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Leading for Multidimensional Sport Employee Well-being:

The Role of Servant Leadership and Teamwork

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Abstract

The personal well-being of sport industry employees has received little attention in the literature. The current investigation addresses this gap by developing a hypothesized model of servant leadership for well-being, positing that such an approach can shape psychological, social, and physical outcomes in the sport workplace. As servant leadership is known to create an environment where employees are awakened, engaged, and developed, this approach is positioned as a key influencer of employee well-being in the sport context. Using data from 489 employees working in professional sports, structural equation modeling analyses indicated servant leadership is predictive of employee life satisfaction and teamwork, with the latter mediating servant leadership's influence on both life satisfaction and physical health. A holistic approach to leadership for multidimensional well-being is henceforth proposed along with management implications for creating environments where sport employees can thrive both inside and outside the workplace.

Keywords: Leadership, well-being, servant leadership, teamwork, life satisfaction, physical health

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1. Introduction

Sport has long been perceived as a contributor to positive outcomes relating to physical, social, and mental well-being (Anderson et al., 2019). The recent special issue in *Sport Management Review* on "Managing Sport for Health" signals sport's potential in this area, however, it also emphasizes the need to go beyond idealistic views and focus on management and leadership practices which prioritize positive health objectives (Edwards & Rowe, 2019). Beyond solely participants, this directive calls for an integrated approach that considers the numerous organizational staff members who play a major supporting role.

Thriving employees are the foundation for positive workplace dynamics and organizational success (Grant et al., 2007). While continual workplace change presents major challenges for employee health and well-being across contexts (Guest, 2017), the sport industry in particular may have dynamics which inherently validate this important issue. For example, passion for sport employment manifests through irrational economic behavior, with a surplus of individuals willing to agree to lower wages for the mere opportunity to 'work in sport' (Hawzen et al., 2018). Further, the long hours and excessive job demands in some cases produce undesirable outcomes like burnout and work family conflict (Huml et al., 2020), elevated stress (Lee, 2019) and pressures to overcommit to job responsibilities leading to emotional exhaustion (Taylor et al., 2019). In addition, the popularity and intense media scrutiny of high-profile sport environments often place employees under increased pressure to succeed (Skinner & Stewart, 2017). Nevertheless, despite growing interest in well-being for sport participants (Filo & Coghlan, 2016), spectators (Inoue et al., 2015), and media consumers (Kim & James, 2019), there remains a distinct lack of knowledge on how to foster and support the well-being of sport employees (Kim et al., 2019).

While leadership plays a significant role in facilitating many positive organizational outcomes, its relationship with employee well-being has largely been neglected (Inceoglu et al., 2018). Furthermore, as leadership can have both positive and negative effects on employees depending on the specific style (Zineldin & Hytter, 2012), a more nuanced understanding of its contribution to employee well-being is warranted. In addition, leadership researchers have typically equated well-being with job satisfaction, despite this narrow focus excluding other dimensions and not fully capturing the broader meaning of well-being (Inceoglu et al., 2018). The current study addresses these issues by investigating how servant leadership affects the psychological, social, and physical domains of employee well-being.

Servant leadership is an approach where the leader prioritizes serving followers first – where there is a genuine concern for followers and a primary focus on their growth and well-being (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Beyond contributing to the leadership and employee well-being literature, this study extends our understanding of servant leadership by considering three outcomes that have received little attention in the literature (Eva et al., 2019). First, life satisfaction is a global assessment of one's quality of life (Diener et al., 1985). Second, teamwork reflects how employees cooperate with each other and work together to achieve goals (Baird et al., 2018). Finally, physical health captures individuals' assessments of their general health based on age, goals, and comparisons with others (Thoits, 2013).

Servant leadership appears uniquely positioned to be a facilitator of well-being due to its significance for all realms of life (Liden et al., 2015) and its focus on follower development across multiple domains (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). In their forty-year review of leadership research in sport management, Welty Peachey et al. (2015) highlighted servant leadership as an approach worthy of considerably more research, calling for further investigation to expand our understanding across multiple sport sectors. Further, the professional sport environment appears to be an ideal testing ground for the impact of

leadership on well-being given the numerous stressors that are often associated with high

profile, socially venerated, and admired workplaces (Kim et al., 2019; Skinner & Stewart,

2017). Using this context as an avenue for theoretical advancement, this study fills a void in

both the general leadership and sport management literatures by considering servant

leadership's effect on well-being constructs that are of interest across multiple sport and

employee settings (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Welty Peachey et al., 2015).

