

Servant Leadership's Role in the Succession Planning Process: A Case Study

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This case study applied the seven constructs of Patterson's (2003) model of servant leadership (agápao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service) to examine the role and effect of servant leadership on the succession process within Freedom Automotive, a for-profit organization. The current owner, a past owner, and six of the seven executive committee members provided data triangulated by three methods of data collection: the observations of the organization over a 4-month period, the data from company records, and responses to eight in-depth interviews conducted using emergent design. This examination of the succession process in a servant-led organization showed a positive relationship between servant leadership principles and the succession process.

At a 2004 servant leadership roundtable conference, Jim Laub (2003) presented a paper identifying two primary reasons that servant leadership is espoused by leaders, writers, and researchers: it is the right way to view leadership, and the concept works. Although scholarly research into servant leadership is increasing (Laub, 2004; Wong, 2003), a lack of specific details persists when examining the definitions and models of servant leadership (Laub, 2003; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004; Winston, 2004). According to Yin (1994), one strategy to discover the details is through the use of case studies.

One business process which holds potential to reflect the impact of servant leadership is succession planning. It is logical that servant leadership would place emphasis on succession planning with its emphasis on the follower (employee) and the follower's development (Bieschke, 2006; Stone et al., 2004). While virtually all organizations encounter the need for succession planning, research and literature have not focused on the actual process (Dyck, Mauws, Starke, & Mischke, 2002). This study provided the opportunity to examine the succession process in a servant-led organization to determine the manner in which the process is involved with servant leadership's focus on the individual employee. The research used Patterson's (2003) model of servant leadership and its seven constructs (agápao love, humility,

altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service) that explain the process by which servant leadership behavior manifests itself in the workplace.

Succession planning was selected for examination for several reasons. It is seen as one of the most critical elements for the continued success of an organization (Brady & Helmich, 1984; Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997); the leader's focus is on the follower (Northouse, 2001); and there is little or no empirical research in this area (P. S. Davis & Harveston, 1998).

This case study provided a portion of the research void by studying Freedom Automotive, a for-profit car dealership which had previously been identified as a servant-led organization (Contee-Borders, 2003). Conoly Lincoln-Mercury's leadership merged with Freedom Ford creating Freedom Automotive, an organization created by a leadership succession at the executive level of two automotive dealerships. The case study method of research included in-depth interviews, observations, and the review of company documents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to collect data and information from Freedom Automotive, owned and operated by Scott Rigell who was identified in Contee-Border's (2003) study as a servant leader, to determine if servant leadership had influenced a previous dealership executive leadership succession or might influence a future dealership executive leadership succession. Ultimately, it was anticipated that the research would help answer a sideline question: does servant leadership work?

Servant leadership and succession planning are both vital issues which have had little in the way of formal research studies data, especially in the area of privately owned businesses. All businesses, large and small, are realizing the importance of executive succession and especially the need to plan for succession. Rothwell (2001) stated, "Amid the twofold pressures of pending retirements in senior executive ranks and the increasing value of intellectual capital and knowledge management, it is more necessary than ever before for organizations to plan for leadership continuity and employee advancement" (p. xvii).

As necessary as succession planning is, Bieschke (2006) referenced a recent poll showing that 94% of organizations had no succession plan at all. In light of that statistic, how do CEOs and business leaders pass on the reigns of leadership to their offspring or others? What planning do they need to do to ensure that their organizations continue after they are no longer able to lead them? Most importantly for this research; what role, if any, does leadership style play in the succession process? While some research has been conducted on the first two questions, none was found on leadership style's influence on the succession process.

Case Study Site

To accomplish the purpose of this study, it was important to identify an organization which met the dual requirements of being a servant-led organization which had recently gone through a succession or was planning a succession. Freedom Automotive became the first choice for this case study for several reasons. Previous research by Contee-Borders (2003) identified the CEO, Scott Rigell, as a servant leader through the implementation of Kouzes and Posner's (1995) Leadership Practices Inventory to both Rigell and his top management team. Her research also asserted that Rigell believes he had implemented the concept of servant leadership within his company.

