

# A New Scale to Measure Executive Servant Leadership: Development, Analysis, and Implications for Research

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**ABSTRACT.** This article introduces a new scale to measure executive servant leadership, situating the need for this scale within the context of ethical leadership and its impacts on followers, organizations and the greater society. The literature on servant leadership is reviewed and servant leadership is compared to other concepts that share dimensions of ethical leadership (e.g., transformational, authentic, and spiritual leadership). Next, the Executive Servant Leadership Scale (ESLS) is introduced, and its contributions and limitations discussed. We conclude with an agenda for future research, describing ways the measure can be used to test hypotheses about organizational moral climate, ethical organizational culture, corporate responsibility, and institutional theory.

**KEY WORDS:** servant leadership, leadership, scale development, ethical leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, spiritual leadership, moral climate, ethical organizational culture, institutional theory, corporate responsibility, interpersonal support, moral integrity, altruism, egalitarianism, transactional leadership, building community

## Introduction

Recent scandals in business, government, sports, non-profits, and other institutions raise questions regarding the quality of organizational leadership. Indeed, the worldwide economic crisis erupting in mid-2008 has challenged organizational scholars to question deeply held assumptions about effective business strategy and to define new models of ethical leadership that can more adequately respond to the demands of a profoundly interdependent global society.

Implicit in this new paradigm is an alternative model of organizational leadership that moves

beyond the “competency inputs” and “performance outputs” traditionally used to measure leader effectiveness – emphasizing instead the moral, emotional, and relational dimensions of leadership behaviors (cf. Bolden and Gosling, 2006). A recent multi-year study by the University of Exeter Centre for Leadership Studies found that practicing managers often consider excellence among these alternative dimensions more essential for success in today’s complex business environment than traditional leadership skills. Discussing results of their research, the authors observe:

The image of leadership conveyed in many competency frameworks could almost lead us to believe that leaders exist in splendid isolation, with no need for meaningful relationship with others, let alone require their belief, commitment or acquiescence. Such an approach neglects both more recent theorizing and accounts that question the extent to which individualistic models of leadership are associated with improved performance (Bolden and Gosling, 2006, p. 258).

Ethical leaders model behavior that followers and stakeholders can count on. They provide a sense of collective meaning that fosters inclusion and mutuality instead of alienation and marginality (see Calabrese and Roberts, 2001; Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Graham, 1995; Merton, 1969; Schminke et al., 2007). Dickson et al. (2001, p. 208) assert, “The leader serves as a role model for his or her subordinates about the types of behaviors that are seen as ethically acceptable and how ethical problems and questions should be addressed.” One role of a leader is to provide cues, both situational and personal “about what is ethical by explicitly rewarding and punishing certain behaviors.” In essence,

“leaders bring out or suppress the tendencies of organizational members to behave in an ethical or unethical fashion.”

Brown and Trevino (2006, p. 597) characterize ethical leaders as “honest, caring, and principled individuals who make fair and balanced decisions.” Ethical leaders develop their followers by modeling behavior [they] “frequently communicate with their followers about ethics, set clear ethical standards and use rewards and punishments to see that those standards are followed.” Importantly, “ethical leaders do not just talk a good game – they practice what they preach and are proactive role models for ethical conduct.”

Although leadership and ethics are topics that have received much attention from a philosophical or normative perspective, much of the literature “suggests what leaders *should* do” and “a more descriptive and predictive socially scientific approach to ethics and leadership” remains fragmented and less developed (Brown and Trevino, 2006, p. 595). This has led scholars to grapple with fundamental questions such as “What is ethical leadership?”, “How can ethical leadership be developed and sustained in organizations?”, and “What are the implications of ethical leadership for organizational climate and culture?”

Clearly, both management scholars and organizational stakeholders understand the need for ethical leaders in business and other institutions. Hambrick and Mason (1984, p. 193) caution, “Organizational outcomes – both strategies and effectiveness – are viewed as reflections of the values and cognitive bases of powerful actors in the organization.” Ethical leadership has been explored in relationship to concepts such as spiritual, authentic, and transformational leadership (see Brown and Trevino, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2010). And, although some similarities exist between these forms of leadership, there are important differences (see Brown and Trevino, 2006).

Among the numerous other leadership frameworks presented in the management literature, one that articulates the emotional, relational, and moral dimensions of leadership in a particularly useful way is the concept of Servant Leadership, introduced four decades ago by Greenleaf (1970) and currently attracting renewed interest among scholars and managers alike (see Avolio et al., 2009). According

to Greenleaf (1970), servant leaders are those who manage organizational challenges by subordinating personal interests to those of organizational stakeholders and who see leadership as an opportunity for service to individuals, organization, and community rather than as a vehicle to attain personal power and prestige. One of the primary goals of the servant leader is to develop future servant leaders.

Although a number of scales to measure servant leadership have appeared in the literature, none have focused specifically on the conduct of top executives. A central tenet of organizational scholarship is that the values, beliefs, and actions of “upper echelon” managers are a principal influence on the culture and climate of the organizations they lead, as well as on the behavior of organizational members. According to Hambrick (2007, p. 334): “If we want to understand why organizations do the things they do, or why they perform the way they do, we must consider the biases and dispositions of their most powerful actors – their top executives.” And, Morgan et al. (2008) assert, “For corporate citizenship to be effective – ensuring that a company minimizes harm and maximizes benefits through its activities and in so doing, takes account of and is responsive to a full range of stakeholders – leadership is required at every level of an enterprise.” As the notion of servant leadership holds promise for helping organizations attain goals embodied in ethical leadership practices, a measure of the construct targeting top executives can make a useful contribution to the literature.

We begin by introducing selected theoretical works related to ethical leadership and moral climate. Then, we review three leadership models in the management literature (see Brown and Trevino, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2010) and compare them to servant leadership in the context of ethical leadership. Next, we introduce the Executive Servant Leadership Scale (ESLS), identifying gaps in the existing servant leadership literature and describing how the scale can bridge these gaps. We describe our procedures for scale development, present results of our analyses, and summarize limitations of our study. Finally, we outline an agenda for future research and conclude by discussing how the servant leadership paradigm reflects ethical leadership in relationship to organizational climate and culture.