The broad aim of the current study is to investigate servant leadership's role as a

facilitator of multidimensional sport employee well-being. To that end, the specific purpose is

to examine the relationship between servant leadership and the life satisfaction, teamwork,

and physical health of employees working in the sport context.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a holistic approach engaging followers in multiple dimensions

and empowering them toward a state of optimal human functioning (Eva et al., 2019). The

servant leadership style explicitly focuses on follower development rather than organizational

objectives, which distinguishes itself from more traditional leadership perspectives

(Greenleaf, 1977). A general premise of this approach is when the leader first attends to the

needs and ambitions of followers, the achievement of organizational objectives will follow

(Lee et al., 2019). While specific follower development areas vary, there is strong support for

the whole-person focus of servant leadership as an enabler for followers realizing their

optimal selves (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Drawing from this perspective, the current study

defines servant leadership as a holistic approach with the central focus of engaging followers

in multiple dimensions so they are empowered to develop into a state of optimal human

functioning (Van Dierendonck, & Patterson, 2015). This definition points to an inherent link

between servant leadership and employee well-being outcomes, as well-being is equated to

states of positive functioning (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Drawing from Greenleaf's (1977) perspectives, Van Dierendonck (2011) argued that servant leadership is a people-centered approach that should generally lead to positive employee well-being. Specifically, Van Dierendonck articulated the following three types of employee outcomes to be expected: 1) personal growth / self-actualization; 2) becoming wiser, healthier, and more autonomous; and 3) becoming servant-like in collaborative teamwork and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). In an expansive review of the literature, Eva et al. (2019) categorized servant leadership's influence in relation to behavioral, attitudinal, leader-related, and performance outcomes. Behavioral outcomes include OCBs and general helping behaviors. Several attitudinal outcomes have also been associated with servant leadership including work engagement and commitment. Leader-related outcomes relate to higher quality leader-follower relationships and perceptions of trust in the leader. Finally, servant leadership has been linked with team effectiveness and performance at the individual, group, and organizational levels.

2.1.1 Servant leadership in sport management. Initial considerations of servant leadership in the sport context have been viewed through the lens of sport psychology and the coach-athlete relationship. Addressing ethical and moral behavior issues in intercollegiate sport, Desensi (2014) promoted servant leadership as a catalyst for coaches to shift from player manipulation strategies focused on winning, towards one centered on the needs and aspirations of their athletes. In search for new leadership approaches suited for the sport context, Rieke et al. (2008) investigated the impact of servant leadership on high school athletes. These authors found athletes to be more satisfied, mentally tougher, and perform better when playing for a coach who exhibited high levels of servant leadership behaviors.

In sport management, however, servant leadership research has lagged significantly in comparison to the mainstream management literature. The earliest meaningful progress in

this direction was provided by Burton and Welty Peachey (2013, 2014), who proposed

servant leadership as a viable approach for the intercollegiate sport environment. They

proposed that leading student-athletes is especially relevant to servant leadership

characteristics relating to ethics, developing people, and the call to service. Another study in

the intercollegiate context was Burton et al. (2017), who explored servant leadership's role in

facilitating ethical climates. Their investigation found servant leadership to be directly related

to both trust in leadership and the perceptions of an ethical climate.

In their comprehensive forty-year review of leadership research in sport management,

Welty Peachey et al. (2015) highlighted servant leadership as an approach worthy of further

consideration and called for additional research that extends beyond the intercollegiate sport

context. A few studies have followed this recommendation in the sport for development

context. For example, Wells and Welty Peachey (2016) revealed that the founder and

regional coordinators of Street Soccer USA displayed core servant leadership behaviors and

provided primacy to follower needs with an attitude of genuine concern. In addition, Welty

Peachey et al. (2018) found servant leadership to have a positive influence on the basic

human needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

2.2 Employee Well-being

Well-being broadly refers to the assessment of life quality and all things important to

how people experience their lives (Rath & Harter, 2010; Zheng et al., 2015). At the core of

this construct is quality of life, which the World Health Organization (2021) refers to as a

broad concept relating to physical health, psychological state, social relationships, and salient

features of the environment. From this perspective, employee well-being is conceptualized as

a multidimensional construct consisting of psychological, social, and physical dimensions

(Grant et al., 2007), and there is convergence on this triumvirate perspective across several

disciplines (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

2.2.1 Employee well-being in sport management. Compared to the growing body of research on sport consumer well-being (e.g., Inoue et al., 2015; Kim & James, 2019), there is a scarcity of research in the sport context that has addressed employee well-being. As an exception, Kim et al. (2017) drew from the positive organizational behavior literature to develop a conceptual model of psychological capital for sport employees. Building on this perspective, Kim et al. (2019) found support for psychological capital having a positive impact on job satisfaction and psychological well-being for National Collegiate Athletic Department (NCAA) employees. However, contrary to expectation, these authors found no significant relationship between authentic leadership and employee well-being outcomes. These results highlight the need for examining an alternative leadership approach to better understand how well-being can be fostered in the sport workplace.

