



# Servant Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness: Examining Leadership Culture among Millennials within a US National Campus Ministry

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## **Abstract**

*This research project used self-typing paragraphs to assess the leadership style of each organizational area within a national campus ministry. Research participants selected from four leadership styles: (a) autocratic, (b) paternalistic, (c) servant, and (d) laissez-faire. Data from five historical organizational reports were used to measure whether each organizational area was growing, plateaued, or shrinking. The findings were compared to determine if there was a relationship between leadership style area growth defined by staff recruitment and the total number of campuses with ministry programs. Findings indicate there is a positive relationship. Areas for which the highest number of staff chose servant leadership as the style of their area also experienced the greatest degree of growth. Conversely, the area with the least amount of servant leadership responses was the area experiencing the greatest decline in staff recruitment and ministry numbers. Spearman's rho and Chi-square analyses indicated statistically significant relationships between servant leadership culture of an area and three measures of area performance.*

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Leadership Effectiveness, Organizational Performance, Campus Ministry, Millennials.

Little research has been conducted on leadership with college students and even less has been written on campus ministry. This research examines the effectiveness of a servant leadership culture within a campus ministry context. It goes beyond the scope of worker contentment and productivity to support the premise that servant leadership is positively related with quantifiable results in the success and growth of the organization. This is even more pertinent because college students are the next generation of leaders and workers, and success with them points us to the likelihood of future success in the workplace if servant leadership is an effective leadership approach with this generation.

The research of this project set out to assess whether there is a positive relationship between leadership culture and growth within a national campus ministry. After tabulating staff and program numbers for five years and assessing the leadership culture for each organizational area, a positive relationship was found. Those areas that were strongest in servant leadership style were also the areas seeing growth. The area that was the weakest in servant leadership style was the one that had experienced the greatest decline in staff and ministry numbers. Additionally, Spearman's rho and Chi-square analyses demonstrated the positive relationship between servant leadership practice and higher levels of performance.

Because the organization being studied works primarily with millennials in the university setting, and because the staff of this organization are primarily comprised of millennials, this article will compare servant leadership to the preferences and traits of the millennial generation. A theoretical argument is built for the use of servant leadership with college students and organizations that work heavily with the millennial generation. Following the theoretical argument is a description of the process of data collection, the findings of the analyses and the implications of study findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Organizational Culture and Leadership Style

Organizational performance is influenced by many factors. For instance, in the business sector a company's market share as well as the levels of bargaining power among buyers and suppliers will influence overall performance. But such factors are not the only ones to consider. On this point, Cameron and Quinn (2005) note that when organizations experience failure it is a neglect of organizational culture that is "the most frequently cited reason for failure" (p. 2). Put positively, Cameron and Quinn note of successful companies that "their most important competitive advantage, the most powerful factor they all highlight as a key ingredient in their success, is their organizational culture" (p. 4).

Organizational culture is typically considered at the level of an overall organization, but, as Cameron and Quinn (2005) note, "organizational cultures may be comprised of unique subcultures" (p. 148). These subcultures are typically characterized by both

“common attributes that make up an overarching culture typical of the entire organization,” but also may “differ perceptibly” from other subcultures in the organization (Cameron & Quinn, p. 148). In the study reported in this article, the researchers engaged staff members in light of performance measures in seven organizational areas. This approach allowed for analysis of the data from both the perspective of the whole of the organization’s staff, and the distinct subcultures in these seven areas.

Cameron and Quinn’s (2005) Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument contains six content dimensions that capture elements of organizational culture. One of these dimensions is “the leadership style and approach” (p. 151). In the present study, the main leadership style the researchers studied was the servant leadership style that characterized the organizational divisions studied. Because of this focus in the study, the following section provides a brief overview of the servant leadership literature informing the present study.

## **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf introduced the term “servant leadership” in 1970 to the business world in his now famous essay, “The Servant as Leader.” Key theorists and researchers have engaged Greenleaf’s discussion in the years since. One of those authors was Spears (1995) who set out to distill a list of the characteristics of a servant leader based on Greenleaf’s work. Spears felt that Greenleaf’s essay worked well for those who were conceptual thinkers but that for some a more concrete list would be helpful. His ten characteristics are: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2010).

Another author who further developed Greenleaf’s work was Senge (1995). Senge felt that servant leadership was the best leadership style to engage in systems thinking. Senge, who found Greenleaf’s essay both simple and profound, wrote that “The Servant as Leader” offers a “new basis for ‘health’” (Senge, 1995, p. 234). Rather than just correct a problem, servant leadership lays the groundwork for an approach that seeks to understand what makes permanent change difficult and addresses the underlying forces that cause the problem. In an earlier article, Senge develops another key thought, building a case that the organizations that will have the greatest success in today’s rapidly changing environment will be learning organizations. Senge describes a learning organization as one where the leader designs, teaches, is a steward and creates a shared vision (Senge, 1990). Senge’s description of a leader in a learning organization is best met by a servant leader.

