. Understanding the lessons of the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequences of the future. The leader has a vision and wants others to embrace and embody the vision.
8. *Stewardship*. Holding the trust of others in order to serve the needs of all; by serving in a mindful and ethical way, a good leader gains the trust and confidence of others.
9. *Commitment to the growth of others*, committed to their learning and improvement.
10. *Building community* among those who work within a living organization.

The concept of servant-leadership includes several dilemmas. Servant-leaders serve their employees by creating a better future for them. At the same time the servant-leadership team is accountable for the performance of their organization, for example an enterprise, school, church, or even a nation. Each investment of the servant-leader in the well-being of the other is at the same time an investment for the benefit of the common good. The leader's skills can be found in bridging the contrasting dilemmas of leading versus serving, control versus compassion, high-tech versus high-touch, power over versus trust/commitment to others (Trompenaars, 2007a). This article will explore how servant-leaders deal with these dilemmas and can bring inspiration and motivation in organizations to address specific business needs. We will see how servant-leaders focus on three interconnected elements of their living organization. First, leaders serve their organization by keeping their strategy updated. This element refers to the mission and vision of an organization, the "brains". The second element is about the people, processes and structure (the "bones"), and the final element refers to the culture (the "nerves") of an organization.

Historical perspective. The roots of servant-leadership can be found thousands of years ago in ancient cultures such as in China, India and Greece. Aristotle stated that the essence of life is to serve others and do well. Kriger and Seng (2005) investigated leadership with inner meaning. The authors found significant features of leadership with inner meaning across the five world religions. Similarities occur in terms of their core vision, namely oneness (Judaism), love (Christianity), surrendering to God (Islam), wisdom and compassion (Buddhism) and liberation from duality (Hinduism). Practitioners of these five world religions represent 72% of the world population, according to Kriger and Seng (2005). Therefore it is highly likely, according to the authors, that these common value structures across world religions may help to understand leadership behaviour and meaning in organizations. At the same time the authors highlight cross-cultural differences among leadership worldviews. Thus, for example, in the Buddhist worldview of leadership, leaders are considered "managers of meaning" who make sense of organizational activities so that employees can find a place for themselves within the organization, whereas in the western world the leader is found to exercise his or her individual talents and to lead effectively within a changing working environment. The Buddhist leader thinks, feels, senses and observes the changing aspects of the world and the inner mind (Kriger and Seng, 2005). In contrast to the western paradigm, in Buddhism there is no "self" that is directing the leader. The ego is considered to be the fundamental cause of unhappiness. Across the world religions the role of a leader is similarly represented as teacher and question-asker (Judaism), role model (Christianity), servant of God and His creators (Islam), teacher and role model (Buddhism) and role model of the "gods" (Hinduism).

From an historical perspective many servant-leaders and leadership movements can be recognized in politics, freedom activism, arts, entrepreneurship, education, religion and more.

We conclude with an analysis of Mohandas Gandhi, generally known as Mahatma Gandhi. In Gandhi and the movement he initiated we find many of the servant-leadership attributes mentioned earlier in this article. Gandhi started his working life like any other professional and soon became a very successful attorney in the UK. While travelling in South Africa for his attorney work, Gandhi was moved by the social inequality in South African society. The racial segregation severely restricted the freedom of coloured South African people. Gandhi decided that his sole purpose from that point onward would be to champion the cause of equal rights for all. Gandhi developed a particular philosophy and practice, generally known as non-violent resistance (Gandhi, 1920). Gandhi's leadership can be compared with the SL attributes of "'healing of relationships" and "stewardship", and the Buddhist "manager of meaning". From an historical perspective, similar qualities can be recognized in the leadership style of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, just to mention a few icons from servant-leadership history.

What can we learn from the past, and are these leadership experiences worth recalling? According to Coleman (2013) things from the past eras of the business community are worth retaining and comparing with today's organizational practices. Coleman recommends holding on to those practices of prior generations that made office life more effective, engaging and fun. These "old school" practices include amongst others making meetings distraction-free. A nostalgic view of the former business practice may be recalled where leaders create an atmosphere with lengthy lunches and dress code. However, current business practice is much more complicated. The dynamics and complexity of the current organization is illustrated by amongst others Pollack and Algeo (2013) on the case of reporting communication relationships between project and change managers. Who reports to whom? Though it concerns two related disciplines (in this case project and change managers) there might be

miscommunication in the delivery of organizational change. These disciplines are based on distinct and separate bodies of knowledge, with resultant differences in their perspectives on how organizational change should be managed. Who should be accountable for its delivery might be perceived differently by project and change managers. Their different mind-sets might cause miscommunication. This case only illustrates the complexity of current business practice and the need for successful leaders to consider the organization in a holistic and interconnected way.

