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An African conception of servant leadership: a consensus-based approach

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2019

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29316

Zondi, Nombuyiselo Caroline, (2019), An African conception of servant leadership :a consensus-based approach, University of the Witwatersrand, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29316

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Abstract

‘Servant leadership’ is a burgeoning research area and a novel approach to leadership, which links the issue of leadership with questions of morality and virtues. Robert Greenleaf, the originator of the theory, describes servant leadership as a theory that ‘begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to first serve, and then lead as a servant’. Scholarship on servant leadership has increased in recent years, with a growing trend for it to be practised in private and non-profit organisations. However, there is still a lack of research on the topic. Some studies have found servant leadership to be a relevant and effective leadership style, and have therefore suggested that educational leadership programmes adopt the principles and apply the practices associated with it. Part of what is intriguing about servant leadership theory is the application of this unique leadership approach in organisations. But to contextualise and apply this approach correctly, we need to understand its Western character and origin. My objective in this project is to understand what servant leadership would mean in an African context, and to evaluate its plausibility in South African school organisations. In other words, my aim is to translate the concept of servant leadership to fit the South African paradigm.

Keywords: African Philosophy; consensus; Servant Leadership; care and Ubuntu