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Psychometric properties of the Self-reported Spanish version of the Multidimensional Servant Leadership Scale in Military Context

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Abstract | **Background:** In recent years, the Spanish Army has prioritised leadership development. Servant Leadership is a model aligned with the Spanish military ethic. To facilitate this development, tools are needed to assess this leadership style in military contexts. Although there is a Spanish version of the Servant Leadership scale that collects followers' perceptions, there is currently no self-reported scale adapted to the military context. The aim of this study is to adapt and validate the self-reported Multidimensional Servant Leadership Scale (MSLS) in Spanish for the military context. **Method:** A Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted with a sample of 382 military personnel from the Spanish Army who completed an online questionnaire. JASP version 0.8.3.1 was used to perform this analysis. **Results:** The results replicated the seven-factor structure of the original scale. In terms of criterion validity, we found that several dimensions of the scale were significantly related to leader engagement, organisational identification, and psychological capital although not all dimensions were significant. **Conclusions:** This paper provides a tool with psychometric guarantees that measures self-perception of Servant Leadership in Spanish military contexts.

Keywords: Servant leadership, Spanish Army, self-reported, scale validation, Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Propiedades psicométricas de la versión española autoinformada de la Escala Multidimensional de Liderazgo de Servicio en el Contexto Militar

Resumen | **Antecedentes:** en los últimos años, el Ejército español ha priorizado el desarrollo del liderazgo. El Liderazgo de Servicio es un modelo alineado con la ética militar española. Para facilitar este desarrollo se requieren herramientas que evalúen este liderazgo en contextos militares. Aunque existe una versión española de la escala de Liderazgo de Servicio que recoge las percepciones de los seguidores, no existe en la actualidad una escala autoinformada adaptada al contexto militar. El objetivo de este artículo es adaptar y validar la Escala Multidimensional de Liderazgo de Servicio autoinformada (MSLS) en español para el contexto militar. **Método:** se realizó un análisis factorial confirmatorio con una muestra de 382 militares del Ejército español que cumplimentaron un cuestionario online. Para realizar este análisis se empleó el programa JASP versión 0.8.3.1. **Resultados:** los resultados replicaron la estructura de siete factores de la escala original. En

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cuanto a la validez de criterio, encontramos que varias dimensiones de la escala estaban significativamente relacionadas con el compromiso del líder, la identificación organizacional y el capital psicológico, aunque no todas fueron significativas. **Conclusiones:** este trabajo proporciona una herramienta con garantías psicométricas que mide la autopercepción de Liderazgo de Servicio en contextos militares españoles.

Palabras clave: Liderazgo de servicio, autoinforme, validación de escala, Ejército español, análisis factorial confirmatorio

Having exceptional leaders is critical for any organisation, but it takes on heightened importance in the Armed Forces, where lives and national security hang in the balance. The environments in which the Armed Forces operate are characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, significant stress, and substantial emotional demands. Research in different contexts reiterates the idea that Servant Leadership (hereafter, SL) is indeed an effective leadership approach in today's organisations, operating in complex, changing environments with high levels of uncertainty and stress, showing positive effects on followers' satisfaction, organisational commitment, service quality, work engagement, service climate, creativity, psychological capital, organisational citizenship behaviour, psychological safety, trust in leader and performance, and negative correlations with employees' burnout, stress and turnover intentions (Ahmed et al., 2023; Daniel et al., 2023; Mahon, 2021; Neubert et al., 2022; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2021). Specifically in military organisations, leaders who practice SL by focusing on the needs and development of their followers foster greater engagement and satisfaction amongst soldiers. This, in turn, enhances performance and ultimately contributes to the success of military operations (Bahmani et al., 2021; Earnhardt, 2008; Richardson et al., 2023; Wuli et al., 2020). Given the positive effects of SL on individuals and organisations, it is pertinent to develop this leadership style in military leaders where the potential consequences of poor leadership can be catastrophic.

