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## **Servant Leadership Practice and its Relation with Employee Job Satisfaction: The Case of Compassion International in Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

Though the modern study of servant leadership may be traced to the revolutionary work of Greenleaf in late 20<sup>th</sup>, the concept of servant leadership can be traced back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The servant leadership model as proposed by Robert Greenleaf is suitable to providing employees with the empowerment and participatory job features that are related to both employee and customer satisfaction. This study assessed the level of practice of servant leadership and its relation with employee job satisfaction. The study involved all professional employees of Compassion International in Ethiopia including senior and middle level leadership of the organization. Descriptive as well as inferential statistics were employed to analyze the quantitative data collected. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicated that servant leadership style is practiced well at the organization and the organization is categorized as servant-oriented organization based on the Organizational Leadership Assessment tool. Moreover, it was noted that the level of employee job satisfaction of the organization is very high (94%) and it is exemplary for other likeminded organizations. A positive relationship of job satisfaction with the overall practice of servant leadership style and that of the five dimensions of servant leadership was observed. In addition, respondents' organizational position, department, sex, service of year and age had significant associations with employee job satisfaction and the level of practice of servant leadership dimensions. Finally, it was concluded that the leadership of this organization has proven and set the example of practice of servant leadership in Ethiopia.

**Keywords:** Job satisfaction, servant leadership, Compassion International, Ethiopia.

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## 1. Introduction and Background Information

Different styles of leadership and leadership theories have been developed and implemented with varying degrees of success. The concept of servant leadership can be traced through passages dating back to the 4th century, most notably passages documented from Lao-Tzu who lived in China 570 B.C. (Brewer, 2010). Accordingly, servant leadership seems to have a deeper or stronger historical base than other types of leadership styles. However, the modern study of servant leadership may be traced to the revolutionary work of Greenleaf (1977). The theory of servant leadership is becoming more commonly accepted among all the various theories of leadership (Anderson, 2005). The servant leadership model as proposed by Greenleaf (1977) is suitable to providing employees with the empowerment and participatory job features that are related to both employee and customer satisfaction.

Servant-leadership represents a model of leadership in which the leader assumes a supportive, service orientated role among stakeholders and followers. The fundamental concept of servant leadership is placing others before self and accordingly servant leaders care about the people that work for them, other person's agendas come before their own and commitment to service comes first (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the total organization and those served by the organization (Laub, 1999).

On the other hand, the term "job satisfaction" reflects a person's attitude towards his/her job and the organization and can be defined as an employees' emotional reaction towards their work environment based on the evaluation of the actual results against their expectations (Phillips and Gully, 2012). Stringer (2006) found empirical support for the suggestion that high-quality supervisor-employee relationships are positively related to levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. Employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment are key elements in determining organizational performance and effectiveness (Alemnew, 2014; Baffic, 2014; Markos, 2015; Rehman, 2012). Various studies support the view that servant leadership

positively affects employee behavior and ultimately job satisfaction. Studies by Johns (2006) and Ehrhart (2004) indicated a strong relationship to exist between leaders and followers with the significant benefit of increased organizational effectiveness. In addition, servant leadership possesses a significant positive correlation with employee satisfaction (Donghong et al., 2012).

In today's competitive and challenging environment, organizations are crying out for ethical and effective leadership that serves others, invests in their development, and fulfills a common vision. Similarly, people particularly in less developed countries are also craving for efficient and supportive services from their leaders, be in the governmental or in non-governmental organizations in general. In line with this, Professor Patrick Utomi, a political economist and former 2011 Nigerian Presidential Candidate noted that while the 20th century promoted an egocentric notion of African leadership, African leaders in this century must be self-sacrificing people that give up their own good for the sake of others: The big challenge in Africa has been the challenge of leadership. Leadership is unselfish behavior. If you are obsessed with self, then you are not a leader. Knowledge and a sense of service- a sense of sacrificially giving up yourself for the sake of others is leadership (Dixon, 2012).

