

# Development of the attitude to Service Leadership Scale in Hong Kong

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## Abstract

Attitude is an important component of leadership qualities. Leaders who believe in the potential of the followers would allow more room for followers to make decisions. Leaders who believe in the importance of moral character would uphold moral principles in their work. With the gradual decline of manufacturing industries and the rise of service industries, there is a need to nurture leaders who can effectively lead in the challenging environment of service economies. In particular, fostering positive attitudes is an important task to be achieved. Unfortunately, measures of service leadership qualities are almost non-existent in the scientific leadership literature. In this paper, the theory and concepts surrounding attitudes towards Service Leadership are outlined. The different steps underlying the development of the Service Leadership Attitude Scale are also described, including literature review, item development, initial validation and main survey.

**Keywords:** Service leadership, attitude, scale, Chinese, development

## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has undergone paradigm shifts in the concepts, framework and application of leadership (1). Hence, the traditional economic theory, which is based on the industrial paradigm, might not be applicable to the service world (2). With the rapid evolution in information and communication technology, personalized services have become increasingly important. In fact, service has become the major economic sector in most developed nations. For example, service industry accounts for almost 80% of the economy in the United Kingdom and the United States (3). In 2013, about 93% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Hong Kong was comprised of a wide range of services, such as hotel and food

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services, banking and insurance, and professional and business services (4).

According to Shek, Chung and Leung (5), there are differences between manufacturing economy and service economy in terms of leadership qualities. For example, while leadership in manufacturing economy is more top-down, it is more bottom-up in service economy. Besides, service leaders need to be more sensitive to different needs and expectations of the customers (6). Moving from a manufacture-oriented economy to a service-oriented economy means that the leaders need to be more responsive to customers' needs in the knowledge-intensive market (7).

## **The nature of service leadership**

With the rise of the service economy, customers have become part of the organizational system (8). The increased diversity of customer backgrounds has imposed variability in the service provider-customer (supplier-customer) relationship (9) and led to a greater level of organizational uncertainty (7). Hence, identifying and satisfying the needs of customers have become an integral cost of the firm (10). In particular, emphasis on consumer experiences of services has become a key differentiator in this highly competitive world (11). Leaders have to manage their organization effectively in order to stay ahead in the highly competitive market. Researchers proposed the use of "customer-centered" service-related competence models, which focus on the leadership behaviors and skills of service leadership to promote the quality of service.

Based on his experience in the service industries, Chung (12) proposed the Service Leadership Theory which posited that it is important to identify effective leadership competencies in the face of the competitive business environment. Under the framework of the Hong Kong Institute of Service Leadership and Management (SLAM), service leaders aim at "providing quality personal service to everyone one comes into contact with, including one's self, others, groups, communities, systems, and environments" (12, p. 5). Compared with the conventional leadership theories (e.g., authentic leadership, transformation leadership), service leadership focuses on changing the followers' beliefs and perceptions about them-

selves and promoting followers' positive behavior (13-15).

There are several unique characteristics of Service Leadership. First, meeting others' needs is a unique feature of Service Leadership. The major premise of the Service Leadership Theory is that leaders promote positive organizational outcomes by satisfying the followers' needs and facilitating their development. Through this empowering process, followers feel more attracted to their service leaders, see them as role models and thereby recognize their optimal level of performance. This is different from the leader-oriented and hierarchical nature of the previous leadership theories (5). The de-emphasis of the hierarchical nature of leadership allows employees to act proactively and initiate changes from the bottom-up in order to address the needs at work (16). Through this changing authority process, employees perceive themselves as part of the organization and feel that they have autonomy to exercise their personal judgment with greater job responsibilities, resulting in increasing job satisfaction and organizational commitment (17, 18). Research studies show that adaptive employees reported better well-being (19, 20), a higher level of proactive skills (21) and greater organizational identification (16).