### **Ethical leadership in the management literature**

The management literature is replete with reasons for leaders to model ethical behavior. Ethical leadership has both direct and indirect effects on follower job satisfaction (see Mulki et al., 2009) and affective organizational commitment (see Neubert et al., 2009). Ethical leaders are role models that are critical for the establishment and maintenance of an ethical organizational climate (see Calabrese and Roberts, 2001; Martin and Cullen, 2006; Neubert et al., 2009; Schminke et al., 2007). And, the ethical leader-to-climate relationship has been found to be strengthened when interactional justice is perceived as high (see Neubert et al., 2009). Andreoli and Lefkowitz (2009) found formal organizational compliance practices and ethical climate to be independent predictors of misconduct among non-profit, for-profit, and governmental employees. Their research suggests that compliance practices moderate relationships between misconduct and ethical climate and the “pressure to compromise ethical standards and misconduct.” The results of the Andreoli and Lefkowitz (2009, p. 309) study further indicate that promoting a moral organization can best be achieved through combining formal mechanisms, such as codes of conduct, with modeling ethical leadership (e.g., “through words and actions of senior managers”). In fact, Andreoli and Lefkowitz (2009, p. 325) assert that ethical role modeling may be more beneficial than a formal code of conduct. They cite the extensive code of conduct that clearly was not being modeled by key executives at Enron when the organization fell. Some studies actually suggest that a leader’s behavior can exert “a more powerful influence on ethical behavior than an employee’s own personal ethical values” (Schminke et al., 2007, p. 184). In the 2005 National Business Ethics Survey, informal issues related to “ethical climate were reported to exert an even stronger influence on organizational outcomes than formal ethics and compliance programs” or “potential financial reward” (see Schminke et al., 2007). Without ethical organizational norms established by top management, individuals are left to make decisions alone at the individual locus relying only on their personal beliefs and moral reasoning abilities (see Martin and Cullen, 2006).

According to Brown and Trevino (2006, p. 599), “the moral management aspect of ethical leadership is more consistent with what we often think of as a transactional style than a transformational style” due to the fact that ethical leadership outcomes can extend “beyond the effects of idealized influence” and are achieved in part through setting standards, and “holding followers accountable to those standards by the use of rewards and discipline.” Although ethical leadership as described by Brown and Trevino (2006, p. 599) “does not include references to visionary or intellectually stimulating leadership,” as these are terms “consistent with transformational/charismatic leadership style,” some scholars argue that leaders can be both transactional and transformational. Further, internal processes generate the actions of both transactional and transformational leaders in the form of both high and low quality exchange relationships (See Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Graen et al., 1982; Kuhnert and Lewis, 1987; Landy, 1985). Thus, the types of transactions in which leaders and followers engage range from obvious (e.g., leader in control of resources) to less obvious, such as development of mutual trust, respect, and commitment (Kuhnert and Lewis, 1987, p. 649).

Sociologist Robert K. Merton (1969, p. 2615) described leadership in general as a social exchange. He believed, “leadership...must involve attributes of the transactions between those who lead and those who follow.” Merton acknowledged that different kinds of leaders exert differing degrees of influence on their followers. In exchange, the leaders engage in “some sort of social transaction” with their followers. Merton (1969, p. 2616) recognized the transactional aspect of leadership as how, “Leaders assist their associates in achieving personal and social goals. In exchange, they receive the basic coin of effective leadership: trust and respect.”

Kuhnert and Lewis (1987, p. 649) describe high quality leader–follower transactions as “augmented by an interpersonal bond” that “relies on the exchange of non-concrete rewards to maintain followers’ performance.” As part of the process of actualizing the needs of both the leader and follower, exchangeable values such as commitment, respect, and trust, or what Burns (1978) called *modal values* come into play. According to Burns, the exchange of *modal values* that occurs in a leader–follower

transaction are different from non-negotiable *end values* present in transformational processes. And, according to Kuhnert and Lewis (1987, p. 653), in rare cases leadership can be both transactional and transformational, but “leaders must know the limitations, the defects, and the strengths of all perspectives.”

Brown and Trevino (2006, p. 600) have considered ethical leadership through the lens of social learning theory: “By observing an ethical role model’s behavior as well as the consequences of their behavior, leaders should come to identify with the model, internalize the model’s values and attitudes, and emulate the modeled behavior.” Consistently, Calabrese and Roberts (2001, p. 268) report “If the leaders act unethically, employees may assume that the leader is sanctioning unethical behavior.” In a recent multi-method study, De Hoogh and De Hartog (2008) found ethical leadership positively related to employee perceived effectiveness of top management teams. In addition, De Hoogh and De Hartog (2008) found employee optimism about the future of work (e.g., the employee’s organization and his or her place in it) to be positively related to ethical leadership.

According to Calabrese and Roberts (2001, pp. 270–271), trust is the foundation of ethical leadership. Trustworthy leaders foster a sense of organizational solidarity that aids in the development of a “climate of mutual trustworthiness.” However, once trust in a leader’s ethics is damaged, misery can result for followers, the organization, its stakeholders, and society at large. “In a fragmented organization, there is little trust and members work together in temporary alliances, consolidating power, and isolating potential threats to the illusion of stability.” Ethical organizations “have a commitment to renewal of members and structures.” This minimizes the fragmentation, alienation, and marginalization that can otherwise detract from mutuality.

Sociologist Bellah (1985) discussed the importance of mutuality in a healthy society (see also Calabrese and Roberts, 2001). Mutuality is the antithesis of alienation. It aids in the symbiosis of relationships. According to Calabrese and Roberts (2001, p. 269), “Inherent in the concept of mutuality is the notion that people are given primacy over objects or outcomes” ... “Mutuality eliminates

alienation. It expresses a set of values guiding ethical behavior.”

According to Martin and Cullen (2006, p. 177), “Ethical climate is the perception of what constitutes right behavior, and thus becomes a psychological mechanism through which ethical issues are managed. Ethical climate influences both the decision-making and subsequent behavior in response to ethical dilemmas.” Martin and Cullen (2006) conducted a meta-analysis examining organizational commitment, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and the negative outcome of dysfunctional behavior using five types of empirically derived ethical climates with 170 studies. The ethical climate types are:

- *Instrumental* – where the actor perceives that self-interest guides behavior, even when it is detrimental to others. In this climate, the norms and expectations that encourage ethical decision-making are guided by an egoistic perspective.
- *Caring* – where actors perceive their decisions in the context of utilitarianism and benevolence, stressing an overarching concern for the well-being of others, including society at large.
- *Independence* – where actors believe their personal moral beliefs should be acted upon, regardless of outside influences and external forces affecting the organization.
- *Law and code* – where actors perceive the organization as supportive of decision-making based on external codes such as professional codes of conduct, the law, or religious texts.
- *Rules* – where actors perceive a strong set of organizational rules to guide decisions and ethical behavior.

Martin and Cullen’s (2006) research suggests that group processes including positive feelings about tasks, cooperation, and mutual personal attraction – all of which are characteristic of a caring ethical climate – help to create positive affect toward organizations among members. In a caring climate, it is likely that organizational units are more cohesive with heightened attraction among members which can transfer to the organization. The findings of the

Martin and Cullen (2006) meta-analysis indicate that each ethical climate type, except for instrumental, is positively related to organizational commitment, with caring rated as the highest positive association.

