Servant leaders inspire servant followers: Antecedents and outcomes for employees and the organization

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ABSTRACT

Despite widespread adoption of servant leadership, we are only beginning to understand its true utility across multiple organizational levels. Our purpose was to test the relationship between personality, servant leadership, and critical follower and organizational outcomes. Using a social influence framework, we proposed that leader agreeableness and extraversion affect follower perceptions of servant leadership. In turn, servant leaders ignite a cycle of service by role-modeling servant behavior that is then mirrored through coworker helping behavior and high-quality customer service, as well as reciprocated through decreased withdrawal. Using a multilevel, multi-source model, we surveyed 224 stores of a U.S. retail organization, including 425 followers, 110 store managers, and 40 regional managers. Leader agreeableness was positively and extraversion was negatively related to servant leadership, which was associated with decreased follower turnover intentions and disengagement. At the group-level, service climate mediated the effects of servant leadership on follower turnover intentions, helping and sales behavior.

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1. Introduction

Robert K. Greenleaf's (1991) famous essay on servant leadership spearheaded a movement that continues to gain strength today. Many of Fortune magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work for in America name servant leadership as a core company value (Ruschman, 2002). There are a number of possible explanations for this trend. Servant leaders may promote increased collaboration and creativity among employees, which helps organizations gain and maintain competitive advantage (Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, & Roberts, 2008). Servant leadership may also improve the ethical culture of modern companies because servant leadership promotes more morality-centered self-reflection by leaders than other leadership styles (i.e., transformational leadership; Giampetro-Meyer, Brown, Browne, & Kubasek, 1998).

Despite the growing popularity of servant leadership practice and the emergence of a promising stream of research affirming its potential utility in organizations (e.g., Neubert et al., 2008; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010a), most research to date has focused on construct development (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Ehrhart, 2004; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Parolini, Patterson, & Winston, 2009; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; van Dierendonck, 2011). There remains a need to better understand the scope and magnitude of the influence that servant leadership has on a range of multilevel outcomes and the differential influences of servant leadership conceptualized at the individual and group levels. Further, more advanced research designs and more comprehensive explorations of antecedents and outcomes are necessary to help scholars and managers better understand how to best apply servant leadership and what benefits can be expected from an emphasis on this particular leadership style.

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We first address these needs by proposing and testing a model that integrates multiple levels of theory and analysis. This is necessary to advance our understanding of any type of leadership (Hofmann, 2002; Yammarino & Bass, 1991), but it is particularly needed in the area of servant leadership. The study by Liden et al. (2008) represents an important initial effort; they tested the influence of both individual-level and group-level servant leadership on individual outcomes (i.e., community citizenship behavior, in-role performance, and organizational commitment). Only individual-level servant leadership emerged as a significant predictor. More recently, Walumbwa et al. (2010a) tested a more extensive multi-level model of servant leadership that revealed group-level servant leadership predicting several individual- and group-level mediators (i.e., self-efficacy, commitment to supervisor, procedural justice climate and service climate), and in turn, individual organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Although these initial results are mixed, they suggest that individual- and group-level measures of servant leadership may both be worthy of consideration in predicting important work outcomes.

In the current study, we apply the social influence theories of social learning (Bandura, 1977) and social exchange (Blau, 1964) to propose that servant leaders initiate a cycle of service, thereby influencing a range of multilevel outcomes both directly and indirectly through service climate (see Fig. 1). We expand upon Liden et al. (2008) and Walumbwa et al. (2010a) by testing both group- and individual-level servant leadership predicting both group- and individual-level outcomes, including group-level measures of store performance and follower helping and sales behavior, and individual-level measures of follower turnover intentions and disengagement. In particular, these individual-level outcomes have received little attention by servant leadership scholars but are of practical relevance to an organization's bottom line (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012).

We also contribute to research and practice in servant leadership by testing a multi-source model. With the exception of in-role performance assessed by a supervisor, the measures included in Liden et al. (2008) and Walumbwa et al. (2010a) originated from the same source (i.e., followers). More recently, Peterson et al. (2012) included multiple sources in their organizational-level research of the servant leadership among chief executive officers (CEOs). They found associations between individual differences as reported by the CEOs, the CEOs' servant leadership as assessed by their chief financial officers, and firm performance as measured by return on assets. We build on this important effort by including assessments drawn from the servant leaders themselves, their managers, and their followers. Thus, we respond to the call for more research on servant leadership from multiple stakeholder perspectives (van Dierendonck, 2011).
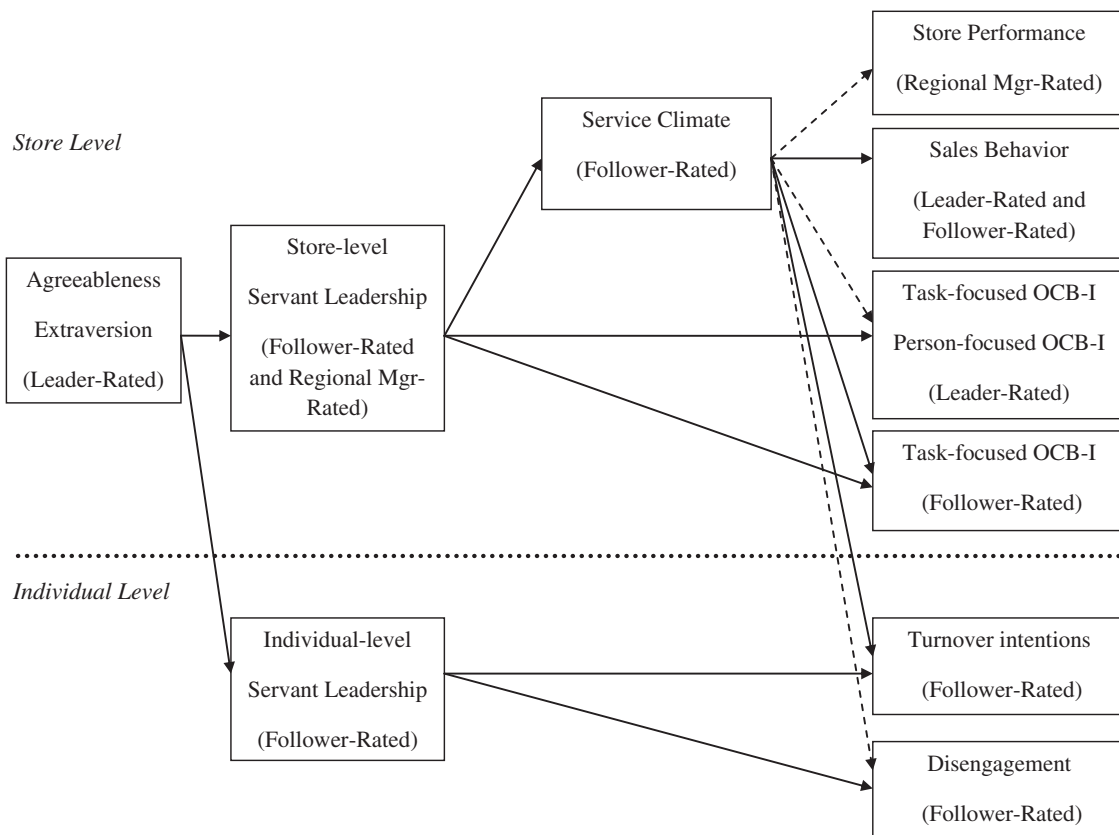
Note: Dashed lines indicate unsupported hypotheses.

Fig. 1. Proposed model.