Too many bosses, too few leaders. What is the difference between a boss (in the sense of a manager) and a leader, in particular a servant-leader? In this article we will see that servant-leaders distinguish first and for all from bosses because of their concern for the living organization, their compassion to motivate employees which in the end counts for the business success. In this respect, Olson, van Bever, and Verry (2008) identified the success and failure factors of organizations during the last few decades. The lack of talent nurturing of employees by their leaders has been among the top factors contributing to the organizational collapses after periods of growth, according to the authors. Obviously, the nurturing of talent, and thus the enhancement of intellectual and human potential in organizations, is the crux of organizational growth and the world of tomorrow. Peshawaria (2011) interviewed bosses on why it is so hard to be a good and effective leader.[1] A host of reasons were heard from interviewees across the world, largely due to the increasing complexity of business today. In the good old days the life of a business leader was reasonably straightforward. Leaders were in control with a set of agreed-upon business objectives and a set of direct reports. The rest of their organization directly reported to their superior. It is almost a nostalgic memory of the past frequently heard in these interviews. The respondents continued that in the past people and resources needed to achieve. Aligning people in the pursuit of common goals was straightforward; you controlled both the carrots and the sticks. Respondents in Peshawaria's (2011) study go on to talk about how difficult business life is today by contrast, and why it is almost impossible to be an effective leader. Below is a sampling of actual quotes from the mouths of surprisingly senior bosses:

> I live in a highly complicated matrix structure and have long given up trying to make sense of it.

> I am responsible for achieving results, but have little or no authority over people and resources that are critical for success.

> I am responsible for leading the business (P&L, compliance, operations, technology) as well as for leading people (pay, performance, morale). One person cannot possibly do all of it effectively.

> I have limited control over either carrot or stick.

> The head office, the control department, the strategic planning group, and many other corporate functions make huge demands on my time, leaving me very little time to do my daily job.

---

[1] The responses were collected from executive education programme participants and seminars between 2000 and 2011.Since 2000 we have been asking our programme participantswhat their leadership challenges are. The comments above are a composite of all the responses.

> My people are constantly looking toward me for answers I simply don't have.

According to the interviewees, life as a leader is a constant struggle to get company results without having adequate authority.[2] In another line of enquiry, Peshawaria asked the following question to participants in his seminars:[3]

> Of all the bosses you've had in your career, how many would you call truly great leaders? For the purpose of this question, a great leader is someone who inspired you to show up every morning and do your best possible work, someone who made you believe in yourself, someone who genuinely cared about your success, and someone whom you wanted to follow willingly.

There is almost unanimous agreement regardless of context or geography of the respondents (Peshawaria, 2011) that one of the key outcomes of enterprise leadership should be profitable growth. This "profitable growth" opinion is in line with the current mainstream in the business world. Plenty of management and leadership advice is available on the subject. Thus, for example, a search for the words "business growth" in the books section of amazon.com generates over 50,000 search results. If the common opinion is to reach profitable growth (see

---

[2]We are not claiming that all respondents involved in these programmes were bosses. However, over a decade, we commonly heard comments from many participants that they are helpless,either because the bosses among our respondents lack authority, or because of complex environmental factors beyond their control. Traditional methods of leadership development seem to be ineffective in producing good leaders. Based on our observations and research we are proposing a new way of looking at leadership. Leadership is about creating a better future for others despite the complex organizational environment. In other words, leaders succeed in spite of the environment, not because of it. Bosses on the other hand blame the complex environment, or their lack of power for their inability to strive and struggle towards the creation of a better future for others.

[3]During the last decade Peshawaria was running seminars for business leaders. He conducted programmes at American Express, Goldman Sachs, Coca-Cola and Morgan Stanley worldwide until 2008. Since 2009, he has been conducting programmes for varied companies and organizations from the Iclif Leadership & Governance Center where Peshawaria currently is the CEO.At these seminars various generations of business leaders were interviewed regarding their leadership practice. Two boss-leadership questions were asked independently of each other in each classroom, every week, during a 10-year period. Thefirst question was: "How many bosses were truly great leaders?" and the average answer in every room continues to be between 0 and 2. The next question was: "Why is it so hard to lead?" and the average answer is captured in the composite comments in the article as explained in footnote 1.

above), why do only a handful of corporate bosses[4] succeed in driving growth successfully and profitably?

Three core questions of successful leadership. Taking into account the complexity of today's business world where we find too many bosses and too few leaders, how can successful leadership be enhanced? According to Peshawaria (2011), Trompenaars and Voerman (2009), Morgan (2007), Blot (2011), Schein (2009), Broekstra (2009), Sluis and Bunt-Kokhuis (2009), Handy (1996) and others, leadership success is less about a toolkit with new uniquely "growth oriented" management techniques; it is more about true commitment to serve people and business related activities and considering the organization in a holistic and interconnected way. At the risk of over-simplifying a very complex challenge, successful servant-leaders never stop asking themselves the following three questions:

1. Do we still have a compelling mission, vision and differentiated strategy that all our people fully understand and accept (the "brains" of the organization; compare the SL attributes of "persuasion", "conceptualization", "foresight" and "stewardship")?
2. Do we have the right people, processes and organizational structure to achieve our aspirations (the "bones" of the organization; compare the SL attributes of "healing" and "awareness" and "commitment to the growth of others")?
3. Do we have an organization-wide culture that helps us grow profitably and ethically (the "nerves" of the organization; compare the SL attributes of "listening", "empathy" and "building community")?

