



# The Relationship between Teacher Perception of Principal Servant Leadership Behavior and Teacher Job Satisfaction

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined the extent to which teachers' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership behaviors correlate with teacher job satisfaction. The population included all high school teachers in the state's public and private high schools. The final sample size consisted of 76 teachers. The study utilized two separate survey instruments to collect perceptions of principal servant leadership characteristics and job satisfaction data. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between principal servant leadership behavior and teachers' job satisfaction. Results indicated a statistically significant relationship between principals' perceived servant leadership behavior and teacher job satisfaction. Finally, none of the demographic factors of teacher gender, years in education, years working with same principal, highest degree held, or school size showed a statistically significant relationships with teacher job satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Principal Leadership, Teacher Job Satisfaction

Teachers in the United States are growing increasingly less satisfied with their jobs. In fact, teacher job satisfaction has dropped to its lowest level in 25 years: “from 62% to 39% very satisfied, including five percentage points since last year” (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2012, p. 6). Correspondingly, teacher stress levels have risen 15 percentage points since 1985 (Strauss, 2013, p. 3). Increasing dissatisfaction does not bode well for teacher retention, which has been a focus of professional study across the nation, and continues to be a primary concern for the profession (Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret, 2004).

Job-satisfied teachers perform better in the classroom, which can lead to increased student achievement (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006). However, the literature regarding teacher job satisfaction points toward a number of factors influencing teachers’ decisions to leave the profession, including a lack of inclusion in building-level decision making, stress due in part to increased accountability, scarcity of time to work with fellow teachers, lack of opportunities for leadership, negative school atmosphere, and inadequate principal support (Bitterstaff, 2012; Markow et al., 2012).

Many of the factors influencing teachers to leave the profession are not necessarily outside the control of school officials: “...school leaders are capable of promoting teacher satisfaction both intrinsically and extrinsically” (Bogler & Nir, 2012, p. 302). A principal’s management or leadership styles can make a great difference in a teacher’s experience in the school, and are reported as one of the most often-cited reasons for dissatisfaction (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Public schools “can pour all the money in the world into training new crops of teachers and pass mandates to assure high quality, but if schools do not have leaders who can cultivate and retain great teachers, the effort is amiss” (Shaw, 2014, p. 106).

Studies of transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and instructional leadership models in both private and public organizations have resulted in large volumes of data. However, servant leadership is a model not yet studied as thoroughly as other modern leadership styles (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003, p. 7). In his 1977 book *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, Robert Greenleaf discusses the societal emergence of a new moral principle related to leadership. Greenleaf (1977) believes, “Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. *Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants*” (p. 23).

According to current literature, a teacher’s perception of controllable, leadership-related factors is closely tied to job satisfaction, though few studies in current literature attempt to link a specific leadership style to teacher job satisfaction (Bitterstaff, 2012). Further, Bogler and Nir (2012) found promoting employee autonomy and authority through empowerment has positive outcomes on employee job satisfaction. It then seems fitting to investigate whether the application of the specific leadership approach of servant leadership may relate to teachers’ job satisfaction levels. This study examined the extent

to which teachers' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership behaviors correlate with teacher job satisfaction.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership and teacher job satisfaction?
2. Which specific characteristics of servant leaders are most highly related to teacher job satisfaction?
3. Which specific characteristics of servant leaders are most highly related to teachers' intrinsic job satisfaction?
4. Which specific characteristics of servant leaders are most highly related to teachers' extrinsic job satisfaction?
5. To what extent do the demographic factors of teacher gender, years in education, years working with the same principal, highest degree held, and school size relate to teacher job satisfaction?

## **The Study**

In an ideal world, teachers would want to come to work every day, and principals would use the most effective leadership tools to influence and motivate their staff members. In an effort to help the educational community move toward this goal, this study focused on teacher job satisfaction and its relationship with servant leadership, which is a style of leadership in the "relatively new field of positive organizational behavior" (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1228).

Leadership makes a substantial difference in the climate and function of an organization. The literature documents strong evidence for correlations between quality leadership and organizational effectiveness. Schools are included in this organizational discussion and benefit from strong, effective leaders. Areas which are significantly linked to leadership in schools include school climate, clarity in school mission and goals, teacher attitudes, classroom routines and practices of teachers, instruction and curricular organization, and students' ability to access education (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 5). In an effort to add to the literature on the topic of servant leadership, this study investigated the relationship between servant leadership behaviors and teacher job satisfaction.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When attempting to determine the relationship between teacher perception of principal servant leadership behavior and teacher job satisfaction, the researchers viewed this study through the lens of Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

### **Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation**

Abraham Maslow (1943) published *A Theory of Human Motivation*, which was an effort to create a "positive theory of motivation" (p. 371) to explain human motivational factors. Maslow believed that humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs. In his work, Maslow encourages a number of shifts in thought, including the concept of homeostasis, the importance of the esteem needs, which had previously been overlooked by popular theories, and the approach that motivation theory is human-centered, rather than animal-centered.

The primary human needs are physiological: air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. Maslow believed that when lacking in several needs, humans will first seek physiological need satisfaction: "A person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else" (Maslow, 1943, p. 373). Further, Maslow theorized that once the current level physiological need is met, another higher level, or "prepotent" need would begin to surface.

Maslow (1943) considered "safety needs" as the next class of needs in this hierarchy. Humans desire to be free from threats of bodily and emotional injury. Maslow described this category as a general human need for predictability and organization rather than unpredictability and disorganization. An individual focuses the most attention on the prepotent need. When a person does not feel safe and the situation is dire enough, the person "may be characterized as living almost for safety alone" (p. 376).