Moreover, leadership problem could influence considerably job satisfaction and work performance of employees and ultimately productivity in any organization. In line with this, servant leadership is supposed to suit as the most essential concept to play a significant role in guiding employee behavior and formulating organizational values that enhance organizational performance (Donghong et al, 2012; Greenleaf, 1977). There are considerable efforts exerted to study the various leadership styles including transformational, transactional and laissez-faire in Ethiopian context and tried to assess their relationship with employee engagement, job satisfaction and commitment (NegussieandDemissie,2013; Alemnnew 2014; Markos, 2015; Mekdelawit, 2016; Tadele, 2016).

While leadership is important everywhere in the world, the way that people actually lead can differ by region. Many researchers have examined what good leadership looks like in Western cultures, but leadership in most of Africa has not been explored in much depth. What we do know is that ideas about leadership are tied to culture, religion, educational background, and language (Eckert and Rweyongoza, 2015). Today, though, the demand for effective leadership and systematic leadership development in Africa is growing more rapidly than ever before. A critical shortage of upcoming leaders is responsible for the underdevelopment of organizations in many African countries (Ugwuegbu, 2001).

Despite the availability of considerable number of conceptual and empirical studies globally, the researcher could not find any published or unpublished research report in the area of servant leadership practice and/or its correlation with employee job satisfaction in Ethiopian context. On the other hand, the need to explore servant leadership phenomena becomes more vital if we consider cultural differences between Western and African cultures as Hofstede (1984) emphasis on the consideration of cultural variance in studying people attitudes and behaviors. Hence this study was done to assess the level of practice of servant leadership, employee job satisfaction and their correlation with each other in Compassion International in Ethiopia.

It is believed that the current findings of this research potentially will contribute empirical data that assist the practical application and theoretical discussions regarding servant leadership. Moreover, the information obtained from this study has the potential to contribute in resolving the concerns created by a lack of research in the area of servant leadership within nongovernmental organizations or even in other service giving organizations in Ethiopian context. In addition, the data from the present study can help to provide areas of emphasis for individuals or organizations interested in developing leadership-training programs at least for Ethiopian context.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study involved both quantitative and qualitative data and it consisted of three parts. Part one enabled to collect demographic information that included gender, age, education, work experience, and role in the organization. While, part two comprised of a quantitative study and gathered data on servant leadership practice and employee job satisfaction. Finally, in part three a qualitative approach using structured interview questions that involved the organizational leadership was employed.

### **2.2. Data Source and Collection Methods**

The source of this research data was primary and collected using structured questionnaire and interview. Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) research instrument (Laub, 1999) that has been known as effective tool was employed to assess servant leadership practice and employee job satisfaction with some modification. There were a total of 42 statements that measured the five dimensions of leadership practice and employee job satisfaction using a five-point Likert scale as a means for participants to report their responses. The categories of responses are: 1=strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The reliability of the current data collection tool was tested and strong reliability result (all greater than .84 Cronbach's alpha coefficient) was found for all of the variables considered.

Prior to the administration of the web-based questionnaire, formal permission for the research was secured from the concerned leadership. Then data was collected through web-based self-administered questionnaire using individual staff outlook mail account sent through group mail. All professional employees of Compassion International in Ethiopia (all employees except housekeepers, messenger drivers and receptionist) were invited to participate in the study. During the survey period, an update on the response rate was given to appreciate and remind participants' a week after the distribution of the survey questionnaire. Moreover, all CIET senior leaders and six middle level management members (supervisors) who served for more than four years in the current managerial role were considered for the qualitative data using structured interview questions.

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

The data was entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for Windows, version 20.0. Descriptive statistic was used to calculate summations, averages and percentages of the data. The five dimensions of servant leadership considered in the current study were: Valuing People, Developing People, Displaying Authenticity, Providing Leadership, and Sharing Leadership. Similar effort was done for the other variables related to employee job satisfaction. Spearman's correlation was employed to examine the existence of significant relationships between the independent variables of the five dimensions of servant leadership with dependent variable (employee job satisfaction). Moreover, Pearson Chi-Square test was employed to assess the associations between the study variables (servant leadership dimensions and job satisfaction) and the other demographic and organization related independent variables considered in this study.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Demographic and Organizational Profile**

