The Role Of Servant Leadership In The African Church Environment

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Abstract: Lack of servant leadership is one of the large problems that today's churches are facing all over the world. Most leaders within the church have mislaid their integrity, spirituality, transparency, and even their faith in God. God has given human beings the ability to influence people toward their purpose through servant leadership. Servant leadership can bring a great solution for the failure of both leaders' behavior and service to others, and it helps to achieve churches' goals and enhance their effectiveness. Servanthood, stewardship, transparency, and behaving ethically are the key ingredients that can sustain servant leadership in Africa Churches. This study explores servant leadership roles in the church environment globally, regionally, and nationally. The study reviewed the literature on servant leadership in the church environment through international journals, updated books, published articles, magazines, and the Bible's view on servant leadership. Therefore, the churches should be headed by the servant leadership ministry in which both the physical and spiritual needs of the congregants are fulfilled. They gain new knowledge about the role of servant leadership in a church environment, servant leaders' behavior, and its impact on the church community and society. The study allows further research on the differences between the role of servant leaders and conventional leaders in the church environment.

INTRODUCTION

In churches around the globe, there are different challenges that hinder church leadership. For example, conflict within the church, lack of knowledge, financial constraints, discrepancies in culture, and other internal factors (bureaucracy, corruption, lack of good governance and security, and conflict) affect today's church. As result, these challenges weaken the servant leadership of current churches all over the world. The lack of servant leadership has hurt the church and community globally (Elliot, Murayama, & Pekrun, 2011). Likewise, African churches fail to lead and evangelize the community around them (Rainer, 2014). The external challenges that African churches face are the growth of Islam, political instability (leadership crisis), economic and social factors, and information and technology (Mwanza, 2019). The churches in Africa face the same challenges, but servant leadership has a great role to solve such problems which hinder the church, community, and the whole country. African churches need servant leaders. The church also exists to serve the community around it at the global, regional, and local levels. Jesus taught "You are the light of the world… Let it shine for all to see. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see so that everyone shall praise your heavenly Father" (New International Version, 2011, Matt. 5:14-16). If African churches' leaders develop a servant leadership style, the church will experience better growth in leadership and wins the community for Christ. However, internal challenges like the new age movement rose from the church and negatively impacted the Nigerian churches (Ndiokwere, 1981, as cited in Akanbbi & Byeyers, 2017).

Churches in Ethiopia were also hurt by false prophecies, cultural barriers, and influence of false prophets, and tribalism (Hautz, 2014, Tamirat, 2019). To overcome these challenges servant leaders should fear God, and keep and apply the principles of servant leadership (Tamirat, 2019). God is able to shift religious, social, cultural, economic, and political stands within Africa through the development of servant leadership (Mwanza, 2019). Theorists also believe that applying the principles of servant leadership is very important for the transformation of organizations and for the common good of the world. According to Spears (2004) as cited in

Johnson (2020), servant leadership is a theory that holds significant principles such as servanthood, transparency, stewardship, and behaving ethically. This study endeavours to see how these ingredients of servant leadership are being practiced in the African church environment.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The writer begins by explaining leadership in general and servant leadership in narrow sense because the church members, the community, and God are looking forward to servant leaders in order to fix the crisis of church leadership. Leadership is mentioned as influencing others to accomplish an organization's goals (Robbins et al., 2013). In the servant leadership philosophy, the goal of the leader is not to lead but to serve. People value a leader who serves them. A servant leader should develop, empower, and inspire followers to act as servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant Leadership is also stated as a motive of serving others first (Northouse, 2016). Within the church context, leaders should influence their followers by building a relationship with their follower (Eacott, 2018). The term "servant leadership" is used in this study to emphasize leaders' behaviour and service to others in the Africa Church environment. Servanthood, transparency, stewardship, and behaving ethically are very important elements for developing servant leadership in the African church environment.

Servanthood: - The global concept and concern of servant leadership are serving others before leading them (Greenleaf, 2012). Serving is the primary purpose of a servant leader (Greenleaf, 2012). According to Oketch (2020), servanthood in leadership is like an overturned hierarchy in which leaders are under the pyramid as a servant. In addition, Clarke (2000) noted that the word servanthood related to Christian leadership after Jesus' pattern.

Transparency: - According to Vargas (2022) in order to run a firm's business, a leader should be transparent, objective, and a model for followers because transparency promotes trust that easily brings positive impacts on organizations' growth. Kernis (2003) describes transparency as conduct that values self-openness and truthfulness that helps to build relationships between leaders and followers. Therefore, transparency is one of the key elements of servant leadership so Christian servant leaders should be transparent by living exemplary life before others.