When a person has satisfied physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs, Maslow calls that individual "basically satisfied." The goal of basically satisfied people becomes self-actualization, which is a person's desire to be the self's best possible version. Maslow (1943) believed that basically satisfied people are not common in our society, which makes the study of self-actualization difficult (p. 381).

### **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory**

Maslow's hierarchy is widely accepted as the theoretical base of motivation theory but does not necessarily relate directly to the workplace as Herzberg's two-factor theory does (Herzberg, 1987). Frederick Herzberg, a contemporary of Maslow's, introduced a work-motivation and satisfaction theory, which runs parallel to Maslow's, but is slightly

different. One difference between Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory is that Herzberg believed that lower level factors such as safe working conditions, acceptable wages, and quality of supervision do not cause employee satisfaction. However, Herzberg theorized a lack of these basic workplace needs could cause employee dissatisfaction. Herzberg called these extrinsic factors "hygiene" or "maintenance" factors.

Herzberg's Two-Factor theory is not the only theoretical approach to motivation affecting the workplace, but it is the most well-known (Aziri, 2011, p. 81). Lewin's Force-Field Analysis (1951), Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964), and Locke's Goal-Setting Theory (1975) are among the more common motivation theories after Herzberg's; each differs with Herzberg's Two-Factor theory. These theories approach motivation as a more complicated phenomenon than does Herzberg's theory. Locke (1975) claims that a number of researchers have pointed out flaws in "the Herzberg controversy" (p. 469). Nevertheless, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of motivation aligns well to Maslow's theory, is the most used and widely-accepted workplace motivational theory; and will be used in this study.

## **TEACHER DISSATISFACTION**

One of the most alarming statistics related to the education system is the number of teachers leaving classrooms. In the United States, over 13% of teachers leave their classrooms each year, and between 40 and 50% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years (Haynes, 2014, p. 2; Ingersoll, 2003, p. 31).

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education revealed that nearly half the turnover in America's schools was due to transfer, not from teachers leaving the profession (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007, p. 3). Whether new teachers leave the profession altogether or leave one school to enter a new classroom, the lack of consistency has an influence on the school climate and student achievement. Teachers generally make gains in skill and confidence during their first four to five years in the classroom. When teachers divorce the education system or transfer to a different classroom, students suffer (Thornton, 2004).

### **Factors Affecting Teacher Job Satisfaction**

The literature points to a number of factors that affect teacher job satisfaction. Kim and Loadman (1994) found the following factors correlated to teacher satisfaction: positive interactions with students and peers, acceptable salary and working conditions, and opportunities for leadership within the school.

In a study of high school career and technical education teachers, increased empowerment correlated strongly with higher levels of teacher job satisfaction: as empowerment decreases, job satisfaction likewise decreases (Cypert, 2009; Schmidt,

2009). Bogler and Nir (2012) found that when the school values teacher contributions and is in touch with a teacher's well-being, those teachers "are more likely to be satisfied both intrinsically and extrinsically" (p. 301). Teachers feel most satisfied when their efforts are supportive of the goals and mission of the school, and contribute to the school's success (Klassen, 2010). Effective teachers emphasize student-teacher relationships and find the highest satisfaction in these relationships (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Marston, Courtney, & Brunetti, 2006). Conversely, Marston, Courtney and Brunetti (2006) determined that parent-teacher relationships are a strong source of dissatisfaction.

Barmby (2006) revealed that student behavior and teacher workload were important factors affecting job satisfaction. Marston, Courtney, and Brunetti (2006) found teachers cited a lack of community recognition and respect, shifting organizational expectations, low pay, and poor working conditions as challenges to satisfaction at work.

### **Teacher Job Satisfaction and Principal Support**

The literature cites administrative support as a key factor in a significant number of studies investigating teacher attrition and teacher job satisfaction. In a recent study of Midwestern teachers, the cause of teacher attrition among early-career teachers most frequently cited is insufficient levels of administrative support (Kolbe, 2014).

Singh and Manser (2008) found that school leaders who possess the skills to create positive school cultures are at the heart of successful educational organizations. School leaders must manage collective knowledge and share leadership, which can strengthen loyalty within the organization (Lin, 2007).

## **ENTER SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

The inspiration for servant leadership struck Greenleaf as he read about Leo, the central character in Hermann Hesse's book, *Journey to the East*. In the story, a group of men set off on a pilgrimage through real and imaginary lands to find ultimate truth. The group identifies Leo as the servant, who is tasked with unskilled, physical responsibilities while faithfully and happily supporting the men on their journey. At a critical point, Leo disappears, and the group falls into despair and turmoil. Members of the group disagree about the purpose and direction of the pilgrimage, and part ways.

At the conclusion of the story, near the end of his long life, the despondent narrator attempts to write the story of their journey. He realizes he is unable to pull the story together and seeks Leo, who seems disinterested in the narrator's questions. Leo reluctantly takes the narrator on a walk and brings him to a meeting of the League, to which the group had once belonged. It is at this point the narrator realizes that all the while Leo was the League's president—the servant, who was actually the leader.

Robert Greenleaf introduced the modern concept of servant leadership in his 1970 essay entitled “The Servant as Leader.” In his essay, Greenleaf points out that society is changing and beginning to view power and authority differently. “People are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways” (p. 3). In a statement, which was in stark contrast to power structures of his time, Greenleaf predicted that the emergence of a “new moral principle” will draw people toward leaders who “have been proven and trusted as servants” (p. 3).