According to Martin and Cullen (2006, p. 181), perceived caring climates not only promote job satisfaction, they also positively influence job satisfaction in different ways. In fact, “managers can foster satisfaction at a variety of levels in their employees through ethical climate perceptions, except for satisfaction with pay, which may be beyond managerial control” (Martin and Cullen, 2006, p. 181). Consistently, the meta-analysis findings showed numerous data points upholding positive relationships with all but instrumental, and with the caring climate ranked highest of the five.

With regard to psychological well-being, the Martin and Cullen (2006) meta-analysis suggested a positive relationship with a perceived caring ethical climate. On the other hand, when organizational members perceive the climate to endorse self-interest, employees are likely to have less concern for their fellows and for the organization, which may result in deviant behaviors and attitudes such as lying, stealing, and cheating.

One of Greenleaf’s unique contributions was the notion that to reach its full potential as a positive social force, servant leadership must be exercised not only by individuals, but also by organizations and social institutions as well. In *The Institution as Servant*, Greenleaf wrote:

Caring for persons...is the rock upon which a good society is built. Whereas, until recently, caring was largely person to person, now most of it is mediated through institutions – often large, complex, powerful, and impersonal; not always competent; sometimes corrupt. If a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions (1972, p. 1).

Greenleaf maintained that the ultimate responsibility for developing organizational and institutional capacity to serve resides with top executives. Not only must these individuals be motivated toward ethical leadership by the desire to serve others in some capacity, they must be equally motivated to

build and strengthen community within and outside the firm. To accomplish this goal, they must also be prepared to share decision-making power throughout the organization, nurture the leadership potential of its members and listen with respect to the concerns of both internal and external constituents. They must be able to recognize when constituent confidence in the organization is waning and to respond by inviting constructive criticism of their ideas. The moral conduct of top executives is particularly critical in creating a servant organization – earning stakeholder trust by demonstrating and encouraging transparency and by freely admitting mistakes at both the personal and organizational level (cf. Greenleaf, 1972).

Johnson (2009, p. 268) asserts, “There is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating an ethical climate. Rather, we need to identify principles and practices that characterize positive ethical climates. Then we have to adapt these elements to our particular organizational setting.” Johnson describes “key markers of highly ethical organizations” as inclusive of “zero tolerance for destructive behaviors, integrity, a focus on process, and structural reinforcement.” Schminke et al. (2007, p. 175) concur that organizational work climate is a revelation of combined perceptions of how business is done. And, ethical work climate “identifies the *ethical* characteristics of the work environment that directly and indirectly affect ‘how things are done around here.’” Alignment of an organization’s ethical climate with the firm’s business strategy provides “powerful means for gaining competitive advantage.”

Merton (1969, p. 2616) reminds us, “Leaders lead as they have been led. But to perhaps a greater extent, styles of leadership are a function of the situation and the character of the organization; it is through the incessant process of self-selection and organizational selection that particular personality types find themselves cast in leadership roles.”

Next, we examine three models of ethical leadership and compare them to the servant leadership construct.

### *Three models of ethical leadership*

Brown and Trevino (2006, pp. 595–596) have defined the ethical leader as one who demonstrates



“normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision making.” They reviewed the leadership literature to examine authentic, spiritual, and transformational leadership as related to the ethical leadership construct. And, although similarities were found, important differences were identified among these leadership constructs. Table I summarizes these similarities and differences. It has been adapted to include servant leadership.

Following is a summary of ethical leadership constructs, including principal distinctions between them in the existing literature and reviewing the servant leadership literature.

*Transformational leadership*

Although there are many similarities between ethical leadership as proposed by Brown and Trevino (2006) and the transformational leader,

there are also important differences. First, as Bass (1985) argued, transformational leaders can be ethical or unethical. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) distinguished between pseudo and authentic transformational leaders arguing that authentic transformational leaders are moral leaders who embrace values such as fairness and honesty, but pseudo transformational leaders are “more selfishly and politically motivated” (Brown and Trevino, 2006, p. 598). The transformational leader is motivated by the end goals of the organization (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006, p. 319). This is somewhat different from the motivation of the servant leader whose ultimate goal, beyond serving the organization, is to assist in the leader development of his or her followers (Greenleaf, 1970, 1972). Smith et al. (2004, p. 85) assert, “servant leadership stresses a leader’s concern for the followers’ well-being reflected in receptive non-judgmental listening and willingness to learn from others. These behaviors are not accounted for by any behaviors in the transformational model.”

TABLE I  
Summary of ethical leadership comparisons

Model	Similarities	Differences
Transformational leadership	Concern for others – altruism Ethical decision-making Integrity Role modeling	Ethical leaders emphasize ethical standards and moral management (more transactional) Transformational leaders emphasize vision, values, and intellectual stimulation (pseudo can be selfish, politically motivated)
Authentic leadership	Concern for others – altruism Ethical decision-making Integrity Role modeling	Ethical leaders emphasize moral management (more transactional) and “other” awareness Authentic leaders emphasize authenticity and self-awareness (dark side – can have unrealistic expectations of an unattainable level of self-knowledge)
Spiritual leadership	Concern for others – altruism Integrity Role modeling	Ethical leaders emphasize moral management Spiritual leaders emphasize visioning, hope/faith, work as vocation
Servant leadership	Concern for others – altruism Integrity Role modeling Moral manager Transactional/transformational	

### *Authentic leadership*

Authentic leaders are acutely aware of how they behave. They care greatly about how they are perceived by others. The objective of the authentic leader is ‘being true to oneself’ or authenticity (Brown and Trevino, 2006, p. 599). However, Chang and Diddams (2009, p. 1) argue that current theoretical development of the authentic leadership construct may include expectations for self-reported authentic leaders “to have a level of self-knowledge which may not be attainable.” In addition, attempts to convince others of one’s authentic leadership could result in greater efforts toward impression management on the part of the leader, instead of increasingly transparent relationships with followers and other organizational stakeholders. In other words, the aspiring authentic leader’s “self-schema of morality could lead to less ethical behavior and harsher judgment of others” (Chang and Diddams, 2009, p. 1).

Chang and Diddams (2009) caution that self-knowledge can be deceptive; thus, authentic leaders must recognize their weaknesses as well as their strengths as authenticity does not always equal morality. Chang and Diddams (2009, p. 3) warn, “People who view themselves as morally superior are more likely to interpret their behavior as moral, rationalizing the behavior that others would find reprehensible.” Consistently, Greenleaf (1970/1991, p. 12) prescribed reflection for the servant leader “...to withdraw and reorient oneself” ...“to sort out the more important from the less important – and the important from the urgent – and attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else.” The servant leader “must constantly ask himself, how can I use myself to serve best?” This necessitates ongoing moral development and continuous dialog through the exchange of modal values with followers and other organizational stakeholders.

