



## A MIXED-METHODS STUDY EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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In today's frenetic ever-changing world, organizations face ambitious destinies, and leaders who aspire to meet and exceed lofty financial goals often find themselves in corrupt terrain. A demand exists in society for more ethical, people-centered leaders (Barbuto, Gottfredson, and Searle 2014; Page and Wong 2000; van Dierendonck 2011). A resounding call is emerging for effective leadership embedded in an ethical framework that gives precedence to developing relationships with followers (Page and Wong 2000; van Dierendonck and Patterson 2010). Although the servant-leadership model is the "less travelled road" in leadership (Sendjaya 2010, 39), its character-focused approach centering on collaboration and a moral mindset may fill the void and lead to more ethical and effective leadership.

The literature indicates an interest has risen and continues to rise in servant-leadership (Ferch 2010; Hunter et al. 2013; Parris and Peachey 2013; van Dierendonck and Patterson 2010) and emotionality in leadership (Rajah, Song, and Arvey 2011). Barbuto et al. (2014) believed emotional intelligence to be "both theoretically and practically relevant to servant-leadership" (315). Servant-leadership and emotional intelligence are two constructs that could influence leadership effectiveness. According to van Dierendonck et al. (2014), leadership effectiveness attributions are important because "they provide followers with a sense of trust in their leader" (546).

Goleman (2004) found that truly effective leaders are also distinguished by a high degree of emotional intelligence. In an analysis on emotions and leadership, George (2000) posited that emotional intelligence has the potential to contribute to effective leadership because "leadership is an emotion-laden process, both from a leader and a follower perspective" (1046). Rajah et al. (2011) argued that research studies examining emotions and leadership will help promote a better understanding of the social interactions and dynamics in the workplace.



## AWARENESS IN THE LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIP

If leaders critically examine how their self-perceptions of servant-leadership behaviors and emotional intelligence competencies compare to the perceptions of their followers, it could improve the quality of their relationships. Hollander (1995) supported this line of thinking by stating, “A major component of the leader-follower relationship is the leader’s perception of his or her self relative to followers, and how they in turn perceive the leader” (55). Awareness helps individuals understand issues involving ethics and values and allows them to view situations from a more integrated, holistic position (Spears 2010). Greenleaf (1977) argued that awareness is not a giver of solace; instead it disturbs and awakens an individual. Leaders who appreciate the salience of emotional intelligence to servant-leadership may be motivated to hone their emotional intelligence competencies and to develop moral, interpersonal relationships with their followers.

## MIXED-METHODS STUDY

This study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research methods. While it is important to focus on quantitative research relating to servant-leadership and emotional intelligence, a need exists beyond this approach to investigate through qualitative means what is required to build a sustainable servant-leadership culture. McGee-Cooper and Trammell (2010) noted that servant-led organizations must be “steadily and continuously cultivated” (130). Winston (2010) argued that a need exists for qualitative research to assist in understanding servant-leadership’s various components.

Parris and Peachey (2013) conducted a systematic literature review of servant-leadership theory in organizational contexts, producing a final sample population of thirty-nine studies, including eleven qualitative studies, twenty-seven quantitative studies, and only one mixed-methods study. Black’s (2010) mixed-methods study examined servant-leadership and school climate. Parris and Peachey’s (2013) research demonstrated that the majority of the studies were conducted in the educational setting (44 percent), while medical institutions, public organizations, nonprofit organizations, and community-level organizations received less attention.

This study addressed the gap in the literature. Two servant-led organizations provided the basis for the current study. The first, located in the north-central region of the United States, is premised in the healthcare field.



The second, located in the western United States, is housed in the communications sector.

### *Purpose of the Research Study*

Current research suggests an empirical link may exist between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence (Barbuto et al. 2014; Parolini 2005). Specifically, Barbuto et al.'s (2014) findings suggested emotional intelligence is a good predictor of a leader's servant-leader ideology, but may not be a good predictor of servant-leader behaviors from the leaders' followers' perspective. Winston and Hartsfield (2004) concluded that strong ties existed between the servant-leadership principles and many of the emotional intelligence factors in their study.

This study had four main objectives. The first was to determine if a relationship existed between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence in the leaders. The second was to examine the perceptions of the leaders and followers relating first to servant-leadership and second to emotional intelligence. The third was to determine if emotional intelligence predicted servant-leadership in the leaders. Finally, two personal interviews were conducted to learn information about the organizations' servant-led cultures.

### *Defining Servant-leadership and Emotional Intelligence*

Scholars define servant-leadership in various ways. Greenleaf (1973) defined the servant-leader by stating, "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (7, emphasis in original). For purposes of this study, servant-leadership focuses on building trust, stressing personal integrity, serving multiple stakeholders, and forming long-term relationships with employees (Liden et al. 2008). Liden et al. (2008) developed the Servant-leadership Scale (SLS) and identified seven dimensions of servant-leadership: (1) conceptual skills, (2) empowering, (3) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (4) putting subordinates first, (5) behaving ethically, (6) emotional healing, and (7) creating value for the community (defined in Appendix A).