A total of 92 participants responded to the survey questionnaire. Most of the respondents (#54/59%) belong to Program implementation department, while remaining are in the other two departments (program communication and Ministry Service). The proportion of male respondents was higher (#60/66%) than that of female (only #31/34%). Moreover, majority of the respondents (#75/82%) were with age category of 30 - 49 years. Interestingly, half (#46/50%) of the respondents have second degree or higher education level, while only 4% of them have diploma and the remaining 46% have first degree. Out of the 92 respondents, 74 (80%) were non-managerial employees, while the remaining 18 (20%) were managers. As to the respondents service of years, 64 (70%) of them have a minimum of six years of working experience in the organization and only 27 (30%) of them have less than six years of service in the organization. This demographic data indicates that the organization has relatively high number of professional staff (over 96% with first degree or above) and relatively stable (over 70% stayed in the organization for six or more years) employees.

### **3.2 Level of Practice of Servant Leadership**

The overall level of practice of servant leadership was assessed using a statement in the questionnaire survey distributed to all professional employees and 82 (89.2%) out of the 92 respondents believe (either strongly agree or agree) that servant leadership is practiced well at CIET. In line with this, further detailed assessment was carried out using the five dimensions of practice of servant leadership style with a total of 30 statements/constructs (each dimension with 6 constructs) through the online questionnaire.

The overall composite score for all of the five dimensions of servant leadership was 80.0% of the maximum expected score. This places CIET in the category of a servant-oriented organization according to the interpretation guide given for the OLA by Laub, 1999. In the construct of sharing leadership dimension, the respondents of this study rated 82.1% of the maximum expected score. In the construct of displaying authenticity dimension, the respondents of this study rated 78.4% of the maximum expected score, which is lower than the overall composite score. While that of valuing people dimension rated 81.9% of the expected maximum score. On the other hand, in the construct of providing leadership dimension, the respondents of this study rated 80.8% of the maximum expected score. Whereas that of developing people dimension scored 77.5% of the expected maximum score, which is lower than all the other four dimensions and the overall composite score. Similar previous studies were conducted in church education system, women-led businesses, community service organizations, a law enforcement agency, a public school district, and individuals from various organizations (Anderson, 2005). Two of these organizations scored OLA ratings of level five (servant-oriented organization) with similar category to the current organization (CIET). But six of the eight studies utilizing the OLA instrument achieved ratings of a level four organization and were given the label of a positively paternalistic organization.

The overall observed 2,183 (79.1%) positive responses (strongly agree or agree) to servant leadership characteristics statements out of the total 2,760 responses indicate that the various servant leadership characteristics or dimensions are being practiced well at CIET. Based on this finding, it seems that the various dimensions of servant leadership are being practiced well at

CIET. Moreover, the major proportion of the responses (79%) indicated that servant leadership style is an established culture in CIET leadership.

The overall mean score for the practice of servant leadership style was 4.0 with standard deviation of 0.82. The mean scores for the five dimensions of servant leadership style (providing leadership, valuing people, sharing leadership, displaying authenticity and developing people) were 4.04, 4.06, 4.11, 3.92 and 3.87 with the standard deviation of 0.83, 0.77, 0.79, 0.81 and 0.89, respectively. These findings on the level of practice of servant leadership dimensions suggest that the organization is generally doing very well almost in all dimensions of servant leadership style. However, two of the five dimensions of servant leadership (developing people and displaying authenticity) seem less practiced as compared to the other dimensions.

In discussing the importance of being committed to the growth of people, Taylor (2002) stated as

An essential characteristic of servant leadership is a belief that people have intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. This belief motivates the servant leader to develop a deep commitment to the growth of each and every individual within his or her organization. This commitment involves a tremendous responsibility to do everything within the leader's power to nurture both the professional and the personal growth of his or her employees (p. 53).