### *Spiritual leadership*

The spiritual leader relies on a sense of calling characterized by altruistic love and related to both leader and followership (Avolio et al., 2009; Brown and Trevino, 2006). Fry (2003, p. 711) defined spiritual leadership as “comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of

spiritual survival through calling and membership.” The ultimate goal of the spiritual leader, according to Fry (2003, p. 727), “is to bring together or create a sense of fusion among the four fundamental forces of human existence (body, mind, heart, and spirit) so that people are motivated to high performance, have increased organizational commitment, and personally experience joy, peace, and serenity.”

The servant leader is also often characterized by altruistic love, but the motivation of this leader is to serve others so followers can “become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous and more likely to become servants themselves” (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 437). There is no specific mention of goals such as joy, peace, and serenity in the servant leadership literature. Rather, according to Spears (1995, p. 5) the level of awareness, which “aids in understanding issues involving ethics and values,” required of an effective servant “is a disturber and an awakener.” Greenleaf knew that “Awareness is not a giver of solace – it is just the opposite...Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed” ... “They have their own inner serenity.”

### *Servant leadership*

Servant leadership moves beyond the “competency inputs” and “performance outputs” traditionally used to measure leader effectiveness – emphasizing instead the moral, emotional, and relational dimensions of ethical leadership behaviors (cf. Bolden and Gosling, 2006). Servant leadership may be an effective means to creating ethical organizational climate and ethical culture that can moderate relationships “between an individual’s moral reasoning level and ethical/unethical behavior” (Brown and Trevino, 2006, p. 601). It is both transforming and transactional in nature.

The motivation of the servant leader is to serve his or her followers so that they too can become servant leaders who will do the same (Greenleaf, 1970, 1972). This is a form of high quality transaction wherein modal values are exchanged through constant modeling and dialog in an attempt to actualize the needs of both parties (Burns, 1978; Kuhnert and Lewis, 1987) as well as to meet or exceed organizational goals. Graham (1995, p. 1) argues that servant leadership encourages followers’ development so that they can function with enhanced moral reasoning and “become autonomous moral agents.”

With regard to ethical leadership in the context of social learning theory, Johnson (2009, p. 266) states:

When it comes to ethics, followers look to their leaders as role models and act accordingly. Leaders are generally seen as legitimate, credible, and attractive because they occupy positions of authority and status. Ethical leaders build on this foundation. They increase their legitimacy by treating their employees fairly and boosting their attractiveness by expressing care and concern for followers. They enhance their credibility (particularly perceptions of their trustworthiness) by living up to the values they espouse. Such leaders are open and honest and set clear, high standards that they follow themselves.

This description characterizes the servant leader at his or her best. The servant leader is called to lead, often by others, through his or her penchant for service to individuals, the organization, and the community. As leaders, these servants develop others through modeling attractive behaviors. The servant leader's behaviors contribute to the social learning of followers who, in turn, become servant leaders. This creates a servant led culture and climate, a servant led institution that exemplifies the values of the group.

Thus far, we have defined ethical leadership, surveyed ethical leadership concepts and discussed similarities and differences between these concepts and servant leadership. Next, we review selected theoretical works on servant leadership as well as other scales designed to assess the construct, identifying gaps in the literature and describing how the ESLS introduced in this article can bridge these gaps. We describe our procedures for scale development, present results of our analyses, and summarize limitations in our study. We outline an agenda for future research and conclude by discussing how the servant leadership paradigm reflects ethical leadership and how it can contribute to the development and creation of an ethical organizational climate and culture.

#### *Servant leadership as ethical leadership*

When Greenleaf first introduced the concept of servant leadership in 1970, he envisioned a model of leadership anchored in the fundamental human drive to bond with others and contribute to the better-

ment of society (cf. Lawrence and Nohria, 2002). Greenleaf proposed that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1970/1991 p. 7). Contrasting servant leadership with other leadership frameworks in vogue at the time, Greenleaf emphasized motivation as the differentiating factor: The servant leader chooses to lead as an outcome of the motivation to serve. He wrote: “The servant-leader... is sharply different from one who is *leader first*, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant – first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (Greenleaf, 1970/1991, p. 7). Indeed, Greenleaf argued, true leadership is virtually synonymous with service and great leaders are perceived as such precisely because of the service they perform for individuals and society. The best test of the servant leader, he maintained, is whether “those served grow as persons” and whether by virtue of the leader’s inspiration they become “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely to become servants themselves” (Greenleaf, 1970/1991, p. 7).

Although the notions of “servant” and “leader” may appear theoretical opposites, and the melding of the two conceptually counter-intuitive, Greenleaf’s ideas about effective leadership emerged from practical experience: Nearly four decades as an AT&T executive, a subsequent career consulting to major corporations and public institutions, and a lifelong passion for studying the interface between organizations and society (see Spears, 2004). Within the organizational context, Greenleaf’s portrait of the servant leader depicts an individual who is constantly seeking, listening, and looking for better ways to accomplish shared objectives, who considers creating value for others – employees, customers, and community – to be the primary goal of management, and who adopts a “holistic” approach to work that includes promoting a sense of community, and sharing in decision-making (Spears, 2004, p. 8). Moving beyond the boundaries of the organization, servant leaders consider at all times the effects of their decisions on “the least privileged in society,” insuring these groups will benefit or at a minimum, “not be further deprived” (Greenleaf 1970/1991, p. 7).



With the founding of the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964 (renamed the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership following his retirement in 1984) Greenleaf's ideas about servant leadership in organizations began to crystallize into a body of work that has continued to influence management practice to this day (see Spears, 2002). Beginning in 1991, with a posthumous re-release of his seminal works, the concept of servant leadership has experienced resurgence among organizational scholars and in the popular press (see reviews in Russell and Stone, 2002; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Whittington et al., 2006). Building on Greenleaf's foundation, researchers have continued to advance understanding of servant leadership – attempting to add conceptual specificity to the original formulation, operationalizing the construct through empirical measures, and subjecting it to critique (see Bugenhagen, 2006; Chen and Barnes, 2008; Dannhauser and Boshoff, 2006; Dennis, 2004; Dennis and Bocarnea, 2005; Dennis and Winston, 2003; Ehrhart, 2004; Farling et al., 1999; Irving, 2004; Irving and Longbotham, 2006; Jenkins and Stewart, 2008; Joseph and Winston, 2005; Laub, 1999; Ostrem, 2006; Parolini, 2005; Patterson, 2003; Stone et al., 2004; Washington et al., 2006; Wong and Page, 2003).