Boyatzis and Sala (2004) defined emotional intelligence as "a set of competencies, or abilities to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about oneself or others that leads to or causes effective or superior performance" (175). The Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI), Version 3, is administered through the research-based consulting firm the Hay Group (2011).



The model consists of twelve competencies that cover four distinct areas of ability: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, and (4) relationship management (defined in Appendix B).

#### THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Leaders exhibit characteristics that are often difficult to describe yet easily perceived by their followers. One of those characteristics, empathy, is defined by van Dierendonck, Nuijten, and Heeren (2009) as “recognizing the emotions of others” (328). Empathy is expressing a genuine caring attitude and concern for others. Rogers (1980) pointed out that research supports the conclusion that “a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly *the* most potent factor in bringing about change and learning” (139, emphasis in original). Greenleaf (1973) noted that great leaders possess empathy and “an unqualified acceptance” of their followers (13). Greenleaf (1977) posited, “The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects” (20). Spears (2010) identified empathy as one of the ten characteristics central to the development of servant-leaders, noting that the most successful servant-leaders have developed the skill of empathetic listening. Sun (2013) believed being empathetic is critical for servant-leaders because it provides emotional support and healing. Sun also pointed out that by understanding the position of others, leaders can structure “unique learning experiences” for individuals, enabling them to develop and grow (548), a hallmark of servant-leadership. Barbuto et al.’s (2014) findings suggested that emotional intelligence is a predictor of a leader’s efforts to lead with a servant-leader ideology. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1: A leader’s servant-leadership behaviors and emotional intelligence competencies will be positively related.**

Graham (1991) described servant-leadership as “a gift” that is contagious so that followers of servant-leaders are inspired to “pass on the gift” (111). Based on his experience, Greenleaf (1977) asserted that through empowerment, servant-leaders develop followers to become servant-leaders themselves. Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) believed the central issue of empowerment is the servant-leader’s “belief in the intrinsic value of each individual” (251). Ciulla (2004) argued, “Authentic empowerment entails a distinct set of moral understandings and commitments between leaders and followers, all based on honesty” (60). Servant-leaders who model serving behaviors and practice a moral leadership philosophy can build trust with





their followers and pass on the servant-leadership gift. Therefore, we offer the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2: A leader's servant-leader behaviors will be positively related to the leader's servant-leader behaviors as observed by the followers.**

To develop a philosophy of people-centered leadership, servant-leaders must possess the ability to sense others' feelings and perspectives. Gardner (1999) used the term "emotional sensitivity" to describe individuals who are sensitive to the emotions in themselves and others (206). Emotional intelligence serves as a survival guide to servant-leaders by helping them to manage their own emotions and also to recognize and understand the emotions of others. This dual role of emotions in leadership is important. Rajah et al. (2011) argued, "Not only do leaders need to possess certain emotion-related traits to emerge and be perceived as effective, they are required to use these emotion-related skills to perform the very task of managing emotions among group members" (1111). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 3: A leader's emotional intelligence will be positively related to the leader's emotional intelligence as observed by the followers.**

The relationship between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence is more sharply defined when considering the emotional intelligence components, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Hay Group 2011). Goleman (2004) argued that emotional intelligence is the "sine qua non of leadership" (82). Servant-leaders who practice self-awareness consciously choose to look inside themselves. Greenleaf (1977) believed that "the servant views any problem in the world as *in here*, inside oneself, not *out there*" (44, emphasis in original). Servant-leaders who focus on controlling negative emotions and withholding judgment on followers model an ethical example for others and create the foundation for a trusting, fair environment. A byproduct is long-term, quality interpersonal relationships, a servant-leadership attribute. Thus, we offer the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4: Emotional intelligence will be a predictor of servant-leadership in the leaders.**



## IMPLEMENTING SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Despite servant-leadership's growing popularity, van Dierendonck (2011) noted that "there is still no consensus about a definition and theoretical framework" (1229). This absence of consensus makes implementing servant-leadership a greater challenge. Greenleaf (1977) even admitted that "it is meant to be neither a scholarly treatise nor a how-to-do-it manual" (49). Thus, the challenge for many organizations is how to implement and sustain a serving culture. Parris and Peachey (2013) found the research themes of spirituality, demographics, and the implementation of servant-leadership were the least explored. For these reasons we interviewed leaders from two servant-led organizations. Learning from these organizations will provide meaningful information for implementing a servant-leadership culture.

## QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

A narrative research method was selected for the qualitative data analysis to highlight the richness of the data, which would be difficult to gain by other methodologies. Josselson (2011) noted a commonality of narrative researchers is to approach the problem of the analysis of lived experience represented by words rather than numbers for the benefit of social science understanding. Narrative research explores the whole account rather than fragmenting it into discursive units or thematic categories (Josselson 2011).

Two digitally recorded telephone interviews with each organization's department head of training and development were completed in one and one-half hours and one hour respectively. Each interviewee's responses were analyzed separately because each organization shared a unique servant-leadership journey. The recordings were transcribed verbatim into two transcripts. Upon review, the interviewees provided minor revisions that did not materially affect the data. The following synopsis, guided by three interview questions, describes the servant-leadership journeys as related by the interviewees.