At first these questions seem rather obvious. After all, we have known for a long time that leaders, in particular servant-leaders, must focus on strategy (Question 1, the brains of the organization); people, processes and structure (Question 2, the bones of the organization); and culture (Question 3, the nerves of the organization) to achieve success. So what's the big idea here? There is not one. Servant-leaders that drive sustainable, profitable growth don't do different things; they do the same things differently by focusing on questions 1, 2 and 3. If there is a difference, it is their sincerity of purpose and consistency of focus on an ideal organizational architecture. In the old days, these three areas of management responsibility were periodic activities that the top team could revisit once every few years. In today's ever changing business landscape, these questions must be asked and reviewed at least every quarter of a year, and action must be taken to fine tune and adjust where needed. Pro-active and holistic focusing on the above three questions becomes their full-time job.

The organization as a living organism. To explain this is more detail, we use the metaphor of the human body, where brains, bones and nerves are very much interconnected to achieve a certain goal such as learning, walking, driving a car, finishing a report etc. The organization as a living mechanism was well described by Morgan (2007) who argues that all organizational theories are based on implicit images or metaphors. Morgan was able to translate theory into practice by presenting these metaphors or images of organizations.

---

[4] We have been asking another question for over 12 years now: On a 1–10 scale where 10 is "at peak potential" and 1 is "well below potential", we asked "How is your organization performing in the market place today?" We ask this question when we have the top management team of an organization with us for a Leadership Advisory Session. The average answer we are getting over time is 6.5. This shows that by their top management's own perception organizations can be 35% more successful.

According to Morgan metaphors create powerful insights and encourage imagination while analysing organizations. Morgan shows how the organization is a living ecological organism, a self-organizing being. In contrast to organizations as machines (where roles are tightly defined), the organization as organism acknowledges the ecological impact of the environment to organizations. To survive and achieve growth, the organization must be in balance with the environment. Thus, for example, groups or teams within the ecological organism have a natural need to survive in different environments.

The metaphor of the living organization with the interconnectivity of brains, bones and nerves is also identified by others. For example, Trompenaars (2007b, p.70) argues that it is the integration of the cognitive ("brains") and the limbic, and the rational analytic with the more emotional quadrants ("bones" and "nerves") that as a whole and in the end results in creativity. People may have different starting points in terms of preferences and orientations, but it is how well they make connections between these orientations that generate new thinking in a team or organization as a whole.

In line with Morgan's theory on the organization as a living organism and Trompenaars' interconnectivity approach, we use the metaphor of the living organization with brains, bones and nerves. In the perspective of this living organism metaphor: how are people nurtured (compare SL attributes of "listening" and "empathy") in an organization as a complex holistic system of a living organism? What servant-leadership is needed to develop talents in the living organization? The leader must be capable to recognize and anticipate on the strengths and weaknesses of the (sub)organization (compare SL attribute of "listening"), analyse problems (compare SL attribute of "awareness") and formulate a mission and vision in the intended direction (compare SL attributes of "persuasion", "conceptualization" and "foresight"). Leading by serving means defining the structure, listening to and understanding the people, constantly keeping in line with the organizational core values (does the environment encourage cooperation, knowledge sharing, or the opposite?) based on the commitment of the people in the organization.

Understanding the organization as a living organism has implications for leadership, Just as after a certain age human bodies need more frequent medical check-ups in order to live longer and more healthy lives. In this metaphor, companies that grow or have to downsize their business must regularly check on their organizational health and have a medical check-up. Peshawaria (2011) refers to the three focus areas mentioned earlier as the brains, bones and nerves of the organization. The most important interconnected elements to be asked by servant-leaders to check the fitness of the organization are discussed below.

The Brains

The first question to be asked by servant-leaders is: "Do we still have a compelling mission, vision and differentiated strategy that all our people fully understand and accept (referring to the 'brains' of servant-leadership)?" Mission and vision are often misunderstood concepts in business. Ask average corporate bosses to articulate their company's mission and vision, and expect to hear something such as, "We want to grow our market share by 15%," or "Our mission and vision is to be the best and biggest in our industry." You might also hear something like, "Our mission is to consistently earn 18% ROE (return on equity)." The following two examples show a mission and vision of a different kind. Example one: Wal-Mart (Trompenaars & Nijhoff Asser, 2010) – "Our mission is to give ordinary people a chance to afford the same things as rich people, and our vision is to become a $125 billion

company by the year 2000." Example two: Amazon's mission is "to be Earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online, and endeavours to offer its customers the lowest possible prices" (Amazon). Wal-Mart and Amazon.com are companies of a different kind and market segment, but what they have in common is a mission and vision to put the customer first. Listening to and creating opportunities for the customer is very much in line with servant-leadership. On the one hand, the average boss only articulates what the organization aspires to get for itself from the marketplace. Its self-centred objectives are getting greater market share and becoming the best and the biggest. On the other hand, the servant-leader also states what he/she wants to give to the marketplace. How can they serve society and create a better future for others? In the cases of Wal-Mart and Amazon, the mission and vision is about creating value for customers by offering low prices and convenience respectively.

