

THE ANTECEDENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ACADEMIC SERVANT LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY IN A FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITY IN INDONESIA

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Research Background

Leadership for higher education is an absolute necessity. Higher education institutions (HEIs) like university are expected to improve themselves in enacting their roles as the generator of knowledge. University exists to pursue the truth (Jaspers, 1946) and to transform society (Brennan et al., 2004). These important roles must be done by the HEI in the era of global financial crisis when budget is both limited and restricted (Bienen and Boren, 2010). Looking at it from a positive perspective, this is the era where the quality of the university is being tested. Universities with high academic qualities will still be the ideal destination for potential students for their higher education and the trusted research institutions for research grants (Lawton et al., 2013).

This means leadership in higher education is expected to drive academic quality. High quality lecturers are the ones who will improve the teaching learning and the research performance of the institution (Boyer, 1990; Farnham, 1999). The scholarship caliber of these lecturers should be nurtured in order to harness their academic potentials (Ramsden, 1998). Leaders in colleges and university are expected to improve their leadership effectiveness in order to facilitate their colleagues. These higher educational leaders are still seeking the right leadership approach to ensure their leadership effectiveness. Some leadership scholars suggest that the sector adopt the leadership approaches from other sectors. These scholars argue that the sector of higher education has benefited from approaches such as authentic leadership and transformational leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Bryman, 2009; McCaffery, 2010). On the other hand higher educational leadership experts assert that the sector should come out with its own leadership mantra (McNay, 1995; Birnbaum, 1991; Bolden et al., 2009).

Servant leadership as one of the approaches has also been studied by leadership scholars as a promising leadership approach for the sector of higher education (Parris and Peachey, 2013). Fransworth (2007) asserts that this service oriented leadership is the proper leadership way which can drive the followers in the sector of higher education in dealing with the challenges of the sector creatively. Wheeler (2012) posits that servant leadership is a leading and living philosophy that will create a sustainable culture which values integrity and professionalism. Integrity and professionalism are badly needed by university and colleges if they have to thrive in this competitive era.

Given that universities are the front-runner of empirical research, every claim about effective leadership should be tested empirically. This includes the effectiveness of servant leadership for the sector (Farling and Stone, 1999). Scholars of leadership suggest that servant leadership is associated with leaders' hardiness (McClelland, 2008) and followers' commitment (Hunter et al., 2013). Moderated by the climate of empowerment in an organization, servant leadership is proven to be associated with the performance of the leadership in the sector of higher education (Iken, 2005;

Burton and Peachey, 2013; Wheeler, 2012). In the sub-sector of faith-based higher education, servant leadership research tends to be done based on the positive assumption of the leadership approach (Jacobs, 2011; Rubino, 2012). Furthermore, the research of servant leadership in higher education tends to look at mixed followers without discerning whether the followers are academics or non-academics (i.e. supporting professionals) (Wheeler, 2012).

This research was designed to explore the practice of servant leadership among the academic leaders in a faith-based university in Indonesia. The purpose of the research is to evaluate the practice of servant leadership within the faith-based campus and eventually advance the body of knowledge of servant leadership and higher educational leadership. The evaluative purpose of this research is aimed to inform the Board of the university about the implementation of servant leadership in the academic sphere within the case campus. The research-based information will be beneficial for the Board to make the necessary changes if servant leadership is to be effective.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, this research has raised two research questions: 1) How do the academic leaders understand servant leadership? 2) What do the academic leaders do to ensure the implementation of servant leadership as they lead their lecturer? The first research question is expected to produce themes related to the antecedents of the academic servant leadership while the second is expected to construct the characteristics of the academic servant leaders within the case study campus. Knowing the antecedents will evaluate the initial driver of servant leadership among the academic servant leaders. This will be the important evaluator for the Board given that servant leadership is supposed to be based on the natural feeling to serve (Greenleaf, 1977) among the leaders and not due to the instructions written on the case campus's statutes. The exploration of the characteristics of the academic servant leaders will let the Board understand the actual servant leadership practised by these academic servant leaders and thus enable the Board to design appropriate leadership development program for the current and the future leaders.

