

# Exploring Servant Leadership and Needs Satisfaction in the Sport for Development and Peace Context

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The purpose of this study was to explore how servant leadership influences followers' work-related needs satisfaction within the sport for development and peace field. We examined whether leaders used and followers perceived aspects of servant leadership, and if so, did servant leadership work to satisfy the basic psychological needs of followers (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness). Based on an online survey ( $n=76$ ) with followers (employees) and qualitative interviews ( $n=14$ ) with both leaders (executive directors and founders) and followers (employees), our results revealed that followers perceived and leaders used aspects of servant leadership in sport for development and peace organizations. Leaders used servant leadership behaviors to set the vision for the organization. In addition, followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were met through servant leadership. This study supports use of servant leadership behaviors to satisfy the needs of followers in sport for development and peace organizations.

**Keywords:** effectiveness, empowerment, self-determination

The past 20 years has seen an increased interest in the field of sport for development and peace (SDP) within policy circles, in academia, and in practice (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016). SDP organizations, governments, and development organizations in many diverse countries and geographic regions are attempting to utilize sport in some capacity to advance various social change and development agendas. These organizations may be true SDP organizations/nonprofits constituted for the express purpose of creating sport-based interventions to address specific, targeted outcomes, or these sport-based interventions may be an arm of an existing development

nongovernmental organization (NGO) folding sport into its program offerings (Coalter, 2013; Levermore, 2008). As a plus sport (sport used as a hook to draw in participants) or sport plus (sport augmented and adapted with other ancillary services) type of intervention (Coalter, 2010, 2013), or as a blend of both approaches, these programs are often founded and administered by passionate leaders committed to social justice and helping others. Some of these leaders have strong sport backgrounds, and others enter into SDP more from the development sector with little background in sport per se (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Musser, & Shin, 2017).

Despite these good intentions, many SDP organizations and initiatives come and go, and often have short life spans for their programming (Coalter, 2013; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016). Some SDP organizations/initiatives experience challenges in developing organizational capacity over the long term to effectively carry out their missions (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016), whereas others have passionate leaders who may or may not have the requisite business acumen to foster

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long-term effectiveness for their initiatives (Welty Peachey et al., 2017). Although there are SDP organizations that have survived and even thrived in their work, such as the international NGO Right to Play and Magic Bus in India, these are not without critiques of their neocolonialist development agendas and evangelical rhetoric about the power of sport to bring about social change without evidence to back up these claims (Coalter, 2013; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011).

Much of the research to date in SDP has examined the efficacy of interventions on achieving a variety of outcomes, such as facilitating social inclusion of marginalized individuals (Sherry, 2010; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012; Welty Peachey, Lyras, Borland, & Cohen, 2013), building social capital (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008; Spaaij, 2012), and contributing to cross-cultural understanding and peacebuilding efforts (Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2011; Sugden, 2008; Welty Peachey, Cunningham, Lyras, Cohen, & Bruening, 2015), to name but a few. Recently, some SDP research has extended into examining the nature of leadership. Wells and Welty Peachey's (2016) inaugural investigation of a U.S.-based SDP organization revealed that the founder and regional leaders exhibited servant leadership behaviors, as perceived by their followers. With the investigation of SDP leadership still in its infancy, Wells and Welty Peachey (2016) called for future research on the role of servant leadership in SDP and the subsequent impact servant leadership has on organizational outcomes. This call was echoed by Schulenkorf (2017) in his recent review of the SDP management research, citing leadership as a critical area of study within SDP in the coming years. Hence, what has not been examined in the SDP literature is leadership's role in facilitating followers' needs satisfaction (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), which supports employee performance and therefore enhances long-term effectiveness of an organization (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016).