On the other hand, out of the 30 statements related to the five dimensions of servant leadership considered in this survey - '*view conflict as an opportunity to learn & grow*', part of developing people dimension had the highest disagreement and undecided responses (22% and 33%, respectively). In addition two statements: '*encourage people to take risks even if they may fail*'-part of providing leadership and '*are open to receiving criticism & challenge from others*'-part of displaying authenticity had the next highest disagreement and undecided responses. Accordingly, this study discloses that there could be attention areas related to employees' perception about their working environment to encourage them to take risks, and to be creative and innovative. As it is stated by Spears (2004) the servant leader serves by building the skills of followers, removing obstacles, encouraging innovation, and empowering others for creative problem solving. Hence it seems that

there are some development needs of the employees which may need to be identified and addressed. Moreover, how conflict in the workplace is viewed; how risks, criticism and challenges are viewed or handled by leaders need further attention.

Based on the assessment results obtained through the structured questionnaire administered to leaders, it was noted that there is a significant difference ( $P < 0.01$ ) between their passion and actual practice of servant leadership characteristics by CIET leaders. In line with this, 96.4% and 88.6% responses of the leaders were either 4 or 5 out of five (5) scale rating for their passion and actual practice of servant leadership, respectively. Because of the various reasons related to individual life experiences and/or the influences of other people surrounding the leader, it may not be usually possible to practice or live out to the level what a leader is passionate and believes in it.

### **3.3 Level of Employee Job Satisfaction**

In this study, a total of twelve statements/constructs of the questionnaire were intended for assessing the level of employee job satisfaction of the organization. Majority of the responses (93.5%) to the job satisfaction indicator statements were either strongly agree or agree. Whereas, only 5.5% and 1% responses are undecided and disagree, respectively as depicted below (Table 9). This relatively high rate of perception of employee job satisfaction (95%) could be considered as an exemplary to other organizations. On the other hand, Girmay (2015) reported that job satisfaction statements related responses to supervisor role, working condition and interpersonal relation were 37%, 31% and 38% respectively, for agree or strongly agree responses at Head Office Employees of one of the service giving governmental organizations of Ethiopia.

Table 1. The Mean Score for the Level of Employee Job Satisfaction (n=92)

<b>In viewing my own role...</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Std. dev.</b>
I feel appreciated by my supervisor for what I contribute	4.67	0.54
I am working at a high level of productivity	4.30	0.61
I am listened to by those <i>above</i> me in the organization	4.29	0.66
I feel good about my contribution to the organization	4.53	0.54
I receive encouragement and affirmation from those <i>above</i> me in the organization	4.34	0.73
My job is important to the success of this organization	4.65	0.52
I trust the leadership of this organization	4.37	0.67
I enjoy working in this organization	4.60	0.54
I am respected by those <i>above</i> me in the organization	4.44	0.67
I am able to be creative in my job	4.23	0.61
In this organization, a person's <i>work</i> is valued more than their <i>title</i>	4.16	0.79
I am able to use my best gifts and abilities in my job	4.34	0.58
<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>4.39</b>	<b>0.64</b>

**Source: Own Survey**

According to the correlation test, the relationship of job satisfaction with the overall servant leadership style and that of the three dimensions (sharing leadership, valuing people and displaying authenticity) was positively moderate whereas with that of providing leadership and developing people was positively weak.

Table 2. Spearman's Correlation between the Level of Job Satisfaction and Servant Leadership Dimensions (n=552)

<b>Dimensions of Servant Leadership</b>	<b>Spearman's test</b>	<b>Job Satisfaction</b>
Sharing Leadership	Spearman's correlation coefficient	0.386***
Providing Leadership	Spearman's correlation coefficient	0.276***
Developing People	Spearman's correlation coefficient	0.250***
Displaying Authenticity	Spearman's correlation coefficient	0.354***
Valuing People	Spearman's correlation coefficient	0.339***
Overall	Spearman's correlation coefficient	0.431***

\*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### **Source: Own Survey**

This finding of positive correlation between employee job satisfaction and servant leadership practice can be explained by the fact that servant leaders lead by example and enable and empower the followers with all the tools necessary to succeed. This genuine caring and authenticity for the needs of others has led to improved organizational effectiveness. In line with this, various previous studies support the current finding in that servant leadership positively affects employee behavior and ultimately job satisfaction. Studies by Johns (2006) and Ehrhart (2004) indicated a strong relationship to exist between leaders and followers with the significant benefit of increased organizational effectiveness. In addition, servant leadership possesses a significant positive correlation with employee satisfaction (Donghong et al, 2012).