- 1. Please provide the number of years your organization has engaged in the servant-leadership philosophy and then expound on the challenges the organization has faced in adopting a servant-leadership culture.**

For the first organization, the journey was close to twenty years and for the second organization, approximately seven years. One major challenge discussed by the first organization was convincing



leaders of the value of servant-leadership. Some leaders, who had been taught a command-and-control style of leadership, did not embrace a servant-leadership philosophy that involved associates in decision-making processes. For the second organization, having a very traditional leadership style prior to the implementation of servant-leadership posed challenges because the associates were spread out in seven different suites. Each siloed suite had its own culture with a nonteam environment. People were reserved in communication and not open and honest in an attempt to protect themselves. Some departments did not integrate well together, affecting the ultimate success of the company. In the implementation phase when servant-leadership was introduced to the management team, a backlash resulted because team members did not understand what servant-leadership meant or how it applied to their work.

The servant-leadership cultures continually struggled. For the first organization, the CEO, who initiated the servant-leadership journey, accepted another position in the organization. A concern was whether the new incoming leader would support servant-leadership. A simultaneous occurrence was a reorganization in the company, which incorporated another division that did not practice a servant-leadership philosophy. This incident called into question the continuation of the servant-leadership culture. A challenge for the second organization occurred when the leaders attempted to integrate servant-leadership into the organization during a period of rapid growth when new management was hired. New potential applicants were not screened for servant-leadership attributes. Associates were hired for their technical ability. Some individuals did not like the word, “servant.” It took seven years to change the culture.

**2. Please describe in detail the servant-leadership training your organization has conducted or conducts and whether it includes any emotional intelligence components.**

The first organization conducted its own in-house training and used outside speakers. The extensive leader and staff training included off-site retreats and formation development to help associates grow. The formation training goals included building character and virtue in associates to build a better society. The off-site retreat work included emotional intelligence discussions.

The second organization also conducted its own in-house training, which involves three levels of training (understanding servant-leadership, how to practice servant-leadership, and the practice of



servant-leadership). This interactive experience includes experiential learning and incorporates team building. The outcome of the training includes accountability, on-the-spot crucial conversations, and feedback processes. The training incorporates emotional intelligence components.

**3. How has your organization been impacted by building a foundation of a servant-leadership culture and what opportunities have been gained?**

The first organization submitted its first application for a state-level Baldrige Quality Award, which resulted in a site visit. During the application process, servant-leadership was identified as its topmost key competency. Although the organization did not perform as well in terms of its systematic approaches, the Baldrige examiners highlighted that the culture is not easily achieved and cautioned the organization not to lose what it had built. The Baldrige site visit represented an affirmation in the organization's servant-leadership journey from an outside observer.

Another competency identified in the Baldrige application emphasized strong community support, referencing a partnership established in 1994 that unites citizens from different disciplines—the school system, the law enforcement, the port system, etc. These individuals had been meeting monthly to conduct community needs assessments and address health concerns. This group established one of the first dental clinics for low-income individuals.

For the second organization, the lobby bears signage, “In God We Trust, In People We Invest.” This organization established a charitable fund by tithing 10 percent of its profits, which provides grants for local community and international activities identified as 501(c)3 nonprofits. The employee can request grants, which are reviewed by a committee. If the grant is approved, the organization receives funds on the associate's behalf. Framed letters from individuals whose lives have been influenced by the charitable funds are on display.

## METHODS

### *Measures*

Servant-leadership and emotional intelligence were measured from the perspectives of both the leaders and the followers. The Servant-leadership



Scale (SLS) (Liden et al. 2008) and the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI), Version 3 (Hay Group 2011), were used to collect the data. The internal consistency for the SLS ranges from .76 to .86. Responses to the SLS questions were scaled from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The internal consistency for the ESCI ranges from .79 to .92. The ESCI was scored against a frequency range: (a) never, (b) rarely, (c) sometimes, (d) often, (e) consistently, and (f) don't know.

### *Procedures*

The appropriate permissions, informed consent, and Institutional Review Board approval were obtained. Data collection spanned a one-month period with raters answering either an online SurveyMonkey questionnaire or a hard copy of the survey. Podsakoff et al. (2003) argued that one of the major causes of common method variance is obtaining the measures of both predictor and criterion variables from the same rater or source. The leaders completed the self-assessment versions of both instruments. Given the potential for same-source bias, data were used from leaders who had six or more direct reports; and the direct reports rated the leaders on either the SLS or the ESCI. Descriptive variables were collected using a demographic survey.

This study considered the Likert-scale ratings in the SLS and the ESCI as interval/ratio data and used parametric statistical tests to analyze the data. Carifio and Perla (2007) argued that many studies have shown that Likert scales produce interval data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe and summarize the data.

Each rater's survey was reviewed. If an individual merely started a survey and answered only a few questions, the rater's data were immediately discarded. Some individuals chose not to participate in the study. Relating to the ESCI, the Hay Group recommends that each rater must answer at least 75 percent of the questions for their data to be counted (Hay Group 2012). The rationale is that if the rater cannot answer at least 75 percent of the questions about the person, the rater does not know the person's work behavior well enough to rate the person on these specific ESCI behaviors.