As outlined previously, many SDP organizations struggle to demonstrate long-term effectiveness of their programs (Coalter, 2013; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016). As such, leadership could be vital in facilitating followers' needs satisfaction, which, in the long run, could lead to more effective SDP organizations. It has been argued that servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977, 1991), with its emphasis on service to followers, stewardship, and follower development (Ehrhart, 2004; van Dierendonck, 2011), could be critical to the long-term viability and success of SDP organizations due to the care and nurture needed in working with clientele who are often marginalized and disadvantaged (Welty Peachey & Burton, 2016). However, limited empirical research has tested this supposition in the SDP context. This includes a lack of understanding of the relationship between servant leadership and employee needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As recently advanced by some scholars, it could be that leadership behaviors necessary for managing SDP organizations are different within this context

than within other sport-based organizations due to the unique missions, foci, challenges, and stakeholder needs associated with SDP organizations (see Schulenkorf, 2017; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2016; Welty Peachey, Damon, Zhou, & Burton, 2015). As mentioned previously, aside from Wells and Welty Peachey's (2016) initial work, there has been limited scholarship examining leadership behaviors within SDP.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how servant leadership influences followers' work-related needs satisfaction within the SDP field. This research is significant and consistent with the focus of this special issue, as we adopt a follower-centered perspective on leadership (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014) that has not been explored in the SDP context, and which gives insight into how servant leadership influences followers' through satisfaction of followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As such, the present study has direct applicability for SDP practitioners for leading organizations and enhancing follower satisfaction, which could ultimately foster improved organizational effectiveness (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels, 2015), and for also enhancing theoretical understandings of the unique aspects of servant leadership in this space. Understanding the connection between leadership and followers' needs satisfaction is an important step in examining how leadership is related to organizational effectiveness (Leroy et al., 2015). To accomplish our objective, we conducted a mixed-methods study with followers and leaders working for SDP organizations around the world with different missions and foci.

## The SDP Context

With its roots in the ancient Olympic Games and later initiatives for veterans returning from World War I to help them reacclimate to society (Burnett, 2001), SDP has been embraced by governments, the United Nations, and many national and international NGOs as a possible vehicle to achieve development agendas (Kidd, 2011; Levermore, 2008). Although social change and development through sport is a laudable goal, the SDP field has received concerted criticism from scholars, citing its neocolonial roots that exclude local stakeholders from involvement in the process of development through sport (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Nicholls & Giles, 2007), evangelical rhetoric about the power of sport for development adopted in policy circles and by NGOs without a strong evidentiary base (Coalter, 2010, 2013), and the tendency to conduct micro-level programming (i.e., focused on individual development) and then make claims about wider meso- and macro-level impact (Coalter, 2011). Notwithstanding this critical and important work in the SDP field, other scholars have engaged in this space by investigating a wide array of possible development outcomes that might be evinced through sport across contexts and cultures (see Schulenkorf et al., 2016 for



of others, and by actively seeking out contributions of followers (van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leaders put their followers' interests first, provide them with support, and facilitate their followers' performance. Servant leaders also demonstrate humility by not taking sole credit when a task has been successfully accomplished (van Dierendonck, 2011). Furthermore, servant leaders create an environment of interpersonal acceptance in which followers feel safe. They create trusting relationships so that followers are able to make mistakes and still feel they will be accepted. Servant leaders also understand another person's perspective and are able to "walk in another's shoes." Servant leaders demonstrate compassion and show empathy and forgiveness even when confronted with arguments, personal offences, or mistakes (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015).

Finally, servant leaders provide direction by clearly demonstrating to followers what is expected of them (van Dierendonck, 2011). They will provide followers with an appropriate amount of accountability and customize directions based on followers' abilities, needs, and input. This type of leading allows for new ways of getting things accomplished and creates alternative ways to meet old problems, with a consistent reliance on values and convictions when accomplishing tasks (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014).

### Self-Determination Theory

Servant leadership theory emphasizes a concern for the needs of followers more than other leadership theories (Mayer, 2010). Furthermore, servant leadership has a focus on follower care and development (Ehrhart, 2004; van Dierendonck, 2011); this style of leadership can be highly effective in SDP, as providing care, nurture, and empowerment are necessary for positive changes to occur and organizational outcomes to be realized (Welty Peachey & Burton, 2016). Also, as leadership is integral to and a central aspect of followers' organizational context, it therefore "should play a significant role in providing the necessary conditions to support satisfaction of basic psychological needs at work" (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016, p. 127).