The second reason for selecting Freedom Automotive was the fact that there had previously been a succession at the CEO level which involved the current CEO. This allowed analysis of the succession process through studying the previous succession as well as looking at any processes currently in place for the future. The final reason for selecting Freedom Automotive was accessibility. The business owner had been receptive to servant leadership research in the past.

Bieschke (2006) noted, “Many organizations are just one step away from extinction” (p. 1). Bieschke (2006) followed this comment by asking if the Christian church would exist today if Jesus had not recognized and demonstrated the need to equip followers to become the future leaders. If Jesus recognized the need for succession planning in his time, then businesses also need to recognize this today.

Gersick et al. (1997) discussed succession as a process rather than a single event. McConnell (1996) explained that the succession process needs to take a “consistent approach to assembling, analyzing, and retaining information about potential leaders and planning for their further development” (p. 1). The attack on the World Trade Center in New York City highlighted why succession planning was so important. Many companies lost key executives in this disaster and were forced to replace them with no advance notice or preparation.

Brady and Helmich (1984) realized the importance of leadership succession and especially executive succession when they pointed out that “few events in the history of an organization stand to have greater repercussions on its ultimate success” (p. 12). Greengard (2001) pointed out that succession planning was not an easy task: “Mapping out the future involves more than an organizational chart displaying the corporate hierarchy” (p. 34). Yet, despite the obvious need for a succession plan, many companies neglect the task. “45 percent of boards at companies with sales of more than \$500 million have no meaningful process for grooming potential CEOs. And, remarkably, 24 percent of Fortune 500 companies don’t consider succession planning a top priority” (Greengard, p. 36). One of the myths associated with succession planning is that it is only useful for large organizations; when in fact, it is a valuable tool for organizations of all size (McConnell, 1996).

Patterson (2003) developed a servant leadership model which uses seven variables to explain the leader-follower relationship: agápao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (see Figure 1). She also showed that the focus of the servant leader is on the follower rather than the organization. Stone et al. (2004) labeled this focus to be the most important distinguishing characteristic between servant leadership and transformational leadership. Bieschke (2006) related succession planning to looking for and cultivating future leaders.

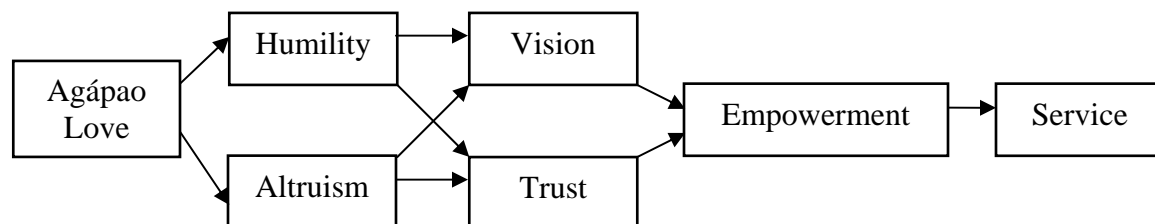


Figure 1. Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership model shows the flow and interaction of the constructs.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions: (a) how did servant leadership affect the leadership succession of Conoly Lincoln-Mercury to Freedom Automotive? and (b) how has servant leadership at Freedom Automotive influenced the succession planning process? Freedom Automotive has three dealerships located in the Tidewater, Virginia area. This case study built on a previous study done on this company which identified it as a servant-led organization (Contee-Borders, 2003). The previous study described how Freedom Automotive's leadership took deliberate steps to incorporate servant leadership attributes into the company's culture. This current study had the following limitations: (a) this study limited generalizability by focusing on only one business, and the results are not intended to be generalizable to a larger universe (Yin, 1994); (b) one researcher conducted on-site interviews and documentation, making interviewer reliability and bias a possible concern; and (c) only one succession within the organization was considered in the study. The study was limited to exploring the succession process rather than looking at successions throughout the organization at all levels.