More specifically, an organization's mission is the core purpose behind its existence. Through its mission, an organization provides a core product or service that meets a critical societal need in a meaningful way. That the organization makes a profit while doing so is a by-product of pursuing the mission, not the core purpose in itself. In other words, mission is an honest articulation of what the organization gives to the marketplace – the difference it makes in the lives of the people it touches. In addition, the vision of an organization goes one step further. Vision is the leadership position the organization wants for itself – nothing wrong with wanting to be bigger and more profitable as long as it is accompanied by a clear mission. Peshawaria (2011, pp. 92–93) describes his early career at American Express India. In the 1980s American Express developed a simple, powerful and clear company mission statement: "To be the world's most respected service brand." The American Express leadership team travelled to all American Express locations around the world to explain what the one-line statement meant. Service was the key word. The core mission was understood clearly by the employees and they were motivated to continually do better.

Other successful "brains" originate from the innovative industry in Silicon Valley. The success in Silicon Valley was also driven by a strong mission and vision to make a better world. For example, the co-founder of the Hewlett Packard engineering company gave a speech as early as in 1960 (Miller & Parker, 2013): "I want to discuss why a company exists in the first place. Why are we here? . . . We inevitably come to the conclusion that a group of people get together and exist as an institution that we call a company so they are able to accomplish something collectively which they could not accomplish separately. They are able to do something worthwhile – they make a contribution to society." Google is another company that also originated in Silicon Valley with a strong idealistic purpose to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. With Google's IPO in 2004 the company made an unconventional proclamation: "Don't be evil. We believe strongly that in the long term, we will be better served – as shareholders and in all other ways – by a company that does good things for the world even if we forgo some short-term gains" (Miller and Parker, 2013, pp. 53–54). However, for successful companies there is a dilemma as well. As they grow, their sustainable mission to society becomes more complex and – in the case of Google – may even lead to controversies about abusing their power. According to Trompenaars (2007b, p. 209) Google was able to reconcile the maximization of profit orientation with the mission of the Google family to make the world a better place. With reconciling the dilemma of being both leader and servant to their vision, Google was ready for even further innovation by the time the company went to the stock market at Wall Street (Trompenaars, 2007b, p. 209). The great challenge for servant-leaders is to do justice to the company mission and vision and uphold integrity above becoming a profit generator. This is an on-going process reconciling the company's sustainable mission and vision with the

reality of being a powerful player in the business market. Or, as the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, states: "Building a mission and building a business goes hand in hand. We are about doing both."

Increasingly, employees want to align themselves to a worthy mission. It inspires them. Compare the mission of Gandhi: his mission and vision was called *Satyagraha* (translated as "insistence on truth" or "soul force" or "truth force"). Satyagraha happens to become Gandhi's vehicle for his fight for freedom and equality, in South Africa and later in colonial India. The Satyagrahi's object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrongdoer. Thus, for example, in implementing the Satyagrahi mission and vision, Gandhi led Indians in protesting against the national salt tax with the 400 km Dandi Salt March in 1930. With Gandhi's unifying personality and strong mission and vision a growing number of Indians followed him along the way during the Dandi Salt March. In his mission and vision he opposed veiling and discrimination against women, child marriage, untouchability, and the extreme oppression of Hindu widows (compare SL attribute of "stewardship"). The Satyagraha movement gave these oppressed groups new self-confidence. Gandhi's mission and vision truly contained meaning for the Indian people. Satyagraha gave hope and dignity in the mainstream of Indian public life (Sarma, 1994).

Returning to the business world today, the key task for servant-leaders, therefore, is to define both a mission and a vision (the brains) that truly mean something to both employees and customers. Servant-leaders may ask: does my organization, division or department have both? However, the most compelling vision, mission and highly differentiated strategy of a company do not guarantee success. Not only is it important for servant-leaders to regularly check for understanding of the company mission and vision; servant-leaders must also assess the fitness in their organization through e.g. listening, personal interviews and/or questionnaires. By doing so, servant-leaders show empathy and get to know better how people feel about the corporate mission and vision, if they understand the company's strategy and to what extent they are inspired by it. Low scores on one or more questions means servant-leaders have work to do on the "brains" of the organization.

The Bones

The second question to be asked by servant-leaders is: "Do we have the right people, processes and organization structure to achieve our aspirations (referring to the "bones" of servant-leadership)?

Right people: Once the organizational structure is agreed on, jobs need to be filled with the best available talent. In today's knowledge economy, people and their talents make the difference in an organization, yet the interviewed senior corporate bosses worldwide cite the identification and hiring of talent as their key challenge (Peshawaria, 2011). On a worldwide scale this problem is even more acute in Asia. According to a McKinsey survey (Dobbs, Lund and Madgavkar, 2012) by 2020 the Chinese economy will need 23 million more college-educated workers than it can supply. While India will have a surplus of high-skill workers, it will have a 13 million shortfall in medium-skill workers. According to Sluis and Bunt-Kokhuis (2009), human talent development has not kept pace with economic development in Asia. While markets are getting more and more sophisticated, companies need equally sophisticated talent. It is therefore more important than ever before to have a clearly laid out strategy for attracting, recruiting and retaining top talent. Trompenaars (2007b, p. 221) illustrates the dilemma of retaining the right people with a European insurance

company that he assisted. The management of this insurance company became concerned because some very talented high-potential staff resigned. From the exit interviews it became clear that high-potential talents felt neglected due to financial cuts in training programmes. The CEO reconciled the need for short-term results (this was the shareholders' concern) and the need for the development of staff by increasing the training budget by 20% for the next year. However, the CEO added one condition: 20% of all training activities had to focus on increasing the bottom line.