In recent years, the Spanish Army has prioritised leadership development and the cultivation of a leadership and ethical culture at all levels within military units, positioning these efforts as a key pillar of a modern army. In fact, self-knowledge and self-leadership have also been incorporated into the conception of professional military (MADOC, 2018). Additionally, a new training model for officer education has been implemented, emphasising leadership as a transversal competence in the military curriculum throughout the five years of education (JEME, 2024). SL is a model aligned with ethics-based military culture in which command is considered a way of serving and the spirit of service is rooted in doctrine and rules of action. In fact, ethical culture is a very important variable in promoting positive work behaviour and satisfaction amongst the staff (Mesquita-Resende et al., 2022; Topa & Moriano, 2012). All these motivations justify the interest and need to promote the development of research on SL applied to the military environment.

Essentially, SL is a set of behaviours that must be developed and trained (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al; 2008; Sendjaya & Sendjaya, 2015). However, Luthans and Avolio (2003) argue that an effective leadership development process requires, amongst other factors, an increase in the leader's self-awareness. Optimal leadership arises when there is alignment between external evaluations (e.g., assessments by followers) and self-evaluations conducted by leaders themselves. This alignment reflects high levels of leader's self-awareness which in turn fosters mutual trust and enhances employee satisfaction, all of which are essential for effective teamwork and the achievement of shared goals (Curtis & Douglas, 2024; Kelly, 2023). Thus, for fostering self-awareness, self-evaluations remain crucial for comparison with the external assessment (London et al., 2023). Indeed, Flynn et al. (2016) established a positive relationship between a leader's self-evaluation and the adoption of SL behaviours, suggesting that self-evaluation is crucial for the emergence of SL.

Liden et al. (2008) developed a behavioural and multidimensional model of SL and a widely used scale to measure it through the perception of followers in any type of organisation. The Multidimensional Servant Leadership Scale (MSLS) has been adapted and validated in several languages, including Spanish (Edú-Valsania et al., 2023). However, the MSLS lacks a self-reported version in Spanish. From a theoretical perspective self-reported leadership scales show the perceptions of how leaders see themselves, being a good reflection of their self-concept with important repercussions on their self-efficacy (Schyns & Sczesny, 2010) and behaviour (Wisse & Rus, 2012). Therefore, the present study aims to provide a psychometrically sound self-rated Spanish adaptation of the MSLS tailored to military contexts, and specifically: (1) To test its factorial structure; (2) To verify the reliability of the scale at both the global and factorial levels; and (3) To test its concurrent, discriminant and criterion validity.

Multidimensionality of Servant Leadership (SL)

The concept of SL was proposed for the first time by Greenleaf (1970). However, the theoretical model of SL has been further reviewed, redefined and developed by different authors, resulting in several definitions and operationalisations of SL (e.g., Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Although these operationalisations consider SL as a multidimensional construct (composed of different factors), the various approaches differ in terms of which factors are key to SL (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Nonetheless, all operationalisations of SL share common features of

servant leaders and currently SL is understood as "an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership, (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community" (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

To summarise the dimensionality of SL, Liden et al. (2008) developed a multidimensional model for organisational settings consisting of seven factors:

Factor 1: Emotional healing. This factor implies that the leader understands and cares about their team's feelings, and emotional well-being, offering emotional support when needed and listening receptively to others.

Factor 2: Creating value for the community. This characteristic means showing conscious and genuine actions for helping the community, as well as modelling these behaviours amongst followers and inspiring their team to contribute to the greater good.

Factor 3: Conceptual skills. This factor includes a deep understanding of the organisation and strong skills in providing practical and technical support to their teams and assisting collaborators in task-related matters.

Factor 4: Empowering. This factor means encouraging and fostering followers' self-determination to solve work-related problems. The leader encourages their team members to take ownership of their work.