Succession planning and servant leadership have different definitions depending on which literature is reviewed. For this research, succession planning is the process of identifying people who could presently move into key positions or could do so after specifically targeted development occurs (McConnell, 1996).

Servant Leadership

To understand Patterson's (2003) servant leadership model, it is necessary to define each of her seven variables. The first variable is *agápao* love. Winston (2002) defined *agápao* love as "to love in a social or moral sense, embracing the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety" (p. 5). *Agápao* love means the servant leader does the right thing for the right reasons. The servant leader considers each person as a total person with needs, wants, and desires (Patterson, 2003) and should genuinely care for them (Crom, 1998).

Patterson (2003), in her second variable of humility, posited that "humility opens the door to vision, but not only vision, it also allows an environment of trust to exist" (p. 6). Winston (2002) stated that humility is "a peaceful virtue that rejects self-glorification and is an almost social reversal in that it purports the idea of serving" (p. 2). Patterson referenced several authors who came to the conclusion that humility is a virtue which allows servant leaders to connect with their followers by not overestimating their own merits (see Bagger, 2002; Hare, 1996; Harrison, 2002; Lawrence, 2002). Sandage and Wiens (2001) also looked at humility as being focused on others which equates with the primary emphasis of the servant leader as a follower-focused leadership style.

The third variable in Patterson's (2003) model is altruism. Winston (2003) described Patterson's position on altruism as "leaders having concern for the welfare of others and going to lengths to care for and improve the welfare of employees even if it means personal sacrifice to the leader" (p. 3). Patterson said, "altruism is helping just for the sake of helping, at any level, and further that this helping is selfless" (p. 14). There is no personal gain in altruism. As with the overall view of servant leadership, altruism moves the leader to seek the benefit of the follower rather than the benefit of the organization (Winston, 2003).

Vision is the fourth variable in Patterson's (2003) model. Her concept of vision is different from that normally found in the literature. Patterson stated, "vision for the servant leader refers to the idea that the leader can see a person as a viable and worthy person, believes in their future state, and thus seeks to serve them as such" (p. 16). Winston (2003), while suggesting that the term vision may be the wrong one to use in this context, explained its use by Patterson as the leader needing "to find out what the follower wants to do with regard to meeting the follower's needs within the context of the organization" (p. 3). This is more of a concept of getting people in the organization aligned with the values of the organization.

The fifth variable in Patterson's (2003) model is trust. Fletcher (1999) and Wis (2002) stated that trust is one of the most important elements of servant leadership. Patterson said, "servant leaders lay the foundation of trust, and trust holds the servant-led organization together. Servant leaders do what they say they are going to do" (p. 19). Patterson's model showed that trust and vision work together and lead to empowerment.

Empowerment is the sixth variable in Patterson's model. Winston (2003) stated that empowerment provides "the follower with the power, authority, accountability, responsibility, and resources to achieve what the follower wants to achieve relative to his/her vision within the organization" (p. 4). Empowerment is a major factor in servant leadership and should be one of its primary foci (Russell & Stone, 2002). Winston (2003) noted that this empowerment of followers is progressive in nature, allowing the follower to learn and grow until he or she is capable and willing to handle larger levels of empowerment.

The final variable is service. Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999); Russell and Stone (2002); Buchen (1998); Wis (2002); Guillen and Gonzalez (2001); and Fairholm and Fairholm (2000) have agreed that service is the core of servant leadership and should be a primary function of leadership. Patterson stated that "the very idea of service is at the heart of servant leadership theory and occurs as the leader serves others, mainly the followers" (p. 22). Winston (2003) noted that this serving is out of a focus on serving rather than the sense of servitude or requirement to serve. This service by the servant leader is to provide the follower with what he or she needs to accomplish their tasks, visions, or goals.