Finally, we further contribute to research on servant leadership by examining leader personality as a valuable tool in understanding and selecting servant leaders. Extant research suggests that leader personality affects the outcomes leaders achieve (Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002), but we know little about the traits linked to servant leadership and its outcomes. Peterson et al. (2012) demonstrated that CEO servant leaders are less likely to exhibit narcissism. In order to better understand servant leadership, we examine two traits that are associated with cognitive-motivational processes that are relevant for servant leadership. We extend this initial research on personality by examining two traits from among the Big Five, agreeableness and extraversion, as antecedents to servant leadership. We focus only on these traits because they are related to motivational strivings (communion and status striving, respectively; Barrick, Mitchell, & Stewart, 2003) that are most relevant to servant leadership. These traits may reflect underlying values that influence the extent to which leaders model servant behaviors and, in turn, the extent to which followers perceive their leader as a servant leader. Only one study has linked leader agreeableness to servant leader behaviors (Washington, Sutton, & Field, 2006), and no studies to our knowledge have investigated leader extraversion. We theoretically position these traits as antecedents of follower perceptions of servant leadership because of the consistency between their motivational bases and servant leader motivations and behaviors. In doing so, we aim to offer theoretical insights into the personality predictors of servant leadership and practical recommendations for leader selection and development.

2. Servant leadership as a construct

According to Greenleaf's seminal essay in 1970, "the servant-leader *is* servant first" (Greenleaf, 1991, p. 13). More recently, Ehrhart (2004) conducted a thorough review of the literature and identified seven dimensions of servant leadership. The first dimension involves *forming relationships with followers*, such as when servant leaders spend quality time and forge interpersonal bonds with their followers. Second, servant leaders *empower followers* (e.g., incorporating follower input on important managerial decisions). Servant leaders also *help followers grow and succeed* by providing opportunities to enhance follower skills. Fourth, servant leaders *behave ethically*. For instance, a servant leader will follow through on promises made to followers to demonstrate their adherence to strong ethical values. Fifth, these leaders *demonstrate conceptual skills*, such as balancing daily work with future vision. They also *put followers first* by promoting follower success. Finally, servant leaders *create value for others outside the organization*, such as encouraging followers to engage in community service opportunities outside of work.

While it shares similarities with related leadership theories, there is mounting evidence that servant leadership is distinct from transformational leadership and leader–member exchange (LMX; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Ehrhart, 2004; Liden et al., 2008; Parolini et al., 2009) and has incremental predictive validity (Liden et al., 2008; Schneider & George, 2011). Servant leadership also has a moral component similar to ethical and authentic leadership (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005; Neubert et al., 2008) but differs in its focus on all organizational stakeholders (Graham, 1991) and inclusion of altruistic and self-reflective behaviors (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Altogether, servant leadership is different from other leadership styles and, in its distinctiveness, offers the potential to have a unique influence on organizations and their stakeholders (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009a; Neubert et al., 2008).

Consistent with recent multilevel conceptualizations of transformational leadership (e.g., Charbonnier-Voirin, El Akremi, & Vandenberghe, 2010; Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008; Liao & Chuang, 2007), a multilevel view of servant leadership is appropriate because it can be conceptualized separately at each level of analysis (Bliese, 2000; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). Indeed, Liden et al. (2008) expanded the definition of servant leadership to encompass both individual and group levels. Initial evidence reveals that between-leader and within-leader variation in follower perceptions of the leader has different associations with follower outcomes (Liden et al., 2008). Therefore, we define store-level (i.e., group-level) servant leadership as an aggregate perception by multiple followers of the extent to which their leader demonstrates servant leadership qualities targeted at their entire team and employs such behavior consistently across all followers. In other words, store-level servant leadership is how a leader is viewed collectively in the eyes of all followers, based on these group-targeted leadership efforts (Walumbwa et al., 2010a). On the other hand, servant leaders also strive to form an individual connection with each follower, which likely results in variance across individuals regarding the level of servant leadership exhibited (i.e., individual-level servant leadership).

3. Servant leadership and the cycle of service

Two key social influence theories that can help explain why individual-level and store-level servant leadership promotes positive outcomes are Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Blau's (1964) social exchange theory. According to social learning theory, individuals learn by modeling the attitudes, values, and behaviors of role models in their environment (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Followers must desire to mimic their leader's behavior (Wood & Bandura, 1989), which is more likely if leaders are viewed as credible role models. Servant leaders are likely to be seen as credible role models because followers perceive their motivations to be altruistic (Brown et al., 2005); servant leaders are self-motivated to serve humbly without expecting service in return. As a result, a servant leader's humble service is often mimicked by followers (Graham, 1991) and may also be reciprocated through the process of social exchange in which followers return the service they receive in kind (Blau, 1964).

Thus, through social influence processes, a servant leader inspires a cycle of service. Greenleaf sums it up when he asks of followers, "Do they, *while being served*, become . . . more likely themselves to become servants?" (Greenleaf, 1991, pp. 13–14).We suggest that the cycle of service will be perpetuated through the social influence process at the individual-level to inspire

followers to reciprocate by remaining engaged with the organization (i.e., low turnover intentions and disengagement), as well as inspire followers to serve other followers (i.e., follower helping behavior) and infuse a climate for service that influences follower sales behavior and store performance at the store-level.

We describe our cycle of service model by first examining the motivational tendencies behind servant leadership that are likely to influence both follower perceptions of servant leadership and willingness to model and reciprocate leader behavior. We suggest that agreeableness and extraversion are two traits from the Big Five most relevant to servant leadership.

3.1. Leader personality and values

Agreeableness reflects an empathetic concern for others (Barrick & Mount, 1991), whereas extraversion reflects a tendency to be "sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active" (p. 3). We draw from recent theory and research on personality and performance (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 2005; Barrick et al., 2003; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000) to suggest that agreeableness and extraversion are associated with servant leadership because they are associated with motivational tendencies likely to be espoused (or rejected) by servant leaders. These motivational tendencies in turn are likely to reflect underlying values that may be communicated to followers through word and deed, leading to follower perceptions of servant leadership and modeling of behavior.

Applying social cognitive theory, Barrick et al. (2003) argued that personality traits, particularly the Big Five, are associated with work-related behavior through their influence on broad motivational intentions or goals. Agreeableness is associated with communion striving, or striving "toward obtaining acceptance and intimacy in personal relationships" (Barrick et al., 2003, p. 66). That is, highly agreeable individuals value positive relationships with others and are motivated (i.e., willing to direct attention, energy, and other resources) to engage in behaviors toward that end. Among individuals in leadership positions, agreeableness, with its concomitant motivation toward social harmony, is likely to be associated with behavior that followers perceive as servant leadership and desire to emulate. For example, just as individuals high on agreeableness focus on interpersonal relationships (Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998) and are modest and other-centered (Judge et al., 2002), servant leaders take time to form quality relationships and build community among followers (Ehrhart, 2004). Further, leaders who are high on agreeableness are likely to protect and develop their followers in order to manage follower satisfaction and goodwill; such actions are also likely to be taken by servant leaders. Initial evidence suggests that agreeableness is related to follower perceptions of servant leadership (Washington et al., 2006).

Hypothesis 1. Leader agreeableness is positively related to follower perceptions of servant leadership.

Unlike agreeableness, extraversion is associated with motivational intentions that may actually run contrary to the values of servant leaders. Specifically, Barrick et al. (2003) argued that extraversion is associated with status striving, or the pursuit of goals "directed toward obtaining power and dominance within a status hierarchy" (p. 66). Indeed, Lucas, Diener, Grob, Sun, and Shao (2000) went so far as to argue that the "primary essence" of extraversion is not sociability, but rather the pursuit of rewards. Put another way, extraverts are sociable primarily because it provides them with greater opportunities for recognition and reward. Such goals reflect values that contradict those espoused by servant leaders, who emphasize the interests of their followers and organization over their own self-interests (Greenleaf, 1991).