In the late 1990s Laub (2003) further explored the concept of leader as servant and set out to answer three key questions: “How is servant leadership defined? What are the characteristics of servant leadership? Can the presence of these characteristics within organizations be assessed through a written instrument?” His creation of the Servant

Organizational Leadership Assessment (SOLA) provided for the first time an assessment tool to determine the leadership culture of an organization (1999). In the opening remarks of his dissertation, Laub gives a possible explanation for why servant leadership has increasingly changed the landscape of leadership.

In the past 25 years we have seen a dramatic increase of women in the workplace, a growing ethnic and racial diversity and a desire to see the workplace serve as a learning environment for personal growth and fulfillment. These changes, among others, have prompted a reexamination of the effectiveness of the traditional leadership model of power and authority. The traditional model has held prominence since the beginning of time, and our history is written around the use and abuse of leadership power. There is a growing call for new leadership thinking and a new vision of organizations that place service to others over self-interest and self-promotion (1999, p. 3).

After Laub's (1999) work, empirical research demonstrating the effectiveness of servant leadership grew. One popular treatment is Collins' (2001) work in *Good to Great*. Although Collins landed on the language of level 5 leaders to capture a leader who combines humility with fierce resolve, Collins acknowledges in his work that he considered the language of servant leaders to describe these effective leaders. Other studies analyzed servant leadership's impact on various organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010), job satisfaction (Irving, 2005; Mayer, Bardes, & Piccolo, 2008), firm performance (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012), and team performance (Hu & Liden, 2011; Irving & Longbotham, 2007). Such literature provides good reason to believe servant leadership will contribute to performance in an organization composed primarily of millennial staff as well.

### **Biblical Leadership Style and Servant Leadership**

Because this study was conducted within the context of a campus ministry, biblical perspectives on leadership style and servant leadership are also relevant to the organization and study. The authors are persuaded that servant leadership is not only an effective contemporary leadership practice based on the growing body of empirical studies, but also historically and biblically grounded. Noting the biblical roots of servant leadership, Sun (2013) argues that the core servant identity dimensions of calling, humility, empathy, and agape love are often used in Christian literature and the Bible. Sun further notes that "the best known example of a leader governed by servant identity is the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 549).

In Scripture the leadership style presented by Jesus is that of a servant. In Mark 10, after arguing about who is the greatest, the sons of Zebedee ask if they might sit in places of honor next to Jesus. His answer enlightens his followers on his view of authority, power and leadership.

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45 TNIV)

Jesus contrasts the leadership practices of the Gentiles to the service orientation emphasized in this passage. Two words are used in this passage to describe the leadership of the Gentile rulers. The first is *katakuriuo*, which translates to lord against, that is to control or subjugate. The second is *katexousiaz*, which means to have or wield full privilege over someone. Juxtaposed against this description, Jesus tells his disciples that if they desire to be great or first they must be the servant or even the slave of all. He then reminds them that even he did not come to be served, but to serve and sacrifice his life for many.

The model of leadership presented here by Jesus is a rebuff of a hierarchical or autocratic model. Leadership is not about honor or position but about serving the needs of the follower. Leaders should be sacrificial in their leadership, and with strong language Jesus makes it clear that His followers are to take their example of leadership style from his own example of servant identity.

## **Leadership and College Students**

The challenges previously noted in this article by Laub (2003) are present on today's college campus. Unfortunately, there has been little research done on the leadership preferences of college students with the exception of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Student LPI) developed by Kouzes and Posner in 1998 and updated in 2006. Kouzes and Posner found that most leadership development programs for students came from the business world, so they created an inventory of student leadership behaviors and actions. These behaviors were categorized into five leadership practices: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Posner, 2004).

The five categories were arrived at by asking students to describe their actions and behaviors when they are at "their personal best as leaders" (Posner, 2004, p. 443). The results give us a better understanding of what leadership style works on the college campus. These results may also be an indicator of what style will be more effective in the future because today's college student will be tomorrow's leader. As servant leadership emphasizes follower-oriented practices, dimensions like encouraging the heart and enabling others to act in Kouzes and Posner's model are consistent with a servant leadership approach.

