THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP, PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND EFFECTIVE FOLLOWERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership has become more significant in organizational research since Greenleaf's (1970) pioneering work on the subject. It has grown in prominence due to empirical evidence demonstrating it represents highly effective leadership practice. Some of the core aspects of Greenleaf's initial definition, including listening, empathy, awareness, and commitment to growth of the individual are conceptually related to psychological safety. The servant leadership aspect of conceptualization, when modeled to employees, serves as the impetus for their own development of cognitive capacities and independent thinking behaviors. Based upon this follower-centric logic, this research examines servant leadership's influence on effective followership through psychological safety as a mediator. Participants consist of 416 working employees in various industries and organizations. Three hypotheses are offered and supported, using structural equation modeling. Psychological safety was found to mediate the relationship between servant leadership and effective followership. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed, along with study limitations and future research opportunities.

Keywords: Servant leadership, psychological safety, effective followership

INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the contribution of servant leadership to effective followership, as defined by Kelley (1992). We posit that, a servant leader's focus on serving a subordinate's needs will engender feelings of safety and comfort which will, in turn, provide a foundation upon which a subordinate's self-managing, self-reliant behavior will flourish. Thus, we will examine the following specific hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1:* There is a positive relationship between servant leadership and psychological safety.
>
> *Hypothesis 2:* There is a positive relationship between psychological safety and effective followership.
>
> *Hypothesis 3:* There is an indirect positive relationship between servant leadership on effective followership as mediated by the variable of psychological safety.

CONCEPTUALIZING EFFECTIVE FOLLOWERSHIP

Effective followership is an under-rated cornerstone of effective organizations. Effective followership consists of self-management and self-reliance, commitment to the organization's purpose, improving one's own performance and competencies, courageous honesty, and personal credibility (Kelley, 1992). Yet much of the prevailing wisdom underplays the role of followership. Kellerman (2008) argues that "Followers are subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors, and who therefore usually, but not invariably, fall into line." Most people, particularly in organizations, are more often followers than leaders, but until recently, the role of the follower has not been considered an inherently valuable position, or a role with a specialized set of skills, motivations, and the power to enhance organizational potential (Kelley, 1988). There is a more recent and positive line of thinking on the concept of followership. Effective followers can shape productive leadership behavior just as effective leaders develop employees into good followers (Suda, 2013). For any project or organization to succeed, there must be people who willingly and effectively follow, just as there must be those who willingly and effectively lead. Leadership and followership are fundamental roles that individuals shift into and out of under various conditions (Suda, 2013).

Many of the competencies that are needed in leaders are the same qualities needed in effective followers. In addition to possessing initiative, independence, commitment to common goals, and courage, a follower can provide enthusiastic support of a leader, but not to the extent that a follower fails to challenge a leader who is unethical or threatens the values or objectives of the organization. Ineffective followers are as much to blame for poor performance, ethical and legal lapses within organizations as are poor and unethical leaders (Suda, 2013).

Kelley defines five basic styles of follower: the sheep, the yes people, the alienated, the pragmatics, and the star followers. Each exhibits a different degree of independent thinking and organizational engagement and differs in their motivations. The following is a basic assessment of each follower type according to Kelley (2008).

The sheep are passive in their thinking and engagement and are motivated by their leader rather than themselves. The yes-people also allow their leader to do most of the thinking and acting for them but are generally positive and always on the leader's side. In contrast, the alienated are predominantly negative but think more independently. They think for themselves but do not contribute to the positive direction of the organization. The pragmatic exhibits a minimal level of independent thinking and engagement as they are more willing to exert energy and get involved when they see where the direction of the situation is headed. The pragmatics lack in demonstrating critical thinking and are motivated by maintaining the status quo. Finally, the star followers think for themselves, have positive energy, and are actively engaged. They agree with and challenge their leaders (Kelley, 2008).

Unfortunately, many followers fall into the first four categories. Gallup's survey of about 150,000 full and part-time employees in 2012 indicates that 18% of employees could be characterized as "actively disengaged." These employees take more sick days, monopolize their managers' time, and perhaps more significantly, spread their discontent among the staff (Gallup, 2013). It is a significant problem.

The topic of followership is directly tied to the subject of employee engagement. Employee engagement as a measure of performance and management strategies to increase engagement have become hot topics since the original Gallup organization research was published (Suda, 2013). The Gallup organization defined employee engagement as "an employee's involvement with, commitment to, and satisfaction with work" (Suda, 2013). Research conducted in the past decade has shown that employee engagement has declined significantly in most industries, with some research citing as few as 29% of employees being actively engaged in their jobs (Gallup, 2013). Various research studies have shown that the following factors influence employee engagement: Employers' commitment to and concern for employee welfare; employee perceptions of job importance; clarity of job expectations; career advancement opportunities; regular dialogue with superiors; quality of working relationships with coworkers and superiors; perceptions of the ethos and values of the organization; and employee rewards and recognition (Suda, 2013).