While scholars view Greenleaf’s essay as the origin of the modern servant leadership movement, his essay does not clearly define servant leadership or characteristics of servant leadership, nor does it designate servant leadership as a specific or new style of leadership. Greenleaf admits to this in his seminal essay, “Serving and leading are still mostly intuition-based concepts in my thinking” (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 3). In fact, no consensus on a definition for servant leadership exists (Parris & Peachey, 2013; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010).

### **Key Characteristics of Servant Leadership**

“Servant leadership is viewed as leadership that is beneficial to organizations by awaking, engaging, and developing employees” (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1247). However, until recently, servant leadership had been neither well characterized nor operationalized. Numerous scholars have attempted to publish illustrative characteristics of servant leadership. In 1995, Spears was the first to use Greenleaf’s writings to create characteristics of servant leaders. These 10 often-quoted “essential elements of servant leadership” (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 250) are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to others’ growth, and building community. Others, including Laub (1999), and Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2003), offered interpretations of the literature and organized the characteristics into various categories.

Efforts to create valid, research-supported instruments to study servant leadership have caused academics considerable difficulty. Multiple research teams have attempted to create valid, multi-dimensional instruments but have been largely unsuccessful. “Servant leadership covers a wide range of behaviors which are hard to grasp in one or two constructs, and may sometimes seem difficult to disentangle” (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 250).

By studying over 1,500 leaders in Europe, van Dierendonck and Nuijten created a valid and reliable multi-dimensional servant leadership instrument in a 2010 study. This measure found the eight “dimensions” of servant leadership to be “standing back, humility, courage, empowerment, accountability, authenticity, forgiveness, and stewardship” (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 249).

This recent study of servant leader dimensions simplifies and coordinates many theories in a current, reliable, and validated format. Since these characteristics support the research of this study, it is vitally important to have a working understanding of each. The following paragraphs describe each of the eight dimensions used in this study's focus.

## **Accountability**

While this study focused on leadership in educational organizations, accountability in the educational sector is a relatively new concept. Literature regarding accountability examples yields a high number of historical and government-related examples, which will assist in illuminating the concept of accountability as it pertains to leadership in education.

Organizational systems require reliable processes, standardized protocols, and fair and equitable rules to function efficiently. Unscrupulous behavior among employees at any level jeopardizes an organization's goals and general welfare. The United States government's system of checks and balances creates a situation of public accountability. This public accountability is important enough to have a non-partisan governmental agency to oversee accountability.

Licht, Goldschmidt, and Schwartz (2007) claimed that in order to understand accountability from a perspective of institutional leadership, one must understand the cultural environment in which the leadership takes place. Egalitarianism and a cultural orientation toward autonomy, which our nation's citizens espouse, cause the chosen leaders to tend toward democratic accountability. Licht, Goldschmidt, and Schwartz (2007) claimed,

A norm of accountability obliges holders of power to give an account of their decision or actions (transparency). They are expected to explain or justify them and, in cases of misconduct, to bear responsibility and make amends. A norm of accountability creates feedback channels between the relevant parties. (p. 665)

Further, in the American culture, accountability has a large influence on a leader's perceived efficacy. In a 2010 study comparing citizens from the United States and France, Essounga-Njan and Morgan-Thomas (2010) concluded that Americans have higher opinions of their leaders when those leaders hold themselves highly accountable (p. 75). While current literature regarding servant leadership deems accountability as crucial to successful practice, other multi-dimensional studies have neglected it as one of the investigated dimensions (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 252).

## **Standing Back**

A strong relationship exists between employees' involvement in decision making and overall morale, motivation, and satisfaction with their jobs (Evans, 2001). Dewan and Myatt (2012) went on to claim,



A leader sometimes stands back, by restricting what she says, and so creates space for others to be heard; in particular, a benevolent leader with outstanding judgment gives way to a clearer communicator in an attempt to encourage unity amongst her followers. (p. 431)

Greenleaf (1977) stated all people are on a continuum from leadership to followership. He theorized that all people find themselves at times leaders and at times followers. Neither end of the continuum is better; however, movement is the preferred state: when a person stops moving on the continuum, learning has also stopped (Greenleaf, 1977). Leaders who knowingly move on the continuum away from leader's role may intentionally contribute to increased empowerment opportunities for followers to step forward into leadership positions in organizations and institutions.

The results of a recent survey of over 100,000 employees in the U.S. indicate that a company may benefit from allowing employee involvement in decision making. Employees working in such an environment feel appreciated and more responsible for the outcome of their decisions. They focus on the future and reduce instances of blame, make better decisions on a daily basis, and show higher confidence and enthusiasm. In addition, their improved ability to make decisions creates time for supervisors to focus on other job responsibilities.

## **Empowerment**

Empowerment creates a practical and positive attitude among followers, and gives them a sense of individual control. A servant leader creates conditions of empowerment when focused on each individual's intrinsic value and the realization of each individual's abilities (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 251).

By combining the works of Maslow and Herzberg, one can determine whether an employee's basic level needs (motivation) or higher-level needs (empowerment) cause satisfaction. When employers satisfy needs related to salary, job security, working conditions, and belonging, motivation occurs. According to Herzberg's Hygiene Theory, these basic needs may cause demotivation when employees perceive them as detrimental situations. Conditions for empowerment surface when a work environment satisfies these basic, motivational needs.

From a psychological perspective, whether chosen as a personal mantra or offered by someone in a higher position of power, true empowerment causes a person to feel enabled: self-efficacy and self-esteem develop in environments of empowerment. These increases in esteem needs allow for an individual's pursuit of self-actualization (Oladipo, 2009, p. 124).

Liu (2015) warned that Western researchers have conducted the overwhelming majority of the studies related to empowerment in leadership situations. Culture,

specifically power differential, plays a substantial role in how empowerment motivates employees and how it operates within an organization (Liu, 2015, p. 481).

