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Perceptions of Transformational and Servant Leadership in the Context of Seigakuin University: Proposal for an Organizational Analysis

Evert D. Osburn

Introduction

The transformational and servant leadership paradigms have come to be recognized as higher order leadership paradigms (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Both are based on values (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Ford, 1991; Greenleaf, 1977; Krishnan, 2001; Kroeck, Lowe, & Brown, 2004; Russell, 2001; Sarros & Santora, 2001), and both incorporate influence, vision, trust, credibility, integrity, and role-modelling, with great emphasis on leaders giving individualized consideration to and showing appreciation for their followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Transformational and servant
leaders seek to meet followers higher order needs (Bass, 1985, 1990, 2000; Cooper, 2005; Greenleaf, 1977; cf. Burns, 1978, on “transforming leadership”), with both types of leaders having the transformation of their charges as a primary goal (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996). In short, transformational and servant leadership are “people-oriented leadership styles” (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2005, p. 354) that are increasingly being recognized as highly relevant forms of leadership.

Regarding transformational leadership, Howell and Avolio (1993) argue that it has a direct and positive influence on followers’ performance levels, while Bass (1999) asserts that transformational leaders produce a sense of collective identity and efficacy in followers as well as higher levels of self-esteem and feelings of meaningfulness in their work. Indeed, two meta-analyses done on transformational leadership’s effectiveness (Fuller, Patterson, Hester, & Stringer, 1996 [32 studies analyzed]; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996 [75 studies reviewed]) concluded that it is closely associated with positive outcomes in the workplace, such as increased satisfaction and exertion of extra effort. Bono & Judge (2003) concur that the transformational leadership model is valid in predicting outcomes like job satisfaction and increased performance (cf. Felfe & Schyns, 2004). Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie (2006) note studies have consistently shown a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). In fact, Bommer, Rubin, & Baldwin (2004) note that transformational leadership has been empirically linked to employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, satisfaction with the supervision, extra effort, turnover intention, organizational citizenship, and overall employee performance, and they assert, “after more than twenty years of accumulated research evidence, there is little doubt that transformational leadership behavior is related to a wide variety of positive individual and organizational outcomes” (p. 195).

Concerning servant leadership, since Greenleaf (1970/1991; 1977; Frick & Spears, 1996) first laid down the foundation for the theory behind it, top leadership theorists have come to recognize the merit of the concept (e.g., Blanchard and Kouzes in Spears, 1998; Covey, DePree, and Bennis in Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Peck and Senge in Spears, 1995). Covey (in Greenleaf, 1977/2002) notes that a great movement is taking place in the world today that has its roots in two key forces: (1) globalization; and (2) “the force of tireless, universal principles that have, and always will, govern all enduring success. . . . One of these fundamental, timeless principles is the idea of servant leadership” (p. 1). Furthermore, Laub (2003) asserts that servant leadership has become increasingly accepted in the leadership and organizational literature.

Though servant leadership as a viable paradigm has been critiqued due to the lack of empirical
evidence to support it (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Laub, 1999; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002), some improvement has been made in this area, with quantitative studies in servant leadership being on the increase (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Drury, 2004; Hale & Fields, 2005; Irving, 2005; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2005; Russell, 2000). Though nowhere near the empirical evidence linking transformational leadership with positive outcomes is available, servant leadership has nevertheless been associated with increasing followers' levels of trust toward both the leader and the organization (Joseph & Winston, 2005) as well as improving follower satisfaction levels, commitment to service, and societal development (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Liden et al. (2005) specifically linked servant leadership to four important organizational outcomes: (1) employees' community citizenship behavior; (2) in-role performance; (3) innovative behaviors; and (4) organizational commitment (cf. Drury, 2004). Thompson (2002) and Irving (2005) found a strong positive correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction, a phenomenon that Dennis and Winston (2003) predict will hold true for servant-led organizations.

Thus, both the transformational and servant leadership paradigms are recognized to be effective forms of leadership in organizations. One major question that has been raised in regard to both, however, is whether or not they are applicable in a cross-cultural context. As to the transferability of transformational leadership to a cross-cultural environment, Bass (1997) contends that there is universality in his transformational-transactional leadership paradigm, stating that “whatever the country, when people think about leadership, their prototypes and ideals are transformational” (p. 135). Yet, the same scholar admits in another work, “the model is universal to a considerable degree, although there are some situations which can be specified in which universality breaks down” (Bass, 1996, p. 737), particularly under certain unique cultural contingencies.