### *Research Participants*

The initial data pool included 42 leaders and 589 direct reports (DRs). The overall response rate from the combined organizations was 56 percent. The final data pool of useable surveys from both organizations included



42 leaders, 171 servant-leadership direct report raters, and 127 emotional intelligence direct report raters.

### *Demographic Descriptive Statistics*

Demographic data collected on the leaders included (1) management level, (2) experience in management (years), (3) tenure with organization (years), (4) age, (5) gender, and (6) educational level. Relating to the leaders, 83 percent have been with their organizations from one to fifteen years, while nearly 70 percent of the leaders were between the ages of forty-one and sixty. The demographic statistics also revealed the leaders were represented by a fairly even gender divide between males (48.78 percent) and females (51.22 percent). As far as educational level, 71 percent had baccalaureate or graduate degrees. Sixty-one percent of the leaders had eleven or more years of management experience, but only 24 percent of the data pool of the leaders included senior-level managers.

Demographic statistics were also collected on the DR raters, which included (1) tenure with organization (years), (2) age, (3) gender, and (4) educational level. For the SLS DR raters, 78 percent have been with their organizations from one to fifteen years, while roughly 60 percent were between the ages of forty-one and sixty. For the SLS DR raters, 69.41 percent were females, while only 30.59 percent were males. Relating to educational level, 53 percent had baccalaureate or graduate degrees.

Examining the ESCI DR raters, 70 percent have been with the organization from one to fifteen years, while just under 60 percent were between the ages of forty-one and sixty. For the ESCI DR raters, females outnumbered males three to one, with 75.40 percent being females, while only 24.60 percent were males. Inspection of the educational level gleaned that 52 percent had baccalaureate or graduate degrees.

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

The first steps of the analyses included coding the data and reverse scoring the appropriate ESCI items. Thereafter, for each rater an average score was calculated for each dimension or competency for each rater group separately (i.e., leaders, SLS DR raters, and ESCI DR raters). An overall servant-leadership or emotional intelligence score was found for each rater by averaging all of the servant-leadership dimensions or all of the emotional intelligence competencies together.



The normality of the data was checked using quantile-quantile plots. There were some instances of skewness (nonnormality) in the mean assessments of the individual DR raters in some subscales. Based on the central limit theorem, it was assumed the sample averages followed a normal distribution.

#### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND RESULTS

##### **Hypothesis 1: A leader's servant-leadership behaviors and emotional intelligence competencies will be positively related.**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between the leaders' overall servant-leadership scores and their overall emotional intelligence scores. A moderate, but significant, positive correlation was found between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence among the organizational leaders ( $r(40) = .42, p = .006$ ). To further examine this linear relationship, canonical correlation analysis was performed on the leaders' self-ratings on the SLS and the ESCI. The canonical correlation coefficient was .87. There was a significant positive relationship at  $p < .01$ .

The next step was to find the components between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence that most influenced the strength of the canonical correlation. The analysis that demonstrated the most important servant-leadership dimension was "Creating Value for the Community." This dimension contributed the most to the canonical variable for servant-leadership, with a standardized coefficient of .91. It also had a nearly perfect correlation with the SL canonical variable, with a value of .97, and had a high correlation with the EI canonical variable, with a value of .84. The servant-leadership dimension "Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed," a major tenet of servant-leadership, was the next-highest contributor to the canonical variable, but with the much lower coefficient of .25 and the lower correlations of .43 with the SL canonical variable and .38 with the EI canonical variable.

Turning to emotional intelligence, the competencies of "Coach and Mentor" and "Emotional Self-Awareness" were the strongest contributors between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence. EI Coach and Mentor had a standardized coefficient of .63, along with a correlation of .69 with the EI canonical variable and a correlation of .60 with the SL canonical variable. EI Emotional Self-Awareness had a standardized coefficient of .45 along with correlations of .59 and .51.



**Hypothesis 2: A leader's servant-leader behaviors will be positively related to the leader's servant-leader behaviors as observed by the followers.**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between the leaders and their direct reports when comparing the leaders' overall servant-leadership scores with the direct reports' overall servant-leadership scores. A moderate, but significant, positive correlation was found between the two groups ( $r(40) = .44, p = .004$ ). Correlation analysis was then conducted on each servant-leadership dimension comparing the leaders' self-rating scores to the direct reports' ratings. Of the seven servant-leadership dimensions, three had significant correlations. They were "Creating Value for the Community" ( $r(40) = .58, p < .001$ ), "Emotional Healing" ( $r(40) = .57, p < .001$ ), and "Behaving Ethically" ( $r(40) = .39, p = .010$ ). Within servant-leadership, these three dimensions exhibited the strongest relationship between the leaders' perceptions and those of their followers.

Two foundational tenets of servant-leadership "Empowering" and "Putting Subordinates First" demonstrated weak correlations that were not significant. In examining SL: Empowering, the correlation coefficient was .25 with a  $p$  value of .109 while SL: Putting Subordinates First had a correlation coefficient of .13 with a  $p$  value of .408. For these two important dimensions of servant-leadership, there was not much similarity between the leaders' perceptions and those of their followers.

