



## SERVANT LEADERSHIP MEASURES AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this research is to examine different measures of servant leadership in literature and advance both the theoretical conceptualization and empirical validation of these in public leadership. Conceptually it extends the understanding of servant leadership measures as reflective constructs, incorporating authenticity, courage, standing back, and forgiveness. Empirically, it tests the relationship of these measures with organizational commitment of employees in the public sector. The model shows that servant leadership measures directly impact commitment. The value of the paper lies in its empirical and theoretical contribution.*

**Keywords:** Servant leadership, Organizational commitment

### INTRODUCTION

For ages the debate on the right leadership style has continued and will probably go on till a consensus on how to lead and who should lead is formed. However, at present this seems an ongoing exercise which attracts researchers to examine leadership using new conceptualizations. However, the study of leadership brings forth evidence of tales about great leaders and larger than life individuals. It is interesting to note that leaders have also been discussed by early religions and appreciated for their respective qualities and virtues (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). Therefore, leaders were people who were supposed to practice ethical values and moral attributes. The concept of servant leadership was brought into leadership literature by Greenleaf's essays- *The Servant as Leader* (1970), *The Institution as Servant Leader* (1972a), and *Trustees as Servants* (1972b). His definition of the servant leader revolves around a way of life that carried the notion of service to an act of service. Thus, his conceptualization of leader rested on the footprints of the character of Leo

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from *Journey to the East* by Hess (1956). Although these essays popularized the term however, conceptualization of it started recently (Burbuto and Wheeler, 2006). In the past thirty years much of its popularity is derived from case studies and different success stories (Farling *et al.*, 1999; Graham, 1991). After which empirical works started to appear (Liden *et al.*, 2008; Neubert *et al.*, 2008; Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008; Van Dierendonk, 2010). It is important that during the past decades of servant leadership investigation empirical studies which started with Laub, (1999) have not resulted on a common consensus about its definition. Since Greenleaf did not empirically validate the theory researches have made different modifications in this model. The most talked about models were developed by Spears (1995), Laub (1999), Russell and Stone (2002), and Patterson (2003). Thus, an exercise to study servant leadership theory and its relationship with organizational commitment forms the rationale for this research paper.

### **Conceptual Models and Measures of Servant Leadership**

Spears (1995) distinguished 10 characteristics that are generally quoted as the essential elements of servant leadership because he translated the idea of Greenleaf into a conceptual model. Spear's 10 characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, commitment to the growth of people, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, building community, (Van Dierendonck, 2010). Laub (1999) developed six clusters of servant leadership characteristics to measure. The items were formulated in terms of organizational culture and leadership in general. The factor analysis showed two dimensions one focused on the organization and the other on top leadership and follower perspectives of leaders. The research shows high correlations among the mean scores. The study however could not prove its multidimensionality. Page and Wong (2000) came up with servant leadership profile. They articulated 99 items divided into twelve categories. Their data analysis from a sample of 1,157 persons resulted in eight dimensions. In later versions the number of dimensions dropped, via seven, to five (Wong and Davey, 2007). Russell and Stone, (2002) formed 9 functional characteristics and eleven additional characteristics of servant leaders. Another servant leadership model suggested was by Patterson's (2003), which had seven dimensions. It can be concluded that these models represent characteristics related to mostly empowering and improving followers for positive outcomes. Another attempt to measure servant leadership was by Dennis and Winston (2003). However, they developed a three-dimensional structure with issues of factor validity. Dennis and Bocarnea, (2005) brought an instrument directly related to Patterson's (2003) seven-dimensional model. This instrument however, discussed only four out of six factors. Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) instrument aimed to measure the ten characteristics described by Spears to which they added calling as an eleventh characteristic. For each factor, five to seven items were identified. Fifty-six items were tested. Thus factor analysis resulted in a five-dimensional instrument. The exercise resulted in a one dimensional instrument (Dannhauser and Boshoff, 2007). Sendjaya *et al.*, (2008) came up with an instrument consisting of thirty five items representing twenty two characteristics broken down into six factors. The items however, show very high inter correlation. Thus, suggesting that some serious issues. Reinke (2004) developed a

one dimensional seven item measure. The distinguished factors were covering, openness, vision, and stewardship. Ehrhart (2004) developed a fourteen item measure with items illustrating two aspects of servant leadership: ethical behavior and prioritization of subordinates' concerns. Liden *et al.*, (2008) developed a scale based on nine dimensions. They used an eighty five item measure. The instrument covers four characteristics such as: empowering and developing people, humility, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship. The latest measure of servant leadership was developed by Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011). In the process a comprehensive ninety nine items with eight constructs was formed. After exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis results presented an eight-dimensional measure comprising of thirty items. The instrument covers eight dimensions of servant leadership. Based on this latest addition in servant leadership theory, the following sections present hypotheses and results for the conceptualized study.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity is closely related to expressing the self in a way that there is an alignment of thoughts and actions. Authenticity in its definition is related to integrity and the adherence to accepted moral values. Authenticity is about being true to oneself. It further elaborates into acting accurately. It expands into truly representing internal intentions, and commitments (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). For a servant leader it transcribes to be honest and keeping promises in doing good. Thus authenticity means showing a genuine quality to serve.