Self-determination theory (SDT) describes the premise that individuals will proactively seek out opportunities to grow and develop to their fullest potential (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Three basic psychological needs—need for autonomy, need for relatedness, and need for competency—are critical to individual growth and psychological development (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2006). The need for autonomy is the most significant of the three needs described by SDT and refers to having choice and the ability to set the course of action for oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Need for relatedness describes how an individual desires a feeling of connectedness, being cared for and caring for others, and having a sense of belongingness to a group, an organization, or to society (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The final of

the three basic needs is the need for competence, as an individual desires to feel effective in his/her interactions within a social context (e.g., in a workplace) and be provided opportunities to practice and master one's capabilities (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Social contexts that are best served to support needs fulfillment for autonomy, relatedness, and competency are those contexts that are both supportive of and congruent with an individual's true self and are in alignment with an individual's values, interests, and potential (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Servant leadership is positively related to the work-related basic needs satisfaction of autonomy.

H2: Servant leadership is positively related to the work-related basic needs satisfaction of competency.

H3: Servant leadership is positively related to the work-related basic needs satisfaction of relatedness.

SDT has been used as a framework to understand how servant leadership influenced organizational outcomes including employees' organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and employee task performance (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Furthermore, servant leadership had an indirect effect through meeting employees' basic needs impacting work engagement and commitments (van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014). Scholars have called for additional research to understand how servant leadership has influence on additional work-related basic needs satisfaction (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010).

### Methods

To best explore the relationship between servant leadership and followers' work-related needs satisfaction in the SDP field, a mixed-methods investigation was employed. A quantitative methodology allowed us to examine the presence of leadership behaviors and their relationship to followers' needs to test the specific hypotheses outlined above. From a qualitative standpoint, we were interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the leadership behaviors being enacted by leaders in SDP organizations and how these behaviors were being manifested. Thus, we developed the following research question to guide the qualitative portion of the study: What are the leadership behaviors SDP leaders are demonstrating and how are they doing so? Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were initiated specifically for this project. The quantitative data were collected first, followed by qualitative interviews, described in detail below. To date, there has been only one leadership study in SDP. Thus, utilizing

quantitative methods alone would not permit this deeper understanding to emerge.

## Quantitative Method

An e-mail database of SDP employees drawn from 85 SDP organizations registered with the [sportanddev.org](http://sportanddev.org) web platform that employed between five and 25 employees was created. Smaller organizations were chosen to ensure employees had an opportunity to interact with the top leader of the organization and to ensure that the top leader was directly involved in working with followers on a day-to-day basis. Each week for 2 weeks a reminder e-mail was sent to prospective participants. In the online survey, participants had the option to provide their e-mail address for a follow-up interview.

The database was used to invite 472 SDP employees to participate in the study. A total of 127 e-mails were returned for multiple reasons; the main reason being the individual no longer was employed by the organization. Of the remaining 345 valid SDP employee e-mails, 76 followers ( $N = 76$ ) from 67 organizations participated in the survey, for a response rate of 22%.

Multiple positions held throughout SDP organizations were represented in our study. The majority of employees represented identified themselves as associate director (37%), advisor (21%), director (11%), coach/trainer (8%), and administrator (5%). Fifty percent of the SDP employees were men. In addition, 67% worked in low- to middle-income countries and 33% worked in high-income countries using soccer/football (51%) as the main development tool. The majority of organizations were headquartered in the United States (30%) or South Africa (11%). The average occupational tenure was 8.00 years ( $SD = 7.96$ ), and the average organizational tenure was 5.83 years ( $SD = 4.89$ ).

