

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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Leadership matters a great deal in the success or failure of any organization.

This instrument was designed to measure both positive and negative leadership characteristics.

An Introduction to these Instruments for Assessing Servant Leaders

Before assessing the degree to which a servant leadership style is practiced by anyone, it is necessary to define what that style looks like. These instruments were developed from an understanding that a servant leader is one whose primary purpose for leading is to serve others by investing in their development and well-being for the benefit of the common good. The fundamental question to ask a leader is, "For whose benefit do you serve?" Is it for self or for others? Are they leading to be served or to serve? Having self-serving motives to please others through satisfying one's ego or need for acceptance or recognition does not represent a genuine desire to serve others for the recipient's benefit.

Being a service-oriented person does not of itself constitute being a servant leader. Servant leadership is as much an attitude towards the responsibilities of leadership as a style of leadership. It is most often presented in juxtaposition to autocratic of hierarchical styles of leadership. What distinguishes servant leaders from others is the purpose behind how they exercise their leadership and whom they consult, more than in the actual decisions they make. Servant leadership begins in the heart with a caring attitude towards others in whom they seek to invest. They take on the mantle of leadership not to satisfy their own aims or desires, but the advancement of the interests of their constituents. They lead with a vision and purpose in order to make a positive difference in their organization or community.

Although there is now a vast literature on servant leadership and many noteworthy proponents and practitioners in virtually all walks of life, there has not been a similar effort made to develop a reliable instrument for measuring the degree to which leaders lead with a servant's heart and are regarded by their peers as living examples of servant leadership. Don Page first developed a rudimentary instrument in the early 1990s for comparing the characteristics of servant leadership among Christian university presidents, chief academic officers, and senior leaders in not-for-profit organizations. After using this cumbersome instrument, comprising 144 questions, for several years, Page invited his faculty colleague at Trinity Western University, Paul Wong, to devise a more accurate and scientific instrument. From their knowledge of the literature on servant leadership and their experiences with servant leadership, they devised a 99-item Servant Leadership Profile consisting of 12 subscales. A factor analysis was performed based on a fairly large sample size of 1,157 subjects. Four of the 12 factors (humility, caring for others, goal setting, and modeling) were eliminated because they were either double-loaded or spread across several un-interpretable factors which contained only one or two items. The factor analysis yielded the following eight valid factors: leading, servanthood, visioning, developing others, team-building, empowering others, shared decision making, and integrity. These factors equated with the work of other scholars on servant leadership. The servant leader develops people through their character and desire to serve others. The servant leader also develops an organization through the effective use of people resources where the emphasis is on meaningful vision casting and team building.

In using this instrument, however, the authors discovered that it was possible for someone to score high as a servant leader by simply predetermining how they wished to be seen as a servant leader. For that reason, an opponent profile was introduced by adding two new subscales to measure abuse of power and egotistical pride as being opposite to the behaviors of a servant leader. Additional items were also added to the remaining eight subscales resulting in a 97 question instrument. Thus the Revised Servant Leadership Profile comprised 10 subscales – eight representing the presence of servant leadership characteristics and two representing attributes antithetical to servant leadership. This allowed both negative and positive aspects to be taken into account in predicting outcomes such as morale, work satisfaction, stress, and productivity. Items were also randomized so that there could be no a priori classification in advance of taking the assessment. Further factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the assessments that were submitted through online SurveyMonkey.com. that resulted in the current seven interpretable factors and a 62 question instrument. The seven factors are: developing and empowering others, power and pride (vulnerability and humility), authentic leadership, open or participatory leadership, inspiring leadership, visionary leadership, and courageous leadership. In these instruments, servant leadership is defined by both the presence of certain positive qualities, and the absence of certain negative qualities. The positive qualities include: (a) Servanthood, (b) Leadership, (c) Visioning, (d) Developing others, (e) Empowering others, (f) Team-building, (g) Shared decision-making, and (h) Integrity.

The negative qualities include: (a) Abuse of power and control, and (b) Pride and narcissism. These negatively worded statements can also be seen in positive qualities, were abuse of power becomes vulnerability, and pride becomes humility.

A simple way to determine whether one is a servant leader is to see whether one scores high on servanthood and leadership, but low on abuse of power and pride. Thus, scoring high on abuse of power and pride automatically disqualifies one as a servant leader, regardless of high scores may be on the other subscales. That is why the inclusion of these two negative subscales is important in the Revised Servant Leadership Profile.

From our experience in using this instrument, an average score on all positive factors (1, 3-7) of 5.6 or above indicates a strong servant leader. A score below 5.6 indicates that work needs to be done on certain factors. The negative factor 2 is scored in the reverse so that anyone scoring less than 2.0 demonstrates the qualities of a servant leader, whereas scoring above 2.0 indicates that work is required.

As with any self-scoring assessment, the participant's own standards or evaluations will influence the results. No two people will agree on what constitutes strongly agree or disagree on the 62 different items. What the self-assessment does provide is a benchmark for later evaluations. To really determine how one functions as a servant leader, the participant needs to compare his/her scores with those of his/her peers, direct reports, colleagues, etc. This is known as a 360 degree instrument. Where there is a significant variation between the two indicates that the participant has a view of herself/himself that is not shared by others. Wally Rude helped to convert and test our 360 degree assessment instrument. The use of these instruments in many different organizations has indicated that there is the greatest discrepancy between how the individual sees himself/herself and how others see them in the area of pride and abuse of power. The participant most often seems himself/herself as vulnerable and humble whereas those who observe or experience this person's leadership find them to be abusive in their exercise of power and egotistical or proud. Of course, not all of the 360 degree assessments will be scored on the same basis, but the collective result should give an aspiring servant leader an indication of where further work is required.

In the last five years, this instrument has been used in hundreds of doctoral and master's level research projects. Among the diverse organizations and groups who have used these instruments have been officers in the Australian navy, the Saturn Car Corporation, Weyerhæuser Corporation, Synovus Financial Corporation, Canadian National Christian Conference, Covenant Planning Group, high school principals in the state of New Jersey, student leaders in the University of Southern Florida, teachers, nurses, hospital administrators, church pastors, sales people, eagle scouts, public servants, businessmen, office staff, social workers, missionaries, translators, and international aid workers.

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