Second, development of followers' competence is another unique feature of the Service Leadership Theory. Effective leaders motivate others to excel themselves through achieving the organizational goals (22). Service leaders encourage the followers to take challenges and to develop personal accountability. In order to differentiate themselves from others who are competitive and to keep staying ahead in the market, leaders seek ways to provide high-quality service for their customers (23, 24). Providing high-quality service thus becomes a prerequisite for organizational success.

Third, high-quality service is provided when the service leaders possess effective intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies (5, 25, 26). Effective service leaders should have high intrapersonal competencies in four areas, namely intelligence quotient (IQ), adversity quotient (AQ), emotional quotient (EQ) and spiritual quotient (SQ). IQ refers to the ability to critically analyze a problem and to search for innovative ways to solve the problem. AQ is defined as the ability to accept and overcome the

difficulties by bouncing back from the challenges. EQ refers to the ability to understand one's own and others' emotions and to manage one's emotions when interacting with others. SQ refers to the ability to share the vision and mission with the followers and to solve problems by utilizing spiritual resources. Moreover, service leaders should have good interpersonal competencies so that they can communicate and work effectively with people of diverse backgrounds (27).

Fourth, moral character is an important attribute of effective service leaders. In particular, honesty and integrity are two major characteristics of a highly effective leadership (28). Service leaders respond with trust and respect and express a strong preference for followers' needs over their own needs (29). Ethical leaders are fully aware of the effects of their behaviors on the development of the followers. They are always aware of their own moral values, perspectives and behaviors and transform their followers into moral agents (30). Acting as change agents, service leaders transform followers into moral agents by behaving morally, developing a moral identity and creating ethical atmosphere (31). Babalola et al. (32) highlighted the importance of ethical leadership in promoting followers' ability to handle conflicting situations. Empirical evidence (14, 33, 34) has shown the link between ethical leadership and followers' morality (i.e., moral identity, moral emotions, moral behaviors, and organizational commitment).

Fifth, effective service leaders must put the interests of the followers first. More specifically, the focus on helping and serving others is the central tenet of service leadership (35). Service leaders show a genuine concern for the followers' welfare and focus on personalized care in creating an atmosphere that promotes the effectiveness of the team (29). They serve as role models for intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation (25). Under this warm and supportive environment, employees feel secured and encouraged to explore innovative solutions in their work and to share their thoughts with their leaders (36).

Sixth, self-improvement is an important attribute of an effective service leader. Effective service leaders constantly evaluate their behavior and performance through reflection (37). Self-reflection helps

individuals to rethink or restructure their assumptions that underlie their own actions, beliefs and behaviors (38). The significance of critical reflection has been demonstrated (39, 40). Self-development is one of the significant competencies in the service industry (37, 41). Customized service is characterized by complexity and utilization of specialized knowledge and skills (42, 43). Effective service leaders are likely to rethink their own working performance, are more aware of others' needs and feel more motivated to promote personal growth. Reflection helps the individuals in personal growth and continuous improvement of leadership skills and knowledge. They are more willing to make changes and seek resources in order to adapt to the uncertain environment (37). This leads to positive influence on the employees through the empowerment process (44, 45). Employees become more welcome for changes and actively engage in continuous personal and professional development (46, 47).

Finally, the notion of "everyone can be a leader" is a defining characteristic of service leadership. In contrast to the concept of "elitist leadership" (i.e., only those who are talented can be leaders), the Service Leadership Theory emphasizes the notion that "everybody can be a leader". This notion suggests that everybody has potential to be a leader and the key is training and opportunities for development. This humanistic assumption is very empowering in nature, providing much space for development for the leaders and followers.

## **Assessment of attitude to leadership**

Facing the ever-changing business environment, new organization learning processes and informational activities have been rapidly increasing (2). Leaders are expected to acknowledge individual differences and tailor their service to meet individual needs (15). Yukl (48) argued that effective leadership may largely depend on the contexts (49). The contemporary leadership theories often focus on how leaders' characteristics and behaviors influence the followers and organizational outcomes (50). As such, some researchers began to study the factors related to effective leadership from the followers' perspective (17, 51-53). In leadership research, attitude towards

the leader refers to the degree of favorability one perceives a leader (54). Wielkiewicz et al. (55) highlighted the importance of understanding of leadership development from the followers' perspective.