**Instrumentation.** Participants evaluated their top leader's servant leadership behaviors (Ehrhart, 2004). Participants also assessed their work-related basic needs (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Ehrhart's (2004) 14-item general measure of servant leadership ( $\alpha = .93$ ) was used to measure how often the top leader's servant leadership behaviors were displayed. Each item response varied from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *frequently, if not always*. Example items included

"how frequently does your top leader make the personal development of employees a priority" and "how frequently does your top leader create a sense of community among department employees."

Van den Broeck et al. (2010) Work-Related Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale was adopted to measure the satisfaction of SDP employees' work-related basic psychological needs as defined in the SDT literature (see Deci & Ryan, 2008). Similar to Chiniara and Bentein (2016), we reduced the original 18-item Work-Related Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale to 12 items anchored by responses ranging from 1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*. Each item began with the following statement: "In your current job, how satisfied are you with the following aspect of your work?" The Work-Related Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale was used to measure four items of the following three dimensions: autonomy ( $\alpha = .84$ ; e.g., "The opportunities to take personal initiative in my work"), competence ( $\alpha = .82$ ; e.g., "The level of mastery I can achieve at my task"), and relatedness ( $\alpha = .80$ ; e.g., "The opportunities to talk with people about things that really matter to me"; Van Den Broeck et al., 2010).

**Analysis.** Prior to examining the hypotheses, listwise deletion occurred, scale reliability was evaluated, interrater agreement was investigated, and descriptive statistics were estimated (see Table 1). Once no violations were discovered and independence was represented (e.g., rWG values less than .70; see LeBreton & Senter, 2008), IBM SPSS (version 23; IBM Corp, Armonk, NY) was used to conduct descriptive statistics (see Table 1) and linear regression analysis.

## Qualitative Method

We conducted 14 semistructured interviews by phone or Skype with founders, executive directors, and followers (employees) from smaller (5–25 employees) SDP organizations around the world with diverse missions and foci. To best answer the research question, 14 individuals were purposively selected (Creswell, 2012) from a pool of survey participants in the quantitative portion of this study (see previous section), who had indicated that they would be willing to engage in a personal interview with a member of the research team. The criteria for selection were to maximize diversity in job roles (leaders

**Table 1 Means, SDs, and Correlations Among Variables ( $N = 76$ )**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Servant leadership	3.80	0.84	—					
2. Need for autonomy	4.24	0.76	.36*	—				
3. Need for competence	4.15	0.66	.47*	.49*	—			
4. Need for relatedness	4.09	0.77	.38*	.42*	.40*	—		
5. Occupational tenure	8.00	7.96	.08	.06	.02	.12	—	
6. Organizational tenure	5.83	4.89	.02	.02	.09	.20	.57*	—

\* $p < .05$ .

and followers), organizational missions, foci, and geographic regions, so that a variety of perspectives on leadership behaviors could be harnessed. Twenty individuals were invited by e-mail to take part in the personal interview, of which 14 agreed to participate. A follow-up e-mail was sent 1 week after initial contact to nonrespondents. After written informed consent was received, interviews were conducted by one of the three authors that lasted between 45 and 75 min. Pseudonyms were assigned for each interviewee (see Table 2 for information about each interviewee). Data saturation was achieved when common themes and topics began to repeat themselves, and new information was not forthcoming (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

The interview guide was derived from the servant leadership literature (Greenleaf, 1977, 1991; van Dierendonck, 2011) and from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Interviewees were invited to share about their perspectives on the leadership style of either themselves as top leader or of the top leader in their organization, and on how this style contributed to followers' needs satisfaction. Sample questions included "How would you describe the leadership style of your top leader?" "What is your top leader's approach to leading followers?" and "In what ways does your top leader help followers feel satisfied in their work?"