Pearson correlations were then performed on the leaders' and the direct reports' servant-leadership dimensions. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the intercorrelations for the leaders and for the direct reports. Table 3 represents the intercorrelations for the direct reports' aggregated scores, and Table 4 displays the direct reports' intraclass correlation analysis (ICC).

Table 1.  
*Intercorrelations for the Leaders' Servant-Leadership Dimensions*

Dimension	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Conceptual Skills	6.18	.45							
2. Empowering	5.84	.56	(.10)						
3. Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed	6.02	.49	.12	.42					





Dimension	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Putting Subordinates First	5.91	.55	.26	.51	.72				
5. Behaving Ethically	6.51	.43	.42	.28	.44	.53			
6. Emotional Healing	6.08	.52	.23	.26	.39	.44	.46		
7. Creating Value for the Community	5.51	.96	.22	.07	.42	.29	.34	.62	

Table 2.

*Intercorrelations for the Direct Reports' Servant-Leadership Dimensions*

Dimension	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Conceptual Skills	5.78	1.02							
2. Empowering	5.42	1.18	.65						
3. Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed	5.27	1.34	.70	.66					
4. Putting Subordinates First	4.74	1.33	.69	.63	.81				
5. Behaving Ethically	5.81	1.08	.82	.65	.69	.74			
6. Emotional Healing	5.23	1.29	.73	.66	.77	.78	.73		
7. Creating Value for the Community	5.27	1.21	.60	.52	.66	.66	.72	.71	

Table 3.

*Intercorrelations for the Direct Reports' Aggregated Scores for the Servant-Leadership Dimensions*

Dimension	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Conceptual Skills	5.80	.60							
2. Empowering	5.47	.70	.62						
3. Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed	5.33	.85	.71	.68					
4. Putting Subordinates First	4.80	.77	.75	.65	.89				
5. Behaving Ethically	5.88	.59	.74	.63	.77	.85			
6. Emotional Healing	5.27	.83	.72	.61	.86	.89	.84		
7. Creating Value for the Community	5.34	.88	.60	.48	.68	.75	.79	.73	



Table 4.  
*Intraclass Direct Reports' Servant-Leadership Dimensions*

Dimension	ICC
Conceptual Skills	.06
Empowering	.07
Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed	.01
Putting Subordinates First	.05
Behaving Ethically	.01
Emotional Healing	.10
Creating Value for the Community	.08

For the servant-leadership dimensions, the correlations for the leaders' intercorrelation analysis ranged from weak to moderate with the exception of the correlation (.72) between "Putting Subordinates First" and "Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed." The direct reports' intercorrelation analyses for individual scores and for scores aggregated by leader ranged from moderate to strong. The direct reports' intraclass analysis revealed low ICC scores. One reason for these low scores may have been that there were too many raters for the number of questions in each dimension.

**Hypothesis 3: A leader's emotional intelligence will be positively related to the leader's emotional intelligence as observed by the followers.**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between the leaders' and the direct reports' overall emotional intelligence scores. The correlation between these two variables was very weak ( $r(36) = -.00$ ) and was not significant ( $p = .999$ ). There is no statistical support to conclude that there was a positive relationship between the leaders' own perceptions of emotional intelligence compared to their followers.

Pearson correlations were then performed on the leaders' and the direct reports' emotional intelligence competencies. Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate the intercorrelations for the leaders and for the direct reports. Table 7 represents the intercorrelations for the direct reports' aggregated scores, and Table 8 displays the direct reports' intraclass correlation analysis (ICC).

Table 5.  
*Intercorrelations for the Leaders' Emotional Intelligence Competencies*

Competency	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Emotional Self-Awareness	3.86	.58												
2. Achievement Orientation	4.32	.50	.34											
3. Adaptability	4.15	.39	.30	.32										
4. Emotional Self-Control	4.03	.44	.11	.09	.30									
5. Positive Outlook	4.23	.46	.37	.11	.39	.45								
6. Empathy	4.02	.42	.53	.38	.46	.29	.54							
7. Organizational Awareness	4.42	.44	.49	.38	.30	(.11)	.14	.61						
8. Conflict Management	4.08	.43	.49	.37	.47	.34	.49	.40	.22					
9. Coach and Mentor	4.24	.47	.43	.61	.40	.14	.44	.49	.43	.34				
10. Influence	3.84	.59	.29	.39	.25	.13	.37	.24	.13	.19	.34			
11. Inspirational Leadership	4.11	.45	.33	.43	.61	.32	.46	.37	.09	.51	.42	.35		
12. Teamwork	4.45	.47	.55	.17	.54	.25	.59	.68	.39	.59	.49	.21	.57	

Table 6.

*Intercorrelations for the Direct Reports' Emotional Intelligence Competencies*

Competency	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Emotional Self-Awareness	3.70	.74												
2. Achievement Orientation	4.28	.67	.58											
3. Adaptability	4.15	.64	.61	.78										
4. Emotional Self-Control	4.11	.70	.57	.57	.71									
5. Positive Outlook	4.25	.65	.72	.71	.75	.69								
6. Empathy	3.87	.74	.80	.74	.75	.64	.73							
7. Organizational Awareness	4.30	.69	.66	.68	.71	.57	.66	.81						
8. Conflict Management	3.86	.77	.70	.69	.67	.65	.68	.76	.68					
9. Coach and Mentor	4.05	.81	.72	.76	.76	.62	.72	.82	.70	.78				
10. Influence	3.80	.71	.67	.60	.66	.45	.59	.66	.61	.52	.64			
11. Inspirational Leadership	3.95	.85	.74	.72	.78	.63	.72	.81	.73	.78	.87	.67		
12. Teamwork	4.26	.68	.71	.70	.78	.66	.76	.80	.76	.81	.82	.61	.83	

Table 7.