Recently, researchers have developed measurement tools to assess attitudes to leadership. For example, Wielkiewicz (56) developed the Leadership Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (LABS-III) which assessed both hierarchical thinking and systematic thinking about leadership. The scale has two dimensions with 14 items per subscale. This scale has been used to assess college students' attitude towards leadership (55, 57, 58). Also, the Operating Room Management Attitudes Questionnaire (ORMAQ; 59, 60) was used to measure the attitudes towards six areas of leadership: assertiveness, teamwork, communication, leadership structure, awareness of personal limitations, and organizational issues. This scale has been tested in the fields of aviation (61) and medicine (59) but no factor analysis has been conducted.

Besides, the attitude towards service has been studied (23, 62, 63). For example, customers' perception of service quality is an assessment of overall service excellence (23) and subjective evaluation of service quality has a close relationship with customer satisfaction (64). Literature on service quality suggests that employees' attitude towards leaders are essential to determine customer satisfaction (65). Parasuraman et al. (23) developed a 22-item tool assessing five dimensions of service quality, namely tangibles, reliabilities, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, and found support for the reliability and factor structure of the scale.

Unfortunately, although there are some measures assessing the attitude to service quality, existing scales for measuring the attitude towards service leadership are relatively scarce. For example, Wu (66) developed three items (e.g., "My service provider offers a larger choice of services for customers"; "My service provider satisfies customers' different needs with more diversified service"; "My service provider offers services of great variety") to assess service leadership and tested its impact on loyalty and brand equity via structural equation modeling which showed support for the reliability and validity of this

construct. However, the coverage of these items on leadership qualities is not in-depth. In fact, despite the fact that service is playing an important role in the global economy, research on service development has lagged behind compared with the research on the manufacturing industry (67). More research in this area can be helpful for the employers to understand which type of leadership style is the most suitable and appropriate in terms of the organizational and follower outcomes. Studying the attitudes of service leadership from employees' perspective is important because leaders need to create a positive atmosphere and accountability for employees so that organizational outcomes of interest (e.g., performance, satisfaction, leadership) can be achieved. Hence, psychometrically sound instruments would help researchers and practitioners understand individuals' attitudes towards service leadership.

Service is a process of applying one's knowledge and skills for the benefit of employees or customers (68). Empirical findings showed that followers' attitudes towards leadership were positively related to follower positive outcomes, such as teamwork performance (62), job satisfaction (69) and organizational performance (70). The establishment of psychometrically sound instruments will definitely increase our understanding of effective leadership in the service industry. Given the emergence of service-oriented economy which stresses the importance of intangible products, such as experiences and the quality of the goods, more research is warranted for helping us better understand effective leadership in this area.

Besides developing scales on service leadership, testing the psychometric properties of the developed scales is an important step. While the majority of research has mostly focused on assessing convergent/divergent validity (23) and content validity (71), little is known about the factor structure of the existing scales. More specifically, exploratory factor analysis has been commonly conducted when testing the factor structure (23, 56). Although service leadership is perceived as a multidimensional concept (5, 25), a unidimensional tool has been employed (66). Clearly, more research should be conducted to test the generalizability of the Service Leadership Attitude Scale in different contexts and populations.

