

Thesis: Servant leadership

In late 2009, Inge Nuijten obtained her doctorate from Erasmus University Rotterdam with a thesis entitled 'Servant leadership: paradox or diamond in the rough?' Leadership is a topic that mainly has importance in the realm of internal branding. Traditionally, the idea has always been that employees serve their leader, but with servant leadership a manager not only leads, but also assumes a servant role. Nuijten shows that servant leadership has a positive effect on employees' well-being, performance and trust in their leader.

The idea that servant leadership might have a positive effect on employees is not a new one. The behaviour that goes with servant leadership has two core dimensions:

- Serve, which means that the manager fades away into the background, assumes a modest and genuine attitude, and shows a willingness to forgive mistakes.
- Lead, where empowerment, stewardship, holding people accountable and courage are keywords.

Servant leadership is a leadership style that is centred on people. Servant leaders employ foresight and are good listeners. This enables them to anticipate the needs of the company's employees and stakeholders. Good awareness of him/herself, others, and his/her environment enable the servant leader to get a vision across that will inspire others and motivate employees. Inge Nuijten ran three studies and identified the effects servant leadership has on employees, teams, and the company at large.

The results of Nuijten's research show that servant leaders are linked to trust and organisational success. Servant leadership has a positive effect on employees' well-being, team performance and trust. This research also shows that servant leadership caters to three important basic psychological needs of employees: autonomy, solidarity and competence. This form of leadership also has a positive effect on team performances. And finally it shows that servant leadership has a positive link with trust in leaders.

Reference(s)

Nuijten, I. (2009), Servant leadership: paradox or diamond in the rough? (a multidimensional measure and empirical evidence). ERIM/ Erasmus Research Institute of Management, RSM, ESE, Erasmus University, Rotterdam. *

* : available in the EURIB library