Additional research on millennials and leadership that was more limited in scope was conducted by Nordbye (2015). Nordbye found that 85 percent of students in a college ministry gave servant leadership as their preferred leadership style to work under. The respondents chose from self-typing paragraphs describing autocratic, paternalistic, servant and Laissez-faire leadership styles. Additionally, respondents indicated they were willing to sacrifice pay and benefits to work with a boss they liked and to work at an organization that complemented their personal values and social practices (Nordbye, 2015).

## Millennial Generation and Leadership Style

In the campus ministry that is the focus of this study, 10% of the staff are in college and 58% are under age 35. Growth in campus ministry is closely tied to student leadership development for two key reasons. A completely staff-led campus ministry is limited in size to the number of staff leading. With strong student leadership a campus ministry can grow considerably larger, as student leaders assume many of the leadership needs of the group. The second reason student leadership is important is that the majority of new staff come from student leaders. For this reason it is important to investigate which leadership culture is most effective with college students and organizations serving college students.

Though research on effective leadership styles among college students is rare, there is an abundance of books and articles on the preferences and traits of the millennial generation. By comparing these characteristics for millennials with current leadership styles there is evidence that some styles are more attractive to millennials than others and by implication will be more successful with them. The millennial generation was born on or after 1982 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They began attending college in 2000 and hit the workforce about 2004 and will continue to do so until 2022 (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Beinhoff (2011) argues that millennials “hold opinions, attitudes, values, and technological competencies that are very different from the generations that preceded them” (p. 2225). In light of this, a careful evaluation of which leadership styles fit best with the millennial generation’s characteristics and preferences is critical. What follows are some of the major descriptions given for millennials and a comparison of those against four common leadership styles: autocratic, paternalistic, servant and laissez-faire.

For this comparison, the description of the first three leadership styles will be those of Laub (2003). First, *autocratic* leadership is one of “self-rule” where the organization exists to serve the needs and interests of the leader first. This often leads to the oppression of the worker to satisfy the wishes of the leader. Second, *paternalistic* leadership is one of leaders seeing themselves as parent to those led. This parental view of leadership encourages the led to take on the role of children. This leads to an unhealthy transactional leadership that operates more on compliance rather than true individual motivation. Most organizations find themselves operating within this understanding of leadership. Third, *servant* leadership is characterized by the six key areas of servant leadership noted below in Table 1. This view sees leadership as serving the needs of those led over the self-interest of the leader. In this kind of organization all people are encouraged to lead and serve. This

produces a community of care where the needs of all are served and the organization is able to put its energy into fulfilling its shared mission.

Laub (2003, p. 3) describes the six key areas in the following chart (See Table 1):

Table 1  
*Laub’s (2003) Servant Leadership Characteristics*

Characteristics	Associated Behaviors
Values People	- By believing in people
	- By serving others’ needs before his or her own
	- By receptive, non-judgmental listening
Develops People	- By providing opportunities for learning and growth
	- By modeling appropriate behavior
	- By building up others through encouragement and affirmation
Builds Community	- By building strong personal relationships
	- By working collaboratively with others
	- By valuing the differences of others
Displays Authenticity	- By being open and accountable to others
	- By a willingness to learn from others
	- by maintaining integrity and trust
Provides Leadership	- By envisioning the future
	- By taking initiative
	- By clarifying goals
Shares Leadership	- By facilitating a shared vision
	- By sharing power and releasing control
	- By sharing status and promoting others

The fourth leadership style that will be used for comparison is laissez-faire and was added to Laub’s styles by Wong and Page in a paper at the same 2003 Roundtable conference. Wong and Page (2003) describes laissez-faire as a leadership style that is hands-off and has the effect of being detached, weak and disinterested.

The first defining characteristic of millennials contrasted against the above four leadership styles is that they trust that the organization will act in their best interest. According to a study of 800 business students from four universities, 60% agreed with the statement, “I trust authority figures to act in my best interest” (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010, p. 215). This trust is based on a belief that the system is equitable and that hard work and positive results will be rewarded and encouraged. According to Hershatter and Epstein, at its roots is the way millennials have been raised. Juxtaposing this trait against leadership styles the best fit is servant leadership. Autocratic does not act in the follower’s best interest but in the leader’s best interest. Laissez-faire acts essentially when a problem arises but not proactively in the best interest of the follower. Paternalistic does care for the follower but

as the name implies it is in a parental manner and the ultimate goal is not the development of the follower, as it is with servant leadership. As Laub (2003) points out, the relationship is intrinsically unhealthy and tends more toward compliance. According to Hershatter and Epstein, younger workers tend to want to choose “the specific tasks in which they will engage and the conditions under which they will engage in them” (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010, p. 217). This added understanding of expectations on the part of millennials toward the organization indicates that though paternalistic leadership cares for the follower, the parental type control will come into conflict with millennials.