Stewardship:- Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, and Greenberg, (2013) noted that one who is in charge of a household is described as a steward. Servanthood and transparency are co-relational to stewardship because serving others is based on the idea of stewardship. Leaders are stewards of their organization's goals, objectives, and assets. They need to manage and utilize organizations' property in a good manner.

Behaving Ethically: - Behaving ethically is very crucial in every aspect of leaders' and followers' life. Because the global concept of ethical leadership is based on common moral and ethical values that build human ethics. Daymond, Acheampong, Prawoto, Abdoellah, Addo, Adu-Yeboah, and Hadley, (2017) perceive ethics as the conduct of the people reflected in action or behavior. It is about distinguishing between good and bad, right or wrong, and correct and incorrect in all aspects of life (Northouse, Kent, Rowland, Litzelman, Chou, Shelburne & Huss, 2016). In this context behaving ethically is related to respecting others, doing justice, and being honest. Hence, African church leaders should behave ethically in order to inspire and influence their followers.

THE CONCEPT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Servant leadership is one of the leadership theories which get concentration in the popular press. Servant leadership was originated in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf. Greenleaf said that a key fact to leaders' greatness is serving which makes leaders great. A 'great leader is a servant first' and it is natural for them to be a servant (Keith, 2021 Greenleaf, 1970). In this leadership philosophy, the goal of the leaders is not to lead but to serve. People value a leader who serves them. Greenleaf also mentioned as a leader is one who emphasizes, empowers, and develops followers, while at the same time inspiring the followers to act as servant leaders too (Greenleaf, 1970; Newman et al., 2015). According to Yukl (2013), servant leadership is one of the growing, ethical leadership theories focusing on leaders' desire to serve others. Servant leadership emphasizes being role models (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al, 2008).

Cultivating followers to become servant leaders and providing them to examine their attitudes, behaviors, and values are some of the key functions of servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970; Liden et al., 2014). Therefore, servant leadership is essential to achieve

churches' goals, improve leaders' behavior, and enhance the effectiveness of churches' ministries. In addition to this, Daft (2016) noted "Servant leadership, which puts the leader in the effect of a servant, who utilizes "caring principles" to focus on followers' needs to help these followers become more autonomous, knowledgeable, and like servants themselves; and …" (p.5). Therefore, servant leadership is defined as serving others first (Northouse 2016). As Sikazwe (2011) mentioned, "servant leadership demonstrates care, concern, spirituality, compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, love, and service over those it leads" (p. 11). Hence, African church leaders should work tirelessly to mitigate the problems of servant leadership.

THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND AFRICA CHURCHES

In Africa, individuals are establishing churches, holding top positions, and making decisions (Mbogori & Matena, 2020). Still, African churches need servant leaders as mentioned in the above session. Servant leaders have a great role to play in the African church. For example, serving, trusting, doing justice, caring, listening, transparency, empowering, persuasion, influencing, empathy, and being a model are some of the roles (Spears (2004) as cited in Johnson (2020). In addition to this, servant leadership helps the church to accomplish holistic missions such as proclaiming Christ's gospel to the unsaved people who live in poverty, delivering the captives who are in the bondages of Satan, and addressing the physical, social, and economic needs of the church community. Bible says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed…" (New International Version, 2011; Luke 4:17-18). Therefore, leaders in African churches should apply these principles to develop both their conduct and ministry.

Servant leaders shall lead their followers by being a model and by providing opportunities to develop values and behaviors (Liden et al, 2014). Servant leadership can help both the church community and society by shaping leaders' and followers' behaviors and service-oriented values. Dennis and Winston (2003) noted that anyone can be a leader but a few of them lead with the heart of a servant. A servant leader has a servant's heart that can be a good field for communicating with followers and performing church evangelism effectively. Nurturing followers to become servant leaders by observing, and imitating their values, behaviors, and attitudes is also the aim of servant leadership. Servant leaders are role models by providing followers with opportunities (Liden et al, 2008).

The best servant leadership model of all time was Jesus Christ the servant leader. The effective servant leaders of current churches must humble themselves; care about their followers' welfare, and point people to Jesus as the source of their life. That is how the churches must lead the people under their administration. As Christ's ambassadors, current churches and their leaders must share with other people the truth of the Scripture and let them have real fellowship with God. Servant leaders must lead both their followers and their organization toward God's goal. In a church setting, servant leaders care for the flock and ensure that their needs are met. They teach, encourage, and equip the flock so that they can perform their commission effectively. Focusing on mobilizing the church members is the most important role that servant leaders should play to improve their conduct and behavior. Jesus trained the 12 disciples to preach the Good News vividly to those who were living in fear and doubt. This is part of Jesus' plan in the NT for the lives of all Christians. Thus, we have been called and appointed by Jesus Christ to accomplish this task. It is obligated to all believers (the church leaders, pastors, evangelists, and members) to witness the truth of the gospel for the people out of the church and within the church (New International Version, 2011, Matt. 28:18-20, Mark, 16:15, Acts 1:8). Therefore, servant leadership has the potential to build church unity, develop spiritual formation, increase ethical behavior, and bring community transformation. Servant Leadership helps to accomplish organizational goals (Robbins et al., 2013). According to Greenleaf, (1970), Liden et al. (2014), and Liden et al. (2008), nurturing followers to become servant leaders, to observe and imitating their values, behaviors, and attitudes are the final aim of servant leadership.

