

## **THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: A Review of The Literature**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The following note is that a review of existing literature pertaining to servant leadership and faculty development. Specifically, this work discussed delivering servant leadership to online faculty through the utilization of a faculty development program. The idea for this literature review stemmed from the author asking how an online academic administrator could utilize the practice of servant leadership in order to improve the overall online academic experience. The intent of the review involved discovering, through a review of the literature, a way of opening up a dialogue that can possibly drive future research studies regarding the practice of servant leadership to improve of the overall online academic teaching experience. In this work, the author conducted a literature review that identified strengths in both faculty development as well as practicing servant leadership within the online education modality.

The literature identified the issue of faculty isolation as challenge for academic administrators and offered up faculty development as a possible solution to overcoming it. The findings of the work showed a benefit to bringing servant leadership practices into faculty development programs in order to improve the overall online teaching environment. The work generates future empirical research ideas regarding building community, the use of servant leadership, and faculty development programs.

**Keywords:** Community, Faculty Development, Isolation, Servant Leadership

### **INTRODUCTION**

The online learning modality is the fastest growing segment of academia in the United States of America showing an annual growth rate of 19% (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Furthermore, roughly 30% (Allen & Seaman, 2010) of college students report taking at least one online course per semester. From an academic administrator's viewpoint, online education possesses the ability to recruit faculty and reach students globally (Sahin, 2007).

Thought a benefit to reaching students and recruitment, the sheer size and growth of online learning means multifarious issues for administrators (Lorenzetti, 2006).

The complexity and approach towards leadership within an online academic environment hold challenges different from those faced in brick and mortar institutions and therefore requires new approaches and practices (Diamond, 2008).

## **BACKGROUND**

**A problem faced within the online academic modality is that of faculty isolation, an ongoing and negative issue (Eib & Miller, 2006). Such an issue creates a feeling of being alone with faculty members feeling as if they have little to no say in the happenings of the organization, the curriculum, and the future (Eib & Miller) as well as little support from the administrators (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). For the online academic administrator, this issue poses a challenge to overcome, and the practice of servant leadership seems to be a solution (Arenas et al., 2009)**

**Within the online academic modality, the focus needs to be on best practices to include improving the experiences of online faculty (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). One way of improving the experience is by fostering community among online educators by way of a servant leadership specific pedagogy.**

**The intent of this article is to open up a dialogue and spark future empirical research regarding feelings of faculty isolation within the online academic modality using existing empirical works. Furthermore, it is to identify a bridge between servant leadership practices (Arenas et al., 2009) and faculty development programs with the hope of strengthening community (Eib & Miller, 2006) within the online academic modality.**

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**Originally coined by Greenleaf (1970), the theory of servant leadership is that of servant first; that the servant leader is one who desires to serve others. Spears (2000) argued that one of the characteristics of a servant leader is a person that strives to build community. Crippen (2006) claimed that the role of a teacher is that of a servant leader; that the educator serves the student. Crippen (2006) utilized the work of Spears (2000) to show a direct correlation between the characteristics of the servant leader and the role of the academic. Hayes (2008) returned to the foundation of servant leadership and the writings of Greenleaf (1970), arguing that the successful teacher is servant first. Hayes (2008) identified the strengths associated with the practicing of servant leadership as it related to student outcomes. Furthermore, Hayes (2008) identified that the teacher who takes on the persona of the servant leader left an impression on the students themselves and improved the overall academic environment.**

**Kezar and Lester (2009) took the idea of leadership away from the centralized role to the decentralized approach where the faculty member holds responsibility. The practice of leadership is at its most effective when it resides with the end user (Kezar & Lester, 2009). The idea for a decentralized leadership practices was the reason Arenas et al. (2009) argued for the practice of servant leadership within the online academic realm. Arenas et al. identified the practice of servant leadership as being the most effective in the decentralized modality of online education.**

**One of major challenges within online academia is time (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). In the online modality, the faculty member needs time to develop coursework, teach and perform a vast array of administrative functions (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).**

**Support throughout the entire process also needs to be a priority; this includes technical support, a major issue and cause of stress within the online classroom (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).**

The overall workload and time needed for online instruction is much greater as compared to that of face-to-face instruction (Keengwe & Kidd, 2008; Nelson & Thompson, 2005). Part of the reason is the amount of time a faculty member devotes to individual students answering questions through technological media and giving feedback on specific works (Lao & Gonzales, 2005).