Empowerment is a key component of teacher satisfaction. Literature repeatedly references the lack of empowerment as one of the main reasons why teachers leave education. A national survey found that “when teachers perceive that their professional leadership is implicitly questioned or limited, they are less likely to remain in the profession” (Berry, Daughtrey & Wieder, 2010, p. 6).

Teacher empowerment can manifest itself in several ways, such as choice of curriculum and materials in instruction, and inclusion in building and district-level decision making. Additionally, teachers cite a loss of control or empowerment related to high-stakes testing and state and federal accountability systems. Teachers feel that overly controlled or prescribed instruction as a challenge to their individual professional abilities as educators, but feel empowered when trusted by administrators to make curricular decisions to best meet student needs (Berry et al., 2010, p. 6).

## **Authenticity**

To further interconnect servant leadership dimensions, Wong and Laschinger (2012) found that authentic leadership increases job satisfaction “both directly and indirectly through empowerment” (p. 954). Likewise, a study in the nursing field, conducted by Wong and Laschinger (2012), suggests that when supervisors are perceived as authentic, those under their supervision feel more empowered, are more satisfied with their positions, and perform at higher levels (Wong & Laschinger, 2012, p. 954).

Authentic leadership emerges when a leader’s professional self takes a back seat to who the leader is personally (Halpin & Croft, 1962). Authenticity is shown when leaders display “a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting input from those who follow” (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009, p. 424).

Freeman and Auster (2011) theorized that authenticity is a much more difficult concept to define and practice than current literature may indicate. Current theoretical approaches to authenticity assume that values, which drive the authentic individual, are either difficult to understand and easy to practice, or easy to understand and difficult to practice. Freeman and Auster claimed that a much more fluid understanding of values must be introduced. The search for authenticity is a “creative process, and ongoing inquiry, rather than a static statement of one’s values and declarations of action” (Freeman & Auster, 2011, p. 16).

## Humility

Humility is the ability to perceive oneself and one's accomplishments from an unbiased perspective. Humble leaders know their limits and work with those they serve to overcome their own limitations and find success (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 267). Hunter (1998) stated,

Humbleness is nothing more than a true knowing of oneself and one's limitations. Those who have the ability to see themselves as they truly are would have no alternative than to be humble. Humility is about being real and authentic with people and discarding the false masks. (p. 112)

Scholars have not accepted humility as a critical attribute in leadership situations likely because it is difficult to determine its impact on leadership practices. "Many decisions of the manager belong to virtues such as justice, strength or prudence, but very few can be considered, strictly speaking, as actions of humility" (Argandona, 2014, p. 67). Argandona (2014) claimed,

The character of a humble manager will be steadier: he will not deceive himself in his self-assessment, he will not feed thoughts of superiority or inferiority, he will not try to pretend to be what he is not or to have what he does not have, he will not allow himself to be dominated by fear of criticism, it will not be easy to humiliate him and he will accept criticism. On equal terms, the process of decision-making of a humble leader will be more consistent over time. (p. 67)

## Forgiveness

Leaders who demonstrate forgiveness attempt to understand others' perspectives and reserve judgment, knowing that trust is built through warmth, compassion, and interpersonal acceptance. Forgiveness relates closely to interpersonal acceptance and to empathy: "Interpersonal acceptance is about empathy: being able to cognitively adopt the psychological perspective of other people and experience the feelings of warmth and compassion" (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 252). A school's business is to make sure students are learning and developing, and character and values are being formed; but most of all schools are all about relationships (Crippen, 2012, p. 193). "Two essential elements of relationships are developing trust and then using that trust to speak honestly when appropriate; one without the other is meaningless" (Chaleff, 2009, p. 23). Writing about leadership in a chaotic world, Wheatley (2005) affirmed the necessity of relationships in all situations:

In this world, the *basic building blocks* of life are relationships, not individual. Nothing exists on its own or has a final, fixed identity. We are all *bundles of potential*.

Relationships evoke these potentials. We change as we meet different people or are in different circumstances. (p. 170)

Holt and Marques (2012) stressed that the teaching of empathy in pre-business and other pre-professional programs must increase if we wish to move away from the ethical disasters our nation has experienced in recent years. The literature indicates that while natural maturity brings people closer to understanding and displaying empathetic behavior, people can learn to practice empathy in various situations, both formally and informally (Holt & Marques, 2012, p. 104).

## **Stewardship**

Hernandez (2008) defined stewardship as beliefs and actions that put long-term, shared interest ahead of personal interest (p. 122). A follower's ability to espouse this ideal comes from leadership support, which has a substantial impact on follower actions and appears in different forms: relational, contextual, and motivational. These supportive leadership behaviors encourage followers to act with "moral courage" and make decisions, which are in the best long-term interest of the organization (Hernandez, 2008, p. 122).

As theories have become more refined, the value of the employee has increased over time. Contemporary theories regarding stewardship look beyond "classical economic principles" and "classical organizational theory" to conclude that the organization is not superior to the individual.

In order to keep organizations moving in the right direction over the long term, savvy leaders recognize and encourage leadership potential they see in less senior employees. "Organizations have to empower those who take initiative and show leadership potential... We need more senior managers who understand that one of their most important roles is to nurture the talent below" (Schneider, 2014, p. 121).

## **Courage**

Batagiannis (2007) claimed that wisdom, passion, and hope are the building blocks of courageous leadership: wisdom allows the leader to understand the issue thoroughly and know the risks involved; passion fuels the action; and hope creates resilience and motivation to reach the goal. True courage does not appear in careless and automatic reactions toward quick fixes, but through thoughtful, reflective consideration followed by action to the goal of finding a long-term solution.