**Table 1. Literature review on measures of leadership and service leadership**

Steps	Details
Step 1: Literature Review on Attitudes to Leadership Measures, Particularly in Different Chinese Contexts	<p><i>Examples of References:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Casimir, G., &amp; Waldman, D. A. (2007). A cross cultural comparison of the importance of leadership traits for effective low-level and high-level leaders: Australia and China. <i>International Journal of Cross Cultural Management</i>, 7(1), 47-60.</li> <li>– Chan, K. Y., &amp; Drasgow, F. (2001). Toward a theory of individual differences and leadership: Understanding the motivation to lead. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>, 86(3), 481-498.</li> <li>– Cheng, B. S., Boer, D., Chou, L. F., Huang, M. P., Yoneyama, S., Shim, D., &amp; Tsai, C. Y. (2014). Paternalistic leadership in four East Asian societies: Generalizability and cultural differences of the triad model. <i>Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology</i>, 45(1), 82-90.</li> <li>– Ho, J., &amp; Nesbit, P. L. (2009). A refinement and extension of the self-leadership scale for the Chinese context. <i>Journal of Managerial Psychology</i>, 24(5), 450-476.</li> <li>– Lan, X. M., &amp; Chong, W. Y. (2015). The mediating role of psychological empowerment between transformational leadership and employee work attitudes. <i>Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences</i>, 172, 184-191.</li> <li>– Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., &amp; Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multi-dimensional measure and multi-level assessment. <i>The Leadership Quarterly</i>, 19(2), 161-177.</li> <li>– Ling, W., Chia, R. C., &amp; Fang, L. (2000). Chinese implicit leadership theory. <i>The Journal of Social Psychology</i>, 140(6), 729-739.</li> <li>– Spreitzer, G. M., Perttula, K. H., &amp; Xin, K. (2005). Traditionality matters: An examination of the effectiveness of transformational leadership in the United States and Taiwan. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>, 26(3), 205-227.</li> </ul>
Step 2: Literature Review on Service Leadership	<p><i>Examples of References:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., &amp; Li, X. (2015). The role of a caring disposition in service leadership. <i>International Journal on Disability and Human Development</i>, 14(4), 319-332.</li> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., &amp; Lin, L. (2015a). Leadership and mentorship: Service leaders as mentors of the followers. <i>International Journal on Disability and Human Development</i>, 14, 351-359. doi: 10.1515/ijdhhd-2015-0456</li> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., &amp; Lin, L. (2015b). Intrapersonal competences and service leadership. <i>International Journal on Disability and Human Development</i>, 14(3), 255-263.</li> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., Lin, L., Leung, H., Yu, L., Ma, C. M. S., &amp; Li, X. (2017). Content validation of the service leadership attitudes scale. In D. T. L. Shek, P. P. Y. Chung, L. Lin, &amp; J. Merrick (Eds.), <i>Service leadership education for university students</i> (pp. 205-225). New York: Nova Sciences.</li> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., Ma, C. M. S., &amp; Liu, T. T. (2015). Adolescent developmental assets and service leadership. <i>International Journal on Disability and Human Development</i>, 14(3), 275-283.</li> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., Ma, C. M. S., Liu, T. T., &amp; Siu, A. M. H. (2015). The role of self-leadership in service leadership. <i>International Journal on Disability and Human Development</i>, 14, 343-350. doi: 10.1515/ijdhhd-2015-0455</li> <li>– Shek, D. T. L., Yu, L., &amp; Siu, A. M. H. (2015). Interpersonal competence and service leadership. <i>International Journal on Disability and Human Development</i>, 14, 265-274. doi: 10.1515/ijdhhd-2015-0407</li> </ul>

## Development of the Service Leadership Attitude Scale

In Hong Kong, service industries account for nearly 93% of the GDP. Despite the importance of service industries, there is a gap in the development of service leadership in Hong Kong. In view of this deficiency, the Victor and William Fung Foundation made a

donation of HK\$40 million to support the Service Leadership Education initiative with the participation of the eight institutions supported by the University Grants Committee. In each university, curriculum materials and subjects on Service Leadership were developed. With this good foundation, one unresolved question is on the availability of objective measures of Service Leadership knowledge, attitude and skills.