Greenleaf's ideas were distilled by later scholars into 10 salient characteristics the servant leader should possess. These included the capacity to listen, express empathy, heal and persuade, the ability to exercise awareness, foresight and conceptualization, a commitment to the growth of individuals, to building community and to acting as steward of stakeholder resources (Spears, 1995). Attempting to discriminate from related transformational and charismatic leadership models, other researchers highlighted the moral foundations of the servant leadership paradigm (Graham, 1991, 1995; Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). They argued that by demonstrating moral courage and integrity, and by attempting to meet the highest priority needs of those being led, servant leaders not only display the most advanced level of moral development, but also inspire followers to emulate their actions. In this way, servant leaders can raise the level of moral reasoning and ethical behavior throughout their organizations to create what Greenleaf labeled “servant institutions” that contribute positively to society as a whole.

Although considerable support for the notion of servant leadership has emerged from anecdotal accounts and case studies in the popular press (see Spears, 2002), empirical investigation of the topic by mainstream management scholars has been slower to emerge. A number of researchers have attempted to fill this gap by creating new scales to measure the construct and by testing the impact of servant leadership on a range of organizational outcomes (see reviews in Avolio et al., 2009; Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006; Liden et al., 2008; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Washington, 2007; Whittington et al., 2006).

However, despite growing scholarly interest, critics note a lack of rigorous theory and research in the servant leadership literature (Avolio et al., 2009). Conceptual overlap with related leadership models persists, as does inconsistent identification of the construct's theoretical dimensions. Concerns related to sampling and analytical method have also been raised, and the practical value of servant leadership as a model for business firms has been questioned as well. Finally, and most germane to the present study, no existing servant leadership measures have been designed explicitly for top executives, focusing instead on workgroup supervisors. Without investigating servant leadership practices in the “upper echelons,” the full organizational impact of this leadership orientation cannot be accurately determined. Our study seeks to address this limitation, as well as other methodological concerns.

## Methods

From instruments created by Liden et al. (2008), Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), Page and Wong (2000, 2003), and Ehrhart (2004) we identified 55 items to measure key dimensions of servant leadership, modifying these items to target top executive behavior specifically. The list was reviewed by a jury for construct validity (Babbie, 2004), then formulated into a 4-point Likert type questionnaire (Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree). The instrument was administered online to a non-probability sample of 1522 adult learners and alumni from a private college in Florida, using a web-based survey program. The questionnaire was introduced as follows: “Please respond to the following statements regarding your perceptions of the Top Executive at

your current place of work. If you have no direct experience with this person, you may consider organizational policies, practices or public communications as evidence of his/her values and beliefs. If you are not currently employed, please consider the top executive at your most recent place of employment.” Data were also collected regarding industry and size of respondents’ organizations, as well as respondents’ organizational level, frequency of interaction with top executive, age, gender, and education. Anonymity and confidentiality were insured.

344 participants completed the questionnaire for a 22.6% response rate. While objectively low, this response rate is consistent with rates from methodologically similar web-based studies (Sheehan, 2002). We removed 124 cases with missing values on greater than 5% of the items and two cases with extremity bias (see Kalton and Kasprzyk, 1982; Trochim, 2001). The remaining 218 usable questionnaires represented 14.3% of recruited participants.

To determine the factor structure of the *Executive Servant Leadership* construct, we first conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using Mplus 5.1. The best structure based on goodness-of-fit tests

yielded four to five factors. We then performed an EFA within a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) framework (Asparouhov and Muthén, 2009) and removed five items with high cross-loadings, 12 showing high error term correlations with items from other factors, seven with loadings below 0.65 on any factor, and three to improve parsimony and model fit.

Our analyses applied a minimum 0.707 factor loading requirement for item retention (see Carmines and Zeller, 1979). Two factors present in other servant leadership measures, *exercising conceptual skills* and *empowering others*, thus “dropped out” of our model. As these behaviors also appear in many other theories of effective leadership, our factor structure may offer clearer construct validity than that of previous servant leadership instruments.

### Results

Results of our CFA revealed a second-order factor, *Executive Servant Leadership*, with five first-order factors reflecting essential servant leadership attributes identified by Greenleaf (see Figure 1). A second-order factor captures the idea that correlated but

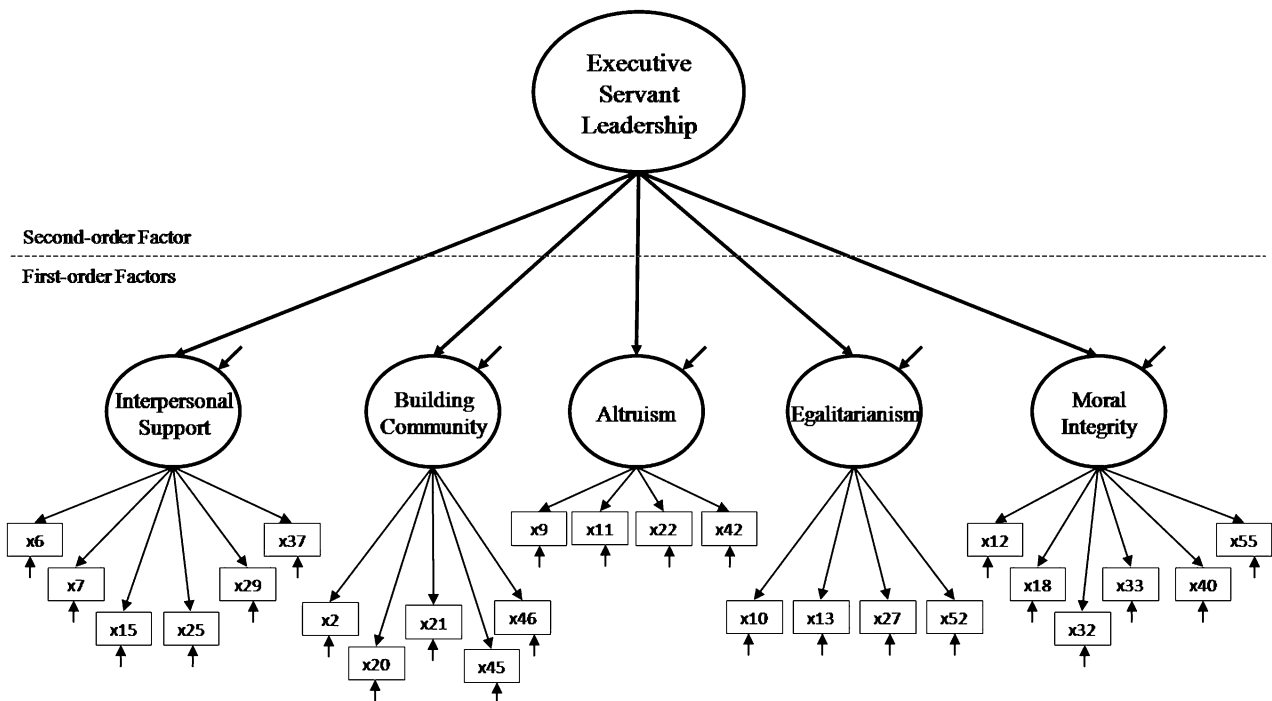


Figure 1. Conceptual model of executive servant leadership.

distinct factors, each measured by multiple items, can best be explained by “one or more common underlying higher order constructs” (Chen et al. 2005, p. 471). Considering servant leadership a second-order factor is supported by the literature (Whittington et al., 2006) and this factor structure fit our data well.