In this respect the study by Harvey and Groutsis (2013) on talent mobility in the Asian Pacific is interesting. The authors argue that the war for talent involves a combination of national governments and organizations and it is no longer a local but a global challenge. The authors show that home and host countries can benefit and suffer a lot from both talent mobility and brain transfer. The reputations of governments and organizations also play an important role in retaining talented workers. Furthermore, skilled migrants can also help to build the reputations of organizations in both home and host countries.

A key question for a servant-leader is: Does my organization ask itself the people/talent question with enough regularity?

Processes: Once the organizational structure has been designed and the right people placed in key jobs as discussed above, appropriate systems and processes should be created to encourage the desired behaviour of employees. Two important systems are at stake here, namely performance management and promotion systems. First, performance management is about what needs to be achieved during a performance period. At the value level, the manager and employee agree on how the desired performance will be achieved. Coaching and feedback can help to motivate people, when used along with (non-)financial awards. Secondly, promotion systems can be an excellent tool to reinforce the desired company values. However, promotion systems contain a leadership dilemma as well; you may lose talented employees to the competition if your high performing talents are primarily evaluated on corporate value-based behaviour. Nothing frustrates high performers in organizations more than bureaucracy and cumbersome internal processes or systems (compare the above example of Trompenaars on high-potentials in the European insurance company).

What can we learn from the above dynamics in relation to processes in living organizations? While most processes are instituted for good reason, some processes tend to get out-dated over time, and start to put a drag on the organization. Yet, many bosses of organizations have less empathy and don't act swiftly enough to change or remove such policies, processes or systems. On the other hand, servant-leaders may be aware and anticipate employees talking about the breakneck speed of change happening around them. The servant-leader can help employees by conceptualizing the organizational horizon and putting evolving processes in perspective. Showing employees the bigger picture (Why are we here, and why another change?) can help them to acknowledge that internal processes and policies may have a much shorter life cycle. Servant-leaders must review and check fitness for such organizational processes regularly.

In his classic Academy of Management article Kerr (1975) shows how companies and governments all over the world repeat the same mistakes. Leaders of these organizations do implement processes in the hope of achieving a desired result. However, more often they end up getting the opposite, negative, impact. In line with Kerr is a recent Indian case. After the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai the Indian government imposed new legislation because foreigners planning violent attacks were able to freely visit India multiple times leading up to the horrific events. Following the new Indian legislation foreign visitors can now only visit

India once every two months. Will this rule really prevent future attacks? Has anyone considered this decision in a more holistic way and foreseen the negative impact on business and tourism?

A key question for a servant-leader is: Does our organization have rules, policies and processes that have either lost their relevance or have begun to hurt our organization? Is there someone in our organization who reviews such "organizational bones" processes on a regular basis?

Organizational structure: In particular for large organizations it is time to rethink their entire approach to organizational design and create more fluid systems and structures. Rethinking the organizational structure also means taking into consideration the "brains" and "nerves" of the organization. Organizational design is not a onetime affair but an on-going process that needs recurrent maintenance. It is likely that by the time the design seems almost right, the business model will have changed so much that the designers need to go back to the drawing board (Peshawaria, 2011, p. 119). In the above section on processes we have seen that while employees gasp at the speed of change happening to them, they may seek stability within their organizations. When it comes to change, employees dislike change of structure the most.

While employees complain about the speed of change, too often they fail to cast a critical eye on their own-siloed rigid or complicated organizational structure. In a world where response time is everything, organizations must get comfortable with an ever-changing structure to remain nimble. Servant-leaders can help employees to cope with this dynamic reality, and employees must be trained to handle ambiguity.

Servant-leaders will check: Is our organization nimble enough to face today's challenges and opportunities? If not, what can we do about it?

The Nerves

The third question to be asked by servant-leaders is: "Do we have an organization-wide culture that helps us grow profitably and ethically (referring to the "nerves" of servant-leadership)?"

Peshawaria (2011) asked successful companies what makes them tick. The respondents cited their strong organizational culture as one of the factors. The reverse is also true. Unsuccessful companies blame their organizational culture for their lack of performance. A recent survey of 12,423 business leaders and 1,897 HR professionals conducted by human capital consulting firm DDI(http://www.ddiworld.com/thought-leadership/research)found that companies with more evolved management cultures were three times more likely to outperform their competitors in terms of metrics such as financial performance, productivity, quality of products or services and customer satisfaction, yet very few organizations get their culture equation right.