Transformational leaders are often high in extraversion (Bono & Judge, 2004), but we assert that leaders low in extraversion (i.e., introverts) are more likely to be perceived as servant leaders. Although extraverts can contribute to the cohesion of a team (Barrick et al., 1998) and the extraversion of a leader can influence overall ratings of leadership effectiveness (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011), other empirical evidence supports our view. Namely, the extraversion of a leader contributes little or nothing to satisfaction with the leader or group performance (DeRue et al., 2011) and does not contribute to quality relationships between the leader and follower (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Ilies, 2009). Extraverts may initiate conversation, but they also enjoy being the center of attention, tend to talk more than they listen, and generally dominate social interactions (Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011). Instead of deferring to the interest of others, extraverts are more likely to actively assert their ideas and strive to advance their ideas relative to others (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002). Extraverts seek to gain influence not through inclusion but through persuasion (Anderson, Spataro, & Flynn, 2008), and they may resist or discourage employee voice or proactivity (Grant et al., 2011).

Contrary to these tendencies, servant leaders exercise humility and place a high priority on the concerns and development of others (Ehrhart, 2004; Liden et al., 2008; Sendjaya et al., 2008). Likewise, introverts prefer to take a less dominant and visible role in social interactions (Grant et al., 2011). Similar to servant leaders, introverts spend time listening; they communicate verbally and non-verbally that they are open to the ideas and input of others. Therefore, we expected that extraverted leaders would be less likely to be perceived as servant leaders by others compared to introverted leaders.

Hypothesis 2. Leader extraversion is negatively related to follower perceptions of servant leadership.

3.2. Individual-level servant leadership: reducing follower withdrawal

At the individual-level, followers frequently witness their servant leader's commitment to follower needs and well-being through other-centered and relational behavior. For example, servant leaders support and empower their followers, foster self-confidence, and build follower trust (Liden et al., 2008). According to the social influence theory of social exchange (Blau,

1964), followers may perceive the servant leader's commitment to their needs and well-being as meriting a reciprocal response. Follower engagement and commitment to remain a member of the leader's team rather than quit may thus reflect "payback" for a positive social exchange (Liden, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2010a).

Leadership behaviors have been found to explain withdrawal intentions, which may represent a follower's extent of "payback" to the organization by staying (e.g., Hughes, Avey, & Nixon, 2010). Yet, other than Jaramillo et al.'s (2009a) test of a mediated model of the impact of servant leadership on follower turnover intentions through job attitudes, this important association has received scant research attention. Previous research has shown positive linkages between servant leadership and workplace attitudes and attachments (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Hu & Liden, 2011; Liden et al., 2008; Neubert et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010a), which influence turnover intentions (i.e., job satisfaction and commitment; Allen & Griffeth, 2001; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Mobley, 1977; Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009). In support of these processes, Jenkins and Stewart (2008) found that servant leaders improved the job satisfaction of their nursing staff, and Jaramillo et al. (2009a) found that servant leadership was associated with the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of salespeople. Servant leadership influences followers by satisfying basic follower needs and treating followers fairly (Mayer, Bardes, & Piccolo, 2008). Therefore, we proposed that through the process of social exchange, followers of servant leaders are unlikely to develop intentions to leave their organization.

Hypothesis 3. Individual-level servant leadership is negatively related to follower turnover intentions.

Similar to the process proposed with turnover intentions, followers of servant leaders may become less disengaged in their work as a reciprocal response to the commitment shown by their leader. Conceptualized as the opposite of engagement, disengagement refers to psychologically withdrawing oneself from work tasks, including negative attitudes/affect toward work and executing work tasks mechanically (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003). Although no research to our knowledge has investigated disengagement as an outcome of servant leadership, leadership in general is speculated to be a major factor contributing to employee engagement in the workplace (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). For instance, engagement has been linked to authentic leadership (Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010b) and transformational leadership (Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011). Further, disengagement is negatively associated with employee commitment and positively associated with turnover intentions (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Extending these findings, we predict that followers of servant leaders are not likely to psychologically withdraw from their work.

Hypothesis 4. Individual-level servant leadership is negatively related to follower disengagement.

3.3. Store-level servant leadership: inspiring follower helping behavior

Beyond reduction of follower withdrawal, we posit that servant leaders also inspire a cycle of service more broadly at the store-level. Store-level servant leadership is the overall level of servant leadership exhibited in the store by the leader, as perceived across followers and other stakeholders. It is likely construed through the overall store environment rather than through individual relationships and daily leader–follower interactions.

Our model posits that servant leaders will inspire their followers to help others just as they have been helped by their leader. Helping behavior, also termed organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), is "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4). Specifically, OCB-I refers to interpersonal helping behavior directed toward coworkers. It includes assisting coworkers with work even if not part of an employee's formal job requirements (i.e., task-focused OCB-I), as well as praising coworkers when they do well or lifting coworker spirits when they feel low (i.e., person-focused OCB-I; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002).

In line with social learning theory and research linking servant leadership and helping behavior (Ehrhart, 2004; Hu & Liden, 2011; Liden et al., 2008; Neubert et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010a), we proposed that followers throughout a store are likely to perform helping behavior toward their coworkers as a mirror of the behaviors they witness their servant leader exhibit. Followers witness their leader displaying strong ethical standards, promotion and empowerment of others, and service for the community. In turn, followers model these values and behaviors by helping others, including peers, customers, and community members (Ehrhart, 2004). This is akin to the falling dominoes effect described by Bass, Waldman, Avolio, and Bebb (1987). Servant leadership is also related to follower motivation to exert extra effort (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), which is necessary for extra-role helping behaviors.

Hypothesis 5. Store-level servant leadership is positively related to follower helping behavior (task and person-focused OCB-I).

3.4. The mediating role of service climate

In addition to direct effects of servant leadership, store-level servant leadership may impact follower outcomes through the overall dynamic it creates within the store; in particular, in the creation of a climate for service, which in turn may impact follower behaviors and attitudes. Defined at the group level, service climate refers to "employees' shared perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures that are rewarded, supported, and expected concerning customer service" (Schneider,

Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002, p. 222). Servant leaders foster a climate of service by role modeling other-oriented service behaviors and emphasizing the importance of service values like personal integrity, trust, and interest in others' growth and success. Servant leadership is also associated with perceptions of fair treatment, which may lead to a climate in which employees are likely to help one another and customers in a spirit of high-quality service (Ehrhart, 2004). Work by Smith, Montagno, and Kuzmenko (2004) supports this idea; they suggested that servant leaders foster a culture focused on personal growth of individuals and the organizational system as a whole. In an organization focused on customer service as a core value, we expected this concern for personal and organizational growth, coupled with an emphasis on organizational policies, practices, and procedures that focus on serving customers and the broader community, may naturally lead to a climate for service. Extant research supports a positive effect of servant leadership on service climate (Walumbwa et al., 2010a).

In turn, we expected that service climate would be associated with follower helping behaviors, turnover intentions, and disengagement. Indeed, research shows that service climate is consistently associated with helping behaviors (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005). In line with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), this is likely because a positive service climate fosters social norms of helpfulness and cooperation among the group of employees and with customers. These norms are likely to strengthen as employees observe such behaviors being rewarded and modeled by leaders and coworkers. Further, social exchange theory suggests that this climate of service may cultivate follower satisfaction with and commitment to the leader and organization, thereby increasing the desire of employees to "pay back" the organization for providing a positive and rewarding environment of service (i.e., by not withdrawing from that environment; Blau, 1964). Walumbwa et al. (2010a) demonstrated that the relationship between servant leadership and helping behavior is partially mediated by service and procedural justice climate, and we extended their work to examine turnover intentions and disengagement as additional outcomes. Namely, we predicted that store-level servant leadership influences follower outcomes through service climate.