#### *First-order factors for executive servant leadership*

##### *Interpersonal support*

Interpersonal support offered by top executives can not only help organizational members develop their full potential, but can also foster an organizational culture conducive to growth and service. The importance of interpersonal support is captured in one of Greenleaf’s central ideas about servant leadership – that those served should “grow as persons... more likely to become servants themselves” (1970/1991, p. 7). Items operationalizing interpersonal support included helping others succeed, nurturing employees’ leadership potential, listening carefully to others, sharing decision-making with those most affected by decisions, treating employees with dignity and respect, and recognizing when organizational morale is low.

##### *Building community*

The ability to build community, both within and outside the organization, is a critical attribute of servant leadership, with emphasis on external communities a distinguishing feature of the construct. In our measure, top executive capacity to build internal community involves valuing individual differences, encouraging a spirit of cooperation, and inspiring organizational commitment. Building community outside the firm entails recognizing that organizations have a moral duty not only to consider the impact of organizational action on communities in which they operate but to constructively improve these communities as well.

##### *Altruism*

Defined as unselfish concern for others manifested in constructive service (see Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002), altruism is at the core of Greenleaf’s notion of servant leadership and has been shown by other leadership scholars to exert a positive impact on

employee motivation and performance (Avolio et al., 2009). In our scale, top executive altruism is operationalized by serving others willingly with no expectation of reward, sacrificing personal benefit to meet employee needs, placing the interests of others before self-interest, and preferring to serve others over being served.

##### *Egalitarianism*

An important feature of servant leadership is egalitarianism: rejecting the notion that leaders are inherently superior to other organizational members and understanding that learning and influence are multi-directional processes. Greenleaf considered an egalitarian perspective both central to servant leadership and critical for preserving executive legitimacy within the firm. Here, we operationalize egalitarianism as top executives who welcome constructive criticism, display interest in learning from employees, invite input from all levels of the organization and encourage debate of their ideas.

##### *Moral integrity*

Moral integrity, like altruism, is fundamental to servant leadership. Greenleaf not only emphasized the importance of the “moral man” and the “moral society,” but also the “moral organization” as well. Our scale operationalizes executive moral integrity as behavior that inspires employee trust and promotes transparency and honesty throughout the organization – refusing to use manipulation or deceit to achieve personal goals, freely admitting mistakes, and valuing integrity over profit or material gain.

Table II shows the ESLS questionnaire.

#### *Psychometric properties of the model*

Our CFA revealed that a second-order factor model fit the data well ( $\chi^2_{(268)} = 503.00$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.03). We tested this against a first-order factor model, excluding the second-order factor *Executive Servant Leadership*, and found no significant improvement in fit ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(3)} = 2.32$ ,  $p = 0.508$ ). We also found that fit worsened significantly when any two factors were combined (range of  $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)}$  was 15.67–74.83,  $p < 0.000$ ). See Table III.

TABLE II  
ESLAS pilot questionnaire

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My Organization's Top Executive...

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- (1) Invests time and energy developing others' potential
- (2) Considers the effects of organizational decisions on the community
- (3) Effectively thinks through complex problems
- (4) Maintains high ethical standards
- (5) Inspires others to lead through service
- (6) Recognizes when employee morale is low without asking
- (7) Looks for ways to make others successful
- (8) Encourages open exchange of information throughout the organization
- (9) Sacrifices personal benefit to meet employee needs
- (10) Encourages debate of his/her ideas
- (11) Serves others willingly with no expectation of reward
- (12) Inspires employee trust
- (13) Invites constructive criticism
- (14) Shares power with others throughout the organization
- (15) Nurtures employee leadership potential
- (16) Encourages employees to volunteer in the community
- (17) Seems able to tell if something is going wrong in the organization
- (18) Refuses to use manipulation or deceit to achieve his/her goals
- (19) Promotes empathy and tolerance throughout the organization
- (20) Encourages a spirit of cooperation among employees
- (21) Inspires organizational commitment
- (22) Places the interests of others before self-interest
- (23) Expresses genuine enjoyment in serving others
- (24) Willingly shares credit for organizational accomplishments
- (25) Treats all employees with dignity and respect
- (26) Demonstrates clear understanding of how to attain organizational goals
- (27) Displays interest in learning from employees, regardless of their level in the organization
- (28) Tries to build consensus among employees on important decisions
- (29) Ensures greatest decision-making control given to employees most affected by decision
- (30) Solves organizational problems with new and creative ideas
- (31) Refuses to compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success

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TABLE II  
continued

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My Organization's Top Executive...

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- (32) Freely admits his/her mistakes
- (33) Promotes transparency and honesty throughout the organization
- (34) Takes time to talk to employees on a personal level
- (35) Follows through on what he/she promises to do
- (36) Articulates a clear direction for the organization's future
- (37) Listens carefully to others
- (38) Looks for new ways to make employees' jobs easier
- (39) Believes our organization should give back to the community
- (40) Values integrity more than profit or personal gain
- (41) Believes employees should be given freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best
- (42) Prefers serving others to being served by others
- (43) Demonstrates sensitivity to employees' personal obligations outside the workplace
- (44) Enthusiastically celebrates others' accomplishments
- (45) Believes our organization has a duty to improve the community in which it operates
- (46) Values diversity and individual differences in the organization
- (47) Consistently tries to bring out the best in others
- (48) Believes employees should be provided with work experiences that enable them to develop new skills
- (49) Demonstrates concern for employees' personal well-being
- (50) Engages in community service and volunteer activities outside of work
- (51) Makes employee career development an organizational priority
- (52) Welcomes ideas and input from employees at all levels of the organization
- (53) Creates a feeling of belonging in our organization
- (54) Communicates candidly with others
- (55) Models the behavior he/she expects from others in the organization

