

MEASURING SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Servant leadership is focused on serving followers first with ethical, empowering, supportive, and empathetic behaviors. Whereas other leadership approaches, such as transformational leadership, focus on aligning follower behavior with the goals of the organization, servant leadership has a strong focus on providing followers with the tools and support they need to reach their full potential. When followers are empowered, supported, and trust their leaders, their engagement in required, and especially, discretionary behaviors, naturally follows. Over time, followers serve coworkers and customers without being directed to do so by the leader. In order for the power of servant leadership to be harnessed by organizations, it is essential to be able to accurately measure it. Two major research efforts conducted by UIC researchers have resulted in the development of a valid measure of servant leadership. The research has revealed that servant leadership is comprised of seven components or dimensions:

1. **emotional healing**, which involves the degree to which the leader cares about followers' personal problems and well-being
2. **creating value for the community**, which captures the leader's involvement in helping the community surrounding the organization as well as encouraging followers to be active in the community
3. **conceptual skills**, reflecting the leader's competency in solving work problems and understanding the organization's goals
4. **empowering**, assessing the degree to which the leader entrusts followers with responsibility, autonomy, and decision-making influence
5. **helping subordinates grow and succeed**, capturing the extent to which the leader helps followers reach their full potential and succeed in their careers
6. **putting subordinates first**, assessing the degree to which the leader prioritizes meeting the needs of followers before tending to his or her own needs
7. **behaving ethically**, which includes being honest, trustworthy, and serving as a model of integrity.

The development of the 28-item, 7-dimension measure of servant leadership (SL-28) was conducted with a sample of 298 students, followed by an organizational sample of 182 individuals and their immediate supervisors. Results, published in a 2008 article in *Leadership Quarterly*, revealed that the 28 items provide a reliable and valid measure of servant leadership. Specifically, even when controlling for transformational leadership and leader-member exchange, **servant leadership dimensions were shown to be positively related to:**

- job performance
 - commitment to the organization
 - participation in community service activities
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Recognizing that in some situations, such as annual employee attitude surveys, it would be desirable to be able to measure servant leadership with fewer items, we developed a 7-item version (SL-7) of our 28-item scale. With data collected from 729 undergraduate students, 218 graduate students, and 552 leader-follower dyads from 11 organizations, and at the team level with a study consisting of a total of 71 ongoing intact work teams, the results (presented in an article that is in press in *Leadership Quarterly*) revealed that **the SL-7 was positively related to:**

- individual and team job performance
- individual and team organizational citizenship (discretionary) behaviors
- individual creativity
- team confidence in the team's ability to perform well (team potency)

Implications of the Results:

Our servant leadership measures provide valid assessment for diagnosing the leadership climate in organizations, or as providing a baseline for organizational training or coaching activities. The short (SL-7) version is most appropriate for providing an overall picture of the degree to which servant leadership is being practiced in the organization. The longer version (SL-28) is better suited for use in training and coaching. This is because it provides detailed information on each of the 7 dimensions, allowing for training targeted only at dimensions in which a manager is shown to be deficient. For example, the manager may demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior, but score low on empowering followers. Training would then focus on skills involved in empowering followers. We recommend that the SL-7 or SL-28 be employed at multiple points in time so that changes in the engagement in servant leader behaviors can be evaluated.

For details, please refer to the original articles: Liden, R.C., Wayne, S.J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multilevel assessment. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 161-177; Liden, R.C., Wayne, S.J., Meuser, J.D., Hu, J., Wu, J., & Liao, C. (in press). Servant leadership: Validation of a short form of the SL-28. *Leadership Quarterly*.