Prior to a discussion of engagement, we will differentiate between work engagement, job commitment, work involvement, and engagement proper. Engagement proper is based in the prior Gallup material. The construct of employee engagement focuses on the immediate—more focused on the work in the moment. It can be likened to cognitive flow (Csikszentimahlyi, 1975). In positive psychology, a flow state, also known colloquially as being in the zone, is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does, and a resulting loss in one's sense of space and time.

Work commitment is an attitude of commitment to remaining in a type of job and it is often strongly correlated with organizational commitment (Millward, & Hopkins, 1998). The experience is generated from past experiences, and this leads to more future commitment instead. It is different from cognitive flow because it is a broader content domain, which includes vigor, absorption, and dedication, with dedication being focused on overcoming obstacles.

Job involvement (Lodahl & Kejnar, 1965) is considered reflective of personality and far broader than engagement, instead focusing on the importance of one's work within one's life. A person with high work involvement would consider their work to be a primary focus in their life and important to their identity.

Walters and Diab (2016) confirm the findings on disengagement. They cite Kahn's framework of personal engagement and disengagement. When employees are disengaged, they withdraw emotionally, physically and cognitively from their work (Kahn, 1990). Walters and Diab (2016) also refer to work engagement, job engagement, and engagement as interchangeable in their paper on the subject. We will examine the links between engagement and psychological safety.

According to Walters and Diab (2016), Kahn's (1990) framework of engagement, and May's and colleagues' (2004) corroboration suggests that engagement has three antecedents: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. We are interested in the safety function in this paper. As Walters and Diab (2016) explain, psychological safety is the feeling that one can act as oneself without fear of negative ramifications (Kahn, 1990). Safety is predicted by relationships with coworkers and supervisors, coworker norms, and personal self-consciousness (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004;

Walters & Diab, 2016). We will attempt to connect the relationship between effective followership, engagement, and psychological safety through servant leadership practices.

With specific interventions such as those brought to bear by servant leaders, employees are more likely to become, as Kelley (1992) suggests, followers who are both critical, independent thinkers and active in constructive behaviors. These followers exhibit consistent behavior to all people, regardless of their power in the organization, and deal well with conflict and risk. They cope with change, put forward their own views, and stay focused on what the organization needs. They understand how others see them and are mindful. They make acts of leadership often, and use their referent, expert, network and information power often in service of the organization (Kelley, 1992).

Based upon this follower-centric logic, this research examines servant leadership's influence on effective followership (Kelley, 1988, 1992). Specifically, whether it increases employee psychological safety and, through it, helps employees become more active followers, thinking for themselves and being actively engaged in their work.

Conceptualizing Servant Leadership

Servant leadership can be traced back to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., who promoted it as a method to approach leadership (Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2013; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Servant leadership is virtuous, highly ethical, and based on the premise that service to followers is at the heart of effective leadership (Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2013; Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008). Servant leaders also demonstrate the qualities of vision, caring for other people, altruism, humility, hope, integrity, trustworthiness, and interpersonal acceptance (van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership has become more significant in the Organizational Behavior (OBD) research since Greenleaf's (1970) pioneering work on the subject. It has grown in prominence due to empirical evidence demonstrating it represents highly effective leadership practice. According to Northouse (2015), effective leadership is non-linear and highly interactive, qualifications common to servant leaders. Because of these facts, research in servant leadership has become more popular, with 414 books and more than 481 dissertations and peer-reviewed articles written on the subject in the last 40 years (Gandolfi, Stone, & Deno, 2017).

Servant leadership is unique among leadership styles because of its "follower first" position (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Servant leadership directs its focus first on followers to succeed and second on the success of the mission (Gandolfi et al., 2017). Spears (2004) has specified facets of Greenleaf's initial definition of servant leadership by presenting ten characteristics present in Greenleaf's description—listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community. This focus on employee needs and uniqueness of domain content found within dimensions make servant leadership different from other leadership approaches, such as transformational (Avolio & Bass, 1990) and authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Servant leadership focuses more on serving subordinates first, while transformational leadership is transformative first. Transformational leaders set goals and challenge employees to meet them. They motivate employees to self-lead. Authentic leaders consistently stick with personal values as the main thrust of their leadership.

Edgar Shein (2013) mentions humble inquiry as a cornerstone of servant leadership behavior. He defines humble inquiry as "the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person." These ideas link nicely with Greenleaf's components of listening and empathy, as well as awareness and foresight.