#### **3.4 The Associations between Servant Leadership Dimensions, Job Satisfaction and Other Factors**

The analysis of this research data included the interactions of the study variables (servant leadership dimensions and job satisfaction) with various factors (independent variables) such as respondents department, sex, age, employee organizational position and employee service of years in the organization. Moreover, it involved the associations of the five dimensions of servant leadership as an independent variables and job satisfaction as

dependent variable. Statistical analysis using Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted and the corresponding results of this analysis are presented in Tables 3-5.

Accordingly, statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) association was observed between leadership/management and non-managerial employees perception of the overall servant leadership practice and that of job satisfaction. The rating of assessment of the perception of level of servant leadership practice and employee job satisfaction were lower for non-managerial employees as compared to that of leadership or management members' rating (Table 3). In line with this, Ayalew (2014) reported that the perception of leaders about their leadership practice and the employees' perception on the leadership practice of the organization were different at one of the service giving governmental organizations. This difference may be due to the possible information gap between the managerial and non-managerial employees of the organization.

**Table 3.** Association between Position with the Level of Job Satisfaction and the overall Practice of Servant Leadership

Responses	Level of Job Satisfaction			Level of Servant Leadership Practice			
		Leaders	Employees	Total	Leaders	Employees	Total
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	No.	153	364	517	205	543	742
	%	70.8	41.0	46.9	38.0	24.5	26.9
<b>Agree</b>	No.	61	453	514	277	1,164	1,441
	%	28.2	51.1	46.6	51.3	52.4	52.1
<b>Cumulative (St. agree and agree)</b>	No.	<b>214</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>1,031</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>1700</b>	<b>2,182</b>
	%	<b>99.1</b>	<b>92.1</b>	<b>93.5</b>	<b>89.3</b>	<b>76.6</b>	<b>79.1</b>
<b>Undecided</b>	No.	2	59	61	44	385	429
	%	0.9	6.7	5.5	8.2	17.3	15.5
<b>Disagree</b>	No.	0	11	11	14	116	130
	%	0	1.2	1.0	2.6	5.2	4.7
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	No.	0	0	0	0	18	18
	%	0	0	0	-	0.8	0.7
<b>Total (no.)</b>		<b>216</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>1,103</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>2,220</b>	<b>2,760</b>

Chi-Square for Job Satisfaction & Overall Servant Leadership Practice are 65.24<sup>\*\*\*</sup> & 63.37<sup>\*\*\*</sup> respectively

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Chi-square (2 sided) is significant at  $p < 0.01$

**Source:** Own survey

In addition, department had significant association with the level of employee job satisfaction and practice of Servant Leadership Dimensions (Sharing Leadership and Valuing people). This difference may be due to the difference of the nature of work and working conditions of employees among the three departments.

**Table 4.** Association of Sex with the Level of Job Satisfaction and Practice of Servant Leadership Dimensions (four of them)

Variable	Responses	No. (%) of responses based on Sex			Pearson Chi-Square
		Male	Female	Total	
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	St. Agree	359(50)	157(42)	516	34.36***
	Agree	323(45)	185(50)	508	
	Undecided &/or disagree	37(5)	30(8)	67	
	Total	719	372	1091	
<b>Providing Leadership</b>	St. agree	121(34)	50(27)	171	23.93***
	Agree	180(50)	85(46)	265	
	Undecided &/or disagree	59(16)	51(27)	110	
	Total	360	186	546	
<b>Valuing People</b>	St. agree	107(30)	43(23)	150	22.54***
	Agree	199(55)	111(60)	310	
	Undecided &/or disagree	54(15)	32(17)	86	
	Total	360	186	546	
<b>Displaying Authenticity</b>	St. agree	97(27)	28(15)	125	31.10***
	Agree	190(53)	103(55)	293	
	Undecided &/or disagree	73(20)	55(30)	128	
	Total	360	186	546	
<b>Developing People</b>	St. agree	86(24)	34(18)	120	20.71***
	Agree	191(53)	104(56)	295	
	Undecided &/or disagree	83(23)	48(26)	129	
	Total	360	186	546	

\*\*\* The association is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-sided).