In a study examining virtuous leadership behavior, researchers point out that integrity and courage are mentioned in a large number of scholarly articles, though have not been studied as thoroughly as their use would imply (Palanski, Cullen, Gentry, & Nichols, 2015, p. 297). Palanski et al. summarized a recent article to reveal one notable exception to this lack of specific research findings in the literature. In a 2012 study, Sosik, Gentry, and Chun

found that “both integrity and courage drive performance by acting as exemplary examples of expected behavior that enable those in organizations to remain true to the organization mission, even in the face of opposition” (Palanski et. al., 2015, p. 298).

Leaders who help organizations manage change often meet subordinate resistance, and in some cases, direct confrontation. A key to organizational success is the leader’s ability to work through interpersonally and institutionally difficult conditions while staying true to the values of the organization (De Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2014, p. 881).

## METHOD

This study endeavored to add to the body of research by examining the extent to which teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ servant leadership behaviors correlate with teacher job satisfaction.

### Population and Sample

This research was conducted in a Midwest state in the United States. The population consisted of high school teachers in public and private high schools in the state. All practicing high school principals in this Midwest state (except the researcher) were contacted through the state email system and had the opportunity to participate in this study. Each principal was asked to contact the first and last teachers on the school’s alphabetized staff list (in order to eliminate the potential for bias.) These teachers were offered the opportunity to participate in the study and be asked to complete surveys related to (1) the teachers’ perceptions of the servant leadership characteristics exhibited by their principal and (2) their own levels of job satisfaction. Teachers were also asked to provide specific demographic data, such as gender, years in education, years working with the same principal, highest degree held, and school size. In this study, the sample is the group of teachers who were forwarded emails from their principals.

### Instrumentation

This study utilized two separate survey instruments to collect perceptions of principal servant leadership characteristics and job satisfaction data. Participants completed the Servant Leadership Survey, which “may freely be used for scientific purposes” (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 256). Participants also completed the Minnesota Satisfaction Survey – Short Form, developed at the University of Minnesota and licensed under CC BY 2.0.

The Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) is a 30-item questionnaire used to gather data related to eight “dimensions” or characteristics of servant leadership. Among the thirty items are multiple prompts relating to each of the eight dimensions: empowerment (7 items), accountability (3 items), standing back (3 items), humility (5 items), authenticity (4

items), courage (2 items), forgiveness (3 items), and stewardship (3 items). Respondents choose one of six responses ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010) developed the Servant Leadership Survey and tested for reliability: .89 for empowerment, .81 for accountability, .76 for standing back, .91 for humility, .82 for authenticity, .69 for courage, .72 for forgiveness, and .74 for stewardship.

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire – Short Form (MSQ) has 20 items, and is used to gather data related to overall job satisfaction. The MSQ also contains specific items related to intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Respondents choose one of five responses ranging from *very dissatisfied* to *very satisfied*.

Researchers at the University of Minnesota tested the MSQ for reliability and indicated the following coefficients: .80 for intrinsic satisfaction, .86 for extrinsic satisfaction, and .90 for general satisfaction (Weiss, Dawis, and England, 1967, p. 23).

## Data Collection

Data were collected using Survey Monkey, an Internet-based survey tool. Principals across the Midwest state, who received the invitation to participate, were asked to forward the email, including links to both surveys, to the first and last teachers in the school's alphabetized list of certified teachers. These participating teachers were asked to complete surveys, and the data were returned to the online Survey Monkey account held by the researcher. The directory contained contact information for 162 high school principals at 144 public and 18 private high schools in the state for the 2016-17 school year. After eliminating the researcher, the total number of principals contacted in the study was 161. Since each principal was asked to forward the email to two teachers, the total possible number of study participants was 322. Of the 322 possible survey responses, 76 were completed for a response rate of 23.6%.

## Demographic Data

Study participants were asked to identify a number of demographic facts including gender, number of years employed as an educator, highest academic degree held, the number of years working with current principal, and number of students in the high school where they worked. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, data gathered for this research are not identifiable to individual teachers, principals, or school districts.

Forty-nine of the respondents were female (64.5%) and 27 (35.5%) were male. Two of the respondents (2.6%) had been employed as an educator for less than one school year. Four teachers (5.3%) indicated working in education between one and two years. Twelve respondents (15.8%) had worked between three and five years in education. Three (4%) had worked in education between six and eight years. Nine respondents (11.8%) had worked between nine and eleven years in education. Eleven (14.5%) had worked in

education between twelve and fifteen years. Thirty-five respondents (46.0%) indicated they had worked for more than fifteen years as an educator.

Sixteen respondents (21.0%) indicated they had been working with their principal for less than one year. Twelve teachers (15.8%) indicated working with their principal between one and two years. Twenty-five respondents (32.9%) had worked between three and five years with their current principal. Eight (10.5%) had worked with their principal between six and eight years. Seven respondents (9.2%) had worked between nine and eleven years with their principal. Four (5.3%) had worked with their current principal between twelve and fifteen years and another four respondents (5.3%) indicated they had worked for more than fifteen years with their current principal.

All respondents reported having a Bachelor degree or higher, and none reported having a doctorate. Forty-four (57.9%) indicated they held a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree. Twenty-eight (36.9%) held a Master of Arts or Master of Science degree. Two respondents (2.6%) indicated they held multiple Master of Arts or Master of Science degrees. And another two (2.6%) reported having earned an Educational Specialist degree.