Hypothesis 6. Service climate mediates the relationship between store-level servant leadership and follower turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 7. Service climate mediates the relationship between store-level servant leadership and follower disengagement.

Hypothesis 8. Service climate mediates the relationship between store-level servant leadership and follower helping behavior (task and person-focused OCB-I).

3.5. Sales behavior and store sales performance

We also expected that store-level servant leadership would effectively enhance sales performance through service climate. The manner in which servant leaders promote the interests of their followers and the broader community of stakeholders provides a clear example for followers in promoting the interests of their customers. Thus, through both processes of role modeling and social exchange (Bandura, 1977; Blau, 1964), servant leaders promote a customer service orientation in the workplace that is reflected in how followers treat customers (i.e., service climate), which should affect individual and organizational performance in the sales context.

Although scant research has examined this link, Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts (2009b) asserted that "servant leadership may be a particularly effective style of sales leadership to instill in and model for the sales force a genuine motivation to serve customers" (p. 257). Indeed, the climate fostered by a servant leader is likely to focus on personal and organizational development (Smith et al., 2004), which in a sales organization translates to development of customer-oriented behaviors. Servant leadership likely helps develop a strong service climate in which the customer's needs are highly valued and carefully addressed, which leads to stronger unit performance (Ehrhart, Witt, Schneider, & Perry, 2011). In support of this notion, Jaramillo et al. (2009b) found that servant leadership was related to salesperson customer orientation, which in turn increased customer-directed helping behavior and outcome performance (e.g., self-perceptions of exceeding sales objectives and contributing to a good market share). Liden et al. (2008) also demonstrated a relationship between servant leadership and follower in-role performance. Collectively, a service orientation among employees has also been associated with unit-level profitability and consumer sales measures (Lytle & Timmerman, 2006), and servant leadership has been linked to increased return on assets (Peterson et al., 2012). Therefore, we hypothesized that servant leadership enhances follower in-role sales behaviors and overall store sales performance by creating a service climate, as the store leaders are role models of servant behavior that followers translate into serving customers effectively.

Hypothesis 9. Service climate mediates the relationship between store-level servant leadership and follower sales behavior.

Hypothesis 10. Service climate mediates the relationship between store-level servant leadership and store sales performance.

4. Method

4.1. Sample

We collected data from a United States retail organization that includes servant leadership as a core value in its mission and practice. This organization operates over 600 stores offering high-end apparel and personalized customer service. Each store has one store manager and 9 employees, on average. Most employees work in customer-facing sales positions, but 1 or 2 employees

per store work in non-customer-facing support positions. Regional managers supervise multiple stores across an assigned geographical region, acting as the boss of those store managers.

The organization allowed us to recruit employees from 385 randomly selected stores across the United States. Out of the 385 store managers, 110 responded (29% response rate). At least one follower from 224 of the 385 stores responded (425 followers total; 12% follower response rate,[1] average 1.54 employees per store, 7 employees maximum per store). Out of the 224 stores with follower responses, we obtained regional manager ratings for 108 stores. This represented 40 unique regional managers out of 59 invited (i.e., regional managers completed multiple surveys, one survey for each store in their geographic region; 68% response rate). We were able to match 216 of our 425 followers to a store manager respondent (51%), 213 followers to a regional manager respondent (50%), and 116 followers to both a store manager and regional manager respondent (27%).

Because the organization's executives were concerned about protecting the anonymity of the respondents, we did not include typical demographic items in the surveys. However, based on our work with focus groups from the organization and anecdotal data informally shared by the organization's human resource executives, we estimated that the employees are mostly males in their 20s, 30s, and 40s with moderate to high tenure with the organization (the organization placed strong emphasis on low employee turnover and promoting from within). Most store employees were also full-time and consider their work with the organization a professional career, rather than a part-time or short-term job.

To determine if there was a difference between store managers who responded to the survey and those who did not, we compared aggregated follower-rated servant leadership and service climate ratings in stores with a responding store manager to stores without a responding store manager (based on follower ratings from those stores). We found that servant leadership ratings were not significantly different ($t = 1.21$, ns), but service climate ratings were significantly higher for stores with a responding store manager ($t = 3.15$, $p < .01$). Although this difference raises response bias concerns, the small mean difference (.33) relative to the standard deviation for the scale (.70 in stores with a responding manager, .82 in stores without a responding manager) indicates that the difference is likely of little practical significance.

4.2. Procedure

Executives at the organization randomly selected 385 stores (representing all regions across the United States) from among their 600 stores to participate. Three separate surveys were developed according to the job level of participants. The regional manager survey included a measure of store manager servant leadership and store sales performance. Regional managers were sent a link to their survey via e-mail and asked to complete a separate survey for every store in their region. Store managers (one per store) were sent: (a) a link to the store manager survey via e-mail and (b) a link to the employee survey to distribute to their store employees. The store manager survey included self-ratings of personality and overall ratings of follower helping behavior and sales behavior occurring in the store. The employee survey included a measure of store manager servant leadership, service climate, self-rated turnover intentions and disengagement, and overall follower helping behavior and sales behavior occurring in the store. By nature of the data collection strategy, four of our follower outcome measures were distributed to only a portion of these respondents (out of 425 total followers participating, 245 followers received and completed the task-focused OCB-I and sales behavior measures and 92 followers received and completed the person-focused OCB-I and disengagement measures, with no overlapping respondents).

At the request of the company, all regional and store manager invitation emails were generated and sent by a company executive. To maintain anonymity and increase the comfort level of respondents, unique store codes were created by the researchers (rather than asking participants to provide store identification numbers). Each store's code was emailed to the store manager so he/she could communicate the code to his/her employees. Participants were assured that their responses would not be accessible at any time to representatives of their organization, and they were assured full anonymity in their responses. In addition to collecting no demographics, these measures were enforced to encourage more participation and honesty from the respondents.

4.3. Measures

Table 1 provides a summary of how each construct was measured, including who responded to each measure, who or what was the object of each measure, and at what level each measure was modeled. Responses were given on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) unless otherwise noted.

4.3.1. Personality

We used Goldberg et al.'s (2006) 10-item subscales of the International Personality Item Pool to assess leader agreeableness ($\alpha = .80$) and extraversion ($\alpha = .84$). Leaders rated their own personality using items such as "Have a good word for everyone" and "Know how to captivate people" (respectively), in terms of how well each statement describes them on a scale of 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate).

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[1] Follower response rate was calculated by dividing 425 follower participants by total number of followers in the 385 stores invited to participate. Although we did not have complete data on total number of followers, we estimated based on store manager reports of number of employees per store to estimate 3465 total followers invited to participate (385 stores each with 9 average employees).

Table 1
Summary of study measures.