Succession Planning

Succession in small family firms is a rare event, happening only once per generation. Therefore, there are few people in either the family or the business with any experience of when and how the issue should be handled (Fox, Nilakant, & Hamilton, 1996). Ward and Aronoff (1992b) listed three reasons why letting go of the family business is tough for parents: (a) they felt financially insecure, (b) they felt the business was their personal identity, and (c) they felt control over the business gave them more control over family members and family behavior.

Another issue in family-owned business succession is the extent to which second generation ownership would be jointly shared. According to Ward and Aronoff's (1992a) research, about 50% of the owners of family firms in the United States expected that in the next generation, their businesses would be jointly owned and managed by two or more of their children. Many family-business experts have proposed that these shared ownerships would inevitably fail (Ward & Aronoff, 1992a). Morris, Williams, Allen, and Avila (1997) addressed this problem when they listed three sets of determinants for a successful family business transition: "the preparation level of the heirs, the nature of the relationships among family members, and the types of planning and control activities engaged in by the management of the

family business” (p. 385). Morris et al. declared that relationships within the family have the single greatest impact on successful transitions.

Founders face an unavoidable succession dilemma of making either an explicit or implicit strategic decision about transferring ownership of the family business. The main alternatives are to sell the business to someone outside the family or to make arrangements for an interfamily succession (Bjuggren & Sand, 2001). However, as it turns out, family conflict is the biggest obstacle to passing the business to successors (Bedosky, 2002).

The implication is that these relationships need to be managed just like a business manages its relationships with suppliers or customers. Yet, only approximately 20% of family-owned businesses have succession plans, mainly because the incumbents are unwilling to turn over authority to the younger generation (Rohland, 1996; Yue, 1999). Nelton (1990) offered that the 80-something founder refusing to turn management over to the 50-something “kid” may become more common. Poe (1980) observed that many business owners are too busy keeping their businesses alive to worry about succession, and they lack confidence in their children to take over the businesses.

Chief executives of family businesses also have to deal with the problem of not only finding a successor but realizing that their search is not limited to the person with the most suitable record and abilities but must take into account the added complications of family membership and expectations (Brown & Coverley, 1999). The literature has provided abundant reasons for incumbents to plan for succession including minimizing taxation, continuing the business, developing expertise, maintaining employee relations, and meeting strategic goals (Brown & Coverley). Without a well-conceived succession plan, leadership might not be placed in the right hands; unnecessary tax consequences may occur for the heirs; crisis planning might be needed during a time of emotional strain; and siblings may fight over roles, money, and authority (Korman, 1999). A proper succession process affords family firms the opportunity to select effective leaders who are capable of rejuvenating their businesses (Ibrahim, McGuire, Ismail, & Dumas, 1999; Ward, 1987). Several studies have suggested that the succession process should be initiated very early in the heir’s life (S. Davis, 1968; Stavrou, 1999; Ward, 1987).

Research Method

This research used two design strategies Patton (2002) called emergent design flexibility and purposeful sampling. Emergent design flexibility means the researcher was open to adapting inquiry as an understanding of the situation deepened or changed. This strategy allowed “the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be” (p. 56). Patton went on to say that qualitative designs need to remain open and flexible and continue to be emergent even after data collection begins. Guba and Lincoln (1989) added that emergent design requires the researcher to follow new information as it emerges.

Purposeful sampling was selected because it offers “useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). In this research, the phenomenon of interest was the effect of a servant leader on succession planning. By purposefully selecting a servant-led organization which had gone through a succession, the researcher gained insights and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest. This design strategy also did not try to generalize the data from a sample to a population but merely looked at gaining insight about the phenomenon studied.