2.3 Hypothesis Development

To effectively situate the proposed outcomes of servant leadership within their respective well-being domains, psychological, social, and physical well-being are briefly outlined in conjunction with the development of the first three hypotheses.

2.3.1 Psychological well-being. The psychological dimension of well-being concerns optimal functioning and subjective experience (Grant et al., 2007). Psychological well-being has traditionally been viewed as having two prominent aspects: hedonic and eudaimonic (Ryff et al., 2004). Ryan and Deci (2001) offer a detailed historical perspective on each component which is briefly discussed here. Hedonic well-being stems from a Greek philosophical view where the goal of life is pleasure maximization, with happiness levels viewed as the sum of hedonic moments. This aspect focuses on concepts like happiness, positive affect, and low negative affect. The alternate viewpoint of eudaimonic well-being considers true happiness as a concept different from momentary hedonic pleasures. This aspect relates to Aristotelian views of optimal well-being (i.e., eudaimonia) which is found in

virtue and worthwhile pursuits. The term psychological well-being is sometimes used in the literature to denote only the eudaimonic aspect (e.g., meaningfulness), with the hedonic component (e.g., happiness) frequently referred to as subjective well-being (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2001). In the current study, both aspects are considered as part of the psychological well-being domain (e.g., Grant et al., 2007; Hernandez et al., 2018; Ryff et al., 2004).

2.3.1.1 Life satisfaction. One common operationalization of the psychological well-being domain is life satisfaction (Hernandez et al., 2018), which refers to the overall judgement of a person's life experiences based on their own chosen criteria (Diener et al., 1985; Erdogan et al., 2012). Satisfaction with life is a cognitive construct relating to both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of psychological well-being (Keyes et al., 2002). While often viewed through a hedonic lens (Ryff et al., 2004), life satisfaction also overlaps with the eudaimonic aspects of meaningfulness (McGregor & Little, 1998), fulfillment (Grant et al., 2007), and 'a life well lived' (Raj, 2018). Leadership researchers have focused more on job satisfaction than life satisfaction, and little is known about how leadership might spillover to wider psychological health concepts (Upadyaya et al., 2016). Servant leadership appears an optimal approach due to its association with all facets of follower lives (Liden et al., 2015) and its focus on multiple areas for personal growth beyond the workplace (Greenleaf, 1977).

The argument for servant leadership positively influencing employee life satisfaction stems from the key characteristics of this approach that directly relate to quality of life. First, servant leadership's focus on developing people aligns with the human need to strive for personal growth and realizing one's potential (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership should therefore serve as a catalyst for personal development and induce favorable views of employees' life experiences through need fulfillment (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009). Second, feeling accepted for who you are and aspire to be provides an increased sense of self-esteem (Lang & Lee, 2005). Servant leadership's focus on interpersonal acceptance and trust should therefore

bolster self-esteem and enhance one's satisfaction with life (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Third, servant leadership's focus on professional growth and career development in the work life domain is closely connected to life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012; Liden et al., 2015).

Furthermore, servant leadership's focus on ethical principles, personal problems, aspirations, and career considerations (Liden et al., 2015; Schwarz et al., 2016) should be especially relevant for the sport environment, where ethics (Champion et al., 2019), personal problems (Ströbel et al., 2018), aspirations (Swanson & Kent, 2015), and career-related social identities (Todd & Harris, 2009) are indeed present factors. It therefore follows that a servant approach to leadership should have a positive influence on sport employee life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership will have a positive relationship with

sport employee life satisfaction.

2.3.2 Social well-being. Another domain of well-being considers the interrelatedness with others. Social well-being refers to how people view their relationships and the degree to which they perceive themselves a functioning member of a group or community (Keyes, 1998). Factors associated with social well-being and relationship evaluations include acceptance, integration, quality, contribution, and potential (Keyes, 1998). While related to psychological well-being, social well-being is differentiated by focusing on more personal and private criteria for individual functioning (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). In the workplace, this type is further distinguished from other forms of well-being by its emphasis on social interactions between employees (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). In organizational settings, an important form of social well-being is employee teamwork (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018), which we argue is particularly relevant for the team sport context.