Research suggests that servant leaders can get good outcomes from followers. Northouse (2010) argues that leadership is a process by which one individual exerts influence to guide others toward the accomplishment of a common goal. Yet servant leadership has gone under the radar as far as this type of outcome is concerned. Some focus has moved to servant leadership and humility as important characteristics of effective leadership (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Some characteristics of humility and servant leadership overlap.

Walters and Diab (2016) discuss the concept of humility, which is endemic to effective servant leadership. They state that one of the categories involved in recognizing followers' strengths and contributions is a verbalized appreciation for subordinates, contributions, acknowledging followers' strengths, and a referral to the team when talking about successes (Walters & Diab, 2016). These components lead to better employee outcomes. Some of the above aspects of Greenleaf's initial definition, including listening, empathy, awareness, and commitment to growth of the individual, as well as the modernizing versions thereafter provide a road map to examination of psychological safety, while conceptualization, when modeled to employees, serves as the impetus for their own development of cognitive capacities and independent thinking behaviors.

Conceptualizing Psychological Safety

Psychological safety, according to Kahn (1990), is the feeling that one can act as oneself without fear of ramifications. According to Walters and Diab (2016), psychological safety has been proposed to encourage help seeking, feedback seeking, voicing of concerns, innovation, and the extension of communication beyond the immediate team (Edmondson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004). Freedom from fear and independent thinking are two qualities vital to the success of business organizations. Psychological safety is the feeling that you can tolerate — and even feel comfortable with — an inherently uncomfortable situation. Psychological safety is believed to facilitate independent employee actions to positively impact organizational outcomes (Avolio & Reichard, 2008).

Edmondson (1999) has defined psychological safety as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Therefore, she sees it as a group construct (Frazier et al., 2016). Frazier, Tupper, and Fainshmidt (2016) see psychological safety as the importance of creating a workplace in which perceptions of interpersonal risk are minimized. Unlike trust and psychological empowerment, psychological safety refers to perceptions of broader social and work environments, and how people perceive that others in the workplace will respond to risk-taking behaviors (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Frazier et al., 2016).

Kahn (1990) identified four antecedents to psychological safety: interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, leadership, and organizational norms (Frazier et al., 2016). This is an important aspect of our study because we will look closely at the servant leadership component affecting

psychological safety. Kahn (1990) and Edmondson (1999) identify positive relationships with leaders as having a crucial influence on perceptions of psychological safety (Frazier et al., 2016). These social exchanges between leaders reveal appropriate behaviors, and act as a precursor to psychological safety. Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng (2011) discuss this very relationship as far as servant leadership goes.

When adults feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to take risks, ask questions, welcome diverse opinions, and generate more productive and creative solutions to problems (Edmondson & Roloff, 2009; Foldy, Rivard, & Buckley, 2009). In other words, they are more likely to engage in deep and meaningful learning. In addition, in conditions of psychological safety, there is a greater proclivity towards independent thinking.

Recent work on psychological safety has stressed the leadership component. Frazier et al (2016) indicate that as leaders develop positive relationships with followers, higher perceptions of psychological safety are likely to occur. As a result, leadership matters in fostering psychological safety. It is in this area that we focus, as multiple research outlets state that there has not been enough research on leadership's impact from multiple perspectives (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Relationships between Servant Leadership, Psychological Safety and Effective Followership

Based on a review of the literature, servant leadership is related to follower outcomes, including job attitudes, organizational citizenship behavior, and performance (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014; van Dierondonck, 2011) as well as outcomes at the team level (Ehrhart, 2004; Hu & Liden, 2011; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011). Liden et al. (2014) suggest that servant leaders affect culture in the workplace, creating behavioral norms and expectations (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). Liden et al. (2014) go on to argue that because servant leaders tend to be respected and admired by followers, they become motivated to emulate their leaders' behaviors. In other words, servant leaders may consciously or unconsciously encourage follower behaviors through role modeling (Liden et al., 2016; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999).

Emulation is a key component of the link between servant leadership and followership. Graham (1991) argues that follower emulation of leader behavior is a key component of servant leadership. Often servant leaders serve as mentors to the followers (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000), which leads to imitation (Weiss, 1977; Yaffe & Kark, 2011). They come to know and accept themselves and self-regulate their behavior to achieve goals that are, in part, derived from and congruent with those of the leader. Hence, expect an authentic relationship between the leader and followers to emerge which is characterized by open and positive exchanges as they pursue shared and complementary goals that reflect deeply held and overlapping values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Engagement as a component of effective followership is also connected to servant leadership. Liden et al. (2014) discuss the concept of serving culture, or the presence of "…a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration…to be taught to new members as the correct way to think, perceive, and feel in relation to those problems." (Schein, 2010). Engagement in these behaviors can be substantially influenced by upper-level management (Liden et al., 2014; Gelfand, Leslie, Keller & de Dreu, 2012; Schein, 1990).