The data collection for this qualitative study took place during a 2-week period in March 2006 at Freedom Automotive's headquarters in Virginia Beach, Virginia and at the three dealerships comprising Freedom Automotive in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Scott Rigell was the key participant in this research for several reasons: he had been identified as a servant leader by the research done by Contee-Borders (2003), he was the CEO of Freedom Automotive, and he went through a type of succession when he obtained Conoly Lincoln-Mercury. The initial step, therefore, was to interview Scott Rigell to get an overview of the organization and to explore both the process he went through in procuring Conoly Lincoln-Mercury and the succession process he had put in place at Freedom Automotive. Additional interviews were done with Conoly Phillips, the previous owner of Conoly Lincoln-Mercury, and with five of the six senior leaders within Freedom Automotive. All five of these leaders are members of Freedom Automotive's Executive Committee.

Document analysis took place in the human resources department at the headquarters location and at two of the three dealerships. Patton (2002) indicated that documents are a rich source of information about organizations and their programs. Documents regarding promotion policies, training programs, evaluation programs, and hiring practices helped to shed light on the succession process of the organization.

This research utilized the general interview guide with servant leadership and succession planning as the two issues explored. This guide differed slightly for each level of respondent since questions concerning the succession between Conoly Lincoln-Mercury and Freedom Automotive did not apply to upper level executives at Freedom Automotive. Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder. The interviews were recorded on a separate file and carefully numbered to correspond with any demographic information obtained for each individual. The interviews were transcribed and were between 45-60 minutes in length.

All interviews were conducted using unstructured methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) which allowed an exploration of the role servant leadership played in the succession process without trying to define the role. The research also looked at Freedom Automotive's employee handbook, new member orientation manual, vision statement, organizational goals, information and slogans displayed in the dealerships, and observations of employee interaction with each other and with customers at both Freedom Ford Norfolk and Freedom Lincoln-Mercury. These additional methods of data collection enabled data source triangulation wherein the researcher examined all data collected to ascertain whether the themes found in the data remained consistent at different times (Stake, 1995). An iterative process was employed to review the data (personal interviews, organizational material, and observations).

Findings

Freedom Automotive does not have a formal written succession plan at either the owner level or the senior executive level. This agreed with Bieschke's (2006) reported poll which showed 94% of organizations having no succession plan at all. Yet, the data from this study showed that there was a succession between Conoly Phillips and Scott Rigell and that there was a strong informal succession process operating at Freedom Automotive. In both cases, the Phillips-Rigell succession and the informal succession process at Freedom Automotive, servant leadership appeared to be a major influence in the actions taken.

During the interview with Scott Rigell, he mentioned that he had discussed contingencies with his wife if something were to happen to him. His ultimate desire was to leave the business

to his son, but only if the son was qualified to run it. He also mentioned that it would be probably 10 years before his son was ready to move into a general manager's position and then a few more years before he would be ready to take control of the business. Scott also mentioned he had three daughters and was not ruling out one of them or a future son-in-law as a possible successor. However, Scott gave the impression that he was not very concerned about his succession. He was only 45 years old at the time of this study; and, because his executive management team was effectively running Freedom Automotive, he did not feel the need to have a definitive succession plan. Despite the fact that there was no formal succession plan or process set up at Freedom Automotive, after compiling and analyzing the data collected, an informal succession process did indeed exist and was identified. It came about from a previous succession at the senior executive level of Freedom Automotive.

In 2002, Scott Rigell made all three of his general managers the presidents of their dealership and gave them and empowered them (along with three executive committee members) with the authority to make all decisions concerning the normal operations of the three dealerships. One president said the three of them "really act as the dealer in our stores" (personal communication, March 20, 2006). Scott met with his executive committee and said, "as I see it, I've got three choices . . . and the third one is to give you, meaning my senior managers, the opportunity to run the stores without a chief operating officer and see how that goes" (personal communication, March 15, 2006). Scott told them that he would evaluate them based on profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction. Although the executive committee members did not move into new positions, they did change positions in respect to their responsibilities and accountability.