One of the demographic questions related to the number of students in the respondent's high school. In an effort to categorize these schools by size of student body in terms most educators would know, the Midwest state's high school activities association's classifications for football were used. In this Midwest state, categories are broken into seven categories ranging from the smallest (9B) to the largest (11AAA). Sixteen respondents (22.2%) reported their school was classified as 9B. Nine (12.5%) indicated their school was classified 9A. Ten respondents (13.9%) specified their school was 9AA. Twelve (16.7%) reported their school was classified as 11B. Fifteen (20.8%) indicated classification as 11A. Five (6.9%) reported their classification was 11AA and another five (6.9%) reported 11AAA.

## RESULTS

Participating teachers were asked to respond to 50 survey questions regarding their perceptions of their principals' servant leadership characteristics and their own job satisfaction. The Servant Leadership Survey contains 30 questions, answered fully by 76 respondents. Teachers responded to statements using a 6-point Likert Scale with a rating of "1" indicating *Strongly Disagree* and a rating of "6" indicating *Strongly Agree*. Teachers' total scores ranged from the lowest score of 97 to a high of 165 ( $M = 143.68$ ,  $SD = 19.31$ ). The highest item mean score ( $M=5.32$ ) corresponded to "My manager encourages me to use my talents." The lowest mean score ( $M=4.03$ ) corresponded to "My manager takes risks even when he/she is not certain of the support from his/her own manager."

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short Form has twenty items, and was completed by 76 participating teachers. The MSQ uses a 5-point Likert Scale, in

which a rating of “1” indicated *Very Dissatisfied* and a rating of “5” indicated *Very Satisfied*. Teachers’ total scores ranged from the lowest score of 59 to a high of 94. The highest item mean score ( $M=4.55$ ) corresponded to “The chance to do things for other people.” The lowest mean score ( $M=3.30$ ) corresponded to “The chances for advancement on this job.”

### **Relationship between Principal Servant Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction**

Research question one investigated the relationship between the teacher-perceived servant leadership characteristics of respondents’ principals and teachers’ own job satisfaction. The Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) and Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short Form were used as variables in computing Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to test for significance set at a level  $p < .01$ . The results showed a strong relationship ( $r = .672, n = 76, p = .000$ ), with high levels of teacher perception of principal servant leadership characteristics associated with high levels of teacher job satisfaction. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Teacher-rated Overall SLS and Overall MSQ Scores*

Survey	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
SLS	76			
MSQ	76			
Total	76	.667**	.445	.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

### **Characteristics of Servant Leaders Most Highly Related to Teacher Job Satisfaction**

Research question two investigated which of the eight characteristics of servant leadership related most highly to teachers’ reported job satisfaction. A comparison of the teachers’ perceived SLS ratings and their MSQ results served as the variables for computing Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficients of each of the eight characteristics to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . All eight servant leadership characteristics show a strong relationship to teacher job satisfaction. The highest-related characteristics to job satisfaction are “empowerment” ( $r = .623, n = 76, p = .000$ ) and “humility” ( $r = .612, n = 76, p = .000$ ). The results are summarized in Table 2.



Table 2

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Teacher-rated Total SLS and Total MSQ Scores Organized by Servant Leadership Characteristic.*

SL Characteristic	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>	Strength
Empowerment	76	.623**	.388	.000	strong
Humility	76	.612**	.375	.000	strong
Authenticity	76	.591**	.349	.000	strong
Standing Back	76	.574**	.329	.000	strong
Stewardship	76	.562**	.316	.000	strong
Courage	76	.490**	.240	.000	moderate
Accountability	76	.483**	.233	.000	moderate
Forgiveness	76	.415**	.172	.000	moderate

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

### **Characteristics of Servant Leaders Most Highly Related to Intrinsic Job Satisfaction**

Research question three investigated which of the servant leadership characteristics are most highly related to teachers' intrinsic job satisfaction. The resulting correlation coefficients are all lower than those of SLS characteristics to overall MSQ scores. However, 7 of the 8 servant leadership characteristics reveal significant correlations to teacher job satisfaction, with the exception of "forgiveness" ( $r = .226$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .048$ ). The highest-related characteristics to intrinsic job satisfaction are "stewardship" ( $r = .464$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and "empowerment" ( $r = .444$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Teacher-rated SLS and MSQ (Intrinsic) Scores Divided into Servant Leadership Characteristic.*

SL Characteristic	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>	Strength
Stewardship	76	.464**	.215	.000	moderate
Empowerment	76	.444**	.197	.000	moderate
Authenticity	76	.412**	.170	.000	moderate
Humility	76	.414**	.171	.000	moderate
Standing Back	76	.398**	.158	.000	moderate
Courage	76	.358**	.128	.002	moderate
Accountability	76	.330**	.109	.004	moderate
Forgiveness	76	.226	.051	.048	weak

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

### **Characteristics of Servant Leaders Most Highly Related to Extrinsic Job Satisfaction**

Research question four investigated which of the servant leadership characteristics are most highly related to teachers' extrinsic job satisfaction. A comparison of the teachers' perceived SLS ratings of their principals and their extrinsic-specific MSQ responses served as the variables for computing Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficients for each of the eight characteristics to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . Results show correlation coefficients are all higher than both SLS characteristics to overall MSQ score and SLS characteristics to MSQ intrinsic scores. The highest related characteristics to extrinsic job satisfaction are "empowerment",  $r = .662$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .000$ , and "humility",  $r = .662$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .000$ . The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Teacher-rated SLS and MSQ (Extrinsic) Scores Divided into Servant Leadership Characteristic.*

SL Characteristic	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>	Strength
Empowerment	76	.662**	.438	.000	strong
Humility	76	.662**	.438	.000	strong
Standing Back	76	.616**	.379	.000	strong
Authenticity	76	.615**	.378	.000	strong
Stewardship	76	.548**	.300	.000	strong
Accountability	76	.541**	.293	.000	strong
Courage	76	.512**	.262	.000	strong
Forgiveness	76	.476**	.227	.000	moderate

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

### **The Relationship Between Demographic Factors and Teacher Job Satisfaction**

Research question five investigates the extent to which the demographic factors of teacher gender, years in education, years working with same principal, highest degree held, and school size relate to teacher job satisfaction. The findings of each demographic are explained in the following sections.