A link between followers and psychological safety also exists. Schein (2013) makes a strong case for the relationship between humility, as shown through a servant leader's use of humble inquiry that overcomes boundaries based on status and position, allowing for greater psychological safety, which serves the foundations for positive working relationships and communication. Schaubroeck et al. (2011) found that servant leaders' empathy, ethical behavior, and prioritization of follower needs develop mutual trust between leaders and followers over time. The trust in turn gives followers the ability to take initiatives and engage in serving behaviors themselves (Colquitt, Scott & Lepine, 2007).

In addition, there is a positive relation between psychological safety and employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004). Kahn (1990) found that higher levels of psychological safety were more strongly associated with engagement than disengagement (Walters & Diab, 2016). Additionally, May et al (2004) found out that psychological safety was the mechanism by which supervisor relations influenced employee engagement (Walters & Diab, 2016).

The last link is between servant leadership and psychological safety. Walumba and Schaubroeck (2009) found that psychological safety mediated the relation between ethical leadership and followers; voice behavior (Walters & Diab, 2016). In addition, Tynan (2005) found that psychological safety mediated the effect of supportive behaviors by supervisors on help seeking and admission of error by followers (Walters & Diab, 2016). Perhaps most importantly, Schaubroeck, Lam and Peng (2011) hypothesize that servant leadership is positively related to team psychological safety through the mediating influence of team members' affect-based trust in the leader. What they discovered is that psychological safety is positively related to team psychological safety and the result is significant.

METHOD

Procedures and Participants

Data collection. Data were collected in *SurveyMonkey*. The quantitative instrument was composed of Likert-type items that included items concerning one's immediate supervisor as well as self-report items. The participation rate for those asked to participate was over 95 percent.

Participants. A total of 118 master's program students participated in the survey and recruited an additional 298 participants who worked within their organizations, providing a total of 416 participants. The students were asked to provide surveys to their coworkers and the entirety of the data was used, with only 28 percent of the data being professional, working masters students, and 72 percent being non-students. The average age of participants was 28 and the sample consisted of 285 males and 131 females. The average tenure of the participants in their organizations was slightly over 5 years.

Measures. All of the instruments used have been previously used in peer-reviewed, published research. The responses to these pre-existing measures for this study were rated using a seven-cell Likert-format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *slightly agree*, 6 = *agree*, and 7 = *strongly agree*).

Servant leadership. This study utilized the 28-item instrument created by Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008). The instrument was used for rating one's immediate supervisor. It consists of seven dimensions: behaving ethically, conceptual skills, creating value of the community, emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, and putting subordinates first. An example of an empowerment item is, "My manager gives me the responsibility to make important decisions about my job." An example of a create value for the community item is "My manager emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community." An example of an emotional healing item is "My manager would be someone I turn to if I had a personal problem." An example of a behaving ethically item is "My manager would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success." The Cronbach alphas for the dimensions within this study are .94 for behaving ethically, .89 for conceptual skills, .85 for creating value of the community, .84 for emotional healing, .89 for empowering, .90 for helping subordinates grow and succeed, and .88 for putting subordinates first. Collectively, the entire instrument's alpha is .94 for this study.

Psychological safety. The instrument used to assess psychological safety was created by May et al. (2004). The instrument is used to assess one's own feelings. The items that composed this instrument are "I'm not afraid to be myself at work," "I am afraid to express my opinions at work," (reverse-coded), and "There is a threatening environment at work" (reverse-coded.) The Cronbach alpha for the scale within this study is .88.

Effective followership. The instrument created by Kelley (1992), consisting of two dimensions, engagement and independent thinking, was utilized. Each dimension consists of ten items. Examples of engagement items include "When starting a new job or assignment, do you promptly build a record of successes that are important to the organization and its leaders?" and "When you are not the leader of a project, do you still contribute at a high level, often doing more than your share?" Two examples of independent thinking items include "Instead of waiting for or merely accepting what the leader tells you, do you personally identify which organizational activities are most critical for achieving the organization's priority goals?" and "Do you make a habit of internally questioning the wisdom of the leader's decision rather than just doing what you are told?" The Cronbach alphas for the engagement and independent thinking dimensions within this study are .96 and .95, respectively. Collectively, the Cronbach alpha for effective followership within this study is .95.

Data Screening. For cases with less than five percent of the data missing, we imputed the missing values using the median as an ordinal value since we used Likert-type scales. Box plots were examined for outliers. We examined kurtosis for values greater than +/-2.00 and found no issues. All the items were retained since kurtosis did not have any impact on exploratory factor analysis.