Millennials value teamwork, community and collaboration (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Servant leadership is the style most aligned with these three core values. Spears (1995) states that servant leadership is based on teamwork and community, and goes on to say that it is a model that attempts to involve others in the decision making process. Spears elaborates, “Today there is a growing recognition of the need for a more team-oriented approach to leadership and management. Greenleaf’s writings on the subject of servant-leadership helped to get this movement started, and his views have had a profound and growing effect” (p. 2). Laub (2003) lists building community as one of his six descriptors of servant leadership and specifically states that working collaboratively with others is part of this process.

A recognized trait of millennials, which is sometimes viewed as negative, is their need for guidance, reassurance and direction (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). This can be frustrating to managers who may feel they must spend a large amount of time assisting millennials to function well at work. Instead of the millennial helping with the workload, the millennial may actually initially increase the workload. Though this may be draining to any leadership style, only the servant leadership style has the development of the follower as a key tenet to its philosophy of leadership. Greenleaf put it best himself in his statement that, “The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 27). Millennials need assistance in becoming more autonomous and again servant leadership holds this as a basic precept.

Not only do millennials often require a high degree of guidance and reassurance, they generally have an expectation that organizations will accommodate them (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles have nothing in their tenets to address this expectation and even if the paternalistic style might see accommodation as positive, it is done in a paternalistic manner which in and of itself might be distasteful to millennials. With a basic premise of serving followers, servant leadership is best suited to accommodate the needs of millennials in the workplace.

The expected and desired relationship with the workplace that millennials have is different from previous generations. They often expect to bring about change through their work and for that reason the values of the organization and its authenticity can be extremely important to millennials (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Covey describes the process of



leadership alignment as defining the organization's vision, mission and values and then making sure that all the structures and systems reflect those three (Covey, 1989). This approach is often important to millennials because it speaks to the authenticity and integrity of the organization. Laub (2003) lists authenticity as another one of the six elements of servant leadership, reinforcing that servant leadership is a well-suited style for millennials and organizations serving millennials.

Comparing each of the four styles to the needs and preferences of millennials yields several observations. Although the *paternalistic* style of leadership may address the desire of millennials for more guidance, there is also a limitation in that this leadership approach will not be attractive to millennials desiring involvement in decision making processes. A *Laissez-faire* leadership approach does not address the needs of millennials either, but arguably is a style that at least does not interfere with preferences of this generation. Though there are elements of compatibility for millennials in these two styles, these leadership approaches are not an overall good fit for millennials.

It is difficult to find anything attractive for millennials in the *autocratic* style because the autocratic approach to leadership is not focused on the good of the worker but rather that of the leader. This top-down, and often heavy-handed, leadership approach goes against the needs and preferences of millennials. Their high need for guidance, along with their expectations of the organization, are not met in the autocratic leadership approach.

Considering the four leadership styles, *servant leadership* seems to best address the preferences and expectations of millennials. Though there may be limited research conducted on leadership style preferences among millennials, based on a comparison of millennial traits and characteristics and common leadership styles it may be proposed that servant leadership is the best fit. In this study—a study conducted in an organization staffed primarily by millennials and serving a millennial population—organizational performance measures are examined alongside the leadership culture in the seven organizational divisions. This will provide relevant data for considering the relationship between organizational performance and leadership culture among a dominantly millennial population.

## METHOD

### Organizational and Sample Characteristics

The campus ministry that is the focus of this research is broken down into seven areas with an area supervisor responsible for leading each division. Following its launch in 1965, the ministry was comprised of independent campus ministries that had little connection to one another other than a national student conference held each summer. For the first 15 years the ministry grew but by the 1980s it began to decline in ministries, staff and student numbers.

In 1992 the ministry was restructured into regions with a supervisor appointed to oversee the ministries and facilitate expansion. Following this structural change, the national ministry began to grow overall but that growth was not uniform. Some regions saw growth, some stayed the same size and others declined. When one region lost its supervisor it steadily declined until only one campus ministry remained. However, the new region to which that supervisor was relocated also saw decline. In 2005 the remaining four regions were subdivided into seven areas in an attempt to shrink the geographical area size for which each supervisor was responsible to oversee. Once again the growth of each area varied significantly. What remained constant was the growth or lack of growth pattern for each individual supervisor. This provides historical rationale for believing leadership culture relates to organizational performance.

Though there can be many contributing factors to the expansion of an organization, the consistency of growth for some regions and areas and the lack of growth for others indicated that leadership style was an influence. This was particularly apparent in those regions and the areas that had maintained the same supervisor for nearly two decades. In no instance had an area grown significantly and then begun to shrink under the same supervisor.