The Antecedents and the Characteristics of Servant leadership

Greenleaf (1977) asserts that servant leadership should be based on the natural feeling that one wants to serve. This assertion was interpreted differently by different servant leadership scholars. Some scholars suggest that this natural feeling is based on the spiritual transformation one experienced which made the leader believes that he is a servant of the Higher Being and since the Higher Being is invisible, the leader manifests the service to his followers (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002; Page and Wong, 2000). Being a servant is the basis on a servant leader's doing (Sendjaya, 2015). Other scholars suggest that one is willing to serve in their leadership due to his or her surroundings. The initial willingness in being a servant leader is due to one's alignment with his or her organizational values (van Dierendonck, 2011) and due to one's experience with the previous servant leader (Beck, 2014).

In their synthesis on transformational leadership, authentic leadership and spiritual leadership, Sendjaya et al. (2008) not only confirm that servant leaders are committed to being a servant out of their obedience to a higher being, but also detail

six servant leadership dimensions: voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality and transforming influence. In voluntary subordination, a servant leader bases on his being (a servant) serves, regardless of his internal and external situation and this dimension becomes the basis for his authentic-self (Sendjaya et al., 2008). The authenticity of servant leaders significantly shapes and affects their relationships with others and the covenantal character means that servant leaders relate with their followers based on their shared values, open-ended commitment, mutual trust and concern for the welfare of the other party (Sendjaya, 2015).

In the responsible morality dimension, Sendjaya (2015) argues that servant leaders are being ethical in exercising their power, ensuring that both the ends and the means are morally legitimised, thoughtfully reasoned and ethically justified. Transcendental spirituality describes servant leaders' relationships with their followers based on spiritual values, aimed at restoring the wholeness of the followers and meaningful, intrinsically motivating work. Last but not least, the transforming influence dimension describes how servant leadership positively transforms those served in multiple dimensions (e.g. emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually) (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

Table 1. Servant Leadership Dimensions and Behaviours (Sendjaya et al., 2008)

Servant Leadership Dimensions	Servant Leadership Behaviours
Voluntary Subordination	Being a servant and Acts of Service
Authentic Self	Humility, Integrity, Accountability, Security and Vulnerability.
Covenantal Relationship	Acceptance, Availability, Equality and Collaboration
Responsible Morality	Moral reasoning and Moral action
Transcendental Spirituality	Religiousness, Interconnectedness, Sense of Mission and Wholeness
Transforming Influence	Vision, Modelling, Mentoring, Trust and Empowerment.

In clarifying the essence of the servant being, Wong and Page (2003) assert that servant being can be observed from their servant character and is rooted in the servant's heart. The servant heart is the inner quality of the person and in Christianity this inner quality exists as the result of essential inner reality of faith-based rebirth/spiritual transformation (Page and Wong, 2000). The innate character of servant leadership for Page and Wong (2000) is the leader's heart, characterised by their commitment to serve others with integrity and humility. Furthermore, Page and Wong (2000) suggest that servant leadership is an expanding circle centred on the servant leader's heart depicted in figure 1.