Exploratory Factor Analysis. Because of the limited amount of validity testing concerning Kelly's (1992) effective followership instrument, an exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood was used to determine the unique variance among the items and the correlations among the factors to be consistent with our subsequent CFA. We used a Varimax rotation to determine whether the observed variables loaded together as expected on latent variables, since the data set was large (n = 416) and Varimax can handle correlated factors. The KMO (.93) and Bartlett's test ($p < .000$) for sampling adequacy were satisfactory. The communalities for each variable were sufficiently high (all of them above 0.45 and only one below .50), thus confirming that the chosen variables were adequately

correlated for factor analysis. Ten factors emerged based on eigenvalues above 1.0, accounting for 68.61% of cumulative variance. The factors for the latent variables of servant leadership and effective followership, demonstrate sufficient convergent validity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010) as well as discriminant validity, without any problematic cross-loadings.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed in Amos 21.0. To improve the model, we covaried multiple disturbance terms for items within servant leadership. Multiple disturbance terms were also allowed to covary for effective followership. The goodness-of-fit results indicate good model fit ($\chi 2 = 11835.60$; df = 1179; $\chi 2/df = 1.56$; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .04; GFI = .86; AGFI = .84; SRMR = .04; and NFI = .90) based on accepted thresholds, with only AGFI being slightly below the suggested .95 for a good fit (Hair et al., 2010). The hypothesized ten-factor model was compared with two alternative models, each one examining one of the latent variables as unnecessary. Alternative Model 2 is a four-factor model in which the seven our dimensions of servant leadership are combined. Alternative Model 4 is a nine-factor model combining the two dimensions of effective followership. The results, shown in Table 1, indicate that the hypothesized model best fit the data.

Table 1. CFA model comparison

Model *Description*	*χ^2/df*	*CFI*	*RMSEA*	*AGFI*	*NFI*
Hypothesized Model: Ten factor solution based on EFA	1.56	.96	.04	.84	.90
Alternative Model 1: One factor solution	9.59	.36	.14	.22	.33
Alternative Model 2: Servant leadership factors combined	4.51	.74	.09	.58	.69
Alternative Model 3: Servant Leadership and psychological safety combined	4.91	.71	.10	.57	.66
Alternative Model 4: Effective followership factors combined	3.76	.80	.18	.49	.75

N = 416

Common method bias. Since all of the data for independent and dependent variables were collected using the same survey instrument, common method bias was examined (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Podsakoff, & Lee, 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Harman's single factor test revealed that the factor did not account for a majority of the variance (28.67 percent). Also, no single factor emerged during the EFA and the first factor accounted for 15.59 percent of the variance, below the 25.00 percent cutoff (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). In addition, we used an unmeasured common latent factor (CLF) method recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to capture common variance among all observed variables within the model, as well as convergent and discriminant validity. Common method was not an issue and all of the latent factors had a composite reliability (CR) higher than .70. For convergent validity, all of the CR values were greater than the average variance extracted (AVE) values. For discriminant validity AVE was greater than maximum shared variance (MSV) on all of the latent factors, and the inter-factor correlations were lower than the square-root of AVE.

The means, standard deviations, AVE, MSV, reliabilities, and correlations are included in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, AVE, MSV, reliabilities, and correlations

	Variable	*M*	*S.D.*	*CR*	*AVE*	*MSV*	*1.*	*2.*	*3.*	*4.*	*5.*	*6.*	*7.*	*8.*	*9.*	*10.*
1.	Behaving ethically	5.28	1.56	.94	.80	.20	*.89*									
2.	Conceptual skill	5.12	1.57	.89	.67	.45	.34	*.82*								
3.	Creating value	5.31	1.21	.85	.59	.45	.40	.67	*.77*							
4.	Emotional healing	5.15	1.47	.85	.58	.28	.39	.48	.53	*.76*						
5.	Empowering	5.30	1.55	.89	.67	.41	.45	.44	.51	.50	*.82*					
6.	Helping subordinates grow	5.29	1.34	.90	.70	.41	.32	.46	.54	.49	.64	*.84*				
7.	Putting subordinates first	4.98	1.33	.88	.65	.26	.30	.39	.50	.38	.46	.51	*.80*			
8.	Psychological Safety	5.08	1.59	.88	.72	.20	.35	.39	.42	.40	.44	.40	.36	*.85*		
9.	Follower engagement	4.83	1.75	.96	.72	.19	.34	.24	.30	.25	.27	.29	.13	.19	*.85*	
10.	Independent thinking	5.12	1.60	.95	.65	.19	.20	.27	.32	.19	.31	.30	.16	.35	.44	*.81*

N = 416

Structural Model. The hypothesized SEM model was compared with three alternative models. Alternative model 1 examined psychological safety as unrelated to servant leadership, but as a predictor of effective followership. Alternative model 1 examined the model with an additional direct relationship between servant leadership and effective followership. Alternative model 2 examined separate relationships between servant leadership and psychological safety with engagement and independent thinking. Alternative model 3 examined psychological safety as a predictor of both servant leadership and effective followership. Alternative model 4 examined servant leadership as a direct predictor of engagement and independent thinking. For all of the models, disturbance terms were allowed to covary. The results, shown in Table 3, indicate that, while all of the models were similar due to the small changes made to the hypothesized model, the proposed model fit the data better than the alternatives.

