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Exploring servant leadership in multiple-deprived rural contexts: a multiple case study of four schools in KwaZulu-Natal

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2020
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/30046

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the findings of a qualitative case study on participants' conceptualisations, practices and challenges when enacting servant leadership in multiple-deprived rural school contexts in KwaZulu-Natal. The study further sought to ascertain what we could learn from this leadership theory to enhance leadership and management in the researched schools. The study was actuated by the noticeable lack of servant leadership in many multiple-deprived rural schools which often manifests itself in a myriad of professional malpractices, a clear decline in ethical and moral fibre and educational values leading to poor learner performance. Four schools were identified within which twelve participants were conveniently selected to share their conceptualisations, practices and challenges of servant leadership with the researcher. Further, interpretivism was used to foreground the study. Content analysis was utilised to meticulously analyse the data which were generated through semi-structured interviews and documents reviews.

The findings seem to suggest that some educators had very limited knowledge of servant leadership principles despite the Batho Pele policy which has existed in the public service since 1996. This policy promotes servant leadership behaviour by 'putting people first' and improving service delivery in the public service and schools in particular. Consequently, despite the anticipated servant leadership practices such as school vision, centrality of teaching and learning, educator professional development, implementation of educational laws and policies and rewarding excellence, there was still evidence of a multiplicity of professional malpractices such as educator-learner sexual relationships, late-coming and absenteeism by educators and rampant fraud, corruption, educator union militancy and dominance in a number of schools. In addressing some of the above ills, this paper concludes that the school stands and falls on its vision adopted by the leadership. Notwithstanding the challenges faced by participants, school principals should learn to be agile, be adaptable and transformational leaders, be excellent communicators, and promote the culture of selfless service and Ubuntu-based values and these skills are likely to assist them to implement the servant leadership practices (Batho Pele policy and other policies) meant to transform their schools into effective educational institutions.

Keywords:

Ethics, multiple deprivations, rurality, servant leadership, transformational leadership, *Ubuntu* leadership.