*Intercorrelations for the Direct Reports' Aggregated Scores for the Emotional Intelligence Competencies*

Competency	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Emotional Self-Awareness	3.69	.47												
2. Achievement Orientation	4.28	.46	.51											
3. Adaptability	4.17	.47	.66	.81										
4. Emotional Self-Control	4.13	.49	.59	.60	.69									
5. Positive Outlook	4.23	.51	.78	.70	.77	.79								
6. Empathy	3.87	.52	.82	.76	.81	.61	.80							
7. Organizational Awareness	4.29	.49	.70	.64	.67	.45	.69	.79						
8. Conflict Management	3.84	.54	.55	.64	.59	.57	.70	.67	.73					
9. Coach and Mentor	4.02	.64	.65	.75	.70	.66	.78	.83	.72	.80				
10. Influence	3.79	.48	.63	.55	.69	.45	.49	.66	.54	.31	.47			
11. Inspirational Leadership	3.99	.65	.71	.75	.85	.61	.68	.87	.70	.64	.81	.74		
12. Teamwork	4.27	.45	.76	.72	.80	.67	.81	.86	.79	.78	.85	.59	.84	



Table 8.  
*Intraclass Direct Reports' Emotional Intelligence Competencies*

Competency	ICC
Emotional Self-Awareness	.10
Achievement Orientation	.02
Adaptability	.02
Emotional Self-Control	.02
Positive Outlook	.02
Empathy	.08
Organizational Awareness	.02
Conflict Management	.01
Coach and Mentor	.02
Influence	.03
Inspirational Leadership	.01
Teamwork	.01

For the emotional intelligence competencies, the correlations for the leaders' intercorrelation analysis ranged from weak to moderate. The direct reports' intercorrelation analyses for individual scores and for scores aggregated by leader ranged from moderate to strong. The direct reports' intraclass analysis revealed low ICC scores. As with the low ICC scores for servant-leadership, one reason for the low ICC scores in this case may have been that there were too many raters for the number of questions in each competency.

**Hypothesis 4: Emotional intelligence will be a predictor of servant-leadership in the leaders.**

Regression analysis on the leaders' self-ratings resulted in a simple linear regression model; predicting the overall servant-leadership score from the overall emotional intelligence score was significant ( $F(1,40) = 8.57, p = .006$ ). The model itself can be stated as follows: Overall SL Score =  $3.87 + .52$  (Overall EI Score). The  $R^2$  of this model, .18, indicated that approximately 18 percent of the variation in the overall servant-leadership score could be explained by the variation in the overall



emotional intelligence score. Emotional intelligence does have value as a predictor for servant-leadership.

Stepwise regression analysis was then performed to determine the predictors that would improve the fit of the model. While typically small values are specified,  $\alpha = .15$  was set as the criterion. Emotional intelligence competencies, “Coach and Mentor” and “Emotional Self-Awareness,” were found to be the best predictors of the overall servant-leadership score: Overall SL Score =  $3.92 + .17$  (EI: Emotional Self-Awareness) +  $.34$  (EI: Coach and Mentor). The stepwise procedure improved the  $R^2$  to a value of  $.34$ .

## DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1 investigated the relationship between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence by comparing the leaders’ overall servant-leadership scores with their overall emotional intelligence scores. Through correlation analysis, a moderate, but significant, positive correlation was found. The leaders in these two organizations understood the importance of emotional intelligence to their serving philosophy of leading. From the leader’s perspective, these results align with the findings of Barbuto et al.’s (2014) study wherein emotional intelligence shared positive and statistically significant relationships with four of the leader’s five dimensions of servant-leadership. Relating to the current study, the servant-leadership dimension of “Creating Value for the Community” stood apart as the most important dimension.

Graham (1991) noted that servant-leaders are sensitive to the needs of all organizational stakeholders, including the least privileged in society. The qualitative interviews revealed the leadership of both organizations encouraged strong community support locally and internationally. Greenleaf (1977) explained the distinction between the dichotomy of leader-first and servant-first by noting that the difference can be found in “the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest-priority needs are being served” (13). The quantitative and qualitative analyses appear to support Greenleaf’s teachings.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 examined the leaders’ and the followers’ perceptions first relating to servant-leadership and second to emotional intelligence. While it was expected to find significant relationships for both hypotheses, a moderate, but significant, positive correlation was only found relating to servant-leadership. There does appear to be a positive relationship between



the leaders' own perceptions of servant-leadership and the perceptions of their servant-leadership behaviors by the followers. Although emotional intelligence components were included in the organizations' servant-leadership training, a very weak correlation that was not significant was found between the leaders' and their followers' overall emotional intelligence scores. While the followers in these organizations recognized their leaders' servant-leader behaviors, the same scenario did not hold true for emotional intelligence. Along similar lines, Barbuto et al. (2014) found no significant relationships between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of servant-leadership from the followers' perspectives. When Nelson, Michie, and DeGroot (2008) discussed leadership and emotional expression, the scholars raised the empirical question, "Are men and women evaluated differently by followers when they display or fail to display particular emotions?" (485). While this gender discussion is beyond the scope of this study, it is worthy of further exploration.

