



Response

Comments on Dannhauser and Boshoff's "Structural Equivalence of the Barbuto and Wheeler Servant Leadership Questionnaire on North American and South African Samples"

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Comments and additional discussion are offered in response to a translation attempt of the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), which appeared in an earlier issue of IJLS (Volume 2, Issue 2, 2007; www.regent.edu/ijls). Suggestions for future research are discussed.

Greenleaf (1970) described servant leadership as a philosophy of leadership that embraces a selfless, service-oriented approach to leading others. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) clarified the construct and operationalized servant leadership with the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ). In their model, five dimensions of servant leadership were identified: altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship.

Dannhauser and Boshoff (2007) attempted to study servant leadership in a cross-cultural setting by translating the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) to Afrikaans for use in South Africa. The original English version and the Afrikaans translation of the SLQ was distributed to 417 salespersons from 100 automobile dealerships in an effort to produce a viable measure for that population. Participants were given the option to complete the instrument in either English or Afrikaans. The authors did not delineate the number of subjects from the sample that completed the form in the original language versus the translated version nor was any type of cultural comparison provided.

A vital concern in such an endeavor is the feasibility of direct translation from English to another language (Weeks, Swerissen, & Belfrage, 2007). Brislin (1970) proposed a method of

translation which was used by Dannhauser and Boshoff (2007). Brislin suggested seven criteria for successfully back-translating psychometric instruments:

1. Write an English form that is likely to be translatable.
2. Secure competent translators familiar with the content involved in the source language materials.
3. Instruct one bilingual to translate from the source to the target language and another to blindly translate back to the original language – allow the translator some practice time.
4. Have several raters examine the original questionnaire and the back-translated versions for errors that lead to differences in meanings (repeat steps 3 until 100% error free).
5. When no meaning errors are found pre-test the translated materials with population that speaks the translated (target) language – revise the translation and/or the original English in light of insights gained during the pretest – no conclusions about the construct may be made until the translated measure can achieve similar psychometric properties.
6. To demonstrate translation adequacy administer the materials to bilingual subjects, some who see the English versions and some who see the translation, and some who see both. Response should be similar across groups as assessed by means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients.
7. Report experience using the different criteria for equivalence.

Brislin argued that there are many effective ways to do back-translation; however, explicit criteria must be followed carefully to ensure a successful and reliable operationalization.

The process of translation was not reported, assessed, or discussed in the Dannhauser and Boshoff (2007) study. Without such detail, the quality of the translation cannot be assessed, nor could a replication of their work be completed by anyone other than themselves. The reported singular factor structure for servant leadership may provide evidence that Brislin's (1970) fifth criterion was not followed. Based on Brislin's recommendations, this finding necessitates further linguistic efforts until reliable and valid translation is achieved. Brislin suggested meaning in the original concept can be lost in translation. Greater refinement with process of translation of the SLQ is required before cross-cultural and psychometric conclusions can be drawn.

Furthermore, it is unclear that Dannhauser and Boshoff adhered to the steps described by Brislin (1970), nor did the authors report the degree of success achieved from these processes—particularly the re-iterations that are clearly necessary and the face validity processes suggested. Providing information on the processes used during translation ensures adherence to a standardized process and provides future studies with an operational framework for such translations.

The title of Dannhauser and Boshoff's study implied a North American comparison sample, but it appeared that the sample was entirely South African. Additionally, the South African sample reportedly had the option of choosing the English version or the translated version of the SLQ. Dannhauser and Boshoff (2007) did not report the number of participants in the sample that chose either version. Descriptive statistics and between group comparison may have provided insight on the transferability of the servant leadership concept to South African culture. Separate factor analyses for both versions of the instrument may have strengthened the argument that servant leadership is a one-dimensional construct in this sample or may have provided insight into translation issues which the authors could have addressed.

Brislin (1970) suggested in step seven of his criteria to report on all criteria in the prior six steps—this information was not provided in the Dannhauser and Boshoff (2007) study. It is unclear that Brislin's first 6 steps were followed, but step 7—reporting all results from steps 1-6—was not provided in their manuscript. Recent work applying Brislin's steps has explicitly reported all findings from each step, which provided evidentiary information about the quality of the translation (e.g., Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005).

Future studies aiming to translate research measures across languages are encouraged to adhere to the processes outlined by Brislin (1970). Additionally, future research should include such processes in the methods section of the work so that other researchers may assess the quality of translation and replicate the work.

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