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Regarding the model's other psychometric properties, unidimensionality of the five scales was achieved and each showed strong internal consistency: Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranged from 0.90 to 0.95 and composite reliabilities from 0.96 to 0.97. All items loaded significantly on their respective factors ( $p < 0.001$ ), thus demonstrating strong convergent

TABLE III  
Final second-order factor model from the confirmatory factor analysis

Factor	Item	Standardized loadings	<i>t</i> Value
Factor 1: interpersonal support $\alpha = 0.94$ C.R. = 0.97	6. Recognize low morale	0.861	45.60
	7. Make other succeed	0.878	52.12
	15. Nurtures employee leadership	0.873	50.64
	25. Dignity and respect	0.851	43.05
	29. Decision-making control to most affected	0.825	36.08
	37. Listens carefully	0.870	49.44
Factor 2: building community $\alpha = 0.90$ C.R. = 0.95	2. Effects of decisions on community	0.796	29.75
	20. Spirit of cooperation	0.910	63.41
	21. Organizational commitment	0.858	42.70
	45. Improve community	0.735	21.89
	46. Values diversity and differences	0.804	30.66
Factor 3: altruism $\alpha = 0.93$ C.R. = 0.96	9. Sacrifice personal benefit	0.843	38.38
	11. Serve with no expectation of reward	0.899	57.31
	22. Others interests over self	0.903	59.58
	42. Serving others over being served	0.871	46.44
Factor 4: egalitarianism $\alpha = 0.94$ C.R. = 0.96	10. Encourages debate	0.889	55.14
	13. Invites constructive criticism	0.907	65.16
	27. Learns from employees at all levels	0.897	60.22
	52. Welcomes input from all levels	0.852	42.43
	12. Inspires trust	0.912	71.73
Factor 5: moral integrity $\alpha = 0.95$ C.R. = 0.97	18. Refuses manipulation and deceit	0.808	32.61
	32. Admits mistakes	0.893	59.20
	33. Transparency and honesty in organization	0.891	58.30
	40. Integrity over profit	0.870	48.47
	55. Models expected behavior (walks the walk)	0.864	46.97
	Second-order factor: executive servant leadership	F1: employee support	0.979
	F2: community building	0.939	71.22
	F3: altruism	0.941	74.23
	F4: egalitarianism	0.967	101.41
	F5: moral integrity	0.983	141.70

Notes:  $\alpha$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ; C.R., composite reliability.

validity. Although our test to determine distinctiveness of the first-order factors demonstrated discriminant validity as per Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a definitive test of discriminant validity could not be performed in the absence of data from other independent or dependent variables. See Tables IV and V.

Applying the latent method factor approach (Williams et al., 1989), we found that both common method variance and common method bias were likely to exist in our measure. However, as studies of *post hoc* CMV correction techniques recommended none of these strategies (see Richardson et al., 2009), we employed no correction techniques and address

the potential for common method bias as a limitation of our research.

## Discussion

The notion of servant leadership is not new. However, efforts to measure the construct and study its effect on organizational outcomes have appeared only in the last decade. And, while the 13 instruments we reviewed have merit, we noted a marked lack of emphasis on measuring servant leadership among top executives, focusing instead on measuring



TABLE IV  
Fit measures for the exploratory factor analysis

	$\chi^2$ (df)	RMSEA	SRMR	Factor determinacies
1 Factor	3041.15 (1224) $p < 0.000$	0.083	0.039	0.996
2 Factors	2605.44 (1174) $p < 0.000$	0.075	0.030	0.959–0.995
3 Factors	2256.75 (1125) $p < 0.000$	0.068	0.026	0.897–0.996
4 Factors	2040.96 (1077) $p < 0.000$	0.064	0.023	0.859–0.995
5 Factors	1849.19 (1030) $p < 0.000$	0.060	0.021	0.866–0.995
6 Factors	1680.89 (984) $p < 0.000$	0.057	0.019	0.846–0.995

TABLE V  
Estimated correlation matrix for latent variables

	Interpersonal support	Building community	Altruism	Egalitarianism	Moral integrity	Executive servant leadership
Interpersonal support	1.000					
Building community	0.953	1.000				
Altruism	0.921	0.884	1.000			
Egalitarianism	0.970	0.909	0.910	1.000		
Moral integrity	0.963	0.924	0.925	0.951	1.000	
Executive servant leadership	0.979	0.939	0.941	0.967	0.983	1.000

Notes: All correlations are significant at the  $p < 0.000$ .

the behavior of immediate supervisors. This is a critical gap in the literature, given the profound influence of executive values, beliefs, and behavior on organizational culture, ethical climate, and behavior (see Avolio et al., 2009; Hambrick, 2007; Martin and Cullen, 2006). In order to create organizations and institutions that effectively serve society, top executives must be the ones to demonstrate such leadership and inspire their followers to emulate their actions (Brown and Trevino, 2006; Graham, 1991). Given the absence of servant leadership scales targeting the top executive, our ESLS provides a useful tool for scholars interested in exploring the effects of such a form of ethical leadership on organizational processes and performance.

Our study further extends existing servant leadership research by empirically testing the second-

order factor “executive servant leadership” as the underlying source of the correlation between the factors making up the construct. To the best of our knowledge, Whittington et al. (2006) appears to be the only other study that considers a second-order factor. The inclusion of a second-order factor in the study of servant leadership adds to the literature in three ways. First, when factors intending to measure an underlying construct such as servant leadership are highly correlated, researchers need to test the assumption that these factors are correlated because of a higher-order factor. Testing the second-order factor solution allows researchers to account for the high correlation among the first-order factors (Chen et al., 2005). Second, when conducting studies where servant leadership is either a dependent or independent variable, the second-order factor allows

the researcher to retain the full structure, include error variances (within a structural equation modeling framework), which provides more reliable parameter estimates between dependent and independent variables. Finally, for researchers trying to understand the antecedents and consequences of servant leadership overall, the second-order factor approach provides for a much simpler interpretation of the results (Chen et al., 2005).