Gibson and Marcoulides (1995) argue that there indeed remains considerable uncertainty as to whether any one leadership style is universal or whether cultural values in any particular country will influence perceptions of leadership. Morden (1995) asserts that it is becoming increasingly unrealistic to adopt an ethnocentric or universalistic view of management practices, a contention that Hofstede (1980/2001; 1983; 1993; 1996) whole-heartedly supports.

The same argument may be levelled at servant leadership, of course. On the one hand, Schuster (2002) posits that, since it is based on what are arguably universal principles, servant leadership in particular is what is needed in the new, globalized economy, and McGee-Cooper and Looper (2001) imply that servant leadership may be especially well-suited to a consensus society like Japan's, a contention supported by Pinner (2003). But, on the other hand, Frick and Spears (1996), certainly proponents of servant leadership, write of it, “In many ways, it is a thoroughly American philosophy
Perceptions of Transformational and Servant Leadership in the Context of Seigakuin University

[emphasis added], based on a deep and high vision, tested by pragmatic results. . . . Yet at the same time, servant leadership contains some elements of Eastern thought, with an emphasis on reflection" (p. 2).

The “thoroughly American” aspect of servant leadership as a formal theory of leadership opens it up to criticism, just as for the transformational leadership model. Hofstede (2001) states unequivocally that “generally accepted U.S. theories might not apply, or only very partially apply, outside the borders of their country of origin” (p. 374), a conclusion that is reinforced by a number of other scholars (e.g., Brodbeck, Frese, Akerblom et al., 2000; Glick, 2001; Merritt, 2000; Newman & Nolan, 1996; Tollgert-Anderson, 1993).

Clearly, the lack of consensus regarding the universality of models like transformational and servant leadership is cause of concern for those involved in leadership roles in foreign countries. This is a research problem that needs to be addressed empirically, which is one of the purposes of the quantitative study on transformational and servant leadership in Japan being proposed herein.

Another problem to be approached is in regard to whether or not followers can distinguish transformational from servant leadership. Though they are alike in many ways, as noted above, there are also significant differences. Perhaps the primary difference is on the focus of each: Stone and Patterson (2005) conclude that the primary focus of transformational leadership is on the organization, with follower development being secondary to organizational objectives. This is in agreement with Bass (2000), who points out the principle motivation of transformational leaders is to achieve organizational goals.

Cerff and Winston (2003) note that this is in contrast to servant leadership, in which the leader’s primary focus is on the well-being of the followers. This, then, is the principal difference between the two paradigms: though both show concern for their followers, transformational leaders’ greatest interest is in getting them to engage in and support organizational objectives, whereas servant leaders’ primary concern is on service to the followers for the followers’ benefit. In other words, transformational leaders serve their followers for the good of the organization, while servant leaders serve them for the good of the followers themselves (Graham, 1991).

There are other areas of contrast as well, such as in some of the specific leadership attributes ascribed to each. For example, risk-taking, commitment to goals, rationality, and problem solving are important to transformational leadership but much less so to servant leadership, which places greater emphasis on leadership attributes such as stewardship, persuasion, encouragement, and teaching (Stone, Russell, and Patterson, 2004).

Liden et al. (2005) state that transformational leadership and servant leadership appear to be
strongly related at first, but that servant leadership is different not only in regard to its primary focus on the followers, but also on the importance placed on serving the community and in cultivating servant leader behaviors in followers so that they, too, will become servant leaders. In fact, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) conclude that servant leadership and transformational leadership differ in how they approach the primary role of the leader, the role of followers, the moral component of leadership, outcomes expected, and how they relate at the group, organizational, and societal levels.

Furthermore, Humphreys (2005) suggests that the effectiveness of each is different depending upon the environment. He posits that transformational leadership could well be more effective in unstable, dynamic situations, whereas servant leadership would be more appropriate in more static environments. Therefore, context and environment play crucial roles regarding the effectiveness of the two leadership paradigms.

Consequently, though there are similarities between transformational and servant leadership, there are also important differences. That being said, though Liden, et al. (2005) have done a quantitative study involving both leadership paradigms, there is a dearth of empirical research determining whether or not followers can distinguish between the two and whether or not there are measurable differences in the specific outcomes they produce when compared within a particular organizational setting. These, then, are the second and third research problems that this study attempts to address.