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded by two of the authors. Intercoder reliability was established through each author independently coding two transcripts, then discussing interpretations and coding (Creswell, 2012). Following, a third transcript was independently coded by each author, and another discussion took place, with the level of agreement on coding strategy higher than in the first round of coding. The remainder of the transcripts was then coded by one of these two authors. The data analysis process began by employing a priori or thematic coding, as recommended

by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). A priori categories were drawn from the servant leadership literature (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011) and from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Next, an open coding process was followed as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008), so that additional themes could be captured. All of these initial codes were then folded into key themes (Creswell, 2012), which are portrayed below in the qualitative findings. For example, the initial codes of empowerment, empathy, humility, and autonomy helped to form the theme of empowerment leading to autonomy. As a last step, selective coding allowed us to lift out key data extracts to support the themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Dependability and credibility of the qualitative portion of the study were enhanced by having two of the authors code the transcripts and confer on their interpretations through numerous conversations. The interviewees also reviewed their transcripts for accuracy, and the themes and interpretations drawn forth from the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviewees had only minor edits to their transcripts to reflect clarity, and they generally agreed with our interpretations.

## Results

### Quantitative Results

The quantitative portion of our study allowed us to specifically test how servant leadership influenced followers' needs satisfaction. The first hypothesis, which stated servant leadership is positively related to the work-related basic needs satisfaction of autonomy, revealed a significant relationship for autonomy ( $\beta = 0.36, p = .00$ ). Thus, H1 was supported. In addition, the second hypothesis, which stated servant leadership is positively related to the work-related basic needs satisfaction of

**Table 2 Description of Interview Participants**

Participant	Role	Sport of Focus	Sex
Roger	Director (follower)	Baseball	Male
Rick	Executive director (leader)	Lacrosse	Male
Kevin	Executive director (leader)	Basketball	Male
Steve	Educator (follower)	Soccer/football	Male
Nick	Chief strategist (follower)	Various sports	Male
Liz	Coach (follower)	Various sports	Female
Scott	Founder/executive director (leader)	Soccer/football	Male
Mitchell	Country director (follower)	Lacrosse	Male
Vernon	Founder (leader)	Wheelchair sports	Male
Erin	Executive director (leader)	Soccer/football	Female
Asrah	Serving as executive director in principal (leader)	Various sports	Female
Lynn	Transportation coordinator (follower)	Mostly health education, bit of various sports	Female
Alex	Chief program officer (leader)	Soccer/football	Male
Oscar	Director (follower)	Soccer/football	Male

competency ( $\beta=0.47, p=.00$ ), was significant. Thus, H2 was supported. Finally, the third hypothesis, which stated servant leadership is positively related to the work-related needs satisfaction of relatedness ( $\beta=0.38, p=.00$ ), was supported.

## Qualitative Findings

From a qualitative standpoint, we aimed to answer the research question centered on identifying the kinds of leadership behaviors SDP leaders are demonstrating and how they are doing so. In many instances, respondents also made connections between these leadership behaviors, followers' needs satisfaction, and indirectly to organizational effectiveness. Several key themes emerged: leadership as vision and mission driven, empowerment leading to autonomy, cultivating a growth mindset connected to competence, and relatedness.

**Vision and mission driven.** Both SDP leaders and followers emphasized leadership that was driven by the values and missions of their respective organizations. Leadership based on support of the organization's mission is not unique to SDP, as all organizations (including sport organizations) are mission driven to a certain extent; however, SDP organizations share missions that are based on empowerment, shared responsibility, personal development, and community sustainability. Leadership in the SDP context based on this mission-driven approach is positioned to follow the tenets of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011) based on empowerment and personal development. For instance, Scott described the mission of his organization: "Our main outcome is personal development and personal growth through everything that we do." Echoing that point in describing the vision for his organization, Alex shared:

At the core of everything that we're doing program-matically, it's to provide the kids with the best possible experience. I think at the end of the day if that's not your focus and you're not able to work towards that goal, then I think you need to take a step back and think about what you're doing and why you're doing it there.