In 2006, Scott took another step by offering his senior managers 20% ownership in their stores because he felt like they should reap some of the benefits since they ran the stores. Scott said other dealers could not believe he would let his general managers completely run their store without his direct input. When the presidents of the dealerships were asked how often they met with Scott, they replied that they met about once every 3-4 weeks with, at times, as long as 3 months between meetings. Scott does not come to the executive committee meetings either.

When discussing the promotion of his general managers to presidents of their respective dealerships, Scott made an interesting comment about why he made that decision. Scott said, "I hit 40, and I thought, 'I don't want to do this, I don't want to do this anymore'" (personal communication, March 15, 2006). He also said that he was not ready to sell the stores, so he offered his management team the opportunity to run the stores with virtually no input from him. Agápao love said you do the right thing for the right reason at the right time. Was this agápao love or selfishness? There was altruism, humility, trust, vision, empowerment, and service involved in his actions; but, was it based on servant leadership? From the executive committee's standpoint, it was based on servant leadership. One of the executive committee members said of the transition, "he [Scott] had some other things he wanted to do. As long as the dealerships continued to thrive and they were run the way that he ran them, he wasn't going to be involved. And, he's lived up to every word of it" (personal communication, March 20, 2006).

An analysis of the data collected showed that servant leadership did have an impact on the succession process between Conoly Philips and Scott Rigell and at Freedom Automotive. The findings, however, also uncovered the lack of a formal succession plan at Freedom Automotive. Furthermore, there appears to be apathy toward the need for a plan at the executive level in the organization. This finding was in line with the literature (Bieschke, 2006) but differed from what was anticipated. Freedom Automotive's extensive training program and

employee coaching could be construed as a succession plan, but those interviewed on the executive committee revealed that Scott Rigell and the executive committee had never given much thought or attention to who would lead should a senior member leave or the owner be incapacitated. It was generally assumed that the general sales manager would take that position if such a need arose. There was not, however, a specific program in which individuals were prepared or trained to fill a specific position. Senior leadership had not given thought to the possibility of replacing their positions in the future.

The lack of a succession plan might be correlated to the absence of turnover at the executive level. The high level of job satisfaction could be directly related to the practice of servant leadership principles in the organization and the focus on the needs and well-being of the employees. This low turnover was also cited as being well below the industry average for all job levels at Freedom Automotive. The low turnover was reflected in interview comments by the executive committee members that most employees elected to stay with Freedom Automotive even when they could make more money somewhere else. Often employees who leave for other positions will call a few months later to inquire if there is a possibility to return, indicating that employees value other work values besides money. The low turnover rate is a characteristic commonly found in organizations where servant leadership is proactively practiced and reflects positively that servant leadership is effective in sustaining employee longevity due to its focus on people development and growth within the organization.

Although no formal succession plan was found at Freedom Automotive, there was an informal succession process occurring. More importantly, this informal succession process appeared to be motivated by the servant leadership principles practiced by the owner of Freedom Automotive and his executive committee. The general sales managers had been promoted to the position of president of their respective dealerships. The increased responsibility, authority, and operational autonomy (empowerment) delegated to the executive committee members by Scott was not extraordinary in the context of a servant-led organization. From the succession perspective; it was extraordinary in that the CEO was still very much alive, active in operations, not intending to retire in the foreseeable future. Patterson's (2003) model predicted that Scott Rigell would be motivated by a sincere desire to do what was in the best interest of his senior leadership. The outcome manifested itself in the form of the promotions. Therefore, the leadership succession had already taken place.

Scott Rigell commented in the interviews that he was tired of doing things the way he had done them for the past 10 years, had become bored with the car business, and wanted to do other things. As Scott's corporate interests changed, he allowed his executive committee to have the control required to run their operations and removed himself as a potential barrier. Scott gave them the autonomy to run the organization and did, in fact, implement a nearly complete succession of responsibility and authority. Scott retained responsibility for some of the larger conglomerate financial issues, but the rest of operational decision making was delegated to the respective presidents.