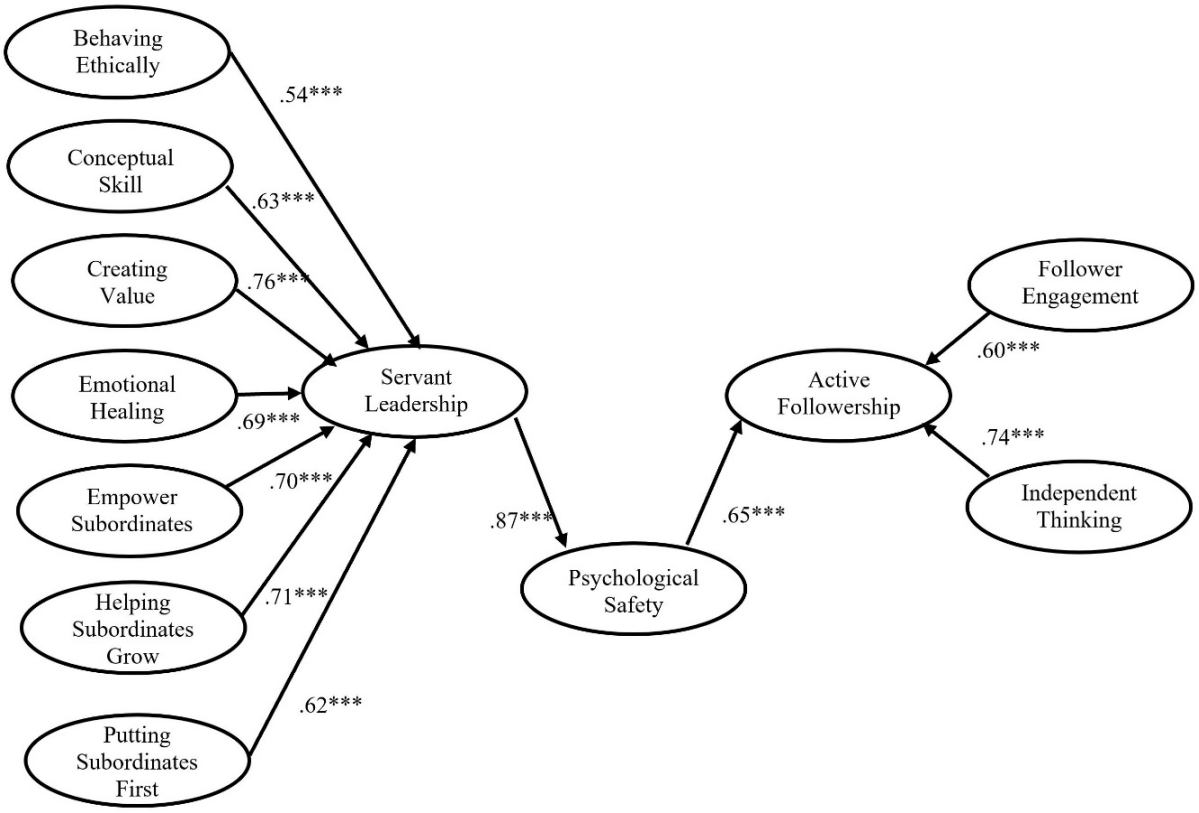
Table 3. Structural model comparison

Model	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI
Hypothesized Model	1.29	.98	.03	.88	.86	.92
Alternative Model 1	1.47	.97	.03	.87	.85	.91
Alternative Model 2	1.39	.97	.03	.87	.85	.90
Alternative Model 3	1.31	.98	.04	.88	.86	.91
Alternative Model 4	1.39	.97	.03	.87	.85	.91

N = 416.

The results of the comparison of hypothesized and alternative models is shown in Table 3. The proposed model fit the data slightly better than the likely potential alternative models (χ^2 = 1480.52; *df* = 1150; χ^2/df = 1.29; CFI = .98; SRMR = .04; RMSEA = .03; GFI = .88; AGFI = .86; and NFI = .92). Significant standardized parameter estimates for the Hypothesized Model are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model and structural equation modeling results



Notes: *** indicates significance at the .001 level.

