

Out to Pasture: Transitioning From Servant-Leadership to Post-Leadership Roles in Academia

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Faculty in leadership or administrative roles may continue their career advancement until retirement. In some cases, faculty may choose or have chosen for them, to not continue in a leadership role in the academy. An extensive search of the literature on post-leadership roles using the search term post-leadership in Web of Science, Communication Abstracts, PsycArticles (ProQuest), ProQuest Research Library, and Education Full-text (EBSCO) databases failed to uncover research specifically related to post-leadership faculty roles in higher education. According to Jasinki (2020) while much scholarship has focused on leadership development in academia, little scholarship has focused on the phenomena of “stepping down.” Utilizing autoethnographic method (see Ellis et al., 2011), the author seeks to understand the connection between the personal journey and the effects of our cultural expectations of post-leadership in academia on self-identity. This current project aims to begin the conversation by sharing a personal narrative about the process of reflection related to post-leadership roles and offering a critical self-analysis within the context of servant leadership.

Keywords: post-leadership, self-reflection, autoethnography, faculty roles

INTRODUCTION

The recent change in status from department chair to faculty at a large university prompted the question, “what next?” Yet, “what next” is in itself a vague question. “What next” implies a professional or personal journey and can imply progression forward in certain contexts. Within the context of higher education, a cultural expectation regarding the professional journey may include appointment to progressively important leadership roles. However, the journey’s path is not always in a straight line. When the journey does not include a direction in alignment with cultural expectations, then the opportunity to study the context, experience or reasons for the change becomes crucial. The study of post-leadership roles in the academy provides one such opportunity.

Esen et al. (2020) found that research into higher education leadership is still relatively scarce following over two decades of investigation, that studies related specifically to department chairs were very few, and servant leadership as a style in higher education non-existent among the studies they reviewed. An extensive systematic search (see Kitchenham, 2004; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020) of the literature on post-leadership roles using the search term “post-leadership” uncovered a total of 130 articles across five major databases: *Web of Science* (n = 5), *Communication Abstracts* (n = 111), *PsycArticles (ProQuest)* (n = 0), *ProQuest Research Library* (n = 12), and *Education Full-text (EBSCO)* (n = 2). A thorough review of these 130

articles failed to uncover a single research article specifically related to post-leadership faculty roles in higher education, specifically as they related to middle management roles such as department chair.

The absence of published research on the topic begs the question, “why not?” Is the topic taboo? Do individuals in this situation choose not to talk about it? What would be the reasons for the lack of research in this area? As Jasinki (2020) noted, “little is known about how senior leaders experience these role changes firsthand” (p. 45). Perhaps a beginning to the conversation around and about this phenomenon needs to occur.

Jasinki (2020) found that administrators experienced returning to the faculty as ambiguous but an experience that provided the opportunity to reinvent themselves. Arden (1997) described the transition back to faculty status as encompassing an initial shock followed by renewal and rebirth. According to Cyphert and Boggs (1986), the transition back to faculty status from an administrative role has two distinct phases: pre-transition, and transition-in-progress. They described the pre-transition phase as involving a high level of stress related to the unknown of post-leadership roles. However, the transition-in-progress was characterized by reasonable expectations about post-leadership life in the academy. Cyphert and Boggs did interview some former department chairs. However, none of their study participants had been out of their administrative role less than one year. They did not directly measure the “initial shock” (Arden, 1997).

Griffith (2006) noted that the transition from an administrative role back to faculty status requires a “time for adjustment” of at least six months. In one study, Mallinger (2013), who used a journal to document the transition back to faculty, described the process as not smooth emotionally. Indeed, Griffith (2006) described former administrators as feeling the need to fix things. This need to fix may be a consequence of the type of leader the former administrator was. In the case of middle management, such as a department chair, that leadership role may be more of the servant-leader type, as most of the functions of the department chair are to serve the needs of faculty and students directly.