Those working in SDP described the visionary and mission-driven nature of their leaders, as Roger, Nick, and other followers used the term vision or visionary when describing their leaders. Roger noted that the leader of his organization is identifying opportunities and ways of meeting objectives that are unlike any other leaders he knows: "She's a visionary, a visionary in a sense that she's always trying to think of how to be innovative, and this means how to do something that nobody else is doing." Also, as Nick shared, his organization's leader has a vision and takes the risks necessary to be successful: "A long-term vision and has sort of always had one, and sometimes knowing where we want to get to without quite knowing how we're going to

get there." In addition, Mitchell discussed the importance of mission-driven leadership in obtaining goals and effectiveness: "Leadership is really focused on the mission that we have . . . we are talking about the goals we should accomplish and our priorities to be effective."

Important to having vision and leading SDP organizations to best fulfill their missions, leadership also demonstrated aspects of servant leadership that support the development and empowerment of followers. Liz noted that her leader shares his vision through empowerment: "It's his vision, but he's so good at sharing his vision with us and then listening to what we see as well." To understand the impacts of servant leadership on followers within SDP organizations, we theorize (including support from previous research) that SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) can help explain how servant leadership influences followers. The following three themes describe how servant leadership supports followers' need for empowerment leading to autonomy, a growth mindset to help develop competence, and the need for relatedness as positioned within SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Empowerment leading to autonomy.** Our participants described how servant leadership influenced the experiences of followers that aligned with empowerment as supported by the tenets of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011) and satisfaction of the need for autonomy as described by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Participants who were employees in the organization spoke directly of their leaders helping meet their needs for engaging in meaningful work and having the freedom to make work-related decisions that are in alignment with their own interests (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Nick noted this relationship with his leader: "He wants to empower all of us to be making our own decisions . . . without his final say or final oversight. . . . What happens is each of us have a chance to use our own strengths within the organization." Steve also recognized this support from the leadership of his organization, who "give us the freedom to look for ways that can seem to be easy for us to achieve it."

Liz noted the leader (founder of the organization) and another longtime leader in the organization were seeking to empower her and those with whom she worked:

They're always talking about, you know, they want us to see this as a career. They want us to see this as a place we can grow. . . . They're like, no we really want this to feel like it's something that you can commit to, and so they're prioritizing that which is exciting.

Our participants serving in leadership positions also spoke to their desire to empower their followers by fulfilling the need for autonomy. Kevin connected empowerment and autonomy quite succinctly: "You've trained them and now you've got to trust them. So, by releasing them you empower them to do what you've

trained them to do, and you let them use their personality.” Vernon also mentioned the importance of leading by example: “My approach is to lead by example in order to motivate and empower our staff.” Asrah described the comfort she took in knowing that if she were to leave her organization, it would continue as a result of the empowerment provided to those she is leading:

I know that if I decide to quit or if I just move into something else, the organization is not going to come collapsing down at all. I think just the fact that we’ve been able to breed leadership at so many levels of the organization . . . that is clearly one contribution. . . . I know that I feel responsible and I’ve been able to contribute to really breeding the leadership at different levels of the organization.

Rick discussed how he provided an empowering environment for his followers and also addressed the challenge of cultural differences in fostering empowerment within followers in his organization:

I like to encourage people to say no and contradict me as much as possible. Because I don’t think that I have all the answers. And I don’t expect people to always say yes to me if they don’t agree. And one of the things in [country] specifically is culturally, they’re very anti-conflict. They agree even though they don’t actually agree. And so, one of the things I did with them when I was there was constantly remind them. I was like guys, I need your opinion on whatever project we’re doing.

Erin also shared:

And then the program directors have a lot of latitude in program design, and I think that’s crucial because they are the ones who are working directly with kids. . . . I have deep confidence in the wisdom of the team and that that wisdom is better than me operating single handedly.

Empowerment is clearly heard in the comments made by several of our participants serving in a leadership role, and this intentional empowerment of followers is important in helping them find meaning and importance in their work, as illustrated by Scott: “It’s important to create that space where they can sort of discover themselves within the scope of the work that we want them to do and find out the best way for them to contribute to that.” Scott went on to relate a story about a former participant who had gone on to become the most significant role model for the program. Scott credited some of this former participant’s development to the leadership provided to him: “If you speak to him he says, ‘look I never knew that this capacity was within me. I never was brought up to believe in myself or to go after these things.’”