Factor 5: Helping subordinates grow and succeed. This characteristic implies demonstrating authentic concern for subordinates' career growth and development by providing support and mentoring.

Factor 6: Putting subordinates first. This factor involves demonstrating through actions that fulfiling followers' work needs is a priority. It also implies that servant leaders are willing to sacrifice their own interests for the greater good of the team members and organisation.

Factor 7: Behaving ethically. This factor means interacting openly, fairly, and honestly with others and displaying consistent behaviour based on ethical standards, setting a positive example for their team.

Based on this model, Liden et al. (2008) constructed and validated the Multidimensional Servant Leadership Scale (MSLS). Recently, Edú-Valsania et al. (2023) adapted and validated the MSLS to Spanish replicating the same structure as the original scale composed of seven factors. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: The structure of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS will consist of seven factors, including: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first and behaving ethically.

Another objective of the present study is to examine the criterion validity of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS by analysing the relationship between SL dimensions and other theoretically related constructs (McIntire & Miller, 2005). In our study, we focus on lead-

er's engagement, organisational identification, and positive psychological capital. The reason for focusing on these three variables is based on the one hand, on their high relevance in psychological research and, on the other hand, on their significant positive effect on the performance and behaviour of leaders and teams. (Lacárcel-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Laguía et al., 2021; Prieto-Díez et al., 2021; Ruíz et al., 2024; Topa et al., 2010).

According to Van Dierendonck (2011) leaders who practice SL experience greater satisfaction and sense of purpose, which contributes to increased engagement. Empirically Lan et al. (2023) found that engaging in SL behaviours promoted leaders' psychological meaningfulness, thus increasing their work engagement. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Self-reported SL will be positively related to leader's engagement.

According to Eva et al. (2019) servant leaders experience a greater alignment between their own values and those of the organisation, which reinforces their sense of belonging and commitment, increasing their organisational identification. From a relational authenticity approach (Spitzmuller & Ilies, 2010), exemplary SL behaviours strengthen leaders' own identification with their organisations. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 3: Self-reported SL will be positively related to leader's organisational identification.

Psychological capital (hereafter, Psycap) comprises efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007). Avolio et al. (2009) found that leaders who adopt positive and ethical behaviours, such as those exemplified in SL, tend to experience higher levels of Psycap. Similarly, Pfrombeck and Verdorfer (2018) and Langhof and Güldenberg (2020) reported a positive relationship between Psycap and SL. Thus, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 4: Self-reported SL will be positively related to leader's Psycap.

Method

Participants

Cadet officers of the Spanish "General Military Academy" located in Zaragoza, Spain, were invited to participate in this research. The sample of this study consisted of 382 military cadets in training (84.4% male) with an average age of 21.02 years (*SD* = 2.11, 18-33).

Instruments

The questionnaire used in this study consists of the following sections.

Self-reported Servant Leadership. We assessed SL using an adaptation of the Spanish version (Edú-Valsania et al., 2023) of the original MSLS (Liden et al., 2008). The adaptation involved rewriting the items in the first person rather than the third person. This scale contains 28 items grouped into seven factors: emotional heal-

ing (four items; e.g., "I care about the well-being of my subordinates"), creating value for the community (four items; e.g., "I am always interested in helping people in the Army"), conceptual skills (four items; e.g., I am able to think effectively to solve complex problems"), empowering (four items; e.g., "I encourage my subordinates to handle important work decisions on their own"), helping subordinates grow and succeed (four items; e.g., "I am interested in ensuring that my subordinates achieve their professional goals"), putting subordinates first (four items; e.g., "I put the interests of my subordinates before my own") and behaving ethically (four items; e.g., " I am always honest"). The scale was designed with a six-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree).

Engagement. We used the Spanish translation of the reduced three-item version (e.g., "I feel full of energy when I work") of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2019). The scale was designed with a seven-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 7 (fully agree). The reliability of this scale was very satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha = .90).

