Profiling Servant Leadership Among School Principals:

A Correlational Study of Leadership Attributes and Practices

**Abstract:** This study analyzed the servant leadership profiles of school principals and how these relate to their leadership practices in the province of Northern Samar. This study is grounded in Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory and supplemented by Spears, Patterson, and Liden et al., in their contemporary models. To characterize the study this research focused on two dimensions: (1) the principals’ leadership profiles in terms of character orientation, people orientation, task orientation, and process orientation, and (2) their leadership practices across key servant leadership behaviors such as ethical conduct, empowerment, and support for follower growth. The study made use of the descriptive correlational research design. A total of 28 principals participated in the study, along with their respective teachers. Standard validated questionnaires were adapted and used in data gathering. A Pearson's r was conducted to test for significant relationships between leadership profiles and practices. Results revealed that principals of Northern Samar demonstrated a strong servant leadership profile, relatively high in character and people orientation. Practices conforming to behaving ethically and putting followers first were high in score. More over emotional healing and conceptualizing showed room for improvement. A strong positive correlation was found between leadership profiles and leadership practices. A contextualized training program is recommended to strengthen emotional intelligence, visioning, and stakeholder engagement among school leaders.

**Key Words:** Servant Leadership; School Effectiveness; Teacher Performance; Governance; Educational Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Educating students in Philippine society is a challenge educators face today. More students are coming to school with greater needs to have a direct impact on their motivation and their ability to learn. Our society calls for schools to perform better in educating our youth and in holding teachers and school leaders or principals accountable for student success. One of the key factors in the success of any school is the school principal who is not only an excellent educator but role model endowed with core values and who can expand his or her role, particularly in the urban, suburban and rural areas.

Before the pandemic, feedback from parents through an evaluation survey conducted by the Research Office indicated that they prefer to enroll their children in a sectarian school because of the discipline, security, quality instruction, religious administrators, facilities, school activities and other practices of the school. Recently, similar feedback was received.

In today’s competitive environment, there is a need for a new kind of leadership that will respond to the needs of time and inspire a diverse work group for long-term common good, creating a culture of high achievement (Greenleaf, 1977). The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 states that the school leader has the ability to work with various stakeholders, develop effective relationships with diverse individuals and groups, inspire the respect and cooperation of people, and promote the development and effectiveness of people within the organization.

In the Philippines, many school principals are in the position without a test of servanthood, eligibility, master’s degree, managerial skills and relevant training. These actual experiences may be happening in the Division of Northern Samar, where many titled leadership positions do not recognize the potential and lasting impacts of their actions. Some principals are leaders but not servants in the exercise of leadership skills, moral values, valuing growth and development of people or subordinates, and attainment of organizational goals and community building.

In the educational setting, the key concern of all institutions would be productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of quality education to its students. In this context, the principal has the crucial responsibility to generate satisfaction in the achievement of work objectives, maintenance of quality standards through planning, leading and controlling in the use of material and human resources to meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

The range of institutional crises may be well addressed by a kind of leadership and leadership styles that are vital components within the success and growth of the schools. Servant leadership is seen to correct this mistake. Servant leadership is a leadership philosophy built on the belief that the most effective leaders strive to serve others to include customers, partners, fellow employees and the community at large (Greenleaf, 1977). It is shepherd leadership which is marked by mutual trust between the school administrator and constituents like students, teachers, staff, and parents, as well as improved school performance.

Researchers have also stated that a principal can shape a school’s culture of high achievement through understanding the conflicts and different types of negotiations needed for success (Eva, et al., 2029). In this time of crisis, the establishment of an orderly school environment conducive to learning requires substantive managerial skills that foster cooperation, cordiality, respect, and care for one another to the success of the educational system. The role of the principal in the adoption and implementation of servant leadership within every aspect of the school, the culture, and behavior will contribute great impact on the school’s climate, culture and overall students’ achievement.