## **Data Collection**

The evaluation tool for this research was self-typing paragraphs. This instrument was chosen because of accuracy and for the ease of use. According to James and Hatten in a study done in 1995, self-typing paragraphs prove as accurate as other models of assessment and are desirable because of their ease of use.

In 2003 Laub presented a paper at Regent's Servant Leadership Research Roundtable where he noted that historically servant leadership has been contrasted to autocratic leadership. The weakness in this approach is that in most instances the alternative to servant leadership is not autocratic but paternalistic leadership. Laub then specifies three categories: autocratic, paternalistic and servant.

For this project, four paragraphs were written based on the four leadership styles Wong and Page used in their 2003 typology of leadership styles (Wong & Page, 2003). Wong and Page used Laub's (2003) three categories, autocratic, paternalistic and servant and added laissez-faire as a fourth. Prior to the appointment of regional supervisors, the organizational leadership style of the campus ministry being researched was essentially laissez-faire. For this reason using Wong and Page's four leadership styles, which included laissez-faire, was preferable over using only the three utilized by Laub.

The next step was to write the paragraphs in language that was not pejorative. When these paragraphs were sent out, the labels were removed for fear that the terms might be understood in a negative light. For clarification purposes they are included here. The

rewritten paragraphs were:

**Autocratic** - Leadership decisions are made primarily by those at the top and other staff are rarely consulted nor are their needs considered. Decisions are made which appear to primarily benefit the leader. Staff are expected to follow instructions even if they strongly disagree with them.

**Paternalistic** - Leadership decisions are made primarily by those at the top and staff have limited input into decisions. Leaders feel they know what is best for the ministry and make their decision based on that assessment. Staff are encouraged and cared for by the leadership even if they don't feel that they have much input into decisions.

**Servant** - Leadership decisions are made by the leader or staff best qualified to make the decision. Leaders express a high concern for the wellbeing of the staff and function more as partners in the ministry. Leaders are respected and model good leadership.

**Laissez-Faire** - There is little leadership for the area and staff are left to work independently. Leaders step in only when there is a serious problem or need.

All staff who had been on campus for at least three months were sent the paragraphs. Those removed from the list had been appointed less than three months or had been securing funding and not working directly with their area leadership. Those on campus less than three months were not sent paragraphs under the assumption that their exposure to the ministry was too brief for them to give an accurate assessment of the area leadership style. In addition to current staff, any staff who had resigned from staff in the previous six months were included. The staff were told that their individual responses would be seen only by the national supervisor and that their confidentiality would be protected. Six staff had no area supervisor and therefore reported directly to the national supervisor. The results of those six were removed from the responses, because those staff might not be completely candid in their responses to their supervisor. After these adjustments were made a total of 57 possible respondents were left assessing seven different areas.

Reminder emails clarified that the staff were to rate the leadership style of their area and not their own personal style on campus. This was done to address a few responses requesting clarification. The option was given to all staff to change their answers if they had mistakenly evaluated their own style or misread the question.

To determine the growth of each area the staff and ministry numbers for each area were analyzed for five and a half years. The staff of this ministry fill out six-month reports twice a year. Three categories were created: growing, plateaued and shrinking. Growing areas were those where the ministries in the area had increased by four and the staff numbers by six or more in the five-and-a-half-year period being measured. Plateaued areas ended the time period with the same number of

ministries and had only a staff increase of four or less. Shrinking areas lost one or two ministries and gained less than two staff. The emphasis was placed heaviest on ministry expansion because some staff appointments are short term with no potential for that person to ever plant or even direct a ministry. These staff help their specific ministry but will not be able to directly contribute to the growth of an area.

## Data Analysis and Findings

After tabulating results from organizational reports for five years, of the seven areas, two fell within the growing category, two plateaued and three shrinking (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*National Campus Ministry Growth and Area Leadership Style (N=50)*

<b>Area</b>	<b>5 Year Staff Numbers</b>	<b>5 Year Ministry Numbers</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Servant Leadership</b>
<b>Growing 1</b>	Increase of 11	Increase of 4	13	92%
<b>Growing 2</b>	Increase of 6	Increase of 4	11	100%
<b>Plateaued 1</b>	Increase of 4	Same	6	83%
<b>Plateaued 2</b>	Increase of 3	Same	5	80%
<b>Shrinking 1</b>	Increase of 2	Decrease of 1	6	83%
<b>Shrinking 2</b>	Increase of 2	Decrease of 2	5	80%
<b>Shrinking 3</b>	Increase of 1	Decrease of 2	4	50%

Of the 57 staff surveyed for organizational leadership culture, 50 responded with answers and one abstained stating that the survey was not truly anonymous because the person collecting the responses knew him. Six staff failed to respond to the survey and did not give a reason for their nonparticipation. Of the missing responses, only two were currently working with the ministry. Six former staff were sent surveys with only two responding. As a general rule, former staff are more likely to be candid in their responses, especially if those responses are negative, because they no longer work for the organization or have working relationships that may be damaged by negative feedback.