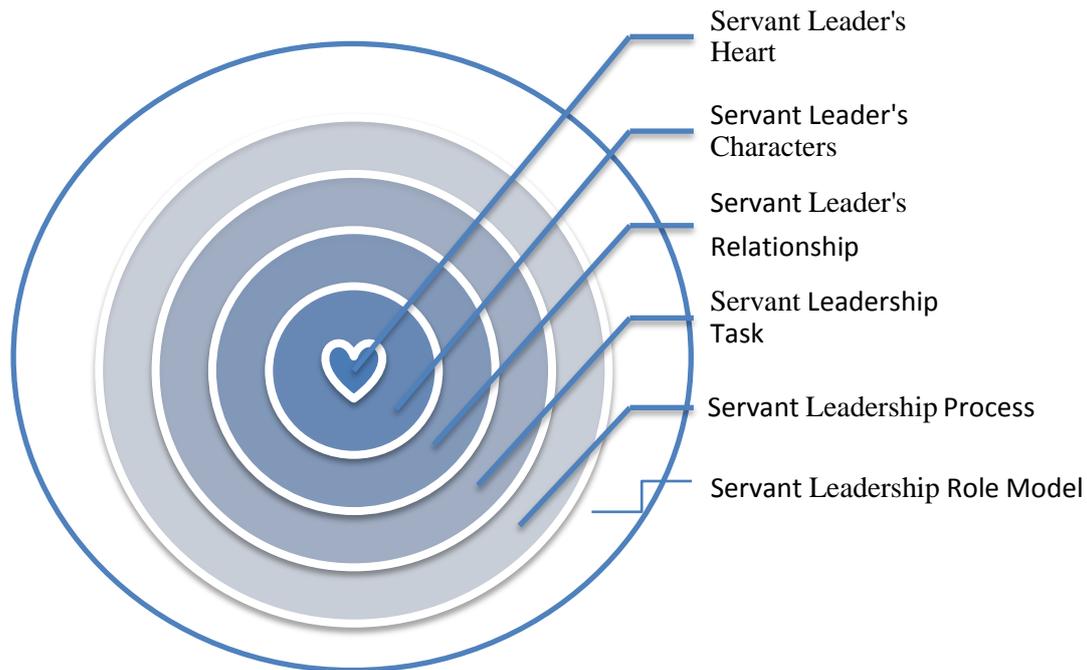


Figure 1.Page and Wong's (2000) Expanding Circles of Servant Leadership

The figure above explains why servant leaders lead by serving. They do so because of their transformed heart and this heart transformation enables them to present their genuine servant leader's characteristics. These characteristics are displayed as they relate to their lead featured by care, empowerment and people development. A servant-led relationship is the foundation to carry the leadership tasks (visioning, goal setting and leading). The leadership tasks have to be manifested in the leadership process (modelling, team building and shared decision making). The expanding process starts from the servant heart and goes further until it reached the process of developing the society.

Given the faith-based nature of the case campus, I am using the Servant Leadership Dimensions and behaviours and the expanding circle of servant leadership characteristics as the backbone theories of the interview questions in relation to the characteristics of the academic servant leaders. The continuous iteration process between the models and the data gathered from the interview is intended to produce the expected and the unexpected themes to enrich the model of the characteristics of academic servant leadership in the sector of higher education.

Case Study Methodology

This research uses case study as its research methodology. The methodology is expected to capture the complexity of leadership practice in the higher educational context (Bassey, 2007; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2014). The case study involves an interview of twenty eight academic leaders leading at departmental, decanal and presidential level. The interview for leaders at three different levels which act as the triangulation of the research will minimize the risk of 'romancing the leader' in a research on leaders (Gronn, 2007). The case campus is a faith-based (Christian) campus which has been running for more than five decades in one of the major cities

in Indonesia. The private campus clearly states in its statutes that leadership in the case campus must be enacted under the principles of servant leadership (YPTK, 2004).

The focus of this study is the academic leadership. Academic leadership is leadership that is intended to influence the academic performance of the lecturers (Ramsden, 1998; Bolden et al., 2012). In this study, the academic leadership is focused on the undergraduate academic programs of the case campus. The academic leaders were interviewed on their academic leadership experience as they lead within the hierarchy of higher education (Tucker and Bryan, 1988; Pepper and Giles, 2015).

Each interview which lasted between 60-90 minutes was audio recorded and processed into transcript ready for the analysis. The process of making the transcript is the enactment of the process of data display. Data display is part of the three concurrent qualitative data analysis procedures suggested by Miles et al (2014). The displayed data for Miles et al (2014) are then processed by an open coding and a close coding process in order to produce the themes in relation to the research questions. The iteration process of reviewing the literature review and the emerging themes has enabled the researcher to produce the relevant themes.

Antecedents of academic servant leadership

In studying for the antecedents of the academic servant leadership, every interviewee was asked to tell their journey to leadership. Interestingly, this research revealed that twenty out of twenty six academic leaders were not willing to be nominated for their current position. This interesting fact provides a deeper insight on why in the end of the day these lecturers were willing to be the academic leader. The exploration of these 'late yeses' has been consolidated into themes related to the antecedents of these academic leader's servant leadership.

One of the departmental heads said how her professional calling supported by her family has helped her to take the leadership position.

"...I believe that I am called to teach the truth to my students. Being a lecturer is enough. However my spouse motivated me by saying that my calling is going to be easily achieved when I am leading my department. I believe his "surprising support" is the confirmation of my calling to be the leader. Moreover ever since I got married, I had to move church to my husband's. In this new church, I don't see myself fit for a ministry. I determined to make my leadership service as my ministry with my husband's blessing" (G1, 24).

For the academic servant leaders their willingness of becoming the academic leader was due to a calling. Becoming an academic leader is a sacrifice that only can be taken based on the calling which stems from their spiritual conviction. A departmental head of an engineering program shared her story:

"I have said no for so many times for the nomination. Once I attended an inauguration of the elected Deans, there I listen to the spiritual talk. The talk

confirmed me that I should be willing to be the officer as I believe that my department is the place where I could do something..." (G1, 19).