### *Limitations*

Despite the contributions of our research, it is not without limitations. First, our data were collected using single-source self-reported questionnaires. As such, we note that common method bias may be present. Future research should consider collecting data for each factor from multiple respondents. For example, if at least five respondents from one organization are recruited, then each respondent could report on a different factor. Although this approach may increase sample size requirements, research results would likely be less biased. Multiple respondents per factor would also strengthen research conclusions by virtue of inter-rater reliability that could be obtained (see Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Second, the sampling frame used for this study presented another limitation as respondents were all recruited from a single private liberal arts college, thereby raising the question of generalizability. Although the clear majority possessed significant work experience and represented a variety of organizations and industries, the ideal approach would be to use stratified random sampling to create strata or clusters that consider geographical area, industry, and business size. This would allow for a larger variation in results and a more representative sample. Potential self-selection bias was also a concern – again limiting accurate generalizability. With the use of proper sampling techniques, sample size calculations based on power analysis, and the use of incentives, quotas per sampling area can be closely monitored to insure proper representation and statistical power is obtained. Moreover, our research did not consider cultural difference among respondents. Considering Hale and Fields (2007) findings that national differences in servant leadership exist, future research should consider including demographic items to

capture the culture variable. Tests of measurement invariance would then show if cultural differences appear in the measurement.

Finally, because we collected data using a web-based survey, we cannot confirm that the person completing the questionnaire was actually the one for which it was intended. This problem is common to all survey research and unfortunately difficult to rectify. While the alternative of in-person surveys or survey interviews could mitigate the problem, these techniques introduce issues – most germane to the present study, concerns about confidentiality and the potential for social desirability bias.

### *Directions for future research*

The ESLS introduced in this article has several implications for organizational scholarship. In addition to extending the scope of leadership research it can contribute to research on ethical leadership, organizational moral climate and corporate responsibility, and research derived from Institutional Theory. Since several existing articles propose ideas for studying servant leadership in relation to central topics in the leadership literature (see Avolio et al., 2009; Polleys, 2002; Russell and Stone, 2002; Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002; Yukl, 2010), we focus here on our three latter themes.

### *Ethical leadership*

The ethical leadership literature indicates both direct and indirect impacts on followers, organizations, stakeholders, and society at large (see Brown and Trevino, 2006; De Hoogh and De Hartog, 2008; Neubert et al., 2009). Future research could examine the impacts of servant leadership and the servant led organization. This might include which dimensions of servant leadership have the greatest impact on followers through organizational and/or individual outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction, employee optimism, psychological well-being, etc.). It could also include exploration of antecedents of servant leadership, as well as research regarding the development of future servant leaders using the social learning lens for enhanced understanding of how leaders develop leaders (see Brown and Trevino, 2006).

### *Moral climate and corporate responsibility*

The moral climate literature suggests that values and behavior of top executives are critical in setting the moral tone of the organization (see Brown and Trevino, 2006; Vidaver-Cohen, 1998). Future research could examine the type of moral climate most likely to emerge in servant led organizations, which dimensions of executive servant leadership have the greatest impact on moral climate and the degree to which moral climate is influenced by top executive servant leadership behaviors. It could also be used to test hypotheses about whether servant leadership is a necessary and/or sufficient condition for a genuinely ethical work climate to emerge (cf. Vidaver-Cohen, 1993, 1995).

With regard to the literature on corporate responsibility, Waldman et al. (2006, p. 1705) observe: “Models of effective leadership have increasingly emphasized values and related characteristics of leaders that could affect... decisions and actions relating to the implementation of corporate social responsibility... Thus... it is somewhat surprising that there has been virtually no systematic theoretical or empirical analysis of the relationship between characteristics of CEO leadership and CSR.” Their study of the correlation between components of transformational leadership and corporate responsibility made a first step in addressing this challenge. However, they examined only the intellectual aspect of transformational leadership in relation to CSR rather than examining the “individualized consideration” dimension of the construct as well. One rationale for this omission was that because individualized consideration highlights interaction between a leader and individual followers, this individualized focus would make it difficult to establish “a clear conceptual linkage to higher level organizational phenomena such as CSR” (p. 1707). In fact, our measure of executive servant leadership, grounded in Greenleaf’s ideas regarding the diffusion of interpersonal support and egalitarianism throughout an organization, does just that – offering an ideal mechanism to test this supposition and advance understanding of the relationship between CEO leadership and corporate social performance.

### *Advancing institutional theory*

The concept of servant leadership has two immediate implications for institutional theory. First, we

know from Oliver (1991) that organizations respond to institutional pressures in one of three ways: conform to the pressure, reject the pressure, or espouse commitment to change with no intent to follow through. Future research could consider whether high level executive servant leadership affects how an organization responds to such pressures and the extent of the response. Second, Bansal and Clelland (2004) and Jonsson et al. (2009), among others, have empirically shown the importance of firm legitimacy to organizational outcomes. If executive servant leadership contributes to making organizations more responsive to society, it may follow that a firm’s legitimacy would increase as a result. Finally, Jonsson et al. (2009) found that loss of legitimacy in one firm can spill over to firms with similar organizational forms and within similar organizational fields. Future research with our scale could investigate how servant leadership can influence recovery of legitimacy lost.

### *Further directions*

Beyond the suggestions noted above, the ESLS can be used to advance understanding of the servant leadership construct generally, thereby serving as a vehicle for more rigorous theory development. As our measure attempts to discriminate servant leadership from related theories in the literature, it could be used to test whether the servant leadership paradigm is sufficient in itself as a model for managing complex organizations or whether it instead represents a cluster of behaviors that require pairing with traditional competencies in order for truly effective organizational leadership to emerge. Research with the scale could also be used to determine whether servant leadership can be viewed as a driving managerial strategy or merely a supplement to other strategic orientations. And the measure can be used to test whether individual-level servant leadership at the top of the organization can indeed, as Greenleaf proposed, create a “servant organization” or whether other conditions within and outside the organization must be present for this to occur.

## **Conclusion**

Implicit in the ongoing conversation regarding ethical leadership is the notion that leaders hold

tremendous power, and that those leaders who perceive organizations and people beyond the “competency inputs” and “performance outputs” traditionally used to measure leader effectiveness are increasingly important in a profoundly interdependent society. As this perspective challenges most established models of business management, ethical leadership also demands profound psychological and moral courage on the part of business leaders. While the practice of servant leadership described in this article clearly embodies such courage, it is not a “quick fix.” Rather it is a developmental process for executives, employees, and the organization as a whole. Leaders must therefore decide if this paradigm is even consistent with “who we really are” or rather, an idealized representation of “whom we would like to be.”

Nonetheless, at the current point in history, organization leaders possess tremendous power for harm – power that appears to be exercised with increasing disregard for its long range impact on society as a whole. In *the Social Nature of Leadership*, Merton compared the exercise of authority-based power to true leadership. He wrote: “Authority involves the legitimated rights of a position that require others to obey – leadership is an interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to” (1969, p. 2615). While the idea of servant leadership requires further critical examination to determine its viability as a practical management strategy, it does hold promise as one form of ethical leadership that can assist to configure a business climate in which value creation shares the stage with moral accountability and the production of goods or services is anchored in social concern. Our measure of executive servant leadership offers a means to investigate this potential.

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