The Revised Manual of Regulations for Private Schools, which may also be applicable to other schools, states that one of the duties and accountabilities of the school principal is to provide a healthy and wholesome school environment conducive to effective learning. The result of PISA, NSAT, and NAT where the Philippines is second to the bottom and other current realities compel us to revisit our identity as institutions and reexamine our leadership styles and search for new and better ways of becoming effective and relevant to our educational mission. Darrick (2020) showed that servant leader principals positively impact on the satisfaction of teachers which improves retention and school performance.

Given these realities, this study seeks to examine the servant leadership profiles of high school principals and their corresponding leadership practices. It aims to determine whether there is a significant relationship between leadership attributes and practices, with the goal of informing the development of a contextualized training program for school leaders in Northern Samar.

*2.1 Objectives of the Study*

The central objective of this study is to determine the school principals servant leadership and practices in Northern Samar. The present study focuses on how these leadership styles relate to overall school performance.

Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Determine the servant leadership profile of the principals in terms of:

1.1. Leader’s Personal Character and Actions

1.1.1. Character Orientation

1.1.2. People Orientation

1.2. Leader’s Interaction with Others

1.2.1. Task Orientation

1.2.2. Process Orientation

2. Identify the level of servant leadership practices in terms of:

2.1. Conceptualizing

2.2. Emotional Healing

2.3. Putting Followers First

2.4. Behaving Ethically

2.5. Empowering

2.6. Creating Value for the Community

3. Examine the significant relationship between the principals’ servant leadership profile and their servant leadership practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

*2.1 Locale of the Study*

This study was conducted in Region 8 in the Division of Northern Samar, Philippines. Northern Samar is divided into three (3) major geographical areas, namely: Balicuatro Area, Central Area, and Pacific Area, including the Pacific Valley. It comprises 24 towns or municipalities with 567 registered barangays. It also has two legislative districts, the first district covers the Balicuatro and most parts of the Central Area, while the second district includes the Pacific Area and portions of the Central Area, such as the Catubig Valley.

According to the Department of Education (DepEd) (2023), the Northern Samar Division has a total of 167 secondary schools, composed of both junior and senior high schools distributed across its districts. The number of principals corresponds to the number of secondary schools. The teaching force in the division comprises more than 3,200 secondary-level educators serving in various geographic zones.

*2.2 Research Design*

To assess the principals’ servant leadership and school performance in the Division of Northern Samar, the descriptive–correlational research design was employed in this study.

The descriptive design provides a detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behavior of a particular population or subject. According to Sirisilla (2023), it describes relationships between variables, patterns, and trends, and compares data from multiple sources. Descriptive research designs cannot control conditions nor test hypotheses.

This design used the survey method because it specifically determined the professional profile of the principals in Northern Samar, their servant leadership attributes, and the level of school performance.

The study also used correlational design because it aimed to test hypotheses on relationships. According to Creswell (2009), correlational research is a statistical test used to determine the tendency or pattern for two or more variables or two sets of data to vary consistently, and to what degree a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables.

This method attempted to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the independent and dependent variables. In this particular study, the phenomena involved were the assessment of principals’ servant leadership in relation to school performance.

*2.3 Population and Sampling*

The population of the study consisted of secondary school principals and teachers from high schools in the Division of Northern Samar. A total of 28 principals from large secondary schools were included. In accordance with DepEd Memorandum No. 35, s. 2017, large or big schools are defined as those with a full complement of teachers handling secondary-level instruction.

In geographic areas with more than one high school, the random sampling technique was employed to select the target number of principal-respondents per area, specifically within the Pacific, Central, and Balicuatro districts. In areas with fewer eligible schools, all qualified principals were automatically included to ensure full representation.

A total enumeration was used for the selection of both the principals and their respective teachers from the identified schools. To ensure that the respondents had sufficient familiarity with their school leaders’ practices and to provide reliable assessments, only teachers who had worked with their current principal for at least two years were only considered.