Organisational Identification. The Spanish version (Moriano et al., 2009) of the Organisational Identification Scale (OIS) of Mael and Ashforth (1992), composed of seven items (e.g., "The success of my organisation is my own success"), was used. The scale was designed with a six-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree). The reliability of this scale was satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha = .81).

Positive Psychological Capital (Psycap). We used the Spanish validation (Azanza et al., 2014) of the original scale (Luthans et al., 2007), which consists of twenty-four items (e.g., "I am confident in my ability to accomplish difficult tasks"). The scale was designed with a seven-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree). The reliability of this scale was very satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

Sociodemographic and control variables. We included in the study two control variables concerning the participants: gender and age.

Procedure

The study was conducted using a survey methodology. The original questionnaire in Spanish version was adapted to the language and military educational context. To this end, a pilot test was first carried out with twenty-five cadets who answered the questionnaire and no difficulties in interpretation and vocabulary were found. Participants proceeded to complete the questionnaire individually in Spanish General Military Academy classrooms while supervised by the evaluators. The questionnaire was applied online using the Qualtrics survey platform. The evaluators explained to participants how the information collected would be used, assuring them that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences, with confidentiality and anonymity regarding their responses. Since we used an anonymous online questionnaire, the study scale was only presented to those participants who expressly agreed to participate in the study after reading the information sheet and informed consent form. No personal information was collected. On average, it took participants approximately 20 minutes to complete the study questionnaire. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED, Ref.12-SISH-PSI-2024).

Data analysis

To test the factorial structure of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS, a confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) was carried out using Jeffreys' Amazing Statistics Programme (JASP) version 0.8.3.1 (JASP Team, 2024). The CFA was performed using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The reliability of the self-reported version of MSLS was evaluated by using Cronbach's alpha both for each factor and for the overall scale. Finally, an exam of convergent, discriminant and criterion validity of the instrument was also conducted. The descriptive, correlational and regression data were calculated using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 29.0.2.0).

Results

Descriptive analysis

First, we calculated the descriptive statistics of the 28 items of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS (Table 1). The values for asymmetry and kurtosis between -2 and +2 are considered acceptable in order to prove normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2019). All values met this criterion.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To test hypothesis 1, we used a CFA. The goodness of fit of the model was tested considering the following indices proposed by Byrne (2016). First, using χ^2/df, a model is considered perfect when its value is 1.00, while ratios below 2.00 are considered as indicators of a very good fit of the model, and values below 5.00 are considered acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Second, with the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990); acceptable values range between .05 and .08. The third set includes the incremental fit index (IFI; Bollen, 1989), the Tucker-Lewis's index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and the goodness of fit index (GFI; Ullman, 1996). Values of .95 or higher are considered excellent, and values greater than .90 suggest an acceptable fit of the model. Together with these indices, we considered the Akaike information criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1987) for model comparisons, so the most adequate model is the one with the lowest value in this parameter. Moreover, to test the factorial structure more accurately, we compared the proposed seven-factor model with three alternative models: a one-factor model (with all items loading in a single factor), a two-factor model, and a four-factor model. None of these alternative models offered a better fit than the seven-factor hypothesised model. The results of the CFA confirmed the original structure of the scale with seven

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, asymmetry, and kurtosis of the 28-item self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS

	M	*SD*	**Asymmetry**	**Kurtosis**
SL1	4.64	0.88	-.22	.03
SL2	5.08	0.78	-.57	.08
SL3	4.79	0.89	-.42	-.09
SL4	4.47	1.06	-.40	.00
SL5	4.95	0.97	-.87	.66
SL6	4.95	0.86	-.56	.07
SL7	4.68	1.03	-.50	-.13
SL8	4.79	0.95	-.61	.48
SL9	4.59	0.96	-.36	.01
SL10	4.58	0.90	-.18	-.43
SL11	4.21	1.14	-.27	-.37
SL12	4.44	0.96	-.22	-.48
SL13	4.61	0.92	-.27	-.38
SL14	4.58	0.94	-.28	-.17
SL15	4.52	0.91	-.31	.20
SL16	3.77	1.27	-.16	-.51
SL17	4.56	0.89	-.04	-.53
SL18	4.79	0.88	-.21	-.60
SL19	4.71	0.89	-.35	-.04
SL20	4.81	0.86	-.31	-.29
SL21	4.39	0.99	-.37	.07
SL22	4.38	1.02	-.37	-.01
SL23	4.42	1.02	-.43	.13
SL24	4.71	0.86	-.50	.61
SL25	4.98	0.90	-.70	.43
SL26	4.83	0.88	-.39	-.21
SL27	4.68	1.09	-.78	.43
SL28	5.09	0.93	-.92	.70

factors (Table 2). The fit of the seven-factor model was totally satisfactory; all values were acceptable: χ^2 (329) = 740.67; χ^2/df = 2.25; RMSEA = .06; IFI = .94; TLI = .93; CFI = .94; GFI = .98. As in Liden et al.'s (2008) original scale, the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS has seven factors. These results provided total support to our first hypothesis.

Table 2. Indices of adjustment and comparison of alternative models

Model	χ^2	*df*	χ^2/df	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI	GFI	AIC
1 Factor	1793.46	350	5.12	.10	.77	.75	.77	.93	24167.95
2 Factors	1594.40	349	4.57	.097	.80	.79	.80	.94	23970.89
4 Factors	1411.54	344	4.10	.09	.83	.82	.83	.95	23798.03
7 Factors	740.67	329	2.25	.06	.94	.93	.94	.98	23157.16

Reliability

To assess the internal consistency of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS, Cronbach's alphas were calculated for the seven factors and for the global 28-item scale. Table 3 shows the alpha coefficients of each factor (ranging from .78 to .89) and global scale (Cronbach's alpha = .92). All the coefficients exceeded the cut-off value of .70.

Table 3. Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS

Factor	Reliability (Cronbach's α)	AVE
F1 – Emotional healing	.78	.48
F2 – Creating value community	.85	.58
F3 – Conceptual skills	.82	.52
F4 – Empowering	.80	.51
F5 – Helping subordinates grow and succeed	.89	.68
F6 – Putting subordinates first	.87	.65
F7 – Behaving ethically	.82	.57
GLOBAL MSLS (28 item)	.92	

Convergent validity

Convergent validity represents the common variance between the indicators and their construct, and it is measured by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The higher the AVE value, the more representative the indicators are of the construct they load on. In general, it is suggested that this value should be above .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE values (Table 3), over .50 in factors 2 to 7, revealed adequate convergent validity; however, the AVE for factor 1 (.48) is slightly below the .50 threshold that is commonly considered acceptable. However, this minimal difference does not substantially affect the overall validity of the scale.

Additionally, a comparison of factor loadings (λ) of each item was conducted. Factor loading values over .50 indicate an acceptable relationship between the item and the factor (Hair et al., 2010). Figure 1 shows that all factor loadings met this criterion.

Discriminant validity

In addition to convergent validity, it is also important to assess the extent to which a factor is truly distinct from other factors—both in terms of how much it correlates with other factors and how distinctly items represent only this single factor. To evaluate the presence of discriminant validity between constructs, it is necessary that the square root of the AVE be superior to the correlation between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 displays the correlations between SL factors and, on the diagonal in bold italics, the square root of the AVE. In view of these results, we can affirm that there is discriminant validity between the dimensions, although factor 1 and factor 5 are closely related.