2.3.2.1 Teamwork. Working cooperatively is a vital aspect of human behavior and social science research (Fan, 2000). As teamwork and cooperation are used synonymously in the organizational (e.g., Bruce & Ricketts, 2008) and sport management (e.g., Doherty et al.,

2010) literatures, we adopt a similar approach and use the term teamwork as representative of both concepts. Teamwork refers to the extent to which employees cooperate with each other and work in unison to achieve goals (Baird et al., 2018). In the organizational setting, teamwork consists of the interpersonal cooperative behaviors relating to communication, information sharing, problem-solving, and decision-making (Porter et al., 2010).

Despite teamwork's inextricable connection to the sporting world, this concept has received surprisingly little attention in sport management. One exception was Doherty et al.'s (2010) investigation of diversity frameworks of power and change. Through a collection of interviews with NCAA Division III athletic department personnel, these authors identified factors contributing to the development, acceptance, and implementation of diversity management initiatives. Through this process, teamwork was found to be a driving force operating at the group level with the potential to promote cultures of diversity in this context.

The consideration of social well-being in the leadership literature is limited. While the concept of social capital has been considered, this has been from the perspective of the leader rather than follower development (e.g., Li, 2013). Collins and Smith (2006) found a positive relationship between commitment-based human resource practices and employee trust, while noting a limitation of their findings was the exclusion of leadership in their model. The promotion of teamwork can be viewed as a central role of leadership (Kalmanovich-Cohen et al., 2018), and we propose servant leadership as especially relevant for facilitating teamwork in the sport workplace. As servant leadership is people-oriented with a focus on helping employees solve problems (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013; Liden et al., 2015) and promotes team cohesion and supportive relationships (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018), it follows that servant leadership should have a positive influence on employee teamwork in this setting.

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership will have a positive relationship with

sport employee teamwork.

2.3.3 Physical well-being. The physical dimension of well-being relates to individual health. Physical well-being has been defined as "positive health and bodily functioning, exercise, good nutrition, absence of illness, physical safety and access to good healthcare" (Raj, 2018, p. 7). This concept has been studied extensively in the natural and social sciences through both subjective experiences and physiological indicators of physical health (Testa & Simonson, 1996). Physical well-being has been considered in relation to different work factors, including stress, injury or disease, and access to healthcare (Grant et al., 2007). Organizational research has tended to follow the occupational health literature and focus on strain (i.e., burnout) and stressors (i.e., workload), however relatively few have included a physical component of well-being in their investigations (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

2.3.3.1 Physical health. The term physical health has been considered synonymously with physical well-being and is a significant factor for optimal functioning (Paggi et al., 2016). Perceived physical health refers to an individual's evaluation of his or her general health in relation to age, goals, and comparison to others (Thoits, 2013), and has consistently been found as strongly correlated with objective physical health measures (Lee, 2015). In organizations, several work-related characteristics like job control, job complexity, and job demands are also positively associated with physical health (Li et al., 2016).

There has been little research addressing the connection between leadership and physical health (Inceoglu et al., 2018). We argue that servant leadership has the potential to be effective in this area due to its focus on employee stress reduction. Stress in the workplace has long been viewed to have a negative influence on physical health (Cooper et al., 1994) and servant leadership has previously been found to reduce job stress (Jaramillo et al., 2009). One way that servant leadership reduces stress is through building trustworthy relationships, as employee stress levels increase dramatically without trust (Roberts, 2020). In addition, as servant leadership incorporates caretaking, role-modeling, and taking responsibility for the

larger group (Van Dierendonck, 2011), these behaviors should in turn further ease employee anxiety levels and positively impact physical health.

Another mechanism by which servant leadership may facilitate physical well-being is through its focus on developing the whole person (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). For example, it is customary for whole-person approaches in a variety of fields such as higher education (Biber, 2020) and occupational health (Mathis & Jackson, 2010) to incorporate physical health as part of their holistic perspective. It therefore follows that a leadership style devoted to serving followers holistically will also include physical health in its approach to enhancing personal well-being (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Furthermore, as sport employees may have a strong appreciation for health due to the physical nature of sport and the salience of physicality in this context (Swanson et al., 2020), servant leadership appears distinctly positioned to incorporate this specific domain of well-being into its emphasis on whole-person development. By focusing on personal capacity building and the best interests of employees (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2015), it follows that servant leadership will be positively linked with physical health in the workplace.

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership will have a positive relationship with

sport employee physical health.