Participants also shared that leadership, by using empowerment and supporting aspects of empowerment, was hoping to foster supportive behaviors among

followers that would better enable organizational effectiveness. To illustrate, Alex described leadership of his organization as “encouraging of people to go above and beyond. . . . But I think it’s also because we expect people to go above and beyond. And people that are here are passionate about what we do.”

**Growth mindset and fostering competence.** Leaders of the SDP organizations also talked about the importance of having a growth mindset to foster an effective organization over the long term. As part of this growth mindset, they discussed the importance of developing competence in relatively young staff. A growth mindset can also contribute to the need for competence by supporting followers’ desires to feel effective in their interactions within the SDP organization and be provided opportunities to practice and master one’s capabilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Nick, for example, shared how his organization was always trying to grow and improve in order to be sustainable over the long term:

I think the danger is to an organization that isn’t trying to continually improve. I’d be hesitant on sustainability or stability to say, oh well, let’s keep the status quo. We actually pride ourselves a lot on trying to push the envelope each and every year and we’ve done that with some of our major initiatives.

Nick continued by then linking this growth mindset to developing the organization’s employees and encouraging them to grow in their work and skills: “I think for us it’s giving them tasks beyond their comfort zone is a big one. This comes in a whole host of ways, making people be a part of teams they wouldn’t normally choose to be a part of.” Rick was very direct with his followers regarding the need to develop competence to successfully lead the program because he felt his followers were overly reliant on his leadership: “There was a point where I’m like I’m not coming to your practices. You have to run it all. This is all on you. I might show up, but you have to be doing it. Setting that expectation . . . I think was big.”

From a staff development perspective, Erin talked about growth in terms of developing the skill sets of relatively young employees without much experience and how this was essential for the organization to be effective:

And so I think there’s a piece for me, as a leader, that I need to keep working on to ensure that I am both supporting them in their growth professionally to that new place, which is much more of a director and a manager, and also figure out how to help them get there because they don’t really know how to do it.

Our participants also discussed their perceptions of how their leaders supported this growth mindset. For instance, Steve noted that it was about having the





14 participants for the qualitative portion of the study. Although we had a diverse representation of leaders and followers, types of sports served, and geographic locations, a greater number of participants would have potentially added to the richness of our qualitative findings.

Several intriguing avenues for future research emerged from the present study. First, given the autonomous and connective nature of SDP organizations, we recommend additional research explore how servant leadership, through support for followers' needs satisfaction, may positively impact followers' work behaviors. Servant leadership has been shown to influence positive work behaviors of employees, specifically OCBs, and this influence occurred indirectly by meeting the needs of autonomy and relatedness as described by SDT (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Given the challenges of sustainability for SDP organizations (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016), servant leadership offers a potential opportunity to enhance organizational effectiveness by positively impacting followers' OCBs by meeting their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. OCB has been studied extensively in the organizational literature as this construct is critically linked to meeting organizational goals and objectives and is therefore a vital construct to organizational effectiveness (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

Future research should examine how servant leadership is related through needs satisfaction (autonomy, competency, and relatedness) to other measures of organizational effectiveness in the SDP context, such as outcome assessments, task performance, performance evaluation, stakeholder perceptions, organizational accountability, and financial responsibility (Herman & Renz, 1999). Future research should also explore the pathways for servant leadership development in followers. In addition, given that the missions of most SDP organizations revolve around effecting individual- and societal-level change, future research can target how servant leadership behaviors are related to individual outcomes in program participants (e.g., social inclusion, social capital development, prejudice reduction) and community-level outcomes (community development, inclusive communities, etc.).

In conclusion, the present study answered multiple calls (see Schulenkorf, 2017; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2016; Welty Peachey, Damon, et al., 2015) and extended the understanding of how servant leadership impacts followers through satisfying psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the SDP context. Much more work examining the nature and effects of leadership in the SDP context is certainly needed, and we invite other scholars to join us in this endeavor.

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