Servant Leadership

According to Samul (2020), studies on leadership from 1923 onward increased significantly after 2010 with sixty-six percent of articles on leadership in the Web of Science published between 2010 and 2019 (N = 12,235). Samul (2020) identified trends in the research on leadership but did not specifically list servant-leadership as one of the major leadership types. An extensive systematic search of the literature on leadership using the Boolean search phrase “servant AND leader” in the *Web of Science* database revealed 1,210, of which 35 were relevant to the context for this study: servant leadership characteristics. A high proportion of those studies (59.5%) were either theoretical defining servant leadership qualities or systematic literature reviews on servant leadership. Only fifteen of the reviewed studies were primary source, empirical articles. Additionally, of the articles reviewed for this study, only six directly addressed leadership in the higher education context, of which only one (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016) collected data from faculty supervisors (N = 10). According to Canavesi and Minelli (2022), research in the characteristics of servant leadership is a recent development compared to other leaderships studies. Additionally, Canavesi and Minelli (2022) found that the values and beliefs of servant leaders have not been thoroughly investigated.

The term servant-leader was first coined by Greenleaf (1970). Servant-leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 6). As the Samul (2020) study implied, research into a specific leadership type, such as the servant-leader, did not commence in full until the 2010’s. The studies reviewed under the search terms of servant and leader fell into one of four possible categories: a) theoretical and definitional studies of servant-leadership, b) qualities and characteristics of servant-leaders, c) individual and group outcomes of servant-leadership, and d) costs (and benefits) of servant leadership.

As the term implies, servant-leaders take on leadership to serve the organization’s good. As Spears described, Greenleaf “had given a name to an undefined yearning that I felt within me. I knew that I wanted to do what I could to help make the world a little better place to live” (2018, p. v). According to Paas et al. (2020), satisfaction of a psychological need mediated by a motivation to serve others is an antecedent to servant leadership. Sun (2013) described servant identity attributes as including a calling to serve, humility,

empathy, and love for others (agape). By way of an example, the service functions of the department chair may include scheduling classes to meet the needs of students about the talents and expertise of faculty, mediating student and faculty complaints and issues, and supporting the pathways toward the department's goals. Sun's attributes may describe virtues that could be essential to effectively meet those functions.

More specifically, in mediating complaints from or between students and faculty, the department chair must empathically listen to both parties. Listening to others may be a daily activity for some individuals serving as leaders in service organizations. How one listens may be demonstrative of his or her leadership style. For one such leader (an executive director), Gaffney (2020) discovered through personal experience that showing kindness to others is foundational for servant leaders. Kindness can be shown through empathic listening.

Similarly, other researchers have described antecedents or foundational qualities of servant-leaders. For example, according to van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015), compassionate love for others is foundational for the virtues that lead to servant leadership. Langhof and Guldenberg (2020), claimed that an altruistic mind-set is a prerequisite for servant leadership. Additionally, they found that core self-evaluation, including self-esteem, internal locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, and low neuroticism, are components of developing servant leaders. However, individuals serving as a leader may modify their understanding of their motivations to lead over time (Zheng et al., 2021). The most effective leaders serve organizational members by providing them with the empowerment and resources to most effectively meet the organization's goals (Brutus & Vanhove, 2017).

Current scholarship on the specific characteristics of servant leadership is disorganized compared to studies of servant leaders (Carton, 2022). Researchers have attempted to list the virtues associated with servant leadership through systematic literature reviews, meta-analyses, and self-report surveys of leaders in various organizational contexts. In one such early study, van Dierendonck (2011) described the characteristics of servant leadership as including: a) empowering and developing others, b) humility, c) authenticity, d) empathy, e) courage, and f) stewardship. However, Hackett and Wang (2012) described thirty virtues associated with servant-leadership in the management literature, including: a) caring, b) empathy, c) honesty, d) justice, and e) service to the common good.

According to Coetzer et al. (2017), research into servant leadership has revealed eight characteristics of servant leaders: a) authenticity, b) humility, c) compassion, d) accountability, e) courage, f) altruism, g) integrity, and h) listening. Additionally, Coetzer et al. (2017) found that servant leadership is defined by competencies in empowerment, stewardship, building relationships, and having a compelling vision. Servant leaders need skills in listening, empathy, communication, and trust (Mcquade et al., 2022). The servant leadership style requires "patience, perseverance, and dedication" (Boone & Makhani, 2012, p. 95). These qualities of servant-leadership may change over time. Specifically, the frequency of servant-leader behaviors increases the longer the individual serves in a leadership role (Beck, 2014). Beck also found that "servant leaders demonstrate an altruistic mindset" (2014, p. 304).