According to Peshawaria (2011) most corporate bosses believe that it is extremely hard to change their company culture. Their belief is based on the assumption that people naturally resist change. One CEO stated, "I am totally frustrated with my people. They don't work hard enough, they walk out of the building on the dot at 5 p.m., and I am not sure what we can do to change this culture because getting people to change behaviour is one of the hardest things to do."

How can servant-leaders deal with changing the culture? The servant-leader will first live and demonstrate the new norms him/herself in being a role model for the organization. Too frequently, a boss may see culture change as something he/she needs to do to their employees. Unfortunately, such a boss misses the point completely. Culture change is what a leader should do to him/herself. A servant-leader will model the new behaviour every day, employees will get the message about what is important and the desired culture will take root. Employees listen to a leader's actions louder than words. According to Peshawaria (2011) many bosses do not walk the talk, but complain that changing culture is hard.

A key question for a servant-leader is: Do I set an example with my own behaviour? Do I communicate our corporate culture? In particular in larger cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary companies it is a great challenge to get the corporate culture right and make employees feel members of the same corporate community. In this respect we can gain a lot of teambuilding insights from Japanese companies. A prominent example is what the Japanese refer to as *monozukuri* (Stahl and Brannen, 2013). It is about fostering synergy in a multidisciplinary and multicultural team. Employees with very diverse backgrounds work together for a specific purpose. According to Stahl and Brannen (2013) *monozukuri* is an art and relies on creativity and perseverance earned through lengthy apprenticeship rather than theory and science. In line with the concept of *monozukuri,* the Japanese concept of *nemawashi* can be mentioned. In the interview with the CEO of the Renault-Nissan Alliance Carlos Ghosn (Stahl and Brannen, 2013) Ghosn refers to the concept of *nemawashi* being a kind of collective project planning through cross-functional team input, advanced communication and consensus. According to Ghosnnemawashi means literally "preparing the roots of a tree for transplant".

To strengthen the corporate culture, the servant-leader may be a role model and encourage creativity in the organization. According to Trompenaars (2007b) creativity is a major source in an organization. Creativity is where the inner world of energy is connected with the external world. People might have a preference, but the spark starts when the two "energies" meet (Trompenaars, 2007b, p. 28). Trompenaars (2007b, p. 38) gives the example of a creative leader able to reconcile opposites; the founding director of Virgin, Richard Branson, is a living example and role model for the employees. Branson can switch from being David in one business situation to Goliath in another. Richard Branson reconciles the big player with the small player, so that the smaller player becomes big. Employees of Virgin are empowered by such a creative leader. Branson is able to live and exemplify Virgin's corporate culture.

Outlook

We began this article with the idea that leadership is about serving and creating a better future for others. In the organizational context, serving is about moving one's orientation away from creating results individually (and thereby enabling personal success), to creating conditions in which the rest of the organization can create successful results. If corporate leaders adopt such an orientation, they become servants to the organization. In order to best serve the organization, leaders must stay focused on three interconnected levels of long-term success; the brains (strategy), bones (structure) and nerves (culture) of the organization. In the fast changing business landscape of today, management teams need to change their strategies, decisions and policies as often as required. We are not recommending change for change's sake here. The point is, the world around us is moving incredibly fast. Servant-leaders need to be prepared to accelerate frequent yet judicious adjustments to the brains, bones and nerves in

order to remain nimble and relevant. Continually shaping the brains, bones and nerves must become the full-time job of enterprise level servant leaders.

Living a sustainable and empowering mission and vision. No one could have predicted that a frail brown man in a loincloth would bring down and fundamentally change the brains, bones and nerves of a mighty British colonial empire. Yet that is exactly what Gandhi peacefully achieved without firing a bullet. There are other noteworthy aspects of Gandhi's servant-leadership story. First, Gandhi had no position, title or formal authority over anyone. He never held any political or military office, did not possess any material wealth and could not boast of any scientific achievement or extraordinary abilities. Yet millions followed Gandhi in his powerful mission and vision (compare SL attribute of "foresight"). His followers were even ready to lay down their lives for his cause. Or, as Trompenaars (2007b, pp. 210–211) argues, the servant-leader gives followers more than they could conceivably repay; thus they become obligated and even more ready to carry out the leader's wishes. The apparent modesty of servant-leadership is especially important in reconciling the need for intention (living a sustainable and empowering mission and vision) and the need for invasion in a larger organization (with impact on the brains, bones and nerves of the British colonial empire). Secondly, living his mission and vision the way Gandhi did was neither comfortable nor glamorous. If he wanted material success and comfort, he would have been much better off as an attorney. He regularly made himself very unpopular and was jailed several times. Gandhi was often physically attacked because of his mission and vision, including the final gunshot that killed him in 1948. Was Gandhi unaware of the dangers involved? Did he do what he did for fame, fortune and glory? These are intriguing questions in the perspective of servant-leadership. And more importantly, how did he manage to achieve the peaceful results he wanted without any formal authority or control of resources?

