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Independent Study FA20

Organization Interview Analysis

December 16th, 2020

Servant Leadership in Education-Based Nonprofits

The presence of Servant Leadership within our communities is undeniable; organizations such as The Container Store, Southwest Airlines, and Starbucks dominate our everyday lives, providing services that serve various communities within their own unique ways. However, what makes organizations based on Servant Leadership distinct and successful lies in both the impact and those running the organizations. Every employee, manager, or volunteer must maintain a certain connection to values and self-awareness, and be flexible and prepared for change in any work they do. This being said, internal motivations and desires always come second to the needs of the community being served, acknowledging that any positive impact, although not always visible, is valuable progress in serving the intended community. Although values, self-awareness, flexibility, and a commitment to service are often common in servant leaders across the world, there is no set list of characteristics or a defined mindset that all servant leaders hold, as servant leaders mold their work ethic and plans to the community to which they serve.

Interested in exploring servant leadership in different community organizations, I decided to look specifically at a few organizations with values focused on education, gaining the ability to both compare similarities in the values of the organization while simultaneously finding differences in the relationship leaders within each organization held with their community and work. My intent in this paper is to specifically investigate traits and thought processes similar within different educational nonprofit organizations through interviews and research the

organizations individually, and to use these alongside texts and pieces on servant leadership to find potential trends in the mindset of a servant leader.

While analyzing and researching the development and presence of servant leadership communities, I started identifying organizations within my community with a dedication to providing more educational opportunities to youth in one of three ways (STEM, the arts, and Literacy). Through this search I found Open Books, The People's Music School, and Girls 4 Science, and generated an interview question list to learn more about the organization and the interviewee's connection with their organization. After contact, I ultimately ended up conducting interviews with Ariel Garcia, the community manager at The People's Music School, and Cary Mele, the program director at Open Books.

My first interview was with Ariel Garcia from The People's Music School. Delivering the benefits of affordable high quality music instruction to young students, The People's Music School is an organization dedicated to improving problem solving abilities and collaboration in the younger citizens of the Chicago area (2020). Garcia, raised in Pilsen and Little Village, had grown up with an appreciation and connection to music, ultimately pursuing it in his higher education ventures. In relation to his position as a part of The People's Music School, Garcia described his work as primarily in family engagement, student advocacy, and logistical support, although often finding himself volunteering to assist in other areas of need within the organization. Throughout the interview, Garcia's commitment to the organization and its values was evident, sharing how his personal experiences with music and both the cultural and familial barriers music comes with, was something that motivated him to actively contribute only the best to his work as a Community Manager. Garcia also expresses this as something that is shared through all his co-workers, using an example of the re-evaluation and planning process that came

with shifting The People's Music School's music opportunities when COVID-19 hit, emphasizing that everyone is driven by the value music holds to children, and because of this, are thorough in all of their work.

This incredible employee-shared work ethic and dedication to the mission of the organization is notable in the accomplishments of The People's Music School, having served over 10,000 students since 1976 and providing over 250,000 learning dedicated hours every year (2020). With family outreach, personal mentorship, and the benefits music education provides to young children, it is evident that The People's Music School embodies servant leadership through a unique shared drive that Garcia and his co-workers demonstrate in their relationship with the organization, its goals, and vision for future generations.

Similarly, Open Books also demonstrates a presence of servant leadership within their organization. Open Books is an organization dedicated to providing literacy resources to thousands of students in the Chicagoland area through instilling a passion and interest in reading and helping students develop their writing skills (2020). My interview was conducted with Cary Mele, who has worked at Open Books for over nine years, has a Masters degree in Literacy, and whose passions mainly lie in getting children interested and engaged in literacy as they grow. Mele works as the program director of Open Books, responsible for running the various Literacy programs and workshops that Open Books has to offer and bridging the Leadership and Literacy Program teams together in communication. Expression of her servant leadership shows in her dedication to the students, and the shift in perspective on writing and reading that many if not all students often exhibit, something unique and motivating that both Mele and her co-workers get to witness first hand. Mele shares how much Open Books values collaboration between team members to achieve their goals for in-home book libraries and improved literacy rates among the

youth of Chicago, and that all this is present because of the unique backgrounds and perspectives her and her co-workers share that all ultimately result in a passion for literacy and community improvement.

The impact of Open Books reflects this as well, with over 31,000 students served, over 564,000 books donated to start in home libraries, and over 130,000 program hours for students since being founded in 2006 (2020). With the shared passion all employees and volunteers of Open Books share for the mission of the organization reflected in the large community impact and positive expression and perspective that Mele and surely all of her co-workers share, it is also evident that servant leadership uniquely reflects and finds itself at Open Books, an organization constantly evolving to fit the needs of the very community it serves.