2.3.4 Mediating role of employee teamwork. Teamwork can be differentiated from the other well-being constructs in the following ways. First, employee teamwork operates with a specific focus on the organizational context (Baird et al., 2018), whereas life satisfaction and physical health extend beyond the work environment (Diener et al., 1985; Thoits, 2013). This distinction suggests employee teamwork as more proximal to the organizational leadership function in comparison to the other two well-being constructs. Second, employee teamwork fundamentally includes other people in its definition and evaluation (Baird et al., 2018). As these other individuals also exist within the organizational

framework, and a key outcome of effective leadership is constructive interpersonal relationships (Greenleaf, 1977), these perspectives further support the notion of a closer connection between servant leadership and employee teamwork.

There is a growing sentiment that the social domain has a role in shaping the psychological and physical domains of well-being (Haslam et al., 2019). Perceptions of social dynamics can be a force that shapes both the mental and biological spheres of the human experience (Haslam et al., 2019). Via social networks, companionship, and belongingness, employee teamwork is a job-related source of social well-being which can promote psychological and physical heath (Russell, 2008). In unison with evidence that workplace experiences can impact psychological and physical well-being (Faragher et al., 2005), these perspectives provide a sound rationale for employee teamwork having a mediating role in establishing the effect of servant leadership on life satisfaction and physical health.

Antecedents of life satisfaction stem from areas of work life, non-work life, and perceptions of self-worth (Erdogan et al., 2012). Quality of work life includes evaluations of job and career satisfaction, along with perceived levels of job stress (Erdogan et al., 2012). Notably, quality of work life also includes perceptions of teamwork, communication, and participation in decision-making (Agus & Selvaraj, 2020). As favorable views of quality of work life factors have a positive impact on life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012), we propose positive evaluations of teamwork will have a similar influence. In the sport participation context, there is evidence of a positive association between athletes' team satisfaction and life satisfaction over time (Chen et al., 2018). Given the previously hypothesized effect of servant leadership on employee teamwork (H2), we therefore propose that teamwork serves as a conduit for servant leadership's connection with employee life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Teamwork will mediate the positive relationship between servant leadership and sport employee life satisfaction.

As social well-being and workplace dynamics can be influential in shaping the physical domain (Haslam et al., 2019; Russell, 2008), teamwork is also expected to play a mediating role between servant leadership and employee physical health. Antecedents of physical health include optimism and social support (Li et al., 2016; Shifren & Anzaldi, 2018; Thoits, 2013). These constructs both have connections with cooperative behavior and suggest teamwork as a facilitator of physical health. Optimism relates to the hopefulness and confidence which teamwork often embodies (Gillham & Reivich, 2004). Similarly, social support is exemplified by teamwork, helping others, and making group members feel appreciated and cared about (Holland & Collins, 2020). Teamwork's conceptual overlap with these two direct predictors of physical health lends support for teamwork having a positive association with physical well-being. Furthermore, servant leadership's connection with optimism and social support also provides support for its indirect relationship with physical health through teamwork. For example, Kool and Van Dierendonck (2012) found servant leadership to be a facilitator of optimism, which in turn enhances perceptions of physical health through expectations of positive outcomes (Shifren & Anzaldi, 2018). In addition, servant leadership's compassionate approach increases the perceptions of social support (Van Dierendonck, 2011), which in turn boosts physical well-being through the basic need of relatedness (Li et al., 2016). In sum, noting the previously hypothesized effect of servant leadership on teamwork (H2), we further hypothesize that servant leadership's influence on physical health flows through the construct of employee teamwork.

Hypothesis 5: Teamwork will mediate the positive relationship between servant leadership and sport employee physical health.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were employees from professional sport organizations who are

members of five premier sports leagues in North America: Major League Baseball (MLB),

Major League Soccer (MLS), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National

Football League (NFL), and the National Hockey League (NHL). These employees worked

in business operations departments such as accounting, communications, community

relations, marketing, and partnerships. The gender split for the respondents was 68.7% male

and 31.3% female. The average organizational tenure was 7.4 years, with the average age of

the participants being 37.6 years old. The ethnic identification was 79.3% Caucasian, 8.6%

African American, 5.1% Hispanic, 1.0% Asian, 0.6% Native American, with the remaining

5.5% listing 'other'. The breakdown in terms of league was 26.2% from the NBA, 23.3%

from the NHL, 20.9% from MLB, 18.6% from the NFL, and 11.0% from MLS. As an

indicator of representativeness, the participant demographics in the current study are broadly

similar to those reported in the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC) (Lapchick, 2021).