Altruism may be a function of leader humility. Leader humility is a quality of servant leaders which influences organization members' perceptions of leaders' orientation toward justice (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2023). Altruism may also lead to other behaviors toward team members. For example, the personality trait of benevolent dependability, or being a consistently supportive person, may be related to altruism. However, Sun and Shang (2019), found that such support is negatively related to perceptions of servant leadership among employees. Bragger et al. (2021) found that servant-leaders act according to internal rather than external motivations. However, organizations that reward outcome over process may hinder servant-leadership development (Bragger et al., 2021).

Outcomes of servant-leadership for both team members and their leaders may be a function of the perceptions of the motivations of the servant-leader. According to Fischer and Sitkin (2023), a distinction between intended and displayed leadership styles can influence organizational outcomes. "Servant leadership strongly benefits employee work attitudes and behaviors and group climate and performance" (Zhang et al., 2021, p.387). More specifically, the servant-leadership style had the highest impact on worker job satisfaction compared to transformational, human relations, coaching, transactional, and autocratic leadership styles (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016).

In a study of self-reported outcomes, Verdorfer (2016) found that team members perceived that mindfulness, humility, and a selfless motivation to lead related to a servant attitude of leaders. Verdorfer (2016) also found that team leaders' mindful servant-leader behaviors related directly to team members' perceptions of leader humility and authenticity. In a follow-up study, Verdorfer (2019), team members' perceptions of their leader as a servant positively related to their ideal leader type and identification with and respect for the leader. Relatedly, Rego et al. (2019) found that team members who work with a humble leader report higher levels of psychological capital. Within higher education, Dahleez and Aboramadan (2022) and Dami et al (2022) found that academics' perceptions of fairness from servant leaders positively influence job satisfaction.

Yet, organizations led by a servant may come with costs to the leader. Applying conservation of resources theory, meaningfulness of purpose is a personal benefit for servant leaders. However, with this benefit comes emotional exhaustion (Lan et al., 2022). This cost to benefit ratio decreases with follower support (Lan et al., 2022). According to Zheng et al. (2023), teams that are dependent on servant leaders strongly influence leader emotional exhaustion.

Additionally, leader emotional exhaustion correlates with leader role overload (Zheng et al., 2023). Servant leaders' work behaviors are positively related to both emotional exhaustion and conflict between work and family obligations (Zhou et al., 2020). Engaging in perspective taking can mitigate emotional exhaustion of servant leaders (Liao et al., 2021). According to Craun and Henson (2022), servant leaders can be affected by conflict but with maturity may be able to maintain their mission.

For faculty who practiced servant-leadership in their administrative roles, self-determination of their particular style of leadership may be difficult to discern. According to Waite (2011), leaders must reflect on their leadership style. None of the studies reviewed herein described the self-reflection of the experiences immediately following the transition from the administrative role of department chair to faculty.

METHODS

With a scarcity of prior research to develop hypotheses about post servant-leadership transitional phenomenon in an academic context, an inductive-qualitative approach is most appropriate. However, if talk about the topic is taboo, then finding individuals willing to be interviewed for a phenomenological study may prove difficult. Another inductive approach to start a discussion about the topic, perhaps to make it "safe" for others to talk about the topic in subsequent research, might be autoethnography. Ellis et al. (2011) describe autoethnography as a method of both process and product involving autobiography within a cultural context. That cultural context is shaped by individuals who participate in it (Anderson et al., 2016). According to Keane (2014), "at the heart of the ethnographic stance is a commitment to...self-understanding and a sense of self-worth" (2014, p. 20). Autoethnography involves re/reading, re/viewing, and critically reflecting on self to transform subjective understanding of experience (Qutoshi, 2015) within that cultural context. In this case, the cultural context is leadership roles within higher education. However, the topic within that context is post-leadership.

According to Gunter and Ribbins (2002), leadership "can only be understood through the gathering of professional experiences from within contextualized settings" (2002, p. 388). The aim of this study, through the use of autoethnography, is to describe professional experiences within the cultural context of higher education leadership. The next section begins with describing the context within which the post-leadership experience occurred (The Final Term), followed by a personal account of the journey to place for a post-leadership role (A New Role).