For Hypothesis 2, the servant-leadership dimensions with the highest correlations were "Creating Value for the Community," "Emotional Healing," and "Behaving Ethically." The qualitative interviews assist in reflecting on these results. Relating to "Creating Value for the Community," both organizations highlighted their commitment to serve outside stakeholders. The first example was through a partnership uniting citizens from different disciplines, and the second example was a charitable fund. Liden et al. (2008) suggested that serving others extends beyond the workplace to home and community. These leaders practice a service orientation.

The servant-leadership dimension, "Behaving Ethically," aligns with Graham's (1991) servant-leadership model of leadership that is both inspirational and moral. Graham posited, "Both to serve others and to hold themselves accountable, then, servant-leaders encourage the intellectual and moral development of all around them" (117). Both organizations admitted their previous cultures focused on a traditional leadership philosophy and introducing servant-leadership was challenging. One interviewee described the organization's culture as being siloed and noted associates were not always open and honest. Yet what a contrast these results revealed. The transition to a servant-leadership culture may shed light on the important dimension of "Behaving Ethically."

Relating to "Emotional Healing," these organizations faced challenges in implementing servant-leadership. One interviewee referenced a reorganization that incorporated a divisional restructuring. Sun (2013) discussed how different types of situational cues heighten the self-consciousness





of servant-leaders and activate their servant identities. One example Sun provided is when an organization undergoes a restructuring process where jobs are at stake. The reorganization referenced by the interviewee could have been a catalyst that heightened the servant-leaders' self-awareness and activated a sensitivity for other individuals' well-being, which the direct reports identified as serving behaviors.

Hypothesis 4 explored whether emotional intelligence was a predictor for servant-leadership. Regression analysis produced a significant model of this relationship highlighting that it accounts for approximately 18 percent of the variation in servant-leadership. Similarly, Barbuto et al.'s (2014) results suggested that emotional intelligence is a predictor of a leader's efforts to lead with a servant-leader philosophy.

### *Practical Implications*

The implications of this study are important for two reasons. First, the qualitative interviews provided a look into two servant-led cultures providing evidence that transforming from a traditional leadership style to servant-leadership is possible. It requires a dedicated willingness to address challenges with fresh ideas. Second, the quantitative results provide fertile ground for areas of leadership and followership development.

While it is important to embrace a servant-leadership culture, it then becomes a question of how does an organization sustain it. Through the qualitative interviews, two key challenges relating to servant-leadership were highlighted. First, the leader who initiated servant-leadership took another position creating concern whether the new incoming leader would support servant-leadership. Second, during a period of rapid growth, employees were hired without even screening them for servant-leadership attributes.

When servant-led organizations reflect on succession planning, mission, and values, consideration should be given to how the servant-leadership culture will continue to thrive. Relating to succession planning, organizations must consider how new incoming leadership will impact the serving culture. For potential new hires, it is imperative to communicate the values associated with servant-leadership behaviors. Dialoguing with potential candidates about the servant-leadership culture will position hiring managers to hire individuals who embrace a serving philosophy of living. These discussions will also assist potential candidates in determining if hiring opportunities will be in their best interests.



Looking at the quantitative findings, there are opportunities for leadership and followership development in organizations. A foundational cornerstone of servant-leadership, “Putting Subordinates First,” was not highlighted as an important contributor to the study. While servant-leadership training is important at the organizational level, leaders must also develop trusting relationships with their followers at the individual level. Solomon (2004) argued trust is “a strength, a precondition of any alliance or mutual understanding” (95). Van Dierendonck (2011) also noted, “Interpersonal trust is a must for long-term effective relationships” (1247). “Putting Subordinates First” requires leaders to develop those interpersonal relationships with their direct reports through one-on-one mentoring conversations by genuinely listening to them and by providing meaningful projects with developmental opportunities. Followers must exhibit accountability by communicating their career goals and objectives to their leaders.

Leadership is about influencing one another through reciprocal relationships. Mary Parker Follett’s writings of the 1900s focused on reciprocal relationships. Follett (1924) stated, “Through circular response we are creating each other all the time” (62). The findings of this study underscore that leaders and followers both must take the time to devote to building trusting relationships at the individual level in addition to attending the servant-leadership training at the organizational level. For leaders to develop trusting relationships and to empower followers at the individual level, the goals of the organization should support servant-leadership development at every level of the organization. Often, a tension exists in organizations between the economic goals and the development of associates. However, if an organization focuses on developing a servant-leadership culture, the tension between the economic goals and serving followers must be addressed at all levels of the organization. Leaders must know the organization supports them in developing their followers at the individual level. If it does not, the efforts of the servant-leadership training at the organizational level will impair the fruitful development of a serving culture.