RESULTS

The path coefficients and their p-values were examined to determine support for the hypotheses. A strong positive relationship was found for Hypothesis 1, representing a direct relationship between servant leadership and psychological safety (β = .80, b = .87, *S.E.* = .10, *C.R.* = 7.77, $p \leq .001$). Hypothesis 2 examined the relationship between psychological safety and effective followership. A strong relationship was found (β = .77, b = .65, *S.E.* = .14, *C.R.* = 5.54, $p \leq .001$). Hypothesis 3 focuses on the effect of servant leadership on effective followership through psychological safety as a mediating variable. As such, examination of the indirect effect and its confidence for servant leadership with psychological safety as a mediator is necessary. While results indicate that psychological safety partially mediates the relationships of servant leadership and effective followership (total and indirect effect of β = .62, *S.E.* = .12, *LC* = .33, *HC* = .99, $p \leq .001$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is also fully supported, with a strong indirect effect of servant leadership on effective followership.

DISCUSSION

All three of the hypotheses within this study were supported. The first hypothesis concerned the relationship between servant leadership and psychological safety. The results suggest that servant

leadership can help create an attitude of psychological safety among subordinates. Previous studies have linked psychological safety to identify positive relationships with leaders (Edmondson, 1999, Kahn, 1990), ethical leadership (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009), servant leadership (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011), transformational leadership (Detert & Burris, 2007), leader–member exchange (Coombe, 2010; Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012), and trust in one's leader (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2009). This study provides further support to the relationship of leadership to psychological safety. The servant leadership dimensions of behaving ethically, conceptual skills, creating value of the community, emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, and putting subordinates first (Liden et al., 2008) would seem to make subordinates feel less anxiety and more psychological comfort.

The second hypothesis concerned the positive relationship between psychological safety and effective followership. It was supported as well. This fits well with extant findings in the literature. Kelley (1992) defined effective followership as a composite of engagement and independent thinking. As it relates to this conceptualization, previous studies by Kahn (1990) and May et al., (2004) support engagement as an outcome of psychological safety. Similarly, as it relates to independent thinking, personal initiative (Edmondson, 1999), creativity (Amabile, 1998), learning behavior (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009), and employee voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Frazier & Bowler, 2015; Frazier & Fainshmidt, 2012) were found to be outcomes of psychological safety. These three outcomes share some conceptual relationship with independent thinking. In addition, as it relates to the concept of effective followership, previous studies found task performance (Baer & Frese, 2003; Schaubroeck et al., 2011), information sharing (Bunderson & Boumgarden, 2010), citizenship behaviors (Liang, Farh, & Farh,2012; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), and organizational commitment (Detert & Burris, 2007; O'Neill & Arendt, 2008) were outcomes of psychological safety.

In terms of advancing the literature, this study provides theoretical support for psychological safety as a mechanism by which servant leadership leads to effective followership. This study purports that subordinates who experience psychological safety as a result of a positive leadership experienced will respond by being more engaged and independent thinking followers. This argument took the form of a third hypothesis that posited full mediation between servant leadership and effective followership by psychological safety. Support for this hypothesis suggests that servant leadership could be combined with other approaches that generate increased feelings of security and decreased anxiety among subordinate. Also, intentional focus on psychological safety as a goal of servant leadership may lead to more engaged and independent subordinates without the need for direct intervention in those areas.

The practical implication of this study is that servant leaders can help subordinates become more capable, more involved, more self-determining by helping them to feel safe within the work environment. Serving their psychological needs, particularly their sends of confidence, comfort, and security, can help them as much, and possibly more, than focusing on their material needs, their competencies, and their work-related tasks. Providing subordinates with the confidence to speak their mind, disagree, take the initiative, and proactively handle challenges can increase the impact of a servant leader. Rather than the manager guessing their needs, subordinates can announce them and define them, reducing the amount of effort and attention the manager must provide. Through this increase in effective followership, subordinates can help themselves and require less attention and direct service from their managers.

Study Limitations: This study has a number of limitations. In particular, all of the data was collected through a single survey instrument. Therefore, it is subject to potential common method. However, examination using Harman's single factor and the unmeasured common latent factor (CLF) methods suggested it is not a serious issue. Additionally, the data was collected at one point in time, rather than having time series data, thus there may be influencing contextual issues that are unmeasured. In addition, the followership and psychological safety measures, while used in other studies, have not been highly examined in terms of psychometric soundness.

Future studies. Extending beyond the findings within this research, future studies could focus on other mechanisms aside from psychological safety that might also serve as mechanisms by which the benefits of servant leadership are actualized among subordinates. Mechanisms might be attitudinal or behavioral. Perceived supervisor support (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002)., trust (Hosmer, 1995; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), and leader-member exchange (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) provide potentially viable alternatives to psychological safety as approaches to impacting followership among subordinates.