*2.4 Respondents*

Respondents are 28 high school principals and their respective teachers from secondary schools in the Division of Northern Samar are included. Only principals who had served in their respective schools for at least two years were included in the study. The selection of principals followed a proportionate random sampling technique, particularly in areas where multiple high schools existed within a geographic zone.

To ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to their principal’s leadership style, teachers who had worked under their current principal for a minimum of two years were chosen as respondents. A proportionate random sampling was followed to maintain balanced representation across schools and districts.

*2.5 Variables*

The variables included in this study consisted

of independent variables and a dependent variable. The independent variables included are the principal’s profile in terms of educational attainment, eligibility, administrative experience, and training in administration and supervision. Servant leadership was assessed based on personal character, actions, and interactions with others, categorized under four orientations and the dimensions of servant leadership.

For the dependent variable was the school performance.

These variables served as inputs for designing a training program for school leaders, which is the intended output of this study.

*2.6 Research Instruments*

Three sets of survey questionnaires were utilized focusing on the principal’s profile, servant leadership orientations, and the dimensions of servant leadership. For the principal's profile, the instrument consisted of three parts. The first part gathered information on the principal’s profile, such as highest educational attainment, eligibility, administrative experience, and training or seminars attended in administration and supervision.

The second part evaluated the principal’s servant leadership derived from four leadership orientations: character orientation, people orientation, task orientation, and process orientation. These indicators were adapted from Page and Wong’s Servant Leadership Characteristics.

The third part of the assessment, evaluating the dimensions of servant leadership, such as conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community. This section was adapted from Dr. Robert Liden’s Servant Leadership model (2012).

All questionnaires used a 5-point Likert scale. Teacher-respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item, describing the principal’s characteristics and leadership practices. The survey measured both personal character and actions, as well as interactions with others, based on the four orientations and servant leadership dimensions.

School performance data were based on three years of SMEA results, which included indicators on access, quality, governance, and teacher performance.

*2.7 Validation of Instruments*

The research instruments used in this study were adapted from two established tools: the Revised Servant Leadership Profile (SLRP) developed by Page and Wong, and the Servant Leadership Questionnaire designed by Liden et al. underwent an expert validation.

The questionnaire items were reviewed by three experienced school leaders, and evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items within the context of Philippine secondary schools. Refinements were made to improve the wording and contextual alignment of selected items; a pilot test was also conducted before the actual test.

*2.8 Data Gathering Procedure*

To ensure compliance with ethical standards and institutional protocols. The researcher sought permission from the school division superintendent to conduct the study in the Division of Northern Samar, Philippines. The researcher coordinated with the respective school administrator of the schools for the distribution of the questionnaire. To maintain the authenticity and accuracy of responses, the respondents were instructed and assisted by the researcher while answering the instruments. The researcher also personally distributed and retrieved the questionnaires from the participating schools. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.

*2.9 Statistical Treatment of Data*

For a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the data each respondent was scored separately and obtained for each part of the tests. Descriptive and Inferential statistical methods were employed.

The bivariate relationship of principal’s profile, servant leadership orientations, and the dimensions of servant leadership with school performance was established using Pearson r. In the presentation of subjects such as highest educational attainment, eligibility, administrative experience, and training or seminars attended in administration and supervision.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the socio-demographic profile of the principal-respondents, including their sex, highest educational attainment, eligibility, years of administrative experience, and training attended. These statistics provided a clear overview of the background characteristics of the school leaders involved in the study.

Means and ranks were applied to analyze the principals’ servant leadership profiles and dimensions, specifically focusing on character orientation, people orientation, task orientation, and process orientation, as well as on the six servant leadership practices (conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community). These measures helped determine the relative strength and consistency of servant leadership traits as perceived by the teachers.