Specifically, the RGRC data set indicates average demographics for professional

administration employees working in MLB, MLS, the NBA, and the NFL[1] to be 33.4%

female, 75.1% Caucasian, 11.3% African American, 10.1% Hispanic, and 3.6% Asian

(Lapchick, 2021).

3.2 Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the university Institutional Review Board. The

survey was first sent to members of the academic community and local sports employees to

ensure understanding and readability. Minor modifications were subsequently made to

improve the readability and format prior to distribution. A proportional stratified random

sampling method (Daniel, 2011) was employed to obtain a representative sample of sport

employees working in the leagues noted above. Approximately one third of the organizations

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[1] The NHL is not included in the employee demographic information provided by the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC).

from each league were randomly selected, which resulted in 49 total organizations being sampled and the following frequency representation across leagues: MLB (10), MLS (8), NBA (10), NFL (11), and NHL (10). A total of 5,398 business operations employees were identified from the official online staff directories of the selected organizations and were emailed a link to the survey via the Qualtrics online platform. After the link was sent, the platform software registered 1,097 failed deliveries or returns because of blocked emails or incorrect addresses due to changes in organization, position, or employment status. Out of the 4,301 employees who successfully received the survey link, a total of 489 participants completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 11.4%. The survey included demographic questions and all the construct items as outlined in the following section.

3.3 Measures

Servant leadership was measured with Liden et al.'s (2015) 7-item Likert scale, which has a 7-point range (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree), and a sample item is "My department manager puts my best interests ahead of his/her own." *Life satisfaction* was captured using the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), which has a 7-point response (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). A sample item is "In most ways my life is close to my ideal." *Teamwork* was measured using Stark et al.'s (2014) 5-item scale assessing the extent of cooperation among team members, which was adapted from Campion et al. (1993). A 5-point assessment of the items (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used, and a sample item is "Members of my department work well together to solve problems and make decisions." Finally, *physical health* was measured with three items adapted from Thoits's (2012) physical health scale using a 5-point range (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). For example, "How satisfied are you with the current state of your health?" was modified to "I am very satisfied with the current state of my health."

3.4 Analysis and Results

3.4.1 Nonresponse assessment. Non-response error relates to potential differences between respondents and non-respondents, and the assessment of whether respondents can be viewed as true representatives of the entire sample (Jordan et al., 2011). To assess this possibility in current study, a brief survey was sent to those individuals who did not participate in the original survey. The nonresponse survey included two demographic variables (gender and age) and one item from three different constructs in the main survey. The 92 respondents to the nonresponse survey were then compared to the main survey respondents across all four variables. Chi-square test results ($p = .71$) indicated that responders and non-responders did not differ in terms of gender. In addition, MANOVA results also indicated no significant difference across the other variables (*Wilks' Λ* = .99, $F(4, 576) = 1.53$, p = .19). In sum, these analyses indicated there was no threat to external validity (Kim et al., 2019).

3.4.2 Measurement model. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess the measurement and structural models using Mplus 8.0 software (Los Angeles, CA). To address the potential violation of multivariate normality, the analyses employed the maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The measurement model, which consisted of the four latent constructs, provided the following indices demonstrating good model fit (MacKenzie et al., 2011): comparative fit index = .99, root mean square error of approximation = .03, and standardized root mean square residual = .04. In addition, all four constructs exceeded the recommended levels for both construct reliability (.70) and average variance extracted (.50) (MacKenzie et al., 2011) (see Table 1). The factor loadings were all significant and above the recommended level of .5 (Hair et al., 2006). Further analysis supported the discriminant validity for all the constructs by demonstrating that the square root of average variance extracted for each construct was greater than the correlation values for any pair of the constructs (MacKenzie et al., 2011).

* INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE *

3.4.3 Structural model analysis. The next step tested a structural model specifying the hypothesized relationships. This model included direct paths from servant leadership to life satisfaction (H1), teamwork (H2), and physical health (H3), and direct paths from teamwork to life satisfaction (H4) and physical health (H5). The structural model analysis yielded the following results for the model fit indices: comparative fit index = .99, root mean square error of approximation = .03, and standardized root mean square residual = .04, demonstrating good fit with the data (MacKenzie et al., 2011).

* INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE *

The final results are displayed in Figure 1, with standardized coefficients shown next to each of the direct paths specified in the model. The R-square values are also provided, with the structural model explaining 28% of the variance in employee teamwork, 12% in life satisfaction, and 3% in physical health. These values indicate large, medium, and small effect size levels, respectively, for servant leadership's relationship with the three well-being outcomes (Cohen, 1988). Servant leadership had a significant positive association with life satisfaction ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. In addition, servant leadership had a strong positive relationship with employee teamwork ($\beta = .53$, $p < .01$), providing support for Hypothesis 2. However, the direct path from servant leadership to physical health was nonsignificant ($\beta = .04$, $p = .49$), causing Hypothesis 3 to be rejected.

The analysis also indicated teamwork had significant positive relationships with life satisfaction ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$) and physical health ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). Mediation analysis then yielded a significant indirect positive effect for servant leadership on life satisfaction through teamwork ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$; H4), and for servant leadership on physical health through teamwork ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$; H5), providing support for both Hypotheses 4 and 5, respectively. A follow-up bootstrapping technique indicated that the bias-corrected 95% confidence

intervals for the indirect effects based on 5,000 resampling draws excluded zero, supporting the mediation effect of employee teamwork for both life satisfaction and physical health (Zhao et al., 2010). In sum, these results confirmed Hypotheses 4 and 5.

3.4.4 Follow-up analyses. Two additional analyses were conducted to examine the strength of the relationships and the robustness of the hypotheses. First, to better understand servant leadership's simultaneous connection with multiple well-being domains, consideration was given to the relative strength of the path coefficients. Results from the structural model assessment indicated that servant leadership had the strongest direct association with teamwork ($\beta = .53$), followed by life satisfaction ($\beta = .20$), and a non-significant relationship with physical health. To statistically assess the relative strength of the relationships, a Wald chi-square test was performed. The results of this test confirmed servant leadership's relationship with teamwork to be significantly greater than its association with life satisfaction (Wald $\chi^2 = 5.0$, $p = 0.02$). In addition, the non-significant relationship between servant leadership and physical health provided evidence for servant leadership having a stronger association with teamwork and life satisfaction than with physical health.

Second, consideration was given to the timing of the responses (i.e., in-season vs. off-season) and the potential for well-being to be impacted by contextual factors (e.g., workplace expectations, pressures, time constraints) that could be more salient during the playing season (e.g., Huml et al., 2020). To address this potential concern, we estimated another model including the in-season/out-of-season status as an additional exogenous variable affecting each well-being outcome. The results revealed that, when controlling for whether the teams of the participants' organizations were in-season or out-of-season, there was no change in the statistical significance of any of the structural relationships. This supported the robustness of hypothesis testing reported above.

4. Discussion

The broad aim of this investigation was to assess the role of servant leadership as a facilitator of multidimensional sport employee well-being. The collective results of the analyses provide general support for servant leadership's positive influence across multiple employee well-being dimensions. Our findings extend previous servant leadership research (Upadyaya et al., 2016) by demonstrating a direct linkage with life satisfaction (H1) and addressing the scarcity of empirical assessment of this connection (Chughtai, 2018). Strong support was also found for the direct influence of servant leadership on employee teamwork (H2), which extends previous servant leadership research examining team-related outcomes like cohesion and OCBs (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). Beyond this direct relationship, the current results indicate that employee teamwork plays an important role in the development of other well-being constructs such as life satisfaction (H4) and physical health (H5).

Employee teamwork was identified as a conduit through which servant leadership's influence can spillover into a broader assessment of life quality (H4). As general well-being is equally as important as work-related well-being (Upadyaya et al., 2016), the current results suggest servant leadership is well-equipped to positively impact quality of life beyond the workplace. Another reason for the positive relationship between servant leadership and life satisfaction could relate to how sport employees view their relationships with work. As life satisfaction is a quality of life assessment based on one's own chosen criteria (Diener et al., 1985), it could be that sport employees are more likely to consider their work as a central focus of their lives. For example, with previous investigations noting the willingness of sport employees to work long hours (Huml et al., 2020), and their passion for work linked to both job and career satisfaction (Papadimitriou et al., 2017; Swanson & Kent, 2017), it may be that work life in the sport context has increased significance and is incorporated into general life assessments. In sum, our findings suggest the combination of servant leadership and

teamwork could be especially relevant for optimally addressing the work-life balance interface in this context (e.g., Taylor et al., 2019).