**Teacher Gender.** A comparison of teachers' gender and their MSQ responses served as the variables for computing a point biserial correlation coefficient to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . The results showed no significant correlation ( $r = .091$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .434$ ). The data are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

*Point Biserial Correlations Between Total MSQ Score and Gender*

Respondent Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
Female	49			
Male	27			
Total	76	.091	.008	.434

**Years in Education.** A comparison of teachers' reported years in education and their MSQ responses served as the variables for computing Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficient to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . The results showed no significant correlation,  $r = -.154$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .184$ . The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Total MSQ Score and Years in Education*

Respondent Years in Education	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
< 1 year	2			
1 – 2 years	4			
3 – 5 years	12			
6 – 8 years	3			
9 – 11 years	9			
12 – 15 years	11			
> 15 years	35			
Total	76	-.154	.024	.184

**Number of Years with Current Principal.** A comparison of the teachers' number of years working with the same principal and their MSQ responses served as the variables for computing Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficient to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . The results showed no significant correlation ( $r = -.024$ ,  $n = 76$ ,  $p = .837$ ). The data are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Total MSQ Score and Years Working with the Same Principal.*

Respondent Years With the Same Principal	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
< 1 year	16			
1 – 2 years	12			
3 – 5 years	25			
6 – 8 years	8			
9 – 11 years	7			
12 – 15 years	4			
> 15 years	4			
Total	76	.024	.001	.837

**Highest Degree Held.** A comparison of the teachers' years highest degree held and their MSQ responses served as the variables for computing Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficient to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . The data showed no significant correlation ( $r = -.224, n = 76, p = .052$ ). The results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Total MSQ Score and Highest Degree Held*

Highest Degree Held	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
Does not Apply	0			
Bachelor of Arts or Science	44			
Master of Arts or Science	28			
Multiple MA or MS	2			
Educational Specialist	2			
Education Doctorate or Ph.D.	0			
Other	0			
Total	76	.224	.050	.052

**School Size.** A comparison of teacher-reported school size and teachers' MSQ responses served as the variables for computing Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficient to test for significance at a level  $p \leq .01$ . The data showed no significant correlation ( $r = -.113, n = 76, p = .331$ ). The results are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

*Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Total MSQ Score and School Size*

State Football Classification	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
11AAA	5			
11AA	5			
11A	15			
11B	12			
9AA	10			
9A	9			
9B	16			
Total	76	-.113	.013	.331

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions emerged from the study findings:

1. Teachers who perceive that their principals exhibit servant leadership behaviors are much more likely to be satisfied in their jobs.
2. Teachers who perceive that their principals exhibit servant leadership behaviors are much more likely to be satisfied with the intrinsic factors of their jobs.
3. Teachers who perceive that their principals exhibit servant leadership behaviors are much more likely to be satisfied with the extrinsic factors of their jobs.
4. Extrinsic job-related factors are more highly related than intrinsic factors to servant leadership. Principals may see greater positive changes to teacher job satisfaction levels if they focus their own efforts to implement leadership changes focused on extrinsic factors, such as handling coworkers, making competent decisions, effectively implementing policies, increasing pay and chances for



subordinate advancement, improving working conditions, and praising subordinates for doing a good job.

5. Of the eight servant leadership characteristics studied, “empowerment” and “humility” are most highly related to teachers’ overall job satisfaction. Principals may most effectively and efficiently assist their teachers in increasing job satisfaction of an extrinsic nature by focusing their efforts on empowering their teachers and exhibiting humility.
6. Of the eight servant leadership characteristics studied, “stewardship” and “empowerment” are most highly related to teachers’ intrinsic job satisfaction. Principals may most effectively and efficiently assist their teachers in increasing job satisfaction of an intrinsic nature by displaying characteristics related to stewardship and increasing opportunities for teacher empowerment.
7. Of the eight servant leadership characteristics studied, “empowerment” and “humility” are most highly related to teachers’ extrinsic job satisfaction.
8. The demographic factors of teacher gender, years in education, years working with the same principal, highest degree held and school size do not influence teachers’ job satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

Comparable to findings by van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010), servant leadership is highly correlated with job satisfaction. Based on its positive relationship with teacher job satisfaction, the results of this study strongly support servant leadership be used as a style of leadership in a high school environment in which job-satisfied teachers are desired. This is significant because one of the ways in which a leader’s achievement is measured is through reduced follower turnover (Russell, 2016, p. 62).

Regarding the individual dimensions or characteristics of servant leadership, there are stronger relationships between job satisfaction and the servant leadership dimensions of “empowerment” ( $r^2 = .388$ ) and “humility” ( $r^2 = .375$ ) than between job satisfaction and the other six measured dimensions of servant leadership. Nearly 39% of the variation in teacher job satisfaction is described by variations in perceived principal empowerment and over 37% is described by variations in humility. This would suggest that principals might most efficiently help teachers reach a job-satisfied state if they were to focus efforts on demonstrating humility and finding opportunities to empower teachers under their supervision.