DATA DESCRIPTION

The Final Term

After 11 and a half years, I decided to step down as Department Chair. More accurately, I chose not to request a re-appointment to another three-year term. I had hoped that my experience, knowledge and skill

would have resulted in an appointment as an associate dean or some other administrative post. Still, the options seemed to close around me at my current school.

There had been many changes during my final term: A new president, a new provost, and after two searches, a new dean following two interim deans. Perhaps with all the changes, I was seen as “old school” (see Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010). Or more likely, I failed to understand the university’s direction (see Corson, 1945). For certain, part of my disappointment with a lack of appointment to a new role, post-Chair, was due to my observation that others around me were getting appointments to leadership roles with much less experience and “institutional knowledge.”

My final term also was not without some turmoil (see Penney & Trautlein, 2018). Halfway into the first year of my final term, the dean announced his retirement. It would take the university some time to organize a strong search for a replacement, so the provost sought out current college chairs’ opinion on the qualities of the replacement in a focus group format. As my colleagues and I had worked closely with our dean, we were fairly consistent in our responses to the question. Unanimously we stated that the new dean needed to have experience as a department chair.

A few weeks later, the provost announced that she would be looking for an interim dean and asked for interests among the current chairs and associate deans. I expressed such interest and had a phone interview with the provost. During the conversation, the provost informed me, and followed up with an email, that the person chosen for the interim position would not be a candidate for the permanent position, to which I responded that I was not interested in the permanent position. A few weeks later, the provost announced the new interim dean: a faculty member with no administrative experience as a department chair.

The second year of my final term as chair was difficult. I had relied on the dean to mentor me, and the new interim dean did not fit that role well. For reasons for which I am not aware, the first interim dean did not work out and a second interim dean was named within nine months. At this time, I decided that I should begin looking elsewhere and apply to dean positions at other schools and any associate dean positions that became available at my school. Meanwhile, I continued to do my work as department chair, and even served on the search committee for the dean of another college.

During the search committee’s interview with the search firm hired for the other college, I asked what search firms typically do in recruiting for dean positions. The search firm representative acknowledged that they typically look at department chairs or chairs who have recently stepped down. All things considered, I believed I should be a good candidate for an administrative position somewhere. However, although I applied energy and effort to finding my next administrative role, the opportunities to serve in that capacity did not materialize.

In my final year, a new dean was hired. I requested a meeting with him at the beginning of the Fall semester and informed him that this would be my final year as a department chair. I did not share with him all of my reasons, but I did share that with all the changes at the university, perhaps it was time for fresh view for my department. I also informed him at that time that I would be interested in another administrative post should one become available. A few more associate deans were appointed, but I was not among that group.

Halfway through my final year, I formally requested a faculty development leave beginning the day after I concluded as department chair. The request was granted.

A New Role

The day finally arrived. I felt great relief. I also felt great loss. Certainly, I had tasks in mind for the year of leave. To gain a faculty development leave in the state, a faculty member has to present a proposal for projects that will be completed along with a final report. I had two major long-term projects in mind that were difficult to complete while serving as department chair. Yet, despite these projects, I still felt loss from the role I had served so many years.

For twelve years, I had served as mentor, coach, advocate, and manager among other roles for faculty, students and staff in the department. What was my “new” role? How will my relationships change with colleagues and other community members? For reasons that are still unclear to me, I had believed that the normal life progression for persons in leadership roles in the academy was to be appointed to other

leadership roles until retirement (see Gagnon, 2008). Since that was not happening for me, I started to feel like I had been put “out to pasture.”

An academic year of faculty leave presents an opportunity for self-reflection and discernment (see Benefiel, 2004). My colleagues said to me, “take a break, you deserve it.” But, that first month of grieving was very difficult. It did not feel like “a break.” Other events in my life may have contributed to those feelings. My father passed away the previous Spring. I felt comfort in the belief that he was proud of me and my accomplishments including serving as a department chair at a large university, though his leaving was still quite raw.