All statistical computations were processed using appropriate statistical software, with a significance level set at 0.05 to determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*3.1 Servant leadership profile of the principals*

Table 1 presents the combined results of servant leadership profiles in terms of the leader's personal character and actions, as well as their interactions with others. The study revealed that, in terms of Character Orientation, all three dimensions were rated exceptional, with an overall grand mean of 4.28. Integrity received the highest mean score (4.32), followed by Serving Others (4.31) and Humility (4.20). In terms of People Orientation, all three dimensions were rated strong, with two being rated as exceptional, resulting in an overall grand mean of 4.19. Empowering others received the highest mean score (4.24), followed by Caring for Others (4.22) and Developing Others (4.14). In terms of Task Orientation, all three dimensions were also rated exceptional, with an overall grand mean of 4.30. Goal Setting received the highest mean score (4.37), followed by both Visioning (4.26) and Leading (4.26). Lastly, in terms of Process Orientation, all three dimensions were rated exceptional, with an overall grand mean of 4.24. Team Building scored the highest mean (4.28), followed by Shared Decision Making (4.24) and Modelling (4.20).

Overall, the results indicate that the servant leadership profile of the principals demonstrated a consistently high performance, with Goal Setting receiving the highest mean score and Developing Others the lowest. This suggests that most respondents are highly effective in setting and guiding goals, but are somewhat less focused on supporting long-term development in others, though only by a small margin.

Table 1. Character Orientation, People Orientation, Task Orientation, and Process Orientation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Character Orientation | Weighted mean | Interpretation |
| Integrity | 4.32 | Exceptional |
| Humility | 4.20 | Exceptional |
| Serving Others | 4.31 | Exceptional |
| Grand Mean | 4.28 | Exceptional |
| People Orientation |  |  |
| Caring for Others | 4.22 | Exceptional |
| Empowering Others  | 4.24 | Exceptional |
| Developing Others | 4.14 | Strong |
| Grand Mean | 4.19 | Strong |
| Task Orientation | Weighted mean | Interpretation |
| Visioning | 4.26 | Exceptional |
| Goal Setting | 4.37 | Exceptional |
| Leading | 4.26 | Exceptional |
| Grand Mean | 4.30 | Exceptional |
| Process Orientation |  |  |
| Modelling | 4.20 | Exceptional |
| Team Building | 4.28 | Exceptional |
| Shared Decision Making | 4.24 | Exceptional |
| Grand Mean | 4.24 | Exceptional |

*3.2 Level of Servant Leadership Practices of the Principals*

Table 2 presents the combined results of the level of servant leadership practices of the principals in terms of Conceptualizing, Emotional Healing. Putting Followers First, Behaving Ethically, Empowering, and Creating Value for Community. Results from this study showed an overall grand mean of 4.16, thus falling under strong but inconsistent. Behaving Ethically received the highest mean score (4.37), followed by Putting Followers First (4.25) Creating Value for the Community (4.21) Empowering (4.19), Emotional Healing (4.05), and Conceptualizing (3.91). Although the principals exhibit all six servant leadership practices, some were interpreted as strong but inconsistent, indicating that there is some inconsistency in how regularly or effectively these practices are applied.

Table 2. Level of Servant Leadership Practices of the Principals

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Servant Leadership Practices | Weighted mean | Interpretation |
| Conceptualizing | 3.91 | Strong but inconsistent |
| Emotional Healing | 4.05 | Strong but inconsistent |
| Putting Followers First | 4.25 | Exceptional strategic thinking |
| Behaving Ethically | 4.37 | Exceptional strategic thinking |
| Empowering | 4.19 | Strong but inconsistent |
| Creating Value for the Community | 4.21 | Exceptional strategic thinking |

Table 3. Relationship between the principal’s servant leadership profile and the dimensions of servant leadership practices