Is what we see in Gandhi's story unique for that place and time in history, or can we see similar empowerment by servant-leaders nowadays? Indeed, the servant-leadership impact that just one person or one team can make to improve the future of others can be intriguing, in particular in today's world. We will conclude with the story of a twenty-first-century servant-leader, Wim Leereveld, founding father of the Acess to Medicine Index (ATMI). ATMI ranks the performance of the twenty world-leading pharma companies on their efforts in getting medicines to the poorest patients in the world. Wim Leereveld had no formal position or government authority at the very start. He was a private person with experience in the pharma industry, and developed an ideal, a mission and vision to improve the future of others. His original inspiration for the Index was that two billion people don't have access to medicine. That is a social problem and affects us all. He considered the pharmaceutical industry not part of the problem, but part of the solution. According to Leereveld the big pharmaceutical companies have the know-how to make life-saving drugs. Therefore we need to influence and help them to perform better: "I understood that a driving force within that sector was a sense of competitiveness. Rather than working against that instinct, I thought why not use that characteristic to help redirect efforts towards social issues" (Miller and Parker, 2013). It took Leereveld four years to succeed in developing a sophisticated ranking system and it was first published in 2008. The model is a clever way of raising awareness of social issues. The ATMI codifies the essential elements of what it takes to provide access to medicine. Through the transparent way of showing the sustainable performance of the big pharmaceutical companies, the Index happened to create a powerful impact on the brains, bones and nerves of the pharmaceutical industry and beyond. As GSK's leader, Duncan Learmouth, comments on ATMI: "It's clever, it worked. Because people don't like to be at the bottom and they have strategic discussions about how they're going to improve their position, which is a really good thing" (Miller and Parker, 2013). GSK – one of the giants in

the pharma industry – has topped the ATMI rankings. As far as the brains of GSK are concerned, this company is very motivated to set out and further improve a durable strategy. Pricing was the first big hurdle for access to medicine in the developing world. The next big logistical challenge – for GSK as well as other companies – is improving the fragile health infrastructure in developing countries. Further sustainability issues are investment in neglected tropical diseases, the struggle against HIV/AIDS and sharing intellectual property rights (IPR). IPR is the lifeblood of the big companies who are in a permanent race to register the next blockbuster patent. Nevertheless GSK took the lead in developing new malaria medicines, and served the future of others by publishing their sensitive R&D data in the public domain. This is a courageous and radical step for a competitive company. This GSK publication became an invitation for other research organizations to develop a new generation of malaria medicines. This breakthrough would not have happened if GSK had kept the know-how protected instead of going for a more open and social R&D approach. According to GSK, the ATMI has encouraged them to develop this mission and vision further (Miller & Parker, 2013).

What can we learn from this ATMI case with impressive impact on the twenty-first-century world community? ATMI is a role model of a small and humble servant-leadership team, an energetic team which is improving the future of others by turning the brains, bones and nerves of the pharma industry inside out. It has been a long journey, but as we speak (2014) ATMI is a catalyst in awareness raising among policymakers in NGOs, the World Health Organization and last but not least the patients themselves who can connect with ATMI via the Internet. The bones and nerves of the big pharmaceutical companies are influenced as well, as is illustrated by the fact that on the recruitment site of individual big pharma companies their current ATMI ranking is published. Furthermore, a high ATMI ranking impacts the daily performance of big companies on the Wall Street stock exchange. In leading the twenty-first-century organization, serving social objectives creates a major way forward towards a more sustainable future, as we found in the business case of the pharma industry.

In this article we have seen in both past and present times that leadership with meaning is the most durable service to an organization, the environment and the growth of the people involved.

Annex

Table with summary of the findings; holistic view on the living organization where servant-leadership supports the future growth of people.

SL attributes	Brains			Bones			Nerves
	Mission	Vision	Strategy	Right people	Processes	Organizational structure	Organizational culture
Listening							x
Empathy							x
Healing of relations				x	x	x	

Awareness				x	x	x	
Persuasion	x	x	x				
Conceptualization	x	x	x				
Foresight	x	x	x				
Stewardship	x	x	x				
Commitment to the growth of others				x	x	x	
Building community							x

References

Alahmad, A. 2010. To be ethical or not to be: an international code of ethics for leadership, *Journal of Diversity Management*, First Quarter, 5(1), 31–35.

Alexander, J. & Wilson, M. (2005). Foundations of responsible leadership: from self-insight to integrity and altruism, in Doh, J. & Stumpf, S. (eds), *Handbook on responsible leadership and governance in global business.* Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar.

Access to Medicine Index, ATMI, http://www.accesstomedicineindex.org/ (accessed: 2 March 2014).

Amazon.http://www.amazon.com/Careers-Homepage/b?ie=UTF8&node=239364011 (accessed: 16 June 2014).

Banerjea, P.K. 2010.Wholesome Ethical Leadership.*The IUP Journal of Corporate Governance*, 9 (1/2): 7-14.

Blot, P. de (2011). *Business spiritualiteit: een vernieuwingsmodel voor organisaties in een crisis*. Breukelen: NyenrodeAcademic Press.

Broekstra, G. (2009). *Diep Leiderschap: Het geheim van juist handelen in onzekere tijden.* Kampen, The Netherlands: Ten Have Publishers,.