HOW LACK OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP IMPACTS THE CHURCHES IN AFRICA

The church is universal (Catholic) and it is a reality that is pertinent to everyone universally (Nicene Creed), It is the people of God on the earth. According to Greenleaf (1995), "servant leadership is at the heart of Christian leadership". Lack of servant leadership affects church missions, causes conflict, limits church finance, and also it impacts society negatively (Hautz, 2014). These challenges affect church leaders and members negatively. God is able to shift religious, social, cultural, economic, and political stands within Africa because the earth and all in it are under God's control (Mwanza, 2019).

When the church leaders are not transparent, and ethically wrong, then their followers refused to obey and follow them (Vargas, 2022). Servant leaders should be transparent, objective, and a model for followers because transparency promotes trust that easily brings positive impacts on organizations' growth. Kernis (2003) describes transparency as conduct that values self-openness and truthfulness that helps to build relationships with others (Vargas, 2022). Lack of stewardship, lack of trusting others, seeking personal benefits, lack of commitment, and friendship are means of conflict between church leaders and followers. For example, people gossip about their leaders and present the wrong report. As servant leaders, church leaders should apply servant leadership principles that guide both the leaders and followers to be good at every aspect of conduct and work. Servant leaders need to encourage others instead of taking advantage of their followers.

The churches in Africa have to build the community and its leaders must serve this society. Servant leadership is a relationship rooted in the community. For example, church leaders who prioritize their personal interests like seeking positions kill servant leadership philosophy. Some of the leaders in the church aim to get positions. They are the kind of leaders whose aim is to get positions. This opposes the leadership that Jesus demonstrated. It does not have the feature of servant leadership. While the leaders of African churches are chasing after these issues, they are not able to be good models for their members, co-leaders, and the society around them.

THE OUTCOME OF SERVANTHOOD, STEWARDSHIP, TRANSPARENCY, AND BEHAVING ETHICALLY IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF CHURCH LEADERS AND MEMBERS

Servanthood is one of the key ingredients of servant leadership that can sustain servant leadership in the African church. "Servanthood must be intrinsic in the leader's nature" (Caldwell, *McConkie & Licona,* 2014:p. 20). Consequently, the main concern of African church leaders must be serving others, caring, keeping, and guiding their followers. Therefore, leaders can build relationships with their followers by helping them properly.

African churches need servant leaders who are committed to serving others. One of the most significant internal challenges for African churches is the lack of servant leaders (Elliot, Murayama, & Pekrun, 2011). They also described that African leaders look only one way (externally) for the source of the crisis that put Africa still in bondage. However, internal challenges such as bureaucracy, corruption, lack of good governance and security, and conflict hinder the economic growth and business success of the continent.

The churches in Africa face the same challenges that hurt the life and ministry of both church leaders and members. Church leaders exist to serve their followers, and the community around them. Jesus taught "You are the light of the world… Let it shine for all to see. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see so that everyone shall praise your heavenly Father" (New International Version, 2011, Matt. 5:14-16). If African churches' leaders become servants of others, the church members will follow them, experience better growth in their spiritual life, and wins the community for Christ. The most known example of servanthood is mentioned in the gospel of John chapter 13. In this chapter, Jesus washed their disciples' feet and demonstrated service to others. Therefore, a servant leader can serve others humbly. The outcome of servanthood, in the life and ministry of church leaders and members, is persuasion, empowering, caring for people, and being role modeling. Jesus said "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" (New International Version, 2011 Mark 10:45). Jesus was a model servant leader who gave the first place to serve others.

Transparency motivates followers to engage in church ministry. According to Costa (2003), servant leadership encourages both interpersonal and team levels of transparency and trust. Building transparency helps church leaders to the extent that their followers trust them. Church leaders must be transparent both in life and ministry. They must avoid hidden life; instead, they should empower, facilitate, and help others in the workplace (Akhilele 2021). Transparent leaders are, listening to followers, willing to share in their frustration and pain, and nurture, and learning about their aspirations and needs (Yukl 2013). Therefore, Both African leaders and followers should promote transparency both at the interpersonal and team level by living what they talk about (genuine life), and by being honest and open (smooth communication). They also should be willing to help their co-ministers, appreciate them, and be polite to improve transparency. Being transparent with co-workers, fairness and flexibility, smooth communication, and genuine life, and building relationship are some of the effects of transparency. Therefore, African church leaders have to display these fundamental elements of transparency in the life and ministry of church leaders and members, by sharing both their strong side and shortcomings with their followers.