The fourth research problem involves identifying how culture affects perceptions of transformational and servant leadership and how culturally implicit leadership theories (CLT) may affect both these perceptions and the outcomes that each leadership paradigm produces. House and Javidan (2004) note in their overview of the Project GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) research program’s results that implicit leadership theories “constrain, moderate, and guide” (p. 16) the exercise of leadership as well as the acceptance of leaders and perception of leadership effectiveness. Among the important findings of this monumental study of sixty-two societies worldwide was that culturally endorsed implicit leadership theory affected how people responded to leadership questionnaires.

To summarize, the transformational and servant leadership models have gained support as relevant “people-oriented” leadership paradigms. However, four key research problems have been identified in regard to these leadership styles. These are put in question form, as follows:

Research Question 1: Do the transformational and servant leadership paradigms apply in a cross-cultural context, specifically, that of Seigakuin University in Japan?

Research Question 2: Can Japanese followers distinguish between transformational and servant leadership at the practical level?
Perceptions of Transformational and Servant Leadership in the Context of Seigakuin University

Research Question 3: Are there clear differences in the work outcomes produced by the two leadership styles within a given organizational context? If so, what are they and to what degree?

Research Question 4: How do Japanese culturally implicit leadership theories affect the perceptions of transformational and servant leadership and the work-related outcomes they produce?

Statement of Study

Transformational and servant leadership are important leadership models that both claim universality, an assertion that has been contested. It is the intention of this study to provide empirical support to answer the question as to whether or not these paradigms are applicable to the Japanese context. The study also attempts to determine if followers in a Japanese organization, viz., Seigakuin University, can actually distinguish between transformational and servant leadership. It further explores the relationship of these two leadership models in regard to certain specific outcomes they affect, namely, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Finally, this research investigates the moderating role that culturally implicit leadership theory plays.
in forming perceptions of transformational and servant leadership in the Japanese context and how it affects the work-related outcomes of these two leadership paradigms (see Figure 1).

**Purpose of the Study**

The research to be conducted at Seigakuin University, a private, Protestant Christian university in Ageo, a suburb thirty miles north-northwest of Tokyo, is four-fold in purpose. First, it is intended to expand the current empirical research on transformational and servant leadership in a cross-cultural context. Though a number of cross-cultural quantitative studies involving transformational leadership have been done (e.g., Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003; Wang, Law, Hackett, et al., 2005; Yokochi-Bryce, 1989), Hale and Fields (2005) assert “there is little empirical evidence to support the trans-cultural application of servant leadership” (p. 3), though they point out nonetheless that many of the universally positive leadership attributes identified in Project GLOBE can be traced to components of servant leadership.

The second purpose of the study is to provide further data on the connection between transformational and servant leadership and the work-related outcomes of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior, as well as on which of these outcomes is influenced more strongly by the two leadership styles.

The third purpose of this research is to delve into and provide evidence for how Japanese culturally implicit leadership theory (CLT) affects perceptions of transformational and servant leadership and the outcomes they produce. By identifying specific aspects of CLT in Japan and relating them to these issues while providing empirical support given for the conclusions reached, a significant contribution to the cross-cultural leadership literature is envisioned.

Finally, the study being proposed will provide empirical data to the administration and faculty of Seigakuin University regarding how both transformational and servant leadership are perceived at the school and what specific work-related outcomes can be associated with them. Perceptions and outcomes related to servant leadership are of particular interest, as this leadership style was explicitly embraced by the administration of Seigakuin University and Schools, as reflected in the Seigakuin Declaration on Education:

The faculty and staff at Seigakuin will consistently strive to be renewed, accepting educational responsibility in the spirit of Servant Leadership as shown by Jesus Christ, who said He Himself did not come to be served, but to serve. (adopted at the Seigakuin Conference on Education, November 14, 2002)
Perceptions of Transformational and Servant Leadership in the Context of Seigakuin University

In view of this, it is essential to determine if, in the six years since this policy was adopted, there are any quantifiable results, and, if so, what these may be in relation to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior. The data gleaned may then enable Seigakuin University to assess areas of strength and areas where improvement needs to be made in regard to the implementation of servant leadership at the school.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for at least four reasons. To begin with, it is the first empirical study on transformational and servant leadership of its kind in Japan. Though Yokochi-Bryce (1989) conducted a quantitative research project on transformational leadership in Japan, and Pinner (2003) related his empirical research on Total Quality Management (TQM) practices in Japan to servant leadership, no quantitative study that focuses on both transformational and servant leadership has ever been done in the Japanese context.