Only three staff currently employed at the time of the study failed to return a response or abstained from responding. The area with only four staff received responses from all staff in the area. One area with only six staff received only five responses and one area with seven received six. The other missing responses were from the two largest areas with one missing three responses out of 16 surveys sent and one receiving ten out of twelve surveys sent. The 50 responses out of the 57 total staff fell within the guidelines established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for research within finite populations. Though an attempt was made to broaden the number of staff surveyed by including six former staff, the final result was that 48 current staff out of 51 responded making the results fairly comprehensive. Based on Krejcie's and Morgan's guidelines, the results of the 48 will be representative of the entire population of current staff.

Forty-three staff making up 86% of the staff responded that servant leadership was the organizational leadership style of their area. Four staff or eight percent chose Laissez-Faire and three staff or six percent chose paternalistic. No respondents selected autocratic. Autocratic leadership style is the least desirable style for millennials, therefore it is not surprising that no staff selected this style as operating in any area.

Breaking down organizational leadership culture according to the growth taxonomy listed above found that the overall percentage of staff who chose the paragraph describing a servant style was highest in those areas that were growing. In the area experiencing the greatest growth, amounting to eleven additional staff and four additional ministries, the area leadership style was 92% servant with one person giving an alternate paragraph of parental. In the other area categorized as growing, the result was 100% servant. This area saw six additional staff and four additional ministries. The five areas categorized as plateaued or shrinking had responses from four to six staff and the results were between 80-83% servant style except for the smallest area which came out only 50% servant. This area had an increase of one staff and decrease of two ministries over the five and a half years surveyed. In the other two areas categorized as shrinking, both had one respondent describe the style as laissez-faire. The same was true for the two areas categorized as plateaued.

For those staff responding with an answer other than servant leadership, there was no clear connection of years with the organization or gender. Four had been with the ministry less than five years and three had been with the organization around 10 years. Likewise, there was no connection found with gender. Four were men and three were women. Considering age, four of the seven non-servant responses were 21 to 26; the remaining were 31 to 46. Though those under 30 who responded with a non-servant answer were around the same percentage as the overall staff numbers under 30, it is interesting that staff over 50 all responded with a servant answer. This may be explained by different expectations. Older people are more likely to have worked in organizations where employees were expected to follow directions and little was done to serve their needs or take into account their emotions (Parolini, 2005). For these older staff, any element of servant leadership may have been adequate to prompt a servant leadership response. For younger staff, the converse may be true in that any lack of a servant leadership style will evoke a non-servant leadership answer. They expect servant leadership and where it is weak they are more likely to choose another leadership style as operating in their area.

All seven area supervisors responded and all seven listed servant leadership as the style of their area. Because they were evaluating the leadership style of the area in which they are the primary leader, their responses might be considered more subjective or biased. The tendency to self-enhance by over-claiming strengths or accomplishments is a recognized problem in any self-evaluation tool (Paulhus, Harms, Bruce & Lysy, 2003). This may well not be a conscious decision but the result of self-deception. Area supervisors may have read the paragraphs, determined which leadership style they desired to describe

themselves and chosen that style rather than the style closest to their actual style. Because of this, the researchers ran Chi-square and Spearman's rho analyses using the data set of 43 non-area supervisors (findings reported below).

Though staff were asked to assess the leadership culture of the area, the leadership style of the leader, in this case the area supervisor, would influence responses. The presence, or lack thereof, of servant leadership traits in a leader is reflected in a follower's perception of whether or not an organization practices servant leadership (Parolini, 2005). Because the area supervisor's leadership style is so closely tied to the leadership culture of the area and since the area supervisor's response may be biased in their assessment of themselves, it seems prudent to at least consider the data with their responses removed.

When the responses of the area supervisors are taken out of the data, the servant leadership percentage goes down. This change drops those areas with six respondents to 80% servant leadership and those with five to 75% servant leadership. For the area with four responses the percentage drops to 33% servant leadership. For the number one growing area the percentage drops only .7% and the second has no change because the respondents returned a 100% servant leadership response. Given the possible bias of the area supervisors in assessing essentially themselves, these percentages may be more true to the reality of the leadership style and demonstrate a greater variance between growing, plateaued and shrinking areas.