Criterion validity

An initial regression analysis (Table 5) suggested that self-reported SL was positively associated with leader's engagement (β = .43, p < .001) explaining 18% of its variance; leader's organisational identification (β = .49,

Figure 1. Structural model and factor loadings of the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS
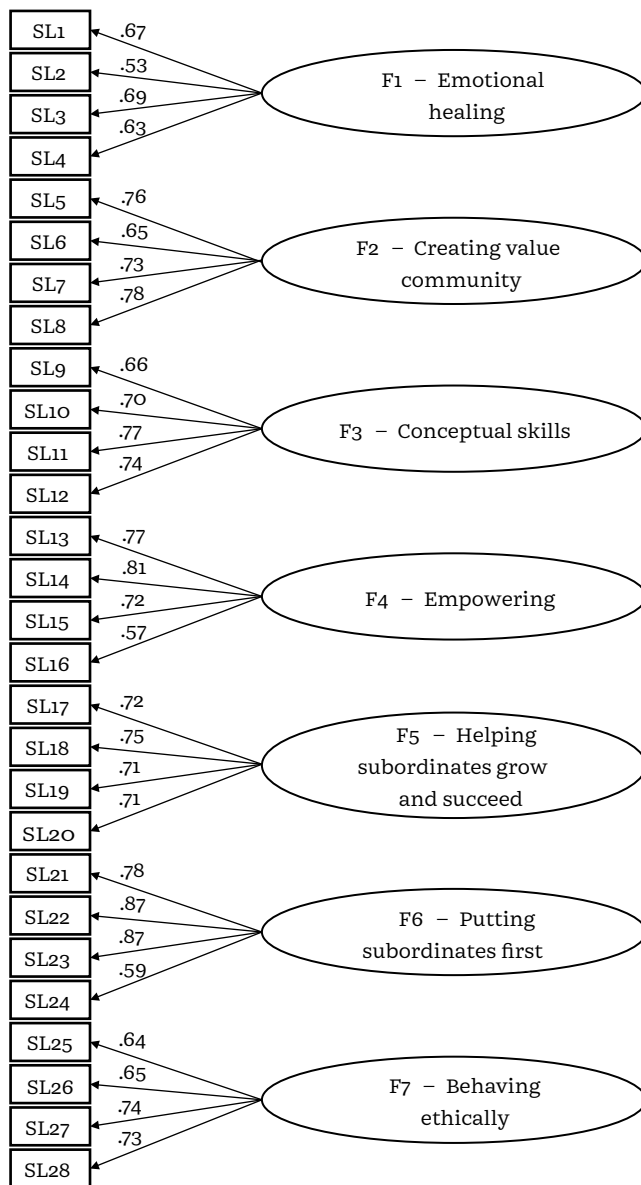
Table 5. Regression results: SL as a predictor variable (overall and by dimensions)

	Engagement	Organisational Identification	Positive Psychological Capital
Servant Leadership	.43***	.49***	.62***
Adjusted R^2	.18	.24	.38
F	85.15***	119.33***	238.64***
SL_F1_ Emotional healing	.12	.12	.06
SL_ F2_ Creating value community	.29***	.29***	.18*
SL_ F3_ Conceptual skills	.00	.16*	.32***
SL_ F4_ Empowering	-.12	-.10	.02
SL_ F5_ Helping subordinates grow and succeed	.07	.01	.01
SL_ F6_ Putting subordinates first	.01	-.04	.12*
SL_ F7_Behaving ethically	.17**	.16**	.07
Adjusted R^2	.23	.28	.40
F	16.80***	22.18***	37.9***

Note. ***p < .001. **p < .01. *p < .05.