Secondly, very few studies have been done simultaneously comparing the outcomes of transformational and servant leadership. There are conceptual works in the literature in which these two leadership paradigms are compared and contrasted (e.g., Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Graham, 1991; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004), but empirical research involving the two simultaneously along with a focus on related outcomes (e.g., Liden, et al., 2005) is sparse indeed.

Thirdly, no focused research has been conducted that identifies specific aspects of culturally implicit leadership theory in Japan and then links them with perceptions of transformational and servant leadership theory and the outcomes of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Certainly Lincoln and Kalleberg’s (1990) seminal quantitative study comparing American and Japanese workers’ attitudes toward the workplace and the role that culture plays in specific outcomes, particularly job satisfaction and organizational commitment, is highly relevant, yet it makes no mention of either the transformational or servant leadership paradigms per se.

Fourthly, though the leadership at Seigakuin University and Schools has admirably adopted the servant leadership paradigm as a model, there is a dearth of analysis on what the actual results have been. This research will provide leaders with quantified information that will enable them to evaluate the effects of servant leadership at the University and to formulate strategies for fine-tuning that will lead to maximum levels of effectiveness.
Thus, this study seeks to answer research questions that are of real importance, particularly to researchers of servant leadership in the cross-cultural context, as empirical evidence on that subject is so scarce. The quantitative analysis of the results and conclusions reached should be of some significance to both researchers and practitioners of transformational and servant leadership in organizations in a cross-cultural setting in general, and to the leadership of Seigakuin University in particular.

**Definition of Terms**

There are some important terms in this study that require defining. Each of them has been alluded to above and will be given more detailed treatment in subsequent research, but a working definition of each term is necessary at this point.

*Transformational Leadership*

Bass (1985) indicates that transformational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders raise followers’ awareness about issues of consequence, help them meet their higher level needs, influence them to transcend self-interest for the good of the group or organization, and inspire them to work harder than they originally expected they would. Pillai, Schriesheim, and Williams (1999) echo this definition of transformational leadership, with Howell and Avolio (1993) further explaining that transformational leaders concentrate on longer term goals; emphasize developing a vision and inspiring followers to pursue it; realign the system to accommodate the vision; and coach followers to take on greater responsibility both for their own development and for the good of the organization. Transformational leaders do so through the exercise of four functional attributes, which have been identified as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987). Importantly, Bass (1999) notes that transformational leadership is leader-inspired devotion to values and ideals, with the ultimate goal being to motivate and enable followers to perform beyond expectations for the good of the group.

*Servant Leadership*

The classic statement on what servant leadership entails is that made by Greenleaf (1970/1991):

> The servant leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . . The leader-first and servant-first are two extreme types. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best
test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; . . . And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? [emphases in original] (p. 7)

Servant leadership as a theory was based on this statement but has been expanded since. As Patterson (2003) makes clear, though, the overarching theme of servant leadership is that servant leaders are those whose primary focus is on their followers and the meeting of their higher order needs, with the organization being peripheral. It is the moral qualities of the servant leader that enable him or her to lead effectively through service to others (cf. Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005).

Stated succinctly, Laub (1999) delineates that “servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of the led over the self-interest of the leader” (p. 8). He goes on to describe effective servant leaders as those who value and develop people, build community, display authenticity, and both provide and share leadership.

**Culture**

Hofstede (2001) defines national culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 9). Project GLOBE added more detail to this, stating that “culture is defined as shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations” (House & Javidan, 2004, p. 15). Henceforth, this is the working definition of culture that will be used in this study.

**Culturally Implicit Leadership Theories (CLT)**

Once again, the GLOBE definition is the most apropos to this study. According to House and Javidan (2004), CLT refers to the notion that individuals within cultures “have implicit beliefs, convictions, and assumptions concerning attributes and behaviors that distinguish leaders from followers, effective leaders from ineffective leaders, and moral leaders from evil leaders” (p. 16). Thus, individuals within cultures attribute effective leadership qualities to those people whose attitudes and behaviors are in closest congruence with the implicit leadership theory they hold.