**Table 2. Initial development of the Long-Form (SLA-LF-132) and Short-Form (SLA-SF-73) Service Leadership Attitude Scale**

Steps	Details
<p>Step 3: Development of the Item Pool (132 Items) with Reference to the Main Proposed Domains</p>	<p>Eight domains were proposed in 132-item long-form Service Leadership Attitude Scale (SLA-LF-132) including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[1] <i>Service Orientation</i> (e.g., Good leaders serve without expecting any rewards),</li> <li>[2] <i>Everyone can be a leader</i> (e.g., Only the elites can lead, reverse-item),</li> <li>[3] <i>Distributed Leadership</i> (e.g., Good leaders are open to challenge and criticism),</li> <li>[4] <i>Employability</i> (e.g., Lucrative leadership positions go to people who are eager and able to serve others),</li> <li>[5] <i>Personalized Service</i> (e.g., Sensitivity towards people’s specific needs is an important trait for any leaders),</li> <li>[6] <i>Attitudes towards Service</i> (e.g., Service providers find it intrinsically enjoyable to render good-quality service ),</li> <li>[7] <i>Principle “E=MC<sup>2</sup>”</i> (e.g., Moral character: Good leaders do not break promises; Competence: Good leaders make convincing arguments; Caring disposition: Good leaders are forgiving.), and</li> <li>[8] <i>Commitment to Continuous Improvement</i> (e.g., One can develop his/her ability to lead).</li> </ul>
<p>Step 4: Initial Validation of the Original Scale (i.e., SLA-LF-132; 132 Items)</p>	<p>The SLA-LF-132 was subjected to a quasi-experimental validation study in semester 1 of the 2016/17 academic year. A total of 208 PolyU students took the pre-test while 190 did the post-test. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on 200 sets of pre-test questionnaires. Results of the EFA informed the retention of a 5-factor, 73-item solution (i.e., SLA-SF-73) which recorded good reliability and a significant and positive correlation with the short-form Service Leadership Knowledge Scale (SLK-SF-50). See below for the five factors extracted and two sample items for each factor.</p>
<p>Step 5: Development of Scale Used in the Main Survey (i.e., SLA-SF-73; 73 items) and the Major Domains</p>	<p><i>Factor 1: Attitudes towards service and competences</i>                      1. Good leaders serve with a genuine heart.                      20. Good leaders can handle stressful situations calmly.</p> <p><i>Factor 2: Attitudes towards moral character and caring disposition</i>                      29. A good leader should be people-oriented.                      39. Good leaders always tell the truth.</p> <p><i>Factor 3: Attitudes towards self-reflection</i>                      64. A good leader is self-restraint.                      68. Genuine leaders are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p><i>Factor 4: Everyone can be a leader</i>                      5. Not everyone is able to lead others. (reverse-item)                      6. Only the “best of the best” can lead. (reverse-item)</p> <p><i>Factor 5: Implicit theory of leadership</i>                      62. Leadership competence is not something that can be changed through learning. (reverse-item)                      63. The ability to lead is inborn and not changeable. (reverse-item)</p>

Note. All sample items were slightly re-worded to avoid familiarity effect.

With further funding from the Victor and William Fung Foundation, the eight universities collaborated to develop scales on the Service Leadership knowledge, attitude and skills. As mentioned above, the Service Leadership Attitude Scale was developed within this context. As far as the Service Leadership Attitude Scale is concerned, several steps were involved:

- Step 1: Literature review on attitudes to leadership measures, particularly in different Chinese contexts
- Step 2: Literature review on Service Leadership
- Step 3: Development of the item pool (132 items) with reference to the main proposed domains
- Step 4: Initial validation of the original scale (132 items)

- Step 5: Development of scale used in the main survey (73 items) and the major domains
- Step 6: Refined scale based on exploratory factor analyses in the main survey (46 items)
- Step 7: Refined scale based on confirmatory factor analyses (46 items)

The details of different steps are outlined in Table 1-3. To assess the attitude to service leadership, Shek et al. (71) developed the 132-item Service Leadership Attitude Scale (i.e., SLA-LF-132) and conducted the initial content validity test of the scale. This scale measures various aspects of service leadership, including service orientation, the belief that everyone can be a leader, leadership competence, moral

character, caring disposition, and commitment to continuous improvement. The content validity of the scale has been established by the high content validity of the individual items and the overall questionnaires.