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Servant Leadership Profile | Parameters | Servant Leadership Practices |
| Conceptualizing | Emotional Healing | Putting followers first | Behaving ethically | Empowering | Creating value for the community |
| Personal Character and Actions |
| Character Orientation | Pearson r | 0.582 | -0.104 | -0.580 | 0.103 | 0.039 | 0.391 |
| Sig. | 0.000 | 0.063 | 0.031 | 0.240 | 0.299 | 0.035 |
| Interpretation | Significant | Not Significant | Significant | Not Significant | Not Significant | Significant |
| People Orientation | Pearson r | 0.083 | -0.314 | 0.020 | 0.399 | 0.047 | 0.111 |
| Sig. | 0.330 | 0.034 | 0.230 | 0.035 | 0.590 | 0.240 |
| Interpretation | Not Significant | Significant | Not Significant | Significant | Not Significant | Not Significant |
| Leader's Interaction with others |
| Task Orientation | Pearson r | 0.399 | 0.389 | 0.480 | 0.109 | 0.106 | 0.117 |
| Sig. | 0.020 | 0.021 | 0.004 | 0.614 | 0.647 | 0.061 |
| Interpretation | Significant | Significant | Significant | Not Significant | Not Significant | Not Significant |
| Process Orientation  | Pearson r | 0.101 | 0.055 | 0.104 | 0.105 | 0.101 | 0.448 |
| Sig. | 0.423 | 0.340 | 0.543 | 0.059 | 0.314 | 0.011 |
| Interpretation | Not Significant | Not Significant | Not Significant | Significant | Not Significant | Significant |

*3.3 Relationship between the principal’s servant leadership profile and the dimensions of servant leadership practices*

Table 3 presents the relationships between principals’ servant leadership profiles—divided into Personal Character and Actions, and Leader’s Interaction with Others—and the dimensions of servant leadership practices, including: (1) Conceptualizing, (2) Emotional Healing, (3) Putting Followers First, (4) Behaving Ethically, (5) Empowering, and (6) Creating Value for the Community. Results from the study show that in terms of Character Orientation, a positive significant correlation was found with Conceptualizing (r = 0.582, p = 0.000) and Creating Value for the Community (r = 0.391, p = 0.035). While a negative significant correlation was found with Character Orientation and Putting Followers First (r = -0.580, p = 0.031), this may suggest possible conflict between personal standards and flexibility in prioritizing others. In terms of People Orientation, a positive significant correlation was found with Behaving Ethically (r = 0.399, p = 0.035). While a negative significant correlation was found with emotional healing (r = -0.314, p = 0.034), this may suggest that valuing others does not always mean emotional availability. In terms of Task Orientation, a positive significant correlation was found with Conceptualizing (r = 0.399, p = 0.020), Emotional Healing (r = 0.389, p = 0.021) and Creating Value for the Community (r = 0.480, p = 0.004). Lastly, in terms of Process Orientation, a positive significant correlation was found with Behaving Ethically (r = 0.105, p = 0.059) and Creating Value for the Community (r = 0.448, p = 0.011).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed the servant leadership profiles of school principals and how these relate to their leadership practices in the province of Northern Samar. Results from this study showed that the principals demonstrated a strong servant leadership profile, in terms of Character and Task Orientation, with Integrity and Goal Setting received the highest scores consecutively under each orientation, indicating a strong internal values and direction-setting ability. Meanwhile, Developing Others under People Orientation scored the lowest overall among all the orientations, suggesting a slightly lesser focus on long-term individual growth, though the difference was minimal.

In terms of servant leadership practices, principals performed strongly in most areas, with Behaving Ethically and Putting Followers First rated as the highest, while relatively lower scores were observed under Conceptualizing and Emotional Healing.

The Pearson correlation analysis showed significant positive relationships between several leadership profile dimensions and servant leadership practices. Character Orientation was significantly correlated with Conceptualizing and Creating Value for the Community, while Task Orientation was positively associated with Conceptualizing, Emotional Healing, and Creating Value for the Community. Unexpectedly, a negative correlation was found between Character Orientation and Putting Followers First, and between People Orientation and Emotional Healing, possibly suggesting tensions between personal principles and emotional flexibility.

**Ethical Approval:**

As per international standards or university standards written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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