**Job Satisfaction**

Simply put, job satisfaction is the emotional reaction of an employee based on the comparison of actual outcomes with desired expectations at work (Fields, 2002; Wood, 2004). Fields (2002) explains that job satisfaction is in reality a multi-faceted construct, depending upon the cumulative level of met (or unmet) worker expectations, the work situation (e.g., job level), the work environment, and the employee’s general affective disposition.

**Organizational Commitment**

The working definition of organizational commitment accepted herein is that of Mowdy, Porter, and
Steers (1982), who define it as “the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (cited in Koh et al., 1995, p. 322; also in Avolio et al., 2004, p. 952). Fields (2002) describes Mowdy et al.’s (1982) definition in more detail, noting that it is a powerful belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values, a desire to expend considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in it.

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**

Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006) describe organizational citizenship behavior as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization” (p. 3). OCB is prosocial behavior that is spontaneously directed toward the benefit of a specific individual in the organization with no apparent prospect of any extrinsic reward being received.

Though various of dimensions of OCB have been identified (cf. Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006, p. 26), this study utilizes the five delineated in Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter (1990), which are briefly described as follows:

1) **Altruism** – Discretionary behaviors that have the effect of helping a specific other person with an *organizationally relevant* task or problem.

2) **Conscientiousness** – Discretionary behaviors on the part of the employee that go *well beyond the minimum role requirements* of the organization.

3) **Sportsmanship** – Willingness of the employee to tolerate less that ideal circumstances without complaining.

4) **Courtesy** – Discretionary behavior on the part of an individual aimed at *preventing* work-related problems with others from occurring.

5) **Civic virtue** – Behavior on the part of an individual that indicates he/she responsibly participates in, is involved in, or is concerned about the life of the company. (p. 115)

The key point for the purpose of this study is that OCBs are work-related behaviors as described in these five dimensions and that they are discretionary, not related to the formal reward system, and promote the effective operation of the organization (cf. Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999).

It is within the framework of the working definitions described above that this study will be conducted. The study focuses on providing empirical evidence in answer to the four research questions referring to the universality of the transformational and servant leadership paradigms; whether or not Japanese followers are able to distinguish between the two; if there are clear differences in how the two models affect job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors; and how Japanese culturally implicit leadership theory moderates
the perception of the two paradigms as well as the work-related outcomes they produce.

Research Proposal for an Organizational Analysis of Seigakuin University

In light of the above, I would like to propose conducting a survey on transformational and servant leadership at Seigakuin University, as the school has reached the milestone of its 20th anniversary. The questionnaire that has been designed for this purpose is entitled the “Leadership Styles and Outcome Survey” and focuses on perceptions of transformational leadership and servant leadership as well as the work-related outcomes of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBO). It is an 84-item survey instrument that is a combination of previously utilized and validated questionnaires in the field of leadership studies, specifics of which are as follows:

1) Transformational Leadership – Avolio & Bass (1995, 2000, 2004): *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire [MLQ] (Form 5X-Short Form)* – 20 items (reduced to cover transformational leadership only)


The anonymous, 20-25 minute, modified Likert-scale survey is intended to target the full-time administration, faculty, and staff of Seigakuin University and is meant to assess each of the primary areas afore-mentioned. The data gathered will be statistically analyzed and the results published in order to enable an objective appraisal of the content matter.
Conclusion

There has been significant discussion in the field of leadership studies regarding the transformational and servant leadership models, but there is still a need for empirical studies to be done on the link between the two and on the work-related outcomes each leadership paradigm produces. The need is magnified significantly when one approaches the questions of how these leadership models are affected in a cross-cultural context, namely, Japanese culture, whether or not they can be distinguished by followers in Japan, what differences there may be in the work-related outcomes they result in, and how Japanese culturally implicit leadership theories may affect all of this.

Furthermore, since Seigakuin University and Schools has made a commitment to servant leadership, it is imperative that the questions be answered as to how its employees really perceive the paradigm in practice and what outcomes are actually being produced through its implementation.

Consequently, this study is being proposed as a means to at least begin answering these important research questions through quantitative analysis. The study will be unique from several perspectives, from Seigakuin University's point of view the most significant of which is the fact that it will provide empirical data on the perceptions at the school regarding the transformational and servant leadership models and their attendant outcomes. Analysis of the results will then enable the school to move one step closer to its principal goal: providing the type of Christian leadership that results in the optimal effectiveness of all its people.

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Perceptions of Transformational and Servant Leadership in the Context of Seigakuin University


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