Related to emotional intelligence, there was a disconnect between leaders and their followers. Yet emotional intelligence was found to be a predictor of servant-leadership. Emotional intelligence is key to servant-leadership. Servant-leaders are not perfect. Each day is a journey. When servant-leaders experience challenging situations, their emotional intelligence allows them to pause and evaluate a situation before reacting, thereby thwarting a self-serving desire. Emotional intelligence training should be included in the



development of servant-leaders. The training should take place in a supportive learning environment. In particular, focusing on defining what constitutes emotional intelligence and then exploring how it is conveyed and perceived by others in the leader-follower relationship may be a valuable facet of training and development. A module of this training could focus on gender issues and investigate how men and women evaluate and express emotions differently in the workplace. Creative discussions on gender differences could have the potential to help associates better understand the role of emotions in the workplace and how emotions affect servant-leadership. This is an area ripe for organizational development.

### *Strengths and Limitations of the Study*

This research study demonstrated several strengths. First, the data were collected from two different organizations housed in separate industries. Second, the mixed-methods study added value to the research because it brought together a more comprehensive account of the area of inquiry. Third, the study was designed to minimize the potential for same-source bias.

The findings must be considered in light of some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design may have influenced the direction of causal influence. Second, even though a framework was put into place for controlling for same-source bias, bias can infiltrate a research project in a variety of subtle ways. Finally, although only 42 leaders participated in the study, the results do represent a sampling of servant leaders.

### *Future Research Suggestions*

It may prove beneficial to replicate this study in countries and cultures other than the United States. A future study could compare organizations whose national cultures represent different degrees of power distance. Another dimension to explore may be to test and compare a servant-led organization next to an organization that espouses a dissimilar leadership philosophy.

### *Conclusion*

The findings demonstrate that there is a significant, positive relationship between servant-leadership and emotional intelligence. Why is emotional



intelligence important to servant-leaders? Without it, the servant-leader is at greater peril of migrating toward a self-serving orientation. Emotional intelligence enables servant-leaders to manage their own emotions and to recognize and understand the emotions of others. This dual role of emotions is a salient factor in leadership effectiveness. With emotional intelligence as a guide, the servant-leader has the distinct benefit of developing moral interpersonal relationships with followers that can lead to enhanced leadership effectiveness.

This empirical study provides further support for cultivating a servant-leadership culture. Both organizations transformed from a traditional leadership structure to a culture focused on stewardship, ethical conduct, caring behavior, and community. The leaders in these organizations recognized the intrinsic value of their associates by making a commitment to foster their personal growth, while at the same time searching for ways to improve society as a whole. It takes time, courage, commitment, and a strong belief in the long-term goal that the meaningful culture being created will change the world for the collective good of society.

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#### APPENDIX A: LIDEN ET AL. (2008) SERVANT-LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS

1. *Emotional healing*—the act of showing sensitivity to others' personal concerns
2. *Creating value for the community*—a conscious, genuine concern for helping the community
3. *Conceptual skills*—possessing the knowledge of the organization and tasks at hand so as to be in a position to effectively support and assist others, especially immediate followers
4. *Empowering*—encouraging and facilitating others, especially immediate followers, in identifying and solving problems, as well as determining when and how to complete work tasks
5. *Helping subordinates grow and succeed*—demonstrating genuine concern for others' career growth and development by providing support and mentoring



6. *Putting subordinates first*—using actions and words to make it clear to others (especially immediate followers) that satisfying their work needs is a priority (Supervisors who practice this principle will often break from their own work to assist subordinates with problems they are facing with their assigned duties.)
7. *Behaving ethically*—interacting openly, fairly, and honestly with others

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#### APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS OF THE COMPETENCIES MEASURED BY THE ESCI

##### *Self-Awareness*

- Emotional self-awareness: the ability to understand our own emotions and their effects on our performance

##### *Self-Management*

- Emotional self-control: the ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses in check and maintain our effectiveness under stressful or hostile conditions
- Achievement orientation: striving to meet or exceed a standard of excellence; looking for ways to do things better, set challenging goals, and take calculated risks
- Positive outlook: the ability to see the positive in people, situations, and events and our persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks
- Adaptability: flexibility in handling change, juggling multiple demands, and adapting our ideas or approaches

##### *Social Awareness*

- Empathy: the ability to sense others' feelings and perspectives, taking an active interest in their concerns and picking up cues to what is being felt and thought
- Organizational awareness: the ability to read a group's emotional currents and power relationships, identifying influencers, networks, and dynamics





## *Relationship Management*

- Influence: the ability to have a positive impact on others, persuading or convincing others in order to gain their support
- Coach and mentor: the ability to foster the long-term learning or development of others by giving feedback and support
- Conflict management: the ability to help others through emotional or tense situations, tactfully bringing disagreements into the open and finding solutions all can endorse
- Inspirational leadership: the ability to inspire and guide individuals and groups to get the job done, and to bring out the best in others
- Teamwork: the ability to work with others toward a shared goal; participating actively, sharing responsibility and rewards, and contributing to the capability of the team

(Hay Group, 2011)

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