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APPENDIX: INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE STUDY

Servant Leadership (Liden et al. 2008)

Emotional Healing

1. Would be someone I turn to if I had a personal problem
2. Cares about my personal well-being
3. Takes time to talk to me on a personal level
4. Can recognize when I'm down without asking me

Creating Value for the Community

5. Emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community
6. Is always interested in helping people in our community
7. Is involved in community activities
8. Encourages me to volunteer in the community

Conceptual Skills

9. Can tell if something is going wrong
10. Is able to effectively think through complex problems
11. Has a thorough understanding of our organization and its goals
12. Can solve work problems with new or creative ideas

Empowering Subordinates

13. Gives me the responsibility to make important decisions about my job
14. Encourages me to handle important work decisions on my own
15. Gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best
16. Allows me to make an important decision at work without consulting him or her

Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed

17. Makes my career development a priority
18. Is interested in making sure that I achieve my career goals
19. Provides me with work experiences that enable me to develop new skills
20. Wants to know about my career goals

Puts Subordinates First

21. Seems to care more about my success than his/her own
22. Puts my best interests ahead of his/her own
23. Sacrifices his/her own interests to meet my needs
24. Does what she/he can do to make my job easier

Behave Ethically

25. Holds high ethical standards
26. Is always honest
27. Would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success
28. Values honesty more than profits

Psychological Safety (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004)

1. I'm not afraid to be myself at work.
2. I am afraid to express my opinions at work. (reverse-coded)
3. There is a threatening environment at work. (reverse-coded)

Followership Style (Kelley, 1992)

Independent Thinking Items Scoring (Dependent)

1. Does your involvement help you fulfill some societal goal or personal dream that is important to you?
2. Instead of waiting for or merely accepting what the leader tells you, do you personally identify which organizational activities are most critical for achieving the organization's priority goals?
3. Do you independently think of and champion new ideas that will contribute significantly to the organization's goals?
4. Do you try to solve the tough problems (technical, organizational, etc.) rather than look to the leader to do it for you?
5. Do you help the leader or organization see both the upside potential and downside risks of ideas or plans, playing the devil's advocate if needed?
6. Do you actively and honestly own up to your strengths and weaknesses rather than put off evaluation?
7. Do you make a habit of internally questioning the wisdom of the leader's decision rather than just doing what you are told?
8. When the leader asks you to do something that runs contrary to your preferences, do you say "no" rather than "yes?"
9. Do you act on your own ethical standards rather than the leader's or the group's standards?
10. Do you assert your views in important issues, even though it might mean conflict with your group or leader?

Active Engagement Items Scoring (Passive)

11. Are your personal goals aligned with your student organization's priority goals?
12. Are you highly committed to and energized by your involvement and organization, giving them your best ideas and performance?
13. Does your enthusiasm also spread to and energize your peers?
14. Do you actively develop a distinctive competence in those critical activities so that you become more valuable to the organization and its leaders?
15. When starting a new job or assignment, do you promptly build a record of successes that are important to the organization and its leaders?
16. Can the leader of your organization give you a difficult assignment without the benefit of much supervision, knowing you will meet your deadline with high-quality work?
17. Do you take the initiative to seek out and successfully complete assignments that go above and beyond your role?
18. When you are not the leader of a project, do you still contribute at a high level, often doing more than your share?
19. Do you help your peers, making them look good, even when you don't get any credit?
20. Do you understand the leader's needs, goals, and constraints, and work hard to meet them?

QRBD

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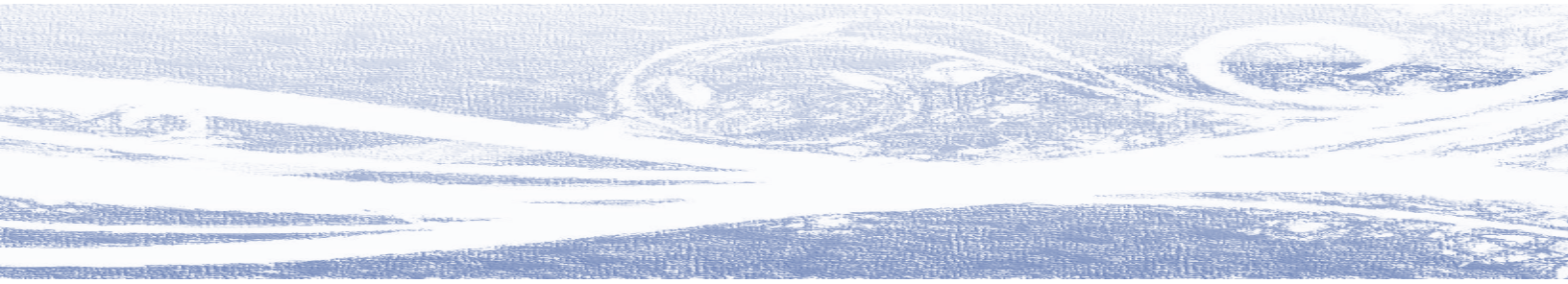

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