Besides the family values and spiritual conviction, the academic leaders stated how their experience with the previous leaders has helped them to make the decision of becoming an academic leader. One of the Deans recalled her acceptance decision in this following evidence:

"I was actually having a plan for myself and my family and was really reluctant in taking the position. My current leader shared how he needs me as one of the few trustworthy leaders within the campus. He shared his vision and what he has in mind for the case campus. His sharing was so compelling that I felt guilty for not taking the offered position" (G1, 6).

The academic servant leaders also confirmed that their servant leadership is initiated due to the identity of the case campus as a Christian campus. One of the deans stated in this following evidence:

"...leading as an academic leader means following the example of Christ. Our campus is a Christian campus and thus we have to follow His example in implementing servant leadership. We lead by being humble and providing excellent service to our lecturers" (G1, 5).

This section has explained the antecedents of academic servant leadership. The antecedents can be categorized into internal antecedents which consist of family values and spiritual conviction and external antecedents which consist of leadership experience and organizational identity. There is a suggestion that these two groups of antecedents are related to each other and that they are influencing the characteristics of the academic servant leaders.

The Characteristics of an Academic Servant Leader

The qualitative data analysis shows that there are eight themes related to the characteristics of the academic servant leader. In this research based on the review of the literature combined with the true meanings obtained from the participants, these themes are stated as: leader's understanding, humility, credibility, authenticity, altruistic mindset, moral responsibility, people development and servant leader's conceptualization. Under the light of servant leadership theories, these themes are categorized as a concentric circle of characteristics. These characteristics are core characteristic, intrapersonal characteristics, relational characteristics and the characteristics related to servant leadership impact.

Core Characteristic (Leaders' Understanding)

When the academic servant leaders were asked on the meaning of their leadership, they said that it is not just service. This shows that there is an inconsistency of these leaders with the theory of servant leadership. Scholars of servant leadership strongly argue that the meaning of leadership is to serve the followers by meeting the followers' needs (Russell and Stone, 2002). There are three other themes besides

'to serve' stated by the academic servant leaders. One head of the department said that for her to lead means to influence others by inspiring them.

"Having all things to do as a leader makes me think that to lead means to inspire others so that they will perform at their best and we can achieve the goal of the organisation more easily" (G1, 9).

Besides of influencing, another academic leader, one of the Deans stated that to lead means to empower others.

"In my opinion, to lead is to empower and to nurture others...accepting the followers' weaknesses, cultivate them to be better and definitely appreciating their strengths" (G1, 4).

Another theme related to the meaning of leadership came in the form of 'direction'. This was stated by one of the heads of the social science programs.

"...in my understanding, the meaning of leading is to have a clear target and to organise my followers to achieve it. This is universal for me, wherever is always like this" (G1, 13).

This section has discussed the evidence that the academic servant leaders understand leadership as a concept that is larger than service. They stated that servant leadership is a service that should bring along empowerment, influence and direction.

Humility, Credibility and Authenticity

Besides their understanding that was not unified on 'to serve', the academic leaders also stated the importance of humility as the academic leaders. One of the presidential leaders said in this following evidence:

"I just didn't want it. I was so happy with my previous position as the head of the research centre. I already have plans for my future that are related to research. I never thought of holding my current position. I feel that the scope of the job is too large and I have not learned much about it. I don't really know how things are being done here" (G1, 2).

Besides humility, another characteristic that emerged from the interview was credibility. The academic leaders of the case campus stated clearly the importance of credibility of the academic servant leader. One of the departmental heads shared her thought in the following evidence:

"...in this second term, I am very reluctant to be an academic leader. There was a shocking moment as I was working on the academic department's accreditation. I read in their assessment guidance and I reflected about myself. A bachelor degree holder like me was far from qualified and this fact would bring down the grade of my programme. I was speechless knowing that I could be the negative factor for my department's assessment. Currently, I already have my Master degree, but I am still

yet to get my first academic rank. Having to lead two Doctoral lecturers and several Master lecturers with higher academic rank gives me constant anxiety” (G1, 26).

The evidence above shows the important of further investigation of humility. Humility is not the same with falling-short of the standard as stated by the interviewee above.