In addition to the above analysis, the researchers conducted Chi-Square and Spearman's rho analyses. From this examination, the researchers identified several statistically significant findings. These analyses were conducted on the non-supervisor staff population. Table 3 provides an overview of the statistically significant Spearman's rho correlations.

**Table 3**  
***Spearman's rho Correlations (N=43)***

	Servant Leadership Culture	
	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
Area Growth	.335	.028
5 Year Ministry #s	.357	.019
5 Year Staff Growth #s	.324	.034

Drawing from Table 3, noteworthy and statistically significant correlations include (a) a positive correlation with servant leadership and area growth, (b) a positive correlation with servant leadership and five-year ministry numbers, and (c) a positive correlation with servant leadership and five-year staff numerical growth.

In addition to the Spearman's rho correlation analysis, Chi-square analyses were conducted in order to examine the significance of the relationship between the leadership culture of an area and key organizational measures of area performance. The researchers

identified statistically significant findings with each of these measures of area performance (see Table 4). Chi-square analyses were also conducted on the relationship between the leadership style of an area and age of staff, years on staff and age of area leader. No statistically significant findings were found in the relationship between leadership culture and age, years on staff and age of leader.

For these analyses, the mean was calculated for each of the associated variables. For instance, the mean for Area Growth was 2.23. Reported numbers above this were labeled as 1 for a growing area. Reported numbers below this were labeled as 0 for an area not growing. These variables were then tested against whether an area was categorized as a servant leadership culture or not (paternalistic, autocratic, or laissez-faire). The researchers include the statistically significant findings here in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Chi-Square Tests (N=43)*

	Servant Leadership Culture		
	Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Pearson Chi-Square	Fisher's Exact Test
Area Growth	.325	.033	.046
5 Year Ministry #s	.325	.033	.046
5 Year Staff Growth #s	.325	.033	.046

The Chi-Square analyses confirm the significance of the associations found in the Spearman's rho correlation analysis. This is important because it confirms that the leadership culture of an area is not statistically independent of area growth and five-year performance measures in the current study. Said positively, area growth and performance is statistically dependent on area servant leadership culture.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this research, it appears that even a small deviation from servant leadership can have a negative impact on the growth of campus ministry. That four of the five areas categorized as plateaued or shrinking fell within the 80-83% of the responses being servant leadership and the fifth, which was the area with the greatest decline, had only 50% respond servant leadership seems to support that servant leadership has a significant impact on campus ministry. Combining the two areas experiencing growth, there was only one deviation from a servant leadership response despite the fact that the combined responses amounted to 24 of the 50 responses. For the plateaued and shrinking areas the responses other than servant totaled six of the 26 responses.

The variance between paternalistic and laissez-faire responses when servant leadership was not chosen was also intriguing. In the four areas that fell within 80-83% servant leadership, the leadership style chosen was laissez-faire. This might suggest that the area supervisors were too hands-off in their leadership style and needed to adjust their leadership to provide more care and involvement for their staff. The fact that these areas still came out as 80-83% servant leadership suggests that it was not a major tendency but impactful just the same.

In the one area that scored only 50% servant leadership, the results were even more conclusive with 50% responding that paternalistic leadership was the style of the area. This area was the smallest area and had lost two ministries in the previous five years. At only a 50% response for servant leadership rather than 80-83%, the results indicate that the leadership style was at best a blend of servant and paternalistic. This was in contrast to the other plateaued or shrinking areas which might have been considered mostly servant leadership but perhaps too hands-off. Because the variance from servant leadership was higher, it mitigates a conclusion that paternalistic leadership is less effective than laissez-faire in campus ministry. It may simply be that the farther a leadership style diverges from servant leadership the more profound the negative impact on growth will be. Given that most businesses today practice paternalistic leadership (Laub, 2003), this does at least raise the question of whether the next generation of followers will remain in organizations that continue strongly paternalistic leadership practices.

Given how important those under 30 are to the future of business alone, it is noteworthy that there is not more research on which leadership styles are most effective in organizations working with this population. By comparing their generation's traits to current leadership styles it is arguable that the servant leadership style best fits the characteristics of the millennial generation and for organizations serving this population. This may in part explain why servant leadership practice has been growing, for as more and more of the millennial generation enter the workforce their influence on organizations and corporations will increase.

When Jesus commands his disciples to be servants in their leadership, he does so as a moral imperative that should define those who follow him. He does not elaborate on the advantage of this style for those who are leaders or to the group or organization. It is doubtful that his listeners saw any benefit beyond that to the follower. What is apparent from this research is that the benefit of servant leadership extends beyond the follower to the organization as a whole. So while servant leadership is a moral imperative for Christians, it is also pragmatically advantageous for campus organizations to practice it as a leadership style. This conclusion may extend beyond campus ministry to any organization that works heavily with millennials.