In this special issue, the findings on the psychometric properties of the Service Leadership Attitude Scale based on exploratory factor analyses are reported. The norms based on the samples are also outlined in another paper. The findings of the confirmatory factor analyses will be presented in another paper. Based on these publications, it can be seen that the Service Leadership Attitude Scale possesses good psychometric properties and therefore can be used in research, assessment, education, evaluation and personnel decision contexts.

**Table 3. Refined scales based on exploratory factor analyses and confirmatory factor analyses**

Steps	Details
Step 6: Refined Scale Based on Exploratory Factor Analyses (i.e., SLA-SF-46E)	<p>Nine items, which were demonstrated to possess low item-total correlation (i.e., &lt; 0.25), were dropped before the ensuing principal component analysis (PCA). Accordingly, the PCA was performed on the remaining 64 items of the SLA-SF-73 using a subset (N = 2,246) of the total sample (N = 4,486), resulting in a 7-factor structure demonstrated to be stable. Upon removing 18 items with loadings below 0.50, a 7-factor, 46-item solution (i.e., SLA-SF-46E) was retained to be subjected to exploratory factor analysis (CFA) utilizing the other subset (N = 2,240). The SLA-SF-46E recorded excellent internal consistency and strong convergent validity, with the latter evidenced by its positive and significant correlations with the external criterion scales as well as other Service Leadership scales under validation. The seven factors of SLA-SF-46E include: Vision and competence (Factor 1), People Orientation (Factor 2), Caring Disposition (Factor 3), Ethical Role Model (Factor 4), Social Competence (Factor 5), Self-Reflection and Self-Understanding (Factor 6), and Positive Views about Human Beings (Factor 7). Three sample items are featured below:</p> <p>28. Good leaders do not give in easily amidst adversity. (Factor 1).</p> <p>38. Good leaders closely examine their thoughts and behaviors. (Factor 6).</p> <p>41. Everyone has what it takes to be a leader. (Factor 7)</p>
Step 7: Refined Scale Based on Confirmatory Factor Analyses (i.e., SLA-SF-46)	<p>The 7-factor SLA-SF-46E was subjected to CFA utilizing the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator, which showed acceptable fit to the data (i.e., CFI = 0.91; NNFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.048). Analyses were based on re-incorporating a previously removed seven-item subscale (from the PCA, due to low item-total correlations) back to the main factor structure. The 8-factor, 53-item factorial structure was subjected to CFA, whereby the fit indices (i.e., CFI = 0.87; NNFI = 0.86; RMSEA = 0.053) suggested an unsatisfactory fit. Inspection of the modification indices (MI) informed the removal of 7 items, due to their extreme MIs with multiple items on the same factor. The CFA was re-run on this 8-factor, 46-item structure where results suggested a much improved fit (i.e., CFI = 0.90; NNFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.054). Inspection of MIs revealed four pairs of parameters showing extreme covariance. After incorporating the correlation between errors for these four pairs of parameters, the findings corroborated the reasonable fit of this modified structure (i.e., CFI = 0.93; NNFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.041). This modified 8-factor, 46-item solution was accordingly accepted as the finalized solution (i.e., SLA-SF-46). The SLA-SF-46 comprises <i>an identical factor structure and labeling as the SLA-SF-46E</i>, with the addition of the eighth factor entitled "Unchangeable and Dark Human Nature". Two sample items of this factor were shown below:</p> <p>43. One's ability to lead is inborn and hardly changeable (reverse-item).</p> <p>45. People need to be checked to ensure they work as required (reverse-item).</p> <p>The SLA-SF-46 and the subscales showed good reliability and convergent validity, with the latter evidenced by the positive and significant associations with the external criterion scales and other Service Leadership scales.</p>

Note. All sample items were slightly re-worded to minimize familiarity effect.

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## Ethical compliance

The authors have stated all possible conflicts of interest within this work. The authors have stated all sources of funding for this work. If this work involved human participants, informed consent was received from each individual. If this work involved human participants, it was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. If this work involved experiments with humans or animals, it was conducted in accordance with the related institutions' research ethics guidelines.

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