Another important related characteristic is authenticity. This means the quality of being vulnerable of a person. One of the female academic leaders shared her thought in the following paragraph.

“I didn’t want it in the first place. I felt that I have not taken care of my children enough when I was “just” a vice head or the deputy of the programme. I can’t imagine if I have to be the head. I was often being called by the head master of my child’s school to hear about my son’s negative behaviour. I was so worried about not being able to be a good wife and mother for my family” (G1, 24).

In summary, humility, credibility and authenticity are three characteristics displayed as the intrapersonal characteristics of an academic servant leader. These characteristics are expanded from their understanding of leadership (Page and Wong, 2000). This section has also explained how each intrapersonal characteristic is unique and interrelated. The humility of academic servant leaders does not mean that they are not credible and authenticity makes sure that humility and credibility are genuine to build trust (Kouzes and Posner, 2003) as these academic servant leaders must relate with their followers. The next section is going to explain the relational characteristics which consist of altruistic mindset and morally responsible characteristic.

Altruistic and morally responsible

When asked about their attitude towards others, the academic servant leaders show certain altruistic mindset. They indicated that they became an academic leader out of their concern for others. One of the Deans said it in this following evidence:

“I want to contribute something to my organisation...I want to improve the performance of my lecturers. Their research performance is still not there...there are four departments, but only one that is quite good since they have two experienced researchers as their research drivers. In the other programmes, I have to change their mind set on their scholarly activities...” (G1, 4).

Further investigation suggests that the academic servant leaders have the altruistic mindset because of their moral responsibility. They see their job beyond the professional reward that they earned. One of the departmental heads highlighted it in this following statement:

“...how to say it? Well, every morning as I go to the campus, I always drive past a primary school near the campus. I see a mother riding a motor-cycle with her daughter, and as they reach the school, the mother ensures that her daughter is well-dressed. It is an analogy for me where we are responsible for parents’ trust which I believe more essential than their financial contribution. They have entrusted

their sons and daughters to study on our case campus. We have to love them by ensuring them that we have provided our best” (G1, 18).

Interestingly, this relational attitude was not directed towards their direct followers. Most departmental heads look at their students as their direct followers instead of their lecturer. This happens as well with the academic leaders at the higher levels.

This section has explained the relational characteristics of the academic servant leaders. They relate with others based on their altruistic mindset (Patterson, 2003).

This altruistic mindset is related to their moral responsibility towards their followers (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

Servant leadership impact (People Development and Servant Leader’s Conceptualisation)

The previous sections have explained the servant leaders’ understanding, their intrapersonal characteristics and their relational characteristics. This section will explain their aspiration of their servant leadership impact. This aspiration of impact can be understood from their conceptualization. In servant leadership, conceptualization is the talent of the servant leader to change his followers so that these followers can change their surroundings (Greenleaf, 1977).

One of Deans stated that for her the meaning of her position is to turn around her School from the inherited bad leadership from the past.

“I thought about this position, well actually I was being offered as the Vice Dean on the previous term. As the senate member of this School, I knew that being a Dean means turning around the school. My close friends have told me that the next Dean has to ‘wash the dirty dishes after a party” (G1, 4).

The evidence above shows that the leader view that there are problems within her academic unit. This means being a leader means being the one who has to clean up the mess left by the former leader.

“I don’t think I was the right candidate, I am still relatively new in my department. I believe there were better candidates than me. I lead in an organisation before but it was not an educational institution. I can’t just use command and control. I want my Dean to reconsider her appointment” (G1, 13).

The statement above shows that for an academic servant leader, this role is different from any other kind of leadership. The following evidence explains the academic leaders’ aspiration in creating a change on their followers:

“I want every undergraduate student who enters my department to be transformed by our process. I myself felt it. My daughter was one of the students of an international programme on this case campus. I admired that programme so much. She and her friends were somehow being changed. They were so serious and committed to their studies as they underwent the programme” (G1, 18).

This section has explained the transformational characteristics of the academic servant leaders. These characteristics to some extent have confirmed the theory of servant leaders' talent of conceptualization (Greenleaf, 1991; Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006).

Spiritual Contemplation

This research has to allocate a special discussion on the topic of spiritual contemplation. In Indonesia, this spiritual contemplation is called a 'pergumulan'.