Construct	Measure	Respondent	Referent	Level
Agreeableness	International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006)	Leader	Leader	Store-level
Extraversion	International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006)	Leader	Leader	Store-level
Servant leadership	Servant leadership scale (Ehrhart, 2004)	Followers	Leader	Individual-level and aggregated to store-level
		Regional Mgr	Leader	Store-level
Service climate	Global Service Climate Scale (Schneider et al., 1998)	Followers	Store	Aggregated to store-level
Turnover intentions	Griffeth et al.'s (2000) scale	Followers	Followers	Individual-level
Disengagement	Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005)	Followers	Followers	Individual-level
Helping behavior	Task- and person-focused OCB-I (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002)	Followers	Store	Aggregated to store-level
		Leader	Store	Store-level
Sales behavior	Created for this study	Followers	Store	Aggregated to store-level
		Leader	Store	Store-level
Store sales performance	Rating of falling short, meeting or exceeding store sales goals	Regional Mgr	Store	Store-level

4.3.2. Servant leadership

We assessed servant leadership from the follower's perspective with Ehrhart's (2004) 14-item measure. This scale included seven dimensions averaged together to form one servant leadership score. Example items included "My store manager creates a sense of community among employees," "My store manager makes the personal development of employees a priority," and "My store manager holds employees to high ethical standards" ($\alpha = .97$).

We also measured store-level servant leadership by asking the regional managers to rate each of their store manager's servant leadership behaviors using the same Ehrhart (2004) measure ($\alpha = .88$). Although this single-source method may be less reliable and valid than aggregation of multiple follower ratings (see James, 1982; Scullen, 1997), it did allow us to test a model without the threat of same-source bias (i.e., independent and dependent variables assessed by the same raters). We suggest that the leader's boss may have a valuable perspective because he/she is focused on evaluating the leader and the store as a whole.

4.3.3. Service climate

Store service climate from the follower's perspective was measured with the 7-item Global Service Climate Scale (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). This scale included items such as "How would you rate the recognition and rewards employees receive for the delivery of superior work and service" and "How would you rate the overall quality of service provided by your store" on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent; $\alpha = .91$).

4.3.4. Follower turnover intentions

Intent to quit was assessed with one item from Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner's (2000) scale: "I intend to quit working for my company within the next 12 months."

4.3.5. Follower disengagement

Disengagement was measured with the 8-item subscale from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). Sample items included "I get more and more engaged in my work" (reverse coded) and "Lately, I tend to think less during my work and just execute it mechanically" ($\alpha = .80$).

4.3.6. Follower helping behavior

Helping behavior was assessed using two subscales of OCB-I (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002), which is a specific form of organizational citizenship behavior directed toward coworkers. Task-focused OCB-I includes helping coworkers with work-related issues through transactions, which can be described as more instrumental, whereas person-focused OCB-I includes helping coworkers with personal issues through friendship and social support. The 6-item task-focused OCB-I subscale ($\alpha = .95$) included items such as "Employees in my store go out of the way to help their coworkers with work-related problems," and the 8-item person-focused OCB-I subscale ($\alpha = .95$) included items such as "Employees in my store listen to coworkers when they have to get something off of their chest." We also asked leaders (i.e., store managers) to assess general follower helping behavior in the store using the same two subscales of task-focused OCB-I ($\alpha = .90$) and person-focused OCB-I ($\alpha = .89$).

4.3.7. Follower sales behavior

We used an extensive qualitative observation and induction process to develop items to assess sales behaviors performed by employees. First, several members of the research team observed store employees from our sample, acting in an informal secret shopper capacity. Then the same researchers compiled lists of key sales behaviors highlighted in several best-selling sales books (Fox, 2000; Holden, 1999; Schiffman, 2008). As a research team, we then compared independent lists and selected the behaviors most directly related to obtaining and increasing the value of customer purchases, such as up-selling. Out of those, we retained the top five behaviors consistent across all independent researcher lists and wrote items to assess the extent to which followers performed those expected sales behaviors. Items were "Employees at my store suggest products in response to customer

requests/needs," "Employees at my store use creative strategies to satisfy customer requests/needs," "Employees at my store make efforts to encourage customers to buy today," "Employees at my store encourage customers to return for future purchases," and "Employees at my store make efforts to up-sell" ($\alpha = .82$). We also asked the store managers to report on these same items ($\alpha = .77$).

4.3.8. Store sales performance

Performance data were gathered from regional managers using the participating organization's own internal rating system. In this organization, stores had two sales goals in the form of a "good" and "excellent" goal. Regional managers rated each store under their supervision on a 4-point Likert response scale of (1) fell short of their assigned "good" sales goal, (2) met their "good" sales goal, (3) exceeded their "good" sales goal, or (4) achieved their "excellent" sales goal. Although executives during focus groups would not disclose the precise formula for calculating "good" and "excellent" performance goals, they did confirm that the formula accounted for such external variables as store location, number of store employees, store inventory, and past performance history.

4.4. Analysis strategy

While our model was multilevel on the whole, we chose an appropriate regression analysis for each hypothesis according to the levels involved. For Hypotheses 1, 2, 6 and 7 the predictors (i.e., leader agreeableness and extraversion and store-level servant leadership) were at the store-level and the outcomes (i.e., follower ratings of servant leadership, turnover intentions and disengagement) were at the individual-level. We used multilevel mixed-effects modeling within SAS Proc Mixed to regress servant leadership on grand-mean-centered leader personality traits (Hypotheses 1 and 2) and to regress follower turnover intentions and disengagement on store-level service climate and store-level servant leadership (Hypotheses 6 and 7).

For Hypotheses 3 and 4, the predictor (i.e., servant leadership) and outcomes (i.e., follower turnover intentions and disengagement) were at the individual-level of analysis. Following recommendations by Hofmann and Gavin (1998), we controlled for servant leadership at the store-level of analysis. We employed SAS Proc Mixed to regress turnover intentions on group-mean-centered servant leadership (pure individual-level created by subtracting the store mean from each individual's score) while controlling for group-mean servant leadership (pure store-level created by taking the mean of all employee responses within each store). Hofmann and Gavin demonstrated that this centering strategy provides results similar to grand-mean-centering but also allows a test of separate level effects to appropriately assess the hypotheses.

As the remaining Hypotheses 5, 8, 9 and 10 were entirely at the store-level, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was most appropriate. Our only available demographic variable, number of employees per store, was significantly related to sales behavior and store sales performance. Therefore, we included number of employees as a control variable in all models that included sales behavior or store sales performance as dependent variables, as suggested by Becker (2005).

Because some analyses included study measures collected by a single method (i.e., follower survey), we tested for the influence of common method variance using procedures described by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) and Williams, Cote, and Buckley (1989). We tested a CFA that included all study measure items loading on their respective constructs as well as an uncorrelated latent variable that represented a method factor. We allowed all items of all scales to load onto the method factor. While model fit improved when the method factor was included in the model, the average variance explained in the items by the method factor was only 12%, which is well below the 25% average method variance that Williams et al. reported across multiple studies. This indicates that common method variance was not a major concern in this study.

To alleviate concerns that many of our stores had only 1 employee report (n = 118 stores), we replicated our hypothesis tests using only stores with 2 or more employee reports (n = 106 stores). The significance test results did not change; therefore, we report results with the full sample below.

5. Results

The descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and scale reliabilities of study variables are presented in Table 2.

5.1. Aggregation Analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we first ran aggregation statistics to ensure appropriate aggregation of our multilevel variables (i.e., follower-rated servant leadership, service climate, helping behavior, and sales behavior). Following recommendations by James, Demaree, and Wolf (1984), we computed $r_{wg(j)}$ using a uniform distribution to assess interrater agreement. For the $r_{wg(j)}$ calculations, we deleted stores with only one follower response. Strong agreement is indicated by $r_{wg(j)}$ values above .70, while moderate agreement is indicated by values between .51 and .70 (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Results demonstrated moderate interrater agreement for servant leadership ($r_{wg(j)} = .54$), service climate ($r_{wg(j)} = .56$), and task-focused OCB-I ($r_{wg(j)} = .57$) which provides some support to justify aggregation to the store-level. We found strong interrater agreement for sales behavior ($r_{wg(j)} = .72$).