Hypothesis 1: Authenticity positively influences organizational commitment

### **Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is defined as the ability to understand and experience the feelings of others (George, 2000). Therefore, it is described as the ability to let go of perceived wrongdoings and not carry a grudge. Similarly, this stands for expressing feelings of compassion, and forgiveness. The attribute of forgiveness is specially needed in situations of arguments where haste and anger can sometimes lead to embarrassing and difficult situations. Suggesting, that for servant-leaders it is important to create an atmosphere where people feel accepted, and would not be hunted for their mistakes. The construct of forgiveness therefore explains that staff or followers would not always be criticized unnecessarily (Ferch, 2005). Forgiveness demands from a servant leader to understand and show care, and altruistic love. Similarly, forgiveness and self acceptance helps growth of the followers and promotes positivity.

Hypothesis 2: Forgiveness positively influences organizational commitment

### **Courage**

It shows the ability and to dare to take risks and trying out new approaches to solve old problems or new challenges. According to Greenleaf (1970), courage is a fundamental characteristic that

distinguishes the servant leader from other leadership styles. Within the organizational context having courage suggests challenging conventional methods. It is related therefore, to pro-active behavior. It is important to see that a servant leader always has the courage to choose the right path. This definition explains that followers perceive the servant leader to be courageous enough to stand for the right cause and support follower needs. Thus, we can say that a courageous leader strengthens follower's moral and goes a step further to help in difficult times.

Hypothesis 3: Courage positively influences organizational commitment

### **Standing Back**

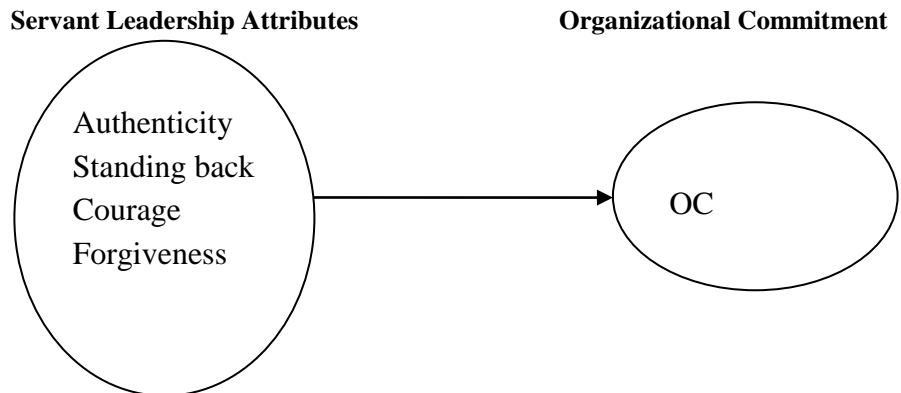
The attribute of standing back is about the extent to which a leader gives priority to the interest of others and provides assistance in an extended manner. Standing back is also conceptualized as retreating into the background when a task has successfully been accomplished and letting the right people take credit. In this way employees and followers feel cared for and encouraged. If a servant leader gives importance to the followers, a feeling of respect starts to develop in the hearts of the followers for such a leader. It also expands the definition of standing back as having someone to fall back on. Therefore, be respected for asking to be helped and not humiliated and looked down for being incapable to handle a situation. Standing back is closely related to most other aspects of servant leadership. It therefore refers to sacrifice and a higher level of understanding on part of the servant leader.