In “taking a break,” I packed up the motorcycle and met up with a friend for the Labor Day weekend. It did not take much convincing, but my friend agreed with the destination of my choosing: The Valle Vidal of Northern New Mexico. The location had special meaning for me. Many years before, my father and I went camping in the Carson National Forest north of Red River, NM. While we were there, we saw signs “Save Valle Vidal.” At the time, there was some controversy regarding plans for the valley in the National Forest, a section of which was privately owned. We had hoped to have an opportunity to see it together one day, but unfortunately the opportunity did not present itself. The trip was intended to provide relaxation, catharsis, and time to reflect. I became convinced that my Dad would have loved it there.

The morning after our first night camping in the Carson National Forest, my friend and I took our motorcycles on a loop East on the forest roads, clockwise around the National Forest to the West entrance. From the West, in mid-afternoon, we entered the Valle Vidal. At 8,000 feet of elevation, the Valle Vidal was a sight to behold. This place was where I wanted to be in the moment, but it became where I needed to be at that time in my grief process. My first thought was, “Dad would have loved to see this!” My second thought was about my place.

If I was “out to pasture,” this is where I wanted to be. It was “my meadow.” The unintended insight had me reconsider my new role. Where was the journey leading me? I began to understand that the faculty leave was a much bigger opportunity than I had originally considered. Beyond the opportunity to work on my two projects and continue any other work-related tasks, including committee-work as a faculty member, the leave provided the opportunity for self-reflection, taking stock of my journey, and clarifying my identity as a faculty member at a university.

I had to ask myself some tough questions. What were the reasons, all of the reasons, I wanted to be an administrator in the first place? What was the meaning of “leadership?” How was that part of my journey related to my first calling to the vocation of teaching?

Life is a journey. Sometimes the traveler chooses the path, and other times the path is chosen for the traveler. My original calling was not toward teaching. That calling to teach came at the juncture of a change in the path chosen for me by someone else. I began to see parallels between my current journey and my past journey, leading me to the chair role.

One of the projects for the faculty development leave was to complete a book that I had been thinking about and working on the edges for over fifteen years. I had developed a draft and an outline of the project leading up to the leave. However, the difficult part remained: How to include my own personal journey within the confines of an academic work on human development over the lifespan. The task would require self-reflection and honesty with myself.

In my role as department chair, I had developed boundaries (see Gunter & Ribbins, 2002) between my personal journey and my relationships with colleagues to maintain some professionalism. Was I wrong in this approach I had taken all of those years? In a real sense, the role change provided some sense of freedom from the boundaries I had created. I might have stunted my own growth through a false sense of duty to the veneer of professionalism.

For the book, the goal had been to demonstrate through my own experience as an example, the journey of life toward a goal of humility. For sure, I can only really reveal my own experience. I had come to accept the possibility that knowing another at that deep level, or speaking for them, was an impossibility; attempting to do so is disingenuous.

The project of self-reflection for the purposes of including my personal experience in the book, also had a place in understanding my role as department chair and my new role as faculty member post-

leadership. The personal narrative in the book covers the progression aspects of the human-development journey from student to faculty member to department chair. Writing those personal narratives forced me to answer the questions about my career.

I did not foresee a role as department chair when I first became a faculty member. As time went on in my assistant professor role, I began to see that I might have something to give as service in an administrative role. When my immediate supervisor announced his intention to not seek another term as department chair, I put my name in contention, and was chosen for the role by the dean. That appointment continued for three more terms. I believed the subsequent appointments acknowledged that I was serving well in the role.

Looking back, I had to admit that other reasons may have played a part in the decision to seek the department chair position. Earlier in my career as a student I had experienced academic administrators that, from my perspective, did not seem to have the needs of the students (and faculty) they served as a priority. Was part of the drive to serve in the role to do better than those before me? How was that purpose in the service of the calling? How was that purpose in serving the larger unseen life-goal seeking humility? Perhaps my naiveté for my own journey was seen by others, resulting in my “perceived” lack of an opportunity for new leadership roles, post-chair.

The original calling came as an unexpected insight for which I was unprepared. After my first year as an undergraduate student, a very strong message emerged: “What am I doing to serve others?” I took that insight to mean my journey led into the formation for the Catholic priesthood. Before the end of the Summer, I had tied up my life and belongings and entered the seminary.