"Well, nobody wants to serve as an administrator, the nature of the work is somehow avoided by many in my school...I come from a broken family [cried], after my dad run away, my mother was being helped by people from the church in our village. I felt that God has been so good to me, transforming my life and so, being an academic leader is one of my ways to repay His kindness" (G1, 3).

Pergumulan is servant leader's intrapersonal communication in order to accept a leadership position and to carry it out. In this faith-based university, this Indonesian term of 'pergumulan' is a noun based on a verb 'bergumul' which means to wrestle (LAI, 2001). In this context the wrestle exists between the will of the servant leader and the will which s/he believes as the will of God (Winston, 2002). These servant leaders accept by their internal rationalization based of their faith or their interpretation of their faith (Fry, 2003; Reinke, 2004).

The head of one of the engineering departments stated very well in this following evidence:

"I know that not being strict to my lecturers will create a weak organizational culture. However, these senior lecturers have been doing their poor performance since forever. My superiors didn't do anything about it. I know that based on my faith, I have to be strict to them, but when I am not supported by my superiors to do so, I feel that I don't feel right in doing so" (G1,13).

The evidence above show how 'pergumulan' is part of the academic servant leaders both in starting their academic journey and in sustaining it.

The proposed model of Servant Leadership Antecedents and Characteristics

The qualitative data analysis process which includes the creation of causal themes suggests that there is a relationship between the antecedents and the characteristics of the academic servant leaders.

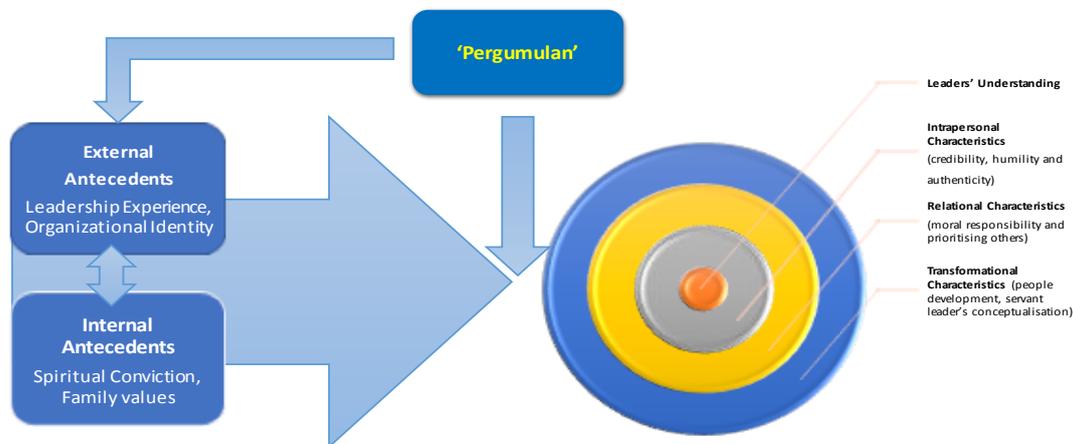


Figure 2. The relationship between the antecedents and the characteristics of the academic servant leaders.

The figure above describes how academic leaders within the case campus got initiated in enacting their servant leadership. There are external and internal antecedents that influenced each other and these antecedents influence these academic servant leaders' characteristics. This influence is moderated by the academic servant leaders' spiritual contemplation known in Indonesian as 'pergumulan'.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the antecedents of academic servant leadership can be classified into internal antecedents consist of spiritual conviction and family values and external antecedents which consist of leadership experience and organizational identity. The exploration of the enactment of academic leadership has suggested that these academic servant leaders displayed eight characteristics that can be seen as a concentric circle. Reviewing the literature on servant leaders' characteristics, these concentric characteristics are categorized into core characteristics, intrapersonal characteristics, relational characteristics and transformational characteristics.

The academic servant leaders of the case campus stated that their willingness and their pursuance of an effective leadership could not be separated from the term 'pergumulan'. Pergumulan or spiritual contemplation occurred when they accepted the nomination process of their current leadership position (Baxter, 2011). This faith-based contemplation which resulted in their willingness of being an academic leader involved their rational considerations such as support from the spouse, the informal leader and certain spiritual events. 'Pergumulan' also emerged as a dominant theme when the academic servant leaders explain their challenges in leading their department. 'Pergumulan' helps these academic servant leaders to lead the difficult people, to do endless administrative tasks, to follow the rules set by the Board and to fulfil the difficult demand from the government.

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Biography

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