This does not mean to suggest that the remaining dimensions of servant leadership are not correlated to job satisfaction. Indeed, the other six dimensions of servant leadership were also found to be strongly related to teacher job satisfaction, revealing “forgiveness” to be the least highly related dimension ( $r^2 = .172$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Additionally, as van

Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010) wrote while developing the servant leadership survey, “Servant leadership covers a wide range of behaviors which are hard to grasp in one or two constructs, and may sometimes seem difficult to disentangle” (p. 250).

Intrinsic job satisfaction is less highly related to servant leadership ( $r^2 = .271$ ) than is extrinsic job satisfaction ( $r^2 = .506$ ). Data analysis indicates that 27% of the change in intrinsic job satisfaction is explained by variations in the principal’s perceived servant leadership behaviors, but over 50% of the changes in teachers’ extrinsic job satisfaction can be explained with variations in overall servant leadership. An analysis of these data support Bogler and Nir’s (2012) belief that “...school leaders are capable of promoting teacher satisfaction both intrinsically and extrinsically” (p. 302).

Results of this study suggest it is not as direct a relationship between principal behavior and intrinsic job satisfaction as it is between principal behavior and extrinsic job satisfaction of teachers. Based on the extrinsic-focused questions on the MSQ, the following principal behaviors will have a greater effect on teacher job satisfaction: how the principal handles teachers, principal competence in making decisions, the way school policies are put into practice, teacher pay and the amount of work teachers do, the chances for advancement on the job, working conditions, the way co-workers get along with each other, and the praise teachers receive for doing a good job.

Literature on servant leadership theory emphasizes the opportunities created by servant leaders to help followers grow, which relate to Maslow’s higher-level needs of love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization as well as Herzberg’s beliefs about motivators in the workplace. This study supports the literature through the multiple strong relationships found between intrinsic MSQ factors and teachers’ job satisfaction levels. However, this study’s findings do not reveal an explanation to the outcome that extrinsic satisfaction is much more highly related to servant leadership perceptions than intrinsic satisfaction. As Maslow theorized, it may be that many of the teachers contacted for this study were not personally able to reach a state of self-actualization due to unsatisfied lower-level needs. It is also possible that it is simply easier to influence follower satisfaction related to extrinsic rather than intrinsic elements. Further research in this area is needed.

Although principals’ servant leadership behaviors do not have as direct an impact on intrinsic job satisfaction as they do on teachers’ extrinsic job satisfaction, seven of the eight principal servant leadership behaviors researched in this study are strongly related to teachers’ intrinsic job satisfaction.

This study found no significant relationships between reported teacher job satisfaction and any of the demographic variables investigated. Gender, years in education, years working with the same principal, highest degree earned, and school size appear to have no significant relationship to job satisfaction among high school teachers in the Midwest state. Of these demographic variables, this researcher found it noteworthy that *years working with the same principal* showed no relationship with job satisfaction. One might think that as a teacher and principal work together longer, their relationship would grow and

strengthen, potentially providing more opportunities for teacher's self-actualization and potential job satisfaction. At least in this study's findings, this is not the case.

The following recommendations result from the study's findings and conclusions.

1. District leaders should consider demonstrated servant leadership ability when screening, interviewing, and hiring principals.
2. Higher education institutions should be aware of the strong correlations between servant leadership and job satisfaction and use this knowledge to assist aspiring school administrators in finding their own personal leadership styles.
3. School principals should be generally aware of all factors relating to teacher job satisfaction, but should pay special attention to their own influence on those factors which have an impact on extrinsic motivation: working conditions, teacher pay, principal decision-making, relationships between staff members, policy implementation practices, potential for teacher advancement, and how teachers are rewarded for their efforts.
4. School principal evaluation should include input related to teacher job satisfaction to provide feedback to principals and superintendents regarding principals' efforts to improve teachers' job satisfaction levels.
5. Ongoing professional development for school administrators in the field should include components related to servant leadership and its relationship to job satisfaction among the teachers under their supervision. Some practical examples of professional development of school administrators include a monthly focus on the 10 often-quoted "essential elements of servant leadership" (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2010, p. 250), which are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to others' growth, and building community. It is important that opportunities for time and safe places are provided for educators to discuss and to celebrate examples of when one or more of these essential elements are put into practice. By providing opportunities for educators to connect to these stories, they may be able to draw conclusions for themselves concerning pieces of the stories that may apply to his or her life.
6. Study findings suggest years in education and highest degree earned have no significant impact on a teacher's job satisfaction. In other words, if hiring someone who is more likely to be satisfied at work is a goal, none of the demographics considered in this study give insight into a teacher's potential job satisfaction.

The next steps include embedding the essential elements of servant leadership into the culture of the school, which includes the hiring practices of all schools. Through intentional and deliberate actions of hiring educators who exhibit the essential elements of servant leadership, a culture of servant leadership may emerge. These hiring practices

should also be emphasized in educational leadership preparation programs to help train the current and the future decision-makers in the human resources departments in schools. The essential elements of servant leadership should also be infused in the evaluation process of educators, which will reinforce the district's goals of creating a culture of servant leadership. In conclusion, what a school leader does consistently over time will eventually become the emphasis within the district.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The following recommendations for future research emerged from this study:

1. This study was conducted in educational environments in a rural Midwestern state. Research should be conducted in another state or geographic region to give insight into this study's external validity.
2. Future research should incorporate student achievement data to the study of servant leadership and job satisfaction to investigate the relationships among all three variables.
3. A future study should further investigate the phenomenon of servant leadership and its impact on teacher job satisfaction through a qualitative approach to validate this study through an alternate methodology.

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