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC1) can also be used as an empirical test of whether there is sufficient variance at the store-level to justify aggregation. ICC1 is a measure of the proportion of total variance in a variable that is explained by responses at the store-level (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000), computed by dividing store-level variance by total variance (store- and

Table 2

Multilevel descriptive statistics and correlations.

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Agreeableness	(.80)														
2. Extraversion	.36**	(.84)													
3. Servant leadership (follower-rated)	.32**	−.19**	(.97)		.63**	−.21**	−.32**	.47**		.43**		.40**			
4. Servant leadership (regional mgr rated)	−.11	−.25**	.13*	(.88)											
5. Service climate	.33**	−.18**	.86**	.08	(.91)	−.39**	−.60**	.62**		.64**		.61**			
6. Follower turnover intentions	−.09	.04	−.54**	−.05	−.44**	–	.72**	−.34**		−.39**		−.37**			
7. Follower disengagement	−.51**	−.27**	−.43**	.46**	−.28**	.68**	(.80)			−.42**					
8. Follower task-focused OCB-I (follower-rated)	.45**	−.17**	.82**	−.11	.76**	−.31**	–	(.95)				.53**			
9. Follower task-focused OCB-I (leader-rated)	.27**	.15*	.27**	.00	.33**	−.51**	−.32**	.22**	(.90)						
10. Follower person-focused OCB-I (follower-rated)	−.03	−.06	.38**	−.05	.42**	−.30**	−.11	–	.61**	(.95)					
11. Follower person-focused OCB-I (leader-rated)	.44**	.18**	.34**	.06	.41**	−.21**	−.10	.30**	.73**	.67**	(.89)				
12. Follower sales behavior (follower-Rated)	.28**	−.13*	.49**	.07	.71**	−.09	–	.69**	.13*	–	.33**	(.82)			
13. Follower sales behavior (leader-rated)	.29**	.25**	.05	−.00	.17**	−.48**	−.33**	.20**	.47**	−.02	.37**	.34**	(.77)		
14. Store sales performance	.12*	.03	.01	.38**	.07	.24**	.18**	.19**	.00	−.47**	.04	.41**	.18**	–	
15. Number of employees per Store	−.01	−.04	−.12*	.22**	.00	−.10	.18**	−.02	−.22*	−.44**	−.12*	.35**	.15*	.25**	–
Grand mean	4.16	3.88	3.43	3.58	3.71	2.08	2.78	3.66	4.04	3.89	4.20	4.19	4.15	2.35	8.53
Between-persons SD	.46	.52	.79	.46	.49	.50	.32	.66	.61	.35	.52	.33	.52	1.09	5.27
Within-person SD			.71		.71	1.13	.64	.77		.76		.54			
Proportion within variance			45%		68%	84%	80%	80%		83%		73%			

Note. OCB-I = organizational citizenship behavior directed toward coworkers. Individual-level correlations are given above the diagonal, and store-level correlations are given below the diagonal. Scale reliabilities are shown in parentheses along the diagonal. Proportion within variance computed by dividing within-person variance by total variance (within- and between-person variance).

*p<.05.
**p<.01.

individual-level variance). Our data suggest that ICC1s were sufficiently high for servant leadership (ICC1 = .55), service climate (ICC1 = .32), task-focused OCB-I (ICC1 = .43), and sales behavior (ICC1 = .27). We also found that a substantial portion of the total variance for each scale was within store (ranging from 45% to 80%; see Table 2). Thus, because there was both within- and between-person variance to explain, we determined that multilevel modeling was appropriate for these measures.

We chose not to aggregate follower-rated person-focused OCB-I to the store-level because the aggregation statistics did not indicate sufficient variance at the store-level for this measure ($r_{wg(j)} = .53$; ICC1 = −.01; proportion within variance = 83%). This likely resulted from our small sample size for this scale (n = 88 stores) and the fact that most stores in this subsample had a single follower respondent. Without multiple respondents per store, we did not capture sufficient store-level variance to aggregate follower-rated person-focused OCB-I to the store-level. Hence, we removed this measure from further analyses.

5.2. Hypothesis tests

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that leader extraversion and agreeableness would be related to follower perceptions of servant leadership. In support of these, we found that agreeableness was positively ($\gamma = .80$, p<.01; Model 1) and extraversion was negatively ($\gamma = −.60$, p<.01; Model 1) related to follower perceptions of servant leadership. We conducted an alternative test of these hypotheses using servant leadership reported by the leader's regional manager and found that extraversion was significantly negatively related to regional manager perceptions of servant leadership ($\beta = −.30$, p<.01), but agreeableness was not ($\beta = .00$, ns).

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predicted that individual-level servant leadership (as reported by followers) is related to follower turnover intentions and disengagement (see Table 3). We found both individual-level servant leadership ($\gamma = −.33$, p<.05; Model 2) and servant leadership aggregated to the store-level ($\gamma = −.36$, p<.01; Model 2) were negatively related to follower turnover intentions. Hypothesis 3 was supported. In support of Hypothesis 4, both individual-level servant leadership ($\gamma = −.33$, p<.05; Model 4) and servant leadership aggregated to the store-level ($\gamma = −.15$, p<.05; Model 4) were negatively related to follower disengagement.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that store-level servant leadership is related to follower helping behavior. For follower-rated helping behavior aggregated to the store-level, store-level servant leadership was positively related to coworker task-focused OCB-I ($\beta = .59$, p<.01; Model 6; see Table 4). We could not test this relationship using follower-rated person-focused OCB-I for reasons described above. However, we replicated this hypothesis test using leader ratings of follower task- and person-focused OCB-I. We found that store-level servant leadership was related to person-focused OCB-I as reported by the leader ($\beta = .16$, p<.05; Model

Table 3
Multilevel modeling results.

Level and variable	Servant leadership (follower-rated)	Follower turnover intentions		Follower disengagement	
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Intercept	3.47**	3.27**	4.05**	3.33**	3.72**
Agreeableness	.80**				
Extraversion	−.60**				
Individual-level					
Servant leadership (follower-rated)		−.33*		−.33*	
Store-level					
Servant leadership (follower-rated)		−.36**	−.09	−.15*	−.03
Service climate			−.46**		−.22
n (individual-level)	178	290	288	92	92
n (store-level)	103	183	183	76	76
σ^2	0.52**	1.33**	1.34**	0.31**	0.39**
τ_{00}	0.50**	0.03	0.00	0.06	0.00

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented. σ^2 indicates individual-level residual variance and τ_{00} indicates variance in the individual-level intercepts across stores.
* $p<.05$.
** $p<.01$.

10), but it was not related to task-focused OCB-I as reported by the leader ($\beta=.13$, *ns*; Model 8). These results demonstrate partial support for Hypothesis 5.

Hypotheses 6, 7, and 8 proposed that service climate mediates the relationship between store-level servant leadership and follower turnover intentions, disengagement and helping behavior. We followed recommendations by Shrout and Bolger (2002) and tested mediation with 3 steps (see Tables 3 and 4). In step 1, we demonstrated that follower-rated servant leadership was related directly to each follower outcome as described for Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 above. In step 2, we demonstrated that servant leadership was related to the mediator, service climate ($\beta=.68$, $p<.01$; Model 12). Finally in step 3, we assessed the indirect effect of servant leadership on follower outcomes through service climate. The mediator service climate was significantly related to follower turnover intentions ($\gamma=-.46$, $p<.01$; Model 3) and servant leadership became non-significant in support of full mediation. Service climate was also related to follower-rated task-focused OCB-I ($\beta=.47$, $p<.01$; Model 7), but servant leadership remained significant supporting partial mediation. Mediation was not supported for follower disengagement or leader ratings of OCB-I. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was fully supported, Hypothesis 7 was not supported, and Hypothesis 8 was only supported for follower ratings of helping behavior not leader ratings.