After four years on that path, and three months away from my taking vows, a direction change had occurred at the discretion of another: I was asked to take a year leave by the seminary director to reflect on my calling. That change in path took a year to grieve. After thirty-three years, and on a different path, a year leave to reflect on my calling occurred again, although the grieving process was a little easier the second time.

The process of considering the new role has changed my understanding of the rigidity of the boundaries I had set around my personal life while serving as chair. Only within the last couple of years had I started to share with a select few others about my leaving the seminary. Now in writing the book I was putting down on paper that painful change in direction that happened so many years ago to a public audience, throwing down the boundaries I had created. In doing so, I am also free to share the pain of loss of the role I had come to know and live for those twelve years as department chair.

In my meadow, I can breathe again. There are still struggles, but they are mine to choose. Life post-leadership can have meaning. That life has to follow a different path. Looking back now after a year from the leave, I can see that I no longer have the stress and sleepless nights I had serving as department chair. I am calmer and the results are apparent in my close personal relationships. I have time to read and self-reflect. I have taken steps to maintain and enhance my health. And, the grief of loss has faded.

Critical Self Analysis

Although I felt a calling to help others, I did not see my role as a department chair as servant-leader. My first sense of the terminology did not occur until I was interviewed for one of the associate dean positions in my fourth term as department chair. Even then, however, the term servant-leader did not occur to me. My academic expertise falls within the subdiscipline of interpersonal communication. Leadership studies were outside my research area and did not occur to me until I began researching for my book during my year of faculty leave. My exposure to servant-leadership research began then.

With that research and described above, I became aware of the scholarship on the characteristics and qualities of the servant-leader. Looking back, the critical turn resulted in the question, “was I a servant-leader?” Certainly, and with experience before my academic journey, I felt a strong “calling” to help others. But what about the other qualities and virtues of the servant-leader? Did I possess those and act accordingly? Certainly, I believe I served others as a department chair, even in day-to-day practical managerial functions of scheduling classes and mediating conflicts, requiring stewardship and empathy. But what of other defining qualities of servant-leadership: authenticity, humility, and courage (see van Dierendonck, 2011).

Self-critical honesty requires I consider whether my needs played a role in my behavior towards others. As a department chair, the faculty, students and staff had daily needs that needed attention. As well, as a middle manager, my responsibilities also included navigating the college and university requirements against the needs of individuals under my supervision. However, I was and am also an academic with contractual teaching, research and service obligations. Additionally, my role as chair also came with the expectation of my supervisor that I remain a model in these areas of faculty responsibility as a leadership requirement. Thus, the role of department chair required some balancing between the needs of others and my own needs to teach and publish.

The struggle between self-needs and the needs of others can be likened to dialectical tensions. As department chair with responsibilities to others, these dialectical tensions were relational. Baxter (1988) proposed that individuals experience tensions between: a) the need for autonomy versus the need for connection, b) the need for openness versus the need for closedness, and c) the need for stability versus the need for change. The autonomy/connection dialectic worked itself through the conscious decision to maintain the veneer of professionalism. The consequence of that decision resulted in a boundary between myself and my colleagues. Such a decision could have impacted my team members' perception of my authenticity.

As a department chair, I was responsible for dealing with the conflict between individuals, including conflict between faculty and me as their supervisor. I was also responsible for the faculty annual and tenure review. I consciously decided to exclude information from faculty under the guise of maintaining confidentiality. The consequence of that decision may have resulted in a perceived lack of trustworthiness among some team members who felt they may have a right to certain information I possessed. Such a decision could have impacted my team members' perception of my courage and humility.

During my tenure, I also made decisions about the department's direction. Although discussions transpired over such decisions, choices were rarely unanimous. One such momentous decision regarded the creation of an online program. Not all faculty were on board with that decision. The tension was felt between the stability of a well-established residential program versus the need for change to meet the needs of a changing student demographic. In this sense, tension occurred between the faculty who desired stability and the students who needed change. This tension was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Lalani et al., 2021), although the department started developing online and hybrid courses several years prior. These decisions may have also impacted team members' perceptions of my trustworthiness.