This issue of time adds to the sense of faculty isolation and a feeling of being alone and overwhelmed (Ebi & Miller, 2006). The issue of isolation within online academia is a byproduct of the fact that faculty and administration operate at a distance and thus work alone (Diamond, 2008; Lorenzetti, 2006). Such isolation can lead to poor attitudes and experiences within the online academic environment (Ebi & Miller, 2006).

Time is of the essence within online academia with only a certain amount to go around once the teaching, service, and scholarship components take place (Keengwe & Kidd, 2008; Lao & Gonzales, 2005; Nelson & Thompson, 2005; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). However, there still needs to be time set aside for faculty development in order to improve the online academic experience for both the teacher and learner (Ebi & Miller, 2006; Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). The purpose of faculty development programs is the improving of outcomes and experiences (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008) through a training program that brings academics together (Ebi & Miller, 2006). For faculty, such training is desired and supported and needs to be created and delivered in manner that is accessible and time friendly (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). The idea behind a strong faculty development program is one that will reduce this feeling of isolation that so many faculty members experience (Ebi & Miller, 2006). Furthermore, the intent behind delivering faculty development programs is the reduction/elimination of obstacles and overcoming the challenges that online academics face (Keengwe & Kidd, 2008). A major limitation exists with regard to empirical research involving online faculty and teaching (Lorenzetti, 2006; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006) specifically to servant leadership and online academia (Arenas et al., 2009).

The existing literature showed that one of the major issues within the online learning modality is faculty isolation (Ebi & Miller, 2006). The accessibility, due to the very nature of online education's vast geographical reach (Diamond, 2008), is also its biggest barrier. Faculty members work alone, isolated from other academics. Interaction rarely takes place and when it does, it happens virtually between individuals through technological media (Drexler, Baralt, & Dawson, 2008; Havard, Jianxia, & Jianzhong, 2008). Existing literature seems to offer a way of overcoming isolation within online academia; claiming that the utilization of a faculty development program brings together faculty to form a community of professionals (Ebi & Miller, 2006). Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) found that faculty want these programs and see a value in having them. Such a faculty development program takes place utilizing technological media that brings academics together regardless of geographical location (Drexler et al., 2008). Within the online educational environment, Arenas et al. (2009) argued that the practice of servant leadership improves the overall academic environment. Arenas et al. (2009) stated "The servant leader must take an active role in the organization, discovering the weaknesses of the existing systems, and inviting others to participate in the development of a community that shares power and a collective vision" (p. 2).

## **LITERATURE FINDINGS**

There were three key findings from the literature review. The first involved Ebi and Miller's (2006) finding of an improved sense of community and a reduction in the feeling of isolation in regards to a faculty development program.

The second involved Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) argument that faculty want and support professional development programs. Finally, the third finding involved Arenas et al. (2009)

Claim that the practice of servant leadership, above all other leadership theories, improved the online academic community. These three key findings provide the basis for a discussion on needed future empirical research regarding servant leadership and faculty development.

The author's intent was to identify, through existing literature, a possible pathway towards improving the online teaching environment and spark both a dialogue and possible future research. Existing literature identified building community as an essential component to improving online faculty experience (Ebi & Miller, 2006) as well as a servant leadership characteristic (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2000). Therefore, further empirical research is needed in order to conclude that the practice of servant leadership can improve the online academic experience. The argument of Ebi and Miller (2006) pertained to using a faculty development program in order to build community; however, Arenas et al. (2009) argued that the practicing servant leadership best serves the online environment. Thus, further research is needed to measure the effect of faculty development programs that involve servant leadership. Finally, Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) claimed that faculty both desire and support faculty development programs. Thus, further research is needed pertaining to faculty perception and attitude involving servant leadership faculty development programs.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The author utilized existing empirical works to form a pathway for online academic administrators, specifically, a pathway to overcome the feeling of faculty isolation (Ebi & Miller, 2006). Moreover, the author identified a correlation between faculty development programs focusing on the practice of servant leadership and the notion of building community within online academia. The reason this work and future research on the subject of servant leadership and online communities is so important, revolves around growth of the online learning modality (Allen & Seaman, 2010).

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