Regarding the Spearman's rho and Chi-square findings, the noteworthy and statistically significant findings included in Tables 3 and 4 further confirm the relationship between servant leadership and the positive performance of ministry areas. Servant



leadership was positively correlated with overall area growth and five-year staff and ministry performance numbers. This provides an important affirmation that servant leadership is positively associated with important measures of organizational effectiveness. In this study, measures of organizational performance are statistically dependent on the servant leadership of an organizational unit.

### **Study Strengths and Limitations**

Overall, the study has important strengths to note. First, it was conducted in a live organizational context both staffed by a majority of millennials and serving a millennial population. This allowed the researchers to explore the theoretical relationship between servant leadership and millennials, and then test to see if servant leadership was a preferred approach among an organization serving this population. Second, because this study targeted specific measures of organizational performance, the study provides important insight not simply on leadership style preference, but the contribution leadership makes to overall performance.

While the study has noteworthy strengths, it is important to identify related limitations as well. Though the instructions sent with the self-typing paragraphs stated that the assessment was to be of the leadership style of the area and not their own personal style, some staff requested clarification. The option was then given to all staff to change their answers if they had mistakenly evaluated their own style or misread the question.

In the self-typing paragraphs the final sentence for servant leadership read, “Leaders are respected and model good leadership.” The use of the phrase “good leadership” for this leadership style and the absence of the phrase’s use for the other styles had the potential to bias the responses. If staff determined that servant leadership was the best response and were concerned with giving the desired response of the leadership, they may have chosen this style over the one they actually felt best described the area leadership style.

Another possible confusion with selecting the leadership style might occur where a follower prefers a paternalistic or laissez-faire leadership style. In this case the follower may influence the working relationship between leader and follower especially in the unstructured environment of campus ministry, which involves setting and completing goals rather than a close office type environment where tasks are assigned and carried out.

One staff person felt the survey was not anonymous and chose to abstain from making an assessment. It must be acknowledged that others may have felt the same and chose to give the response that appeared to be the most flattering, rather than abstain and risk being perceived as contrary. As previously noted, the instructions clarified that individual responses would be seen only by the national supervisor and that their confidentiality would be protected.

Additionally, although the sample size was representative of the organization's staff population, it was a low total number from which to work for analysis. To help address this, the relationship between organizational performance and leadership style was examined through multiple analyses. Similarly, the difference in the size of the areas lent itself to less balance in results. One area had 16 staff and another had four. Within the smaller areas, one non-servant response made up a greater percentage than in the larger areas. While this challenges the findings when looked at by area, this is one of the reasons the researchers also looked at the data across the whole of the staff. The Spearman's rho and Chi-square analyses were employed as a way to evaluate the impact of leadership style beyond an area-specific level of analysis.

It also is important to recognize that leadership style does not exist in a vacuum. The followers of an area and the relationship of the leader and follower, as noted by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, may influence leadership dynamics in an organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The growth within an area is not only influenced by the leadership style but also by the followers and their relationship to the leader among other factors. So, though this study contrasted and compared growth to leadership culture, there are other factors that might influence growth such as follower motivation, expectations and competence, and the strength of the working relationship between the leader and the follower. In one of the shrinking areas, some staff avoid interference on the part of the area supervisor. Such a tense working relationship undoubtedly has a negative impact on growth. Though the area supervisor attempts to recruit staff, the rest of the staff have done little to support that goal, likely due to the above noted factors.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Though limited in scope to one organization, the present study indicates that a positive relationship exists between servant leadership and organizational performance. Larger studies, and studies in other contexts, would help to reinforce these findings. The population focused upon in this study was campus ministers. This population serves millennials in the college environment, and many of these campus ministers are categorized as millennials. Further research needs to be done to determine if the connection between servant leadership and growth exists with populations serving other generations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance in one organization. The organization studied primarily works with millennials. Because of this, the project contrasted the characteristics of the millennial generation against four leadership styles: autocratic, paternalistic, servant and laissez-faire. A study of the relevant literature suggested that the style most compatible with millennials was servant. Ministry and staff numbers for a national campus ministry were analyzed to ascertain which areas were growing, plateaued or shrinking. The staff of these same areas were asked to select a leadership style representative of the leadership in their area. Their

responses were compared to the growth of each area. The areas where servant leadership was selected in the highest percentages were also the areas that were growing. This finding was bolstered by the findings of the Spearman's rho and Chi-square analyses. Both analyses confirmed a statistically significant association between area performance and the servant leadership of an area. The study confirms that organizational performance was statistically dependent on a servant leadership style, and provides important insight into factors associated with organizational effectiveness.

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