These dialectical tensions were felt internally (see Baxter, 1988, 1990) as they related to my own needs as an academic. In striving to maintain a modelling role, as well as a need for my own progress as an academic, I sought to sustain a strong teaching and research record. I was also obliged to the requirements of tenure, post-tenure and annual review by my peers, which if successful resulted in financial rewards in the form of pay raises. As an individual, I felt the criticisms of my peers during review. These requirements and criticisms served as both external and internal motivations for my actions, which were not in the service of others.

Baxter (1990) proposed that individuals respond to dialectical tensions through selection, segmentation, neutralization, and reframing. In my self-reflection over my role as department chair, to what degree did I attempt to justify my actions and decisions within the frame of servant-leader. Certainly, my post-leadership transition resulted in some "reframing." The narrative description of my role as department chair, and more specifically the final term of that role, began shortly after stepping down, during the grieving process; perhaps because of the grieving process. The narrative description of my "new" role began shortly after that, within the first three months post-leadership. I presented these narratives at a professional conference the following spring.

In the time since, I have reflected on my self-reflections and researched servant-leadership qualities. I have also since reflected on the qualities of my feelings of grief immediately following the transition back to faculty. The grief was self-defined as a feeling of being "put out to pasture" with the self-healing reframing as now being in "my meadow." With time as a healer beyond the resignation of "meadow" reframing, I can attempt to understand that resignation from the self-perceived role of the servant leader.

According to Kierkegaard, resignation is a type of despair, and despair “is a sickness of the spirit” (Kierkegaard, 1941, p. 85).

“For in another sense, an ethical-dialectic sense, the despairing man who consciously remains in despair is further from salvation, since his despair is more intense. But unawareness is so far from removing despair, or of transforming despair into non-despair, that, on the contrary, it may be the most dangerous form of despair” (Kierkegaard, 1941, p. 69).

The critical self-reflection of transitioning from a role “of calling” to a role of placement by the other can be transformative. Yet, such understanding cannot be properly understood solely within the self-reflections of the post-leader. My own yearning to be perceived as a servant-leader cannot prove the outcomes of leadership for the people I sought to serve.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The self-perception of a role as servant-leader is unresolved. The continuation of that role in another capacity or context is similarly unresolved. For an individual serving as servant-leader in an academic middle management role, such as a department chair, the dialectical tensions between needs of others and needs of the self seem to preclude the possibility of a truly selfless actor. The average length of the chair role is six years (Cipriano, 2016).

On the contrary, such a role has short-term and long term demands for both the leader, the organization, and the individual members in the organization. Those demands for the leader come with costs. One such theory that may explain individual costs is conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). According to Hobfoll (1989), the major threat to individuals is the loss or potential loss of valued resources. Those valued resources for the department chair may include the internal motivation to continue serving, the need to progress in one’s career, and physical and psychological well-being.

According to Brotheridge and Lee (2002), the emotional labor of servants can lead to burnout. Burnout may negatively affect job performance or lead to stress or emotional exhaustion. Specifically, Wright and Hobfoll (2004) found that job performance and emotional exhaustion are negatively related. By conservation of resources, Gorgievski et al. (2011) found that individuals attempt to maintain personal resources to counter stress and burnout. Such attempts may counter the purposes or functions of the servant-leader whose calling is to serve others. Servant leaders might cope with emotional labor through habituation of efforts (see Brotheridge & Lee, 2002), thus seeking efficiencies in both personal and role tasks.

According to Liu et al. (2008), emotional support of individuals in service roles within organizations could increase those individuals’ abilities to cope with the stress of such roles. In particular, interpersonal connection could bolster individuals’ abilities to cope with the stress associated with emotional labor (Park et al., 2014). Spiritual connections might also alleviate such stressors. To counter dialectical tensions, feelings of secure attachment to a higher power can mitigate emotional costs to servant leaders (Bickerton & Miner, 2023).

CONCLUSION

There still is no answer to the question, “What is the role of a continuing, non-retiring faculty member post-leadership in higher education?” What does it mean to simply “return to the faculty?” Now seems the time to discuss it. From my perspective, many changes have occurred in the academy, especially recently. It seems nonsensical that my observations and experiences are unique to me. The present moment in higher education requires introspection and critique (Hart & Fassett, 2021). Contextual tensions occur within organizations at leadership’s “sharp” end (Thomas & Walker, 2010). Can we talk about what happens after that “sharp” end?

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