DEVELOPING HOLISTIC LEADERS:

RE-EXAMINING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS USING THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Although the practice of adopting formal training programs to improve leadership in organizations has been in existence for many decades (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; McWhorter, Lynham, & Porter, 2008; Pernick, 2001), the last decade has seen a sustained surge of interests and investments within the field internationally (Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Parker & Carroll, 2009; Ready, Hill, & Conger, 2008; Riggio, 2008; Saslow & Buss, 2005; Storey, 2005; Tsang, 2001). A survey conducted on Human Resource (HR) practitioners revealed that 76% of companies with specific talent management initiatives considered leadership development a top priority (Fegley, 2006). More recently, a meta-analytic review of leadership impact in organizations revealed a 66% probability of leadership training achieving a positive outcome (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009). While this phenomenon might be triggered by the increasing evidence that leadership training has a positive correlation to effective leadership behavior (Caligiuri, 2006; Collins & Holton, 2004; Day & Harrison, 2007; Herman, 2007; Kesner, 2003), the impact of leadership development interventions has never been systematically studied, and is identified as the least explored topic in the field of leadership (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010).

Apart from the increasing leadership development programs both at the public and private sectors, the second phenomenon that continues to occur at a global scale is the myriads of corporate scandals and ethical failures involving bullying, abuse of power, unethical practices, toxic emotions and others (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010; Illies & Reiter-Palmon, 2008; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santorra, 2008). A cursory review of extant literature on both leadership development and business ethics reveals the irony of the simultaneous increase of rigorous leadership development programs and unethical corporate practices. Many concur that these problems will continue to persist and grow in the absence of an intentional, systemic effort to invest in the development of authentic and moral leadership (Hilton, 1995; Luthans, 2003; Quatro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007). While that may be a worthwhile solution, a better
understanding of the current leadership development intervention practices is needed before. In this study, we undertake such review to identify the gaps, if any, in what would otherwise be effective leadership development interventions.

Drawing upon servant leadership as a holistic leadership framework, this paper examines leadership development practices published in peer-reviewed journals from 1994-2010. Content analysis revealed that a holistic approach of leadership development that incorporates much neglected ethical and spiritual dimensions is virtually non-existent. The elevated interests and significant investments put in the leadership development field seem to focus on certain dimensions of leadership behaviors at the expense of others. The increasing presence of toxic leadership in modern corporations has seen many to question the way leaders are developed.

Building on the findings of the study, an undergraduate business leadership unit focusing on holistic leadership development of students was developed. Its rationale, features, and positive learning outcomes are also described to provide a case example of how holistic leaders can be developed early in these prospective leaders. Theoretical and practical implications as well as future research directions conclude the paper.

Keywords: Servant Leadership; Leadership Development