While upwards of 90% of the leadership succession has already occurred, there is still issues that need to be addressed. What if something happens to Scott? Will his successor utilize the same servant leadership style or allow the committee to continue running the organization? There is still the need for a smaller scale succession plan to address these issues.

Smith, Montagno, and Kuzmenko (2004) observed that servant leadership works better in a stable external environment and transformational leadership works better for organizations facing intense external pressure. When Scott Rigell first purchased Freedom Ford, the dealership

was losing money annually and was not in the best of financial conditions. Scott introduced servant leadership principles; within months, the chaotic work environment had stabilized. Evidence in this case would indicate that servant leadership can contribute toward creating a stable organizational environment. The subsequent ongoing long-term financial well-being of the organization and lack of employee turnover at all levels provide strong evidence that servant leadership is exerting a positive organizational influence and work environment.

Winston's (2003) model includes a feedback loop to Patterson's (2003) model. This additional feedback loop posits that when servant leaders focus on the individuals within the organization with their best interests at heart, the employees reciprocate by wanting what is best for the leader. This reciprocal effect became evident in the executive committee members' interviews in their comments conveying the love and admiration they have for Scott and their desire to see the business prosper. In this context, Winston's (2003) reciprocal model of servant leadership holds potential for organizations.

This research did not validate the financial status of Freedom Ford, but comments by the executive committee indicated that the company has done very well since the committee members were given increased authority and autonomy. If servant leadership is actually correlated to increased profitability, other organizations might find servant leadership principles attractive and worth initiating.

The Need for Additional Research

This study raises intriguing questions for future research studies. For example, Freedom Automotive provides an environment in which Patterson's (2003) model could be used to examine the impact of servant leadership on organizational profitability. This study examined the success process at the executive level. Additional research should examine the impact servant leadership has on the ongoing succession processes at other levels in the organization.

The need to further delve into leader motivations became apparent in this study. Did owner motivation and that of other senior leaders impact the succession process at Freedom Automotive? Was their motivation self-centered or inline with Patterson's (2003) model? Did the succession originate in self-centered motives or in doing the best thing for the managers and, ultimately, all of the employees?

The findings from this case study should be replicated in other servant-led for-profit organizations to further solidify a positive correlation between servant leadership and the integrative succession process discovered at Freedom Automotive. Is there a reciprocal effect from employees to leadership in organizations using servant leadership principles per Winston's (2003) model? Is the longevity at Freedom Automotive indicative of this reciprocal effect? How well do servant leadership principles function in organizations experiencing unstable external pressure? Does servant leadership contribute to the stabilization of external and internal environments? What will happen to Freedom Automotive if something unexpectedly adverse happens to the senior leadership?

Summary

The findings from this case study are not generalizable to other businesses and organizations; but the data add to the cumulative evidence that servant leadership principles are tangible, achievable, applicable, and may actually integrate succession as a part of operations.

With organizations looking for ways to be more competitive and viewing employees as a critically important corporate asset, these observations have intriguing implications for organizations desiring to implement servant leadership principles.

This study found that servant leadership did positively affect the succession process at Freedom Automotive, but not in a conventional manner. It also found a lack of succession planning when servant leadership's focus on the employee implies such a system would be in place.

It was not the intent of this study to try and answer all the questions about servant leadership. It was hoped that this study would add to the body of knowledge about servant leadership and lead to further research and inquiry.

Succession planning still holds potential to reflect the impact of servant leadership in organizations. Servant leadership's emphasis on the follower (employee) and the follower's development provides the impetus for organizations to embrace the concept of succession planning. This study did, however, find a unique integrative low-grade approach to the process as an unconscious part of daily operations. That provided an innovative twist to the manner in which the actual process can be implemented.

Patterson's (2003) model of servant leadership and its seven constructs (agápao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service) continue to explain the process by which servant leadership behavior manifests itself in the workplace. There is every indication to believe that Jim Laub (2004) was right—servant leadership is the right way to view leadership for some organizations and the concept that works for them.

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