Hypothesis 4: Standing back positively influences organizational commitment

### **Instrumentation for organizational commitment**

Organizational commitment has been extensively researched in the past (Morrow, 1993). Researchers identified its outcomes for leaders and for followers in detail. Organizational commitment was defined by Allen and Meyer, (1990) as a bond that, glued the individual to the organization. They developed a three component measure of organizational commitment which included the reflections in Becker's (1960) side-bet theory. Roe *et al.* (2009) described that these measures were the most applicable. They presented an argument that in all definitions of commitment an individual is glued to a direction. Meyer and Allen used the terms, affective, continuance, and normative commitment capturing different dimensions of the construct in a comprehensive manner. Their instrument suggested that, three components of the model represent different implications for job behavior. The measures advocated that continuance commitment was expected to foster in response to conditions that include the trade off for leaving an organization. Whereas affective commitment was developed in relation to being sensitive to work experiences and normative commitment was said to develop because of social pressures and norms. An eight item each scale was used for measurement of these three components which accounted for 58.8,

25.8 and 15.4% of total variance. The present research uses this measure to empirically study a relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment.



**Fig 1: A research framework for servant leadership attributes and organizational commitment**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Data collection**

To test the hypotheses this research used a cross sectional survey approach to collect data on the presence of servant leadership, and its relationship to organizational commitment among the leaders of a public organization in Punjab, Pakistan. A sample size of 300 employees was used and data was collected through a self distributed questionnaire. According to demographic data there were 225 males and 75 female participants in the study. Four age groups were represented: 18 to 28(9.7%), 29 to 39 (22.7%), 40 to 49 (35.6%) and 50 or above (30.9%). Number of years in employment ranged between less than one to over 40 years. Participants of the study included employees serving in government grade 17 and 18 in the Punjab. Represented organizations were health, education, and agriculture.

### **Goodness of measures**

The study used a questionnaire with five point Likert scale to accumulate data for each variable. Review of literature on servant leadership and organizational commitment from past studies such as (Dierendonck and Nuijten, 2011; Allen and Meyer, 1990) helped to modify the questionnaire for the study. Reliability and normality test were run on the data before further statistical testing. Cronbach's Alpha testing the reliability of the instrument is presented in Table-1. The values from this test ranges from 0.703 to 0.848 thus confirming the instrument to be reliable and having a high level of internal consistency. Normality of data was measured from Kurtosis and Skewness. Results in Table-2 show the values between  $\pm 0$  to  $\pm 2$ . Thus the data is normal.

**Table 1: Reliability test**

Factors	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Standing back	3	0.848
Authenticity	4	0.809
Forgiveness	3	0.703
Courage	2	0.808
Organizational Commitment	24	0.828

**Table 2: Normality test**

Factors	Skewness	Kurtosis
Standing back	-.349	-.557
Authenticity	-.786	.180
Forgiveness	-.130	-.613
Courage	-.251	-.541
Organizational Commitment	-.203	2.218

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to test the significance between variables. The test was conducted between standing back, authenticity, forgiveness, courage and organizational commitment. Table-3 represents correlation results comprising of the  $r$  and  $p$  values of  $r=.411$ ,  $r=.615$ ,  $.056$ ,  $.333$  and significance level of less than  $.001$  showing a positive relationship between servant leadership variables and organizational commitment. Result shows that the presence of servant leadership attributes increases organizational commitment in the organization. The regression between standing back, authenticity, forgiveness, courage and organizational commitment is significant. The model indicates 18% of the variance in servant leadership attributes. The beta values also show a positive relationship between servant leadership factors and organizational commitment. Three out of four hypotheses was accepted. Results are presented in Table-4 which depict that servant leadership attributes significantly affect commitment of employees.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICTAIONS

It can be concluded that the study confirms a relationship between attributive values of servant leaders and organizational commitment of employees. As obviously shown by the findings of the study that employee commitment depends on how the leaders conduct themselves with their followers who ultimately trust them and stay committed to the organization (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The paper emphasizes this relationship and identifies important attributive values of servant

leaders. The study highlights the importance of revisiting servant leadership theory with respect to modeling it with organizational commitment.

**Table 3: Correlation test**

		Standing Back	Authenticity	Forgiveness	Courage
Standing Back	Pearson Correlation	1	.544**	.050	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.393	.000
Authenticity	Pearson Correlation	.544**	1	.053	.615**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.364	.000
Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation	.050	.053	1	.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.393	.364		.333
Courage	Pearson Correlation	.411**	.615**	.056	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.333	

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

**Table 4: Regression test**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.	Hypotheses Result
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	2.193	.142	-----	15.402	.000**	-----
Standing Back	.072	.030	.148	2.367	.019 *	Accepted
Authenticity	.092	.040	.165	2.282	.023 *	Accepted
Forgiveness	.163	.029	.291	5.553	.000**	Accepted
Courage	.031	.034	.061	.909	.364	Rejected
R = 0.442/ R <sup>2</sup> = 0.184, DV: Organizational Commitment						

\*significant at 0.05 levels

\*\* significant at 0.01 levels

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