Source: Own Survey

As indicated in Table 4, the associations between respondents' sex and that of the four dimensions of servant leadership and job satisfaction were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). It seems that male respondents have relatively higher perception of job satisfaction and rated the servant leadership practice higher than the female respondents.

**Table 5.** Association of Service of Years with the Level of Job Satisfaction and Practice of Servant Leadership Dimensions (four of them)

Variable	Type of responses	No. (%) of responses based on service of years				Pearson Chi-Square
		<6yrs	6-10yrs	>10yrs	Total	
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	St. agree	155(48)	213(41)	138(55)	506	23.03 <sup>***</sup>
	Agree	147(46)	264(51)	102(41)	513	
	Undecided &/or disagree	21(6)	39(8)	12(4)	72	
	Total	323	516	252	1091	
<b>Valuing People</b>	St. agree	42(26)	54(21)	52(41)	148	22.77 <sup>***</sup>
	Agree	87(54)	157(61)	63(50)	307	
	Undecided &/or disagree	33(20)	47(18)	11(9)	91	
	Total	162	258	126	546	
<b>Displaying Authenticity</b>	St. agree	36(22)	44(17)	45(36)	125	24.66 <sup>***</sup>
	Agree	88(54)	139(54)	60(48)	287	
	Undecided &/or disagree	38(24)	75(29)	21(16)	134	
	Total	162	258	126	546	
<b>Providing Leadership</b>	St. agree	59(36)	65(25)	44(35)	168	14.57 <sup>**</sup>
	Agree	78(48)	124(48)	61(48)	263	
	Undecided &/or disagree	25(16)	69(17)	21(17)	115	
	Total	162	258	126	546	
<b>Sharing Leadership</b>	St. agree	50(31)	72(28)	53(42)	175	14.98 <sup>**</sup>
	Agree	76(47)	135(52)	59(49)	270	
	Undecided &/or disagree	36(22)	51(20)	14(9)	101	
	Total	162	258	126	546	

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Chi-square (2-sided) is significant at  $p < 0.01$  and <sup>\*\*</sup> Chi-square (2-sided) is significant at  $p < 0.05$

**Source: Own Survey**

Besides, respondents' service of years had significant association with the level of job satisfaction and Practice of Servant Leadership Dimensions (four of them) (Table 5). It seems that those respondents who have stayed in the organization longer (over 10 years) have relatively higher perception of job satisfaction and rated the servant leadership practice higher than those respondents who stayed shorter (less than ten years) in the organization. Respondents' age also had significant association with employee job satisfaction and level of practice of servant leadership dimension (developing people). It was noted that middle aged employees (between 30-49 years of age) had relatively higher perception of job satisfaction and rated developing people dimension higher than the younger (less than 30 years of age) and the older (greater than 49 years) ones.

The observed differences in the level of employee job satisfaction and practice of servant leadership dimensions as the result of the effect of the various factors (independent variables) such as employees department, sex, service of years, age and organizational position could be related to intrinsic and extrinsic conditions of the job environment. The intrinsic component of job satisfaction is dependent on the individual's personal perception and emotional state regarding the work environment including factors such as recognition, advancement, and responsibility. While the extrinsic components are comprised of external job related variables that would include salary, supervision, and working conditions (Negussie and Demissie, 2013).

### **3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis and Findings**

Based on the assessment done through structured interview questions administered to the organizational senior leaders and middle level leaders, it was noted that all of them believe that servant leadership style is practiced well and it is an established leadership culture of the organization. Moreover,

all of them believe that servant leadership style is an appropriate and effective leadership style for accomplishing the organization's intended goal and mission. They fully recommended servant leadership style to be used by other organizations particularly to those service oriented and development organizations.