Stewardship is another element of servant leadership that can be a means to be reflected in the life of servant leaders and to enhance church ministry. Stewardship develops Faithfulness, commitment, responsibility, and accountability in the conduct of leaders and the ministry of the church. According to Patterson (2005), servant leaders humble themselves and value others which make them stewards. Servant leaders as stewards are responsible for the welfare of their followers, and faithful and responsible for the ministry as well. Therefore, stewardship is another element of servant leadership that can be a means to establish the relationship between leaders and members.

Jesus was the model by teaching about stewardship and by living as a steward. He said, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (New International Version, 2011, John 17:4). As Jesus taught, steward leaders should be reliable and honest for the ministry given to them, their owner's possessions, and for the people whom they lead. The parable of dishonest and shrewd managers has a great lesson for servant leaders. The Scripture says, "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. He called him in and asked him. What is this I heard about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer" (New International Version, 2011, Luke 16:1-13). In this passage, the manager lost his position because of a lack of stewardship (wasting owners' possessions).

Based on the above concept of stewardship, African church leaders must understand that they have to be stewards of the leadership position they hold, for church ministries, and for whom they serve. For the common benefit and rights of others, steward leaders must manage their life and activities (Sergiovanni, 2000). The Scripture also talks about three servants in the gospel of Mathew. These servants were commanded by their masters to make a profit with their given talents (New International Version, 2011, Mathew 25: 14-29).   Therefore,   servant   leaders   must   be   stewards   and   committed   to   serving   the   need   of others.

Behaving ethically is very crucial in every aspect of leaders' and followers' life work as well. According to Dei, and Osei-Bonsu (2016), the African continent does not lack natural resources but ethical and servant leadership. For example, the deposit of oil in Nigeria and Sudan, diamonds in the Democratic Republic of Congo, coffee in Ethiopia, and timber in Cote d'Ivoire are some of the natural resources accumulated in Africa. However, civil war, joblessness, youth violence, poor infrastructure, and poverty are hitting even these countries, because of a lack of both ethical and servant leadership that relays on leaders' moral and ethical values. Therefore, African leaders (including Christian leaders) have to develop their moral qualities such as honesty, integrity, modesty, trustworthiness, reliability, and respect toward others, in order to reach common goals through inner virtues, ethical leadership should engage an individual to influence others (Dei & Osei-Bonsu, 2016). With the above moral qualities, ethical leaders direct or lead their followers toward the accomplishment of objectives and goals.

Most church leaders believe that the Holy Bible is the root of Christian ethics because it holds both the law of humans and the law of God. The Bible is the foundation for Christian ethics. In the Scriptures, believers are like the salt of the earth, so they sweeten the bitter world through their good ethics (New International Version, 2011, Matt. 5:13, 14). This indicates the ethical life and conduct of servant leaders are very crucial to others' convictions because they can easily impact none believers around them. Northouse (2015) noted that of ethical leadership focuses on the conduct and character of leaders. Therefore, by being morally right and by doing fair or justice, servant leaders' life can radiate to the people whom they serve. Consequently, other people will follow Christ by looking at their lifestyle.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study allows further research on the role of servant leadership in evangelical churches. It seems that servant leadership can answer the current problems that the church is facing due to leaders' failure (Page & Davey, 2007). Extraordinary pieces of literature must be used and the general overview of servant leadership in the church environment shall be researched. In the coming research, servant leadership effect in enhancing evangelism and the extent of the relationship between a servant leaders and followers should be studied.

CONCLUSION

Servant leadership is very essential to the church around the globe. The purpose of this study was mainly to explore the role of servant leadership in the African church environment. It demonstrates the role of servant leadership conceptually and theoretically. The review of servant leadership in the African church and its role is described vividly. It also describes the four key elements of servant leadership such as servanthood, transparency, stewardship, and behaving ethically, and explores how the lack of servant leadership impacts the church. Therefore, this article provides a careful review of servant leadership and elaborates on biblical references to servant leadership as pillars in the church environment. Servant leaders should gain new knowledge, develop their character, and solve the problems caused by the lack of servant leadership. The study emphasizes the review of servant leadership and its principles that can develop leaders' behavior, churches' productivity, and job satisfaction for ministers.

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