Ciulla, J. B. (2005). Integrating leadership with ethics: is good leadership contrary to human nature? In Doh, J. & Stumpf, S. (eds), *Handbook on responsible leadership and governance in global business.* Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar.

Coleman, J. (2013). Old-school business practices worth bringing back. *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*. 10.00 am, 11 April.

Dobbs, R., Lund, S. & Madgavkar, A. (2012). Talent tensions ahead: a CEO briefing. *McKinsey   Quarterly*,   November. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/economic_studies/talent_tensions_ahead_a_ceo_briefing(accessed: 2 March 2014).

Gandhi, M. K. 1920. Statement to Disorders Inquiry Committee. January 5, 1920. In Satyagrahi Valvuloplasty. *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi,* 19, 206.

Greenleaf, R. (1977). *Servant leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York: Paulist Press.

Handy, C. (1996).*Gods of management: the changing work of organizations*. Oxford University Press.

Harvey, W. & Groutsis, D. (2013).Reputation and talent mobility in the Asian-Pacific.*Proceedings EURAM Conference*, Istanbul, 1–28.

Hind, P. A. Wilson & Lenssen, G. (2009).Developing leaders for sustainable business, *Corporate Governance*, 9(1), 7–20.

Hirsch, E. D. (2002). *The new dictionary of cultural literacy*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Hsieh, T. & Yik, S. (2005). Leadership as a starting point of strategy.*Insights & Publications*. McKinsey & Company, February. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/leading_in_the_21st_century/leadership_as_the_starting_point_of_strategy (accessed: 24 February 2014).

Kahane, A. (2004). *Solving tough problems: an open way of talking, listening, and creating new realities*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Keith, K. M. (2011). *Servant leadership in the boardroom: fulfilling the public trust*. Westfield: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

Kerr, S. (1975).On the folly of rewarding A while hoping for B. *Academy of Management Journal*, 18(4), 769–783.

Kriger, M. & Seng, Y. (2005). Leadership with inner meaning: a contingency theory of leadership based on the worldviews of five religions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 771–806.

Leonard, K. & Loew, L. (2012).*Leadership development factbook*. Oakland: Bersin & Associates, LLC.

Miller, J. & Parker, L. (2013).*Everybody's business: the unlikely story of how big business can fix the world*. Biteback Publishing.

Morgan, G. (2007). *Images of organization.*Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (First edition 1986).

Nuijten, I. (2009). *Servant-leadership: paradox or diamond in the rough*? ERIM PhD Series in Research and Management, nr.183, Rotterdam School of Management. Alblasserdam: Haveka Publishers.

Olson, M. S., Van Bever, D. &Verry, S. (2008). When Growth Stalls. *Harvard Business Review*, 86 (March), 50–61.

Peshawaria, R. (2011). *Too many bosses too few leaders*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Pollack, J. & Algeo, C. (2013). Who reports to whom? Perspectives on the reporting relationship between project and change managers.*Proceedings EURAM Conference*, Istanbul, 1–35.

Sarma, BinaKumari (1994). Gandhian movement and women's awakening in Orissa. *Indian Historical Review*. 21(1/2), 78–79.

Schein, E. (2009). *Helping: how to offer, give, and receive help*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Sluis, L. van der & Bunt-Kokhuis, S. van de (eds) (2009). *Competing for talent*. Royal van Gorcum Publishers.

Spears, L. (2000). On character and servant-leadership: ten characteristics of effective, caring leaders. *Concepts and Connections*, 8(3).

Stahl, G. & Brannen, M. Y. (2013).Building cross-cultural leadership competence: an interview with Carlos Ghosn. *Learning & Education*, Academy of Management, 12(3), 494–502.

Sultan, N. 2011. Making a Difference in a Troubled Country: The Case of Entrepreneurial and Female Leadership in Yemen", in *Leadership Development in the Middle East*, edited by Metcalfe, B. D and Mimouni, F, Edward Elgar.

Thakore, Digvijaysinh (2013). Servant leadership.*International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, (7), 23–32.

Trompenaars, F. (2007a). *A new substantive theory of sustainable creativity and innovation through the integration of cultures*. Inaugural Professorial Lecture, Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Trompenaars, F. 2007b. Riding the whirlwind: connecting people and organisations in a culture of innovation. Oxford: Infinite Ideas Limited.

Trompenaars, F. & Voerman, E. (2009).*Servant-leadership across cultures*. Oxford: Infinite Ideas Limited.

Trompenaars, F. & Nijhoff Asser, M. (2010).*The global M&A Tango*. Oxford: Infinite Ideas Limited.

Vargas, P. & Hanlon, J. (2007).Celebrating a profession: the servant leadership perspective.*The Journal of Research Administration*, 38, 45–49.

Wall Street Journal. 2012. Global Business Shifts Call for 'Post-Heroic' Leaders. January 17.http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970204468004577164523591915692 (accessed: 24 February 2014).

Yasin Khalaf, S. (2004). Servant leadership in the Bedouin-Arab culture.*Global Virtue Ethics Review*, 5(3), 58–79.