In response to the enquiry about their thought on the common characteristics or qualities of servant leadership, the following are the qualities of servant leadership that were indicated by most of the respondents. The mentioned qualities include active listening to others, modeling the way, selflessness and sacrifice for the good of others, serving the right needs of others, consistency in action and character, earnest love and care for others, being people oriented, putting oneself in the shoes of others, empathy and emotionally connected with others. These characteristics of servant leadership identified in the current study are congruent with the definitions/descriptions of servant leadership by various scholars. According to Greenleaf, servant leadership is based on service philosophy and serving to the followers and satisfying their needs are the priority for servant leaders. Servant leaders prefer empowerment, mutual trust, cooperation, ethical utilization of power and value of serving to followers to anything else in the organization (Greenleaf, 1970).

On the other hand, the respondents indicated some of the major benefits of practicing servant leadership to the leader and the organization. Among the mentioned benefits of practicing servant leadership include experiencing internal and deep satisfaction because of serving the needs of others, having healthy and conducive working environment, acceptance and building trust, better sense of achievement in serving the needs of others, enhanced

employee engagement and retention, increased productivity, increased employee motivation and creativity, improved team building and trust. The researchers fully shares with these characteristics of servant leader and various literatures on servant leadership are congruent with it (Green Leaf, 1977; Spears, 2004 and Laub, 1999).

The respondents also stated their view of the major challenges and costs of practicing servant leadership based on their long years of leadership experiences. Among the commonly mentioned challenges and/or costs of practicing servant leadership include possibility of misunderstanding and abuse of leadership humility by some people, fear of possible disrespect by some people, failure of discharge of roles and duties by some irresponsible people, slow decision making, it demands to walk together, costs more time and resource for nurturing and cultivating others, sacrificing self-interest and giving priority to the needs of others and requires more tolerance and understanding of others. In order to minimize the risk of some of the commonly mentioned challenges such as misunderstanding and abuse of humility of servant leaders, disrespect and failure to discharge duties and responsibilities by some people, it is important to stress on one of the dimensions of servant leadership which is providing leadership.

A fundamental principle supporting servant leadership is to gain in-depth knowledge of followers. Effective leaders recognize it takes sincere effort and compassion to reach someone's heart and you must touch their heart before you ask them for a hand (Maxwell, 1998). Intimacy and relationships are the oil that keeps friction down and permits smooth operation within the organization. Servant leaders have a keen understanding of human character and embrace a nurturing teaching style that builds self-esteem. Serving leaders understand institutional objectives are best met when both the needs of the

people and the organization are achieved together, and seldom are these two goals equal (Brewer, 2010).

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Generally, it was noted that servant leadership is practiced well at Compassion International in Ethiopia and the organization is categorized as servant-oriented organization based on the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) tool employed in the current study. Furthermore, it was disclosed that the various servant leadership characteristics or dimensions are being practiced well and servant leadership style is an established culture in CIET. The leaders of this organization believe that all of the five dimensions of servant leadership are practiced well in the organization and fully recommend servant leadership style to be used by other organizations particularly to those development and service oriented organizations. In line with this, it can be safely concluded that the leadership of this organization has proven and set the example of the prospect of practice of servant leadership in development organizations in Ethiopia and beyond. On the other hand, it was observed that two of the five dimensions of servant leadership (developing people and displaying authenticity) as compared to the other three dimensions need attention and intentionality to better establish these characteristics in the organization leadership style. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that the level of employee job satisfaction of the organization is very high(94%) and it is exemplary for other organizations.

Based on the findings of this research and the subsequent conclusions drawn, the following points are recommended.

- ❖ Compassion International in Ethiopia should continue to sustain the culture of the practice of servant leadership style with all its

dimensions and continue to be role model for other likeminded organizations in Ethiopia and beyond. The organization should continue to regularly internalize and reflect on the organizational values and cultural traits among its leadership and employees. The leadership should pay special attention to the two of the five dimensions of servant leadership (developing people and displaying authenticity) and work intentionally to strengthen their practice.

- ❖ The CIET leadership should continue to be creative and proactive to further strengthen and sustain the observed high level of employee job satisfaction and to attract and retain highly competent and committed employees of the organization to better accomplish its intended mission and goals.
- ❖ It is the unfathomable belief and recommendation of the researcher for other likeminded non-governmental and service oriented governmental organizations in Ethiopia to adopt servant leadership style and implement it for the common benefit of the employees, leaders, organizations and the people at large.

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