Hypothesis 9 predicted that service climate would mediate the relationship between store-level servant leadership and follower sales behavior (see Table 5). In Step 1, store-level follower-rated servant leadership was positively related to aggregated sales behavior as rated by followers ($\beta=.29$, $p<.01$; Model 14). In Step 2, servant leadership was related to the mediator service climate ($\beta=.68$, $p<.01$; Model 12), and in Step 3, service climate was positively related to store sales performance ($\beta=.72$, $p<.01$; Model 15). In this final step servant leadership became non-significant in support of full mediation. We also found support for full mediation when using follower sales behavior rated by the leader, as service climate was positively related to leader-rated follower sales behavior in Step 3 ($\beta=.27$, $p<.01$; Model 17). We replicated these tests using regional manager-rated servant leadership as a predictor of sales behavior (follower and leader rated), and results were similar except that there was no significant direct relationship between regional manager-rated servant leadership and follower-reported sales behavior. In

Table 4
OLS regression results for store-level helping behavior and service climate.

Level and variable	Follower task-focused OCB-I (follower-rated)		Follower task-focused OCB-I (leader-rated)		Follower person-focused OCB-I (leader-rated)		Service climate	
	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13
Store-level								
Servant leadership (follower-rated)	.59**	.27**	.13	.07	.16*	.03	.68**	
Servant leadership (regional mgr rated)								.03
Service climate		.47**		.18		.15		
F	142.45**	115.60**	3.31	4.84**	4.85*	2.53	318.04**	0.18
Adjusted R^2	.34	.46	.01	.04	.02	.02	.47	−.01

Note. OCB-I = organizational citizenship behavior directed toward coworkers. Standardized regression coefficients are presented.
* $p<.05$.
** $p<.01$.

Table 5
OLS regression results for sales behavior and store sales performance.

Level and variable	Follower sales behavior (follower-rated)		Follower sales behavior (leader-rated)		Store sales performance			
	M14	M15	M16	M17	M18	M19	M20	M21
Store-level								
Servant leadership (follower-rated)	.29[**]	−.16	.02	−.14	−.12	−.02		
Servant leadership (regional mgr rated)							.45[**]	.47[**]
Service climate		.72[**]		.27[**]		.02		−.02
Number of employees	.19[*]	.25[**]	.22[**]	.22[**]	.16	.16	.19[*]	.17
F	8.39[**]	33.41[**]	4.64[*]	5.62[**]	2.59	.83	21.74[**]	9.76[**]
Adjusted R^2	.09	.40	.04	.07	.03	−.01	.25	.22

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are presented.
  [*] $p < .05$.
  [**] $p < .01$.

summary, Hypothesis 9 was supported using both follower and leader reports of follower sales behavior and using both follower and regional manager reports of servant leadership.

We followed the same mediation procedure to test Hypothesis 10, which posited service climate as a mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and store sales performance (see Table 5). In Step 1, store-level follower-rated servant leadership was not related to store sales performance ($\beta = -.12$, ns; Model 18). In Step 2, servant leadership was related to the mediator service climate ($\beta = .68$, $p < .01$; Model 12), but in Step 3, neither servant leadership nor service climate was related to store sales performance (Model 19) and thus mediation was not supported. We also conducted an alternative test of this hypothesis using servant leadership reported by the leader's regional manager (and thus both servant leadership and store sales performance were reported by the regional manager in this analysis). In Step 1, store-level regional-manager-rated servant leadership was directly positively related to store sales performance ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$; Model 20). However, Step 2 was not supported as regional-manager-rated servant leadership was not related to the mediator service climate ($\beta = .03$, ns; Model 13). Neither was Step 3 supported as service climate was not related to store sales performance ($\beta = -.02$, ns; Model 21). In summary, Hypothesis 10 was not supported with either follower or regional manager reports of servant leadership.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to expand the notion that servant leaders are effective by inspiring a cycle of service in which followers learn to serve each other, customers, and the broader community. In doing so, we extend recent theoretical explications of servant leadership (e.g., Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Parolini et al., 2009; Sendjaya et al., 2008) in a richer theoretical and practical direction by empirically examining personality antecedents of servant leadership as well as follower and organizational outcomes of servant leadership. At the same time, we expand Liden et al.'s (2008) multilevel model of servant leadership to test multilevel outcomes from a multi-stakeholder perspective to assess the impact of servant leadership at the individual and group level.

We found agreeableness positively and extraversion negatively related to servant leadership. In turn, servant leadership was associated with less follower withdrawal in the form of turnover intentions and disengagement. Servant leadership at the store-level was related to follower helping behavior throughout the store. Further, the impact of store-level servant leadership on follower turnover intentions, helping behavior, and sales behavior was mediated by service climate. However, contrary to our predictions, service climate did not mediate the relationship of servant leadership and store sales performance; these were related directly only when regional managers reported on both servant leadership and store performance.

6.1. Theoretical implications

Our study makes a number of potentially important contributions to research on servant leadership. First, our investigation of personality lends insight into the types of individuals who are likely to become servant leaders. Leaders scoring high in agreeableness and low in extraversion were more likely to be perceived as servant leaders by their followers. We suggest that this may be due to underlying motivations and values (communion striving and status striving) that drive servant leader behavior, but future research is needed to test this assertion. Our investigation of extraversion also adds further distinction between transformational leadership (positive relationship; Bono & Judge, 2004) and servant leadership (negative relationship).

Our research also contributes to this area of study by providing insight into the role of service climate. We posited that servant leaders may create a climate for service in the store, through both role modeling and social exchange, which may in turn influence important employee and store outcomes. Indeed, we found support for service climate as a mediator of the effect of servant leadership on follower helping behavior, follower turnover intentions, and follower sales behavior. This provides empirical evidence for at least one mechanism by which servant leadership may have beneficial effects in organizations (i.e., by fostering a favorable climate for service). We encourage future research in sales organizations and other industries to examine a variety of

mediators, including other forms of climate (e.g., innovation climate, safety climate, or sales climate), to see other ways servant leaders affect their organizations.

Arguably the most important contribution of our study is the empirical evidence it provides about the benefits of servant leadership. Applying role modeling and social exchange theories, we hypothesized and found support for beneficial effects of servant leadership on follower helping behavior, withdrawal, and sales behavior. First, we theorized that servant leaders may influence follower helping behaviors because they role model these behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Neubert et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010a). Indeed, employees who perceived their leader exhibiting servant qualities were more likely to assist each other with task-related and interpersonal matters. Second, we theorized that servant leaders may decrease follower withdrawal by instituting positive social exchange, which encourages followers to stay engaged and committed to the organization (Liden et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2010a). In strong support of this, we found negative relationships between servant leadership and two forms of withdrawal—turnover intentions and disengagement. These relationships emerged as both direct and indirect effects through service climate, and at both individual and group levels. Further, we found that sales behaviors that contribute to increased sales, like meeting customer needs and up-selling, were enhanced by servant leadership through the influence of service climate. Again, this finding was supported using multiple source reports of both leadership and follower behavior. In all, these findings provide clear evidence about how and why servant leadership can be beneficial to organizations.

Future research can continue to apply role modeling and social exchange frameworks to explore a wider range of benefits of servant leadership. For instance, it may encourage an expanded range of follower OCB that stimulates organizational improvement through adaptation (Choi, 2007), such as voice behavior that challenges current practices and benefits the organization by promoting improvement (Morrison, 2011). In terms of social exchange, disengagement and turnover intentions are likely early indicators of a turnover process. Future research can shed further light on the influence of servant leadership on the entire turnover process, with particular attention to other early indicators (e.g., burnout), intermediate stages (e.g., search behaviors), and actual turnover (Abelson, 1987).