Through the entirety of the interview process, I found that what worked well was flexibility of having a set list of questions, choosing which questions would provide most valuable insight on each organization's impact and servant leadership tendencies as the interview went on. The versatility in organization values and intentions through educational inequity in music and literacy also worked to my advantage, providing me with unique perspectives and solutions to the varying solutions and needs for change in educational systems alongside proving a similar trend in motivation in those employed or assisting at servant leadership-based organizations. I also found that throughout each interview, the progressively personal and deeper questions allowed for more thoughtful responses, and that given the experience and dedication each individual had to their organization's mission, all answers were completely genuine and always insightful. Having also done previous research on each organization also assisted in making the interview process easier, as there was little to no confusion on the organization's

intent and services, and any follow up questions that were asked were with specific intent to maximize the time and response within each interview.

However, with the original intent to interview a third organization, this interviewing process lacked the insight to programs aiming towards improving STEM educational inequities. With both more time on this project, alongside the opportunity to interview and interact with organizations of varying structures and values, this interview process could have provided much more insight as to how servant leadership presents itself in organizations oriented around educational inequity. In addition to this, because I was also only able to interview one person from each organization, the perspective was limited to that individual, so further research and more time could also allow for multiple interviews in individual organizations.

A different approach I could have taken to vary the outcome with more time and flexibility could be to provide a context of servant leadership and the information I studied throughout the past semester to see if opinion or presentation of a role within an organization would change for an individual. I could have also gone more identity-specific to each individual within interviews to see if servant leadership traits manifested themselves in any other parts of the individual's life outside of work. These are both considerable for further research on the presentation of servant leadership within any organization.

Having originally intended to compare the similarities within the two organizations interviewed while analyzing the relationships community leaders within these organizations held with their communities, I found that the same motivation and resemblance of institutional and personal values was present within both Open Books and The Peoples Music School. There weren't any major notable differences in the structure and communication of the organizations, as they were both considerably similar in their multifacetedness towards serving their intended

communities through flexible departmental structures. As both organizations held ultimately different goals within the educational field, only so many conclusions can be drawn on the structure and success rate of the organization, although both organizations showed notable commitment and outcomes as a result of the dedication to serving their communities. Servant leadership, although often flexibly presented within individuals and organizations, holds a general commonality in the commitment to community through service and collaboration with those who share similar commitments to social issues. This variance in servant leadership can often be reflected in the structure of organizations and the behaviors of those running them, so it is important to acknowledge that the strength and presence servant leadership has is completely dependent on both the organization and their leaders' values, mission, and vision for helping their community. Therefore, without shared values between an organization and a leader and a leader's passion for service to a community, it is extremely difficult for servant leadership to present itself effectively within our communities.

Contact Email Template

Hi,

My name is Charline Rivera and I am a current senior at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. This fall I am working on an independent study that focuses on our communities and servant leadership. For my final project, I am working on a paper that will explore leaders in nonprofit organizations and my hope is to interview leaders I have sought out. I was particularly interested in the vision, mission, and structure of your organization for [these reasons]. Because of these tenets, I believe your organization would be an informative part of my research.

Would anyone from your organization be available to meet over zoom for a one hour interview? I have the following dates available and can schedule something between 9 am to 11:30 am:

Questions I would like to ask involve understanding the way your organization functions in today's environment and the outcomes you see in the work you do. Please let me know if scheduling an interview is possible, or if you have any questions or need any parts clarified.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,
Charline Rivera

Interview Outline and Questions

1. Introduce yourself
2. Ask them to introduce themselves
3. Explain the purpose of your independent study. What you have learned so far. Why this topic is of interest to you. How you believe this person is helpful to interview to understand your topic.
 - a. Explain what is important to you for understanding so they can guide their responses to the questions appropriately.
4. What is your role within the organization?
5. What responsibilities do you hold?
6. *Do they need to elaborate on anything they just said?*
7. What would you say is the mission of [insert company name here]?
8. The vision?
9. How would you say you know that the goal of this mission is accomplished?
10. What are some of the outcomes you use to identify or measure the completion of your goals?
11. How would you describe the culture of your organization?
12. Is there one thing all employees of the organization have in common? Why do you think that is?
13. Who is on your team or who do you work with on a day-to-day basis?
14. What is your team dynamic?
15. What would you say are your key values and do they define the work you do in this organization?
16. What impact do you feel you have left on the community you serve?
17. How would you describe your leadership style?
18. Is there any one thing you would change about your role in the organization? What is it and why?
19. Is there any one thing you would change about the organization as a whole? What is it and why?
20. If the community were to describe the impact you and your organization have on them, what would they say?
21. Wrap up the conversation. Thank them for their time. Ask if they have any questions for you. Let them know how you will use this information in your final project once again. Ask them if they would be interested in seeing your paper once it's done.

Independent Study Resources

Readings, videos, discussions, and any resources from the past semester on servant leadership were all crucial in shaping the discussion and interview content used in this paper. Any information generalized on servant leadership is an outcome and opinion drawn from the information and content covered in the past semester.

References

Open Books. (2020). <https://www.open-books.org/>.

The Peoples Music School. (2020). <https://peoplesmusicschool.org/>.