Table 4. Factors descriptives and correlations

	M	SD	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	ENG	IDORG
F1	4,75	0.70	.69								
F2	4.84	0.79	.68**	.76							
F3	4.45	0.80	.64**	.61**	.72						
F4	4.38	0.80	.58**	.57**	.61**	.71					
F5	4.72	0.76	.69**	.71**	.58**	.62**	.82				
F6	4.47	0.83	.51**	.55**	.55**	.58**	.67**	.81			
F7	4.90	0.76	.56**	.59**	.48**	.49**	.62**	.55**	.73		
Leader's Engagement	6.00	1.07	.39**	.45**	.30**	.23**	.38**	.28**	.39**		
Leader's Organisational Identification	4.01	0.68	.44**	.45**	.42**	.30**	.40**	.31**	.41**	.43**	
Leader's Psycap	4.59	0.51	.51**	.54**	.58**	.46**	.50**	.48**	.44**	.47**	.48**

Note. **p < .01. ENG: Leader's Engagement. IDORG: Leader's Organisational Identification.

$p < .001$) explaining 24% of its variance; and leader's positive psychological capital ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$) explaining 38% of its variance. These results provide partial support for hypothesis 2, hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4, respectively. However, the MSLS has seven dimensions, so it was necessary to determine whether any of them drove the association with the proposed outcomes more strongly than the others, or whether all seven dimensions contributed to it. For this goal, we regressed the seven dimensions of the MSLS to predict those outcomes. Table 5 indicates that regarding leader's engagement only two dimensions were significant: *creating value for community* ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and *behaving ethically* ($\beta = .77$, $p < .005$). Regarding leader's organisational identification, three dimensions were significant: *creating value for community* ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$), *behaving ethically* ($\beta = .16$, $p < .005$) and *conceptual skills* ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$). Finally, for leader's Psycap, only three dimensions were significant: *creating value for community* ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), *conceptual skills* ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and *putting subordinates first* ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to test the psychometric properties of the self-reported Spanish version of MSLS (Liden et al., 2008) in military settings. This goal is theoretically consistent with similar instruments constructed in a self-reported version for Authentic (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008) and Transformational leaders (Bass & Avolio, 2004), which share very close conceptual frameworks (Blanch et al., 2016). This study is also aligned with the study performed by Clark (2019) who adapted the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) for self-reported use; however, the adapted SLS did not align well with the original instrument.

In our study, the CFA showed that the original seven-factor model has the better fit to the data, confirming the underlying structure of the original scale. Moreover, this version also presents optimal values of internal consistency and appropriate concurrent, discriminant and criterion validity. Therefore, we conclude that the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS has good psychometric properties.

Likewise, this study has shown that the self-reported Spanish version of the MSLS was significantly related to leaders' identification with their organisation, engagement and psychological capital. Thus, the more the military leaders perceive their behaviour to be that of a servant leader, the greater their sense of engagement and identification with the Army, and the more they perceived they have developed their positive psychological capital.

Implications

On the one hand, our study reinforces the theoretical model of SL proposed by Liden et al. (2008) and, on the other hand, provides a tool with optimal psychometric properties for the self-assessment of SL in military settings. This self-assessment should be compared with the perception of SL made by the subordinates in order to assess and increase leaders' self-awareness. The availability of this self-reported, validated measure will be useful in SL training programmes.

Limitations

The present research has some limitations that should be considered. This work does not indicate that participants' ratings and self-assessments of their SL are objective and unbiased. Thus, the correlation between the leader's self-assessment and the assessment made by the subordinates should also be examined in further studies. On the other hand, it would also be necessary that further studies focus on examining the predictive ability of self-reported SL on organisational outcome variables such as team effectiveness and cohesion, as well as engagement, Psycap, and identification with the organisation of the followers. Finally, women were under-represented in the current sample. This circumstance is a reality in the Spanish Armed Forces (Dirección General de Personal del Ministerio Defensa, 2025), where the percentage of women is significantly lower than that of men. Future studies should balance the sample by including more women in the study.

Conclusions

The training of leaders in the Armed Forces is determined by a vocation linked to a culture of commitment, ethics and service. That is why military training centres need to have adequate instruments for the evaluation of SL in the academic field, as well as self-evaluation instruments to promote the exercise of self-knowledge. Identifying one's own strengths and weaknesses are key to implementing and promoting specific practices for improvement in institutions.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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