Finally, we found three differential patterns of results across the different rating sources, which may also contribute to theory on these constructs. First, the relationship between servant leadership and follower-rated task-focused helping behavior was not replicated for leader ratings of follower helping behavior. We suggest that leaders may observe followers in more obvious helping behaviors (e.g., actively praising coworkers) but may have less opportunity to observe followers in showing concern for coworkers, as these conversations may occur in private among followers. Follower reports are likely more relevant, as each individual's perception becomes their own reality and most directly influences their own outcomes (Kumar & Jain, 2003). Second, for store sales performance, only regional manager reports of leaders' servant leadership were directly and positively related to store sales performance. As the leaders' boss, regional managers likely have a different perspective than followers because they spend more time evaluating the leader and the store as a whole and spend less time interacting one-on-one with each leader. Therefore, these results may represent a halo effect or self-confirmation bias, wherein regional managers tended to notice and ascribe servant leadership behaviors to good overall performance of the store. This is in contrast to follower's perceptions, which may more accurately reflect behaviors of that leader. Finally, we found that regional manager ratings of servant leadership were not related to leader agreeableness (in contrast to follower ratings). This again suggests that leader bosses have a different vantage point, probably with less opportunity to observe the informal, day-to-day care and concern leaders extend in their relationships with followers. In sum, these differential findings across rating sources highlight the need for future research including multiple viewpoints whenever possible. However, priority should be given to those individuals most directly affected by and exposed to the outcomes of interest.

6.2. Strengths, limitations, and future research

A major strength of this study is our use of multilevel, multi-source data to assess servant leadership with its personality antecedents and follower outcomes. Leadership research is naturally multilevel and the field's understanding of it benefits from including perceptions of raters both above and below the leader. Extending the work of Liden et al. (2008), we took a multilevel view of servant leadership and found interesting discrepancies in different levels of raters. A potential limitation of our findings was revealed when some of the multi-source analyses were non-significant and, thus, our significant findings may have reflected common source bias. Yet, the findings of significant relationships between variables gathered from the same source or level may be the most theoretically and practically compelling association to test. Also, our common method variance analyses demonstrated that only 12% of the variance in study items was explained by a method factor, which suggests that common method variance was not a major concern in the study overall. Our follower behavior measures were also limited to descriptions of the behaviors occurring in the store overall; future research could expand our model by assessing individual follower helping and sales behaviors in addition to aggregate behavior. We encourage future researchers to continue the exploration of multilevel models of servant leadership with attention to ensuring that measures are both meaningful (e.g., raters have ample opportunity to observe those they rate) and multifaceted (e.g., organizational performance is assessed by goal attainment, customer ratings of satisfaction, customer retention, costs associated with turnover).

Limitations may also lie within our study design. Namely, our data were collected within a single organization and, at the request of the organization, we relied on store managers to invite their employees to participate. We did not control the recruitment process and thus do not have knowledge whether or not store managers distributed survey invitations to all their employees or only a portion of employees, which would introduce sampling bias and obscure our computations of response rates.

However, we took steps to ensure employees of their anonymity. To avoid any perceived penalty with (non)participation on the part of the employees, we assigned each store a code word so all respondents could provide that instead of their store number, and we reminded them at several different points that participation was entirely voluntary and no one would know whether or not they participated. Furthermore, responses were submitted directly to the research team using online survey software, giving the organization no access to individual responses. Finally, we did not collect any demographic or relational information in efforts to ensure anonymity in the small units we studied (on average nine employees each). We believe that all of these measures may have reduced some concern with the study design. Still, our findings may not generalize beyond the retail or sales setting and our lack of information about demographics and relationships between leaders and followers may limit our conclusions. We call for researchers to investigate servant leadership practices with additional demographic and relationship data in a broad range of industries with companies that place varying emphases on servant leadership values.

Our data were further limited by our cross-sectional study design, which compromises causal inferences and does not allow us to rule out the possibility of reverse relationships within our model. A cross-sectional design also does not allow us to determine the enduring effects of servant leadership; future research is needed to demonstrate its long-term utility.

Another limitation is, although we suggested that leaders' motivations and values are the underlying mechanisms linking personality to follower perceptions of servant leadership, we did not collect data to examine these mechanisms empirically. Other studies have linked agreeableness and extraversion to communion and status striving, respectively (e.g., Batey, Booth, Furnham, & Lipman, 2011; Chen, Huang, Huang, & Liu, 2011), as well as to job performance (Barrick et al., 2002), but we are unaware of any studies that examined these variables in conjunction to servant leadership. Additional research would be valuable in determining if these motivational strivings indeed mediate the relationship between personality and servant leadership.

Finally, many of our stores had only one employee report, which reduces variability in the store-level measures of servant leadership and service climate. However, in our analyses using only stores with two or more employee reports, significance tests were not different. Timmerman (2005) suggested that low participation rates within team-based studies attenuate study relationships, leading to the possibility of Type II error. Therefore, although low response rate per store represents a potential limitation of our study, results were sufficiently similar to permit us to cautiously make conclusions. Results may have been stronger had we sampled more employees per store.

6.3. Practical implications

Our results suggest that servant leadership can have a positive influence on followers, particularly by instilling a climate for service, enhancing follower helping and sales behavior, and reducing follower withdrawal. Servant leadership contributes to a work environment that promotes the virtue of serving others and in which followers want to remain. These follower outcomes are critical to any organization that strives to reduce turnover costs and enhance employee performance, teamwork, and customer service, but perhaps particularly instructive in a retail environment. For example, turnover costs are a significant problem in retail environments where, among other characteristics of this work setting, non-standard work hours contribute to increased levels of turnover (Martin, Sinclair, Lelchook, Wittmer, & Charles, 2012). Retail owners and managers can benefit from recognizing that servant leadership behavior can contribute to lower intentions to turnover.

These results help to validate the adoption of servant leadership values in a large number of companies, including several at the top of Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work for in America (Ruschman, 2002). Also, because of these positive results, more organizations may consider selecting for and cultivating servant leadership qualities among their managers. Transformational leadership training programs can enhance transformational leadership behaviors (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996), and we may expect similar results for servant leadership, although such programs need more empirical testing. Organizations may consider creating a broader servant-minded culture throughout the organization to better support and maintain the virtuous behaviors of servant leaders in the long-term (Liden et al., 2008).

Overall, our results also suggest an important role for personality testing in the selection, promotion, and placement of managers. Particularly when organizations have named servant leadership as a strategic priority, agreeableness may be an important trait in potential managers, whereas extraversion may be a detrimental trait. Therefore, organizations who emphasize servant leadership might consider selecting individuals for managerial positions based on their level of care and concern for others (agreeableness) instead of solely on their outgoing nature (extraversion). When managers are low on agreeableness and high on extraversion, upper management might seriously consider coaching or other forms of leader development to improve outward displays of care and concern for others, improving their other-orientation overall.

7. Conclusion

This study provides empirical insight into the burgeoning field of servant leadership. In short, our findings provide initial evidence that servant leadership may indeed be an effective leadership behavior in terms of fostering a favorable service climate, inducing positive follower behaviors (i.e., helping coworkers and selling products) and reducing withdrawal (i.e., turnover intentions and disengagement). As organizations continue to embrace the ideals of servant leadership, we encourage additional study so that managers and scholars alike may better understand why and how servant leadership affects employees and organizations.

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