Contrary to expectation, the results indicated the absence of a direct effect for servant leadership on perceived physical health (H3), with employee teamwork instead fully mediating this relationship (H5). One reason for the absence of a direct relationship is that employees in this environment may feel well-equipped to develop this component of their well-being separate from managerial influence. Further, it could also be that physical well-being is more distal to the traditional hierarchical leadership function. For example, the close relationships and social support experienced through teamwork may be more salient facilitators of physical health outcomes in the current setting (Ramchand et al., 2017). From this perspective, it is important to recognize the combinatory potential of leadership and teamwork in the sport workplace. That is, our findings suggest that while leadership may not directly contribute to physical health, creating a teamwork-centered work environment can help facilitate physical well-being.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The current study has several important theoretical implications. First, our research theoretically and empirically demonstrates servant leadership as a facilitator of the three core dimensions of employee well-being: psychological, social, and physical. This approach simultaneously acknowledges well-being as a multidimensional construct (Grant et al., 2007) and increases our understanding of the multi-faceted effects of leadership (Hiller et al., 2011). The present study therefore expands the employee well-being criterion space beyond the narrow focus on job satisfaction (Inceoglu et al., 2018) and extends the nomological network of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019).

Second, this study brings to the fore the prominent role of teamwork in the sport workplace. While a few studies have noted the presence of teamwork in sport organizations

(e.g., Doherty et al., 2010), the current study incorporates an explicit focus on the teamwork

of sport employees. With the strong positive effect of servant leadership on this social well-

being construct, servant leadership appears to be a crucial social resource (Upadyaya et al.,

2016) in this setting. It could be that there is something distinct about the sport context that

places an explicit (or subconscious) emphasis on teamwork. For example, employees in team

sport environments are often fans of the team as well (Wegner et al., 2020), which has been

linked with several positive workplace outcomes (Swanson & Kent, 2015). Moreover, team

sport organizations may naturally attract individuals who prefer high levels of cooperation

focusing on a common mission or goal (e.g., former athletes and coaches). As teamwork is an

integral aspect of sport participation, it may be that sport employees' acute awareness of this

elevates the significance of teamwork in the workplace. This would support the notion that

distinct psychological processes are at play in the sport setting, where employees may

incorporate context-specific attributes as they engage with the leadership process (Swanson et

al., 2020). For example, it might be that sport employees consider teamwork as a fundamental

aspect of optimal functioning (Grant et al., 2007). As servant leadership attends to needs and

ambitions to enable flourishing (Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019), it follows that teamwork

facilitation could be a central component of servant leadership in the sport environment.

Third, our examination of servant leadership's simultaneous influence on

psychological, social, and physical well-being indicates that these connections can vary in

strength and significance. This finding supports the argument that relationships between

leadership and employee well-being outcomes should not be generically viewed as similar in

nature (Inceoglu et al., 2018). A way to interpret the relative strength of servant leadership's

influence relates to managerial practices that create tradeoffs between different dimensions of

employee well-being. That is, from the managerial tradeoff perspective (Grant et al., 2007),

the same leadership approach can result in tradeoffs that may improve one dimension of well-

being and at the same time have a detrimental effect on another (Inceoglu et al., 2018). In the present case, servant leadership had the strongest direct relationship with teamwork, followed next by life satisfaction, and a non-significant direct relationship with physical health. From the trade-off perspective, one reason for the absence of servant leadership's direct influence on physical well-being could be the managerial prioritization of the other well-being dimensions. For example, while job enrichment strategies (e.g., providing meaningful work and responsibility) can produce higher levels of psychological well-being, this is sometimes accompanied by decreases in physical well-being (e.g., strain, fatigue, and overload) (Grant et al., 2007). Likewise, tradeoffs might also help explain the strongest direct relationship between servant leadership and teamwork. For instance, servant leadership behaviors that emphasize teamwork may simultaneously undermine the direct influence servant leadership has on aspects of life satisfaction (e.g., decreased autonomy) and physical health (e.g., increased workload), creating a situation where a large portion of servant leadership's influence flows indirectly to these areas through social well-being (i.e., teamwork).

Finally, this study addresses the structural relationship of the well-being dimensions. Building from Haslam et al.'s (2019) proposition that the social domain (i.e., group life) can shape the psychological and physical health domains, the current study extends this line of research by focusing on the mediating role of teamwork. Through this process, key considerations regarding social well-being have been identified that could play a vital role in its influence on other domains, including the construct's contextual boundary (i.e., work environment focused vs. generally focused) and its proximity to the leadership function. A theoretical advancement is therefore provided for social well-being's role in facilitating psychological and physical well-being. Furthermore, this approach identified a group-level mediator pathway and mechanism through which leadership behavior influences employee well-being (Inceoglu, 2018).

4.2 Managerial Implications

The findings provide several practical insights for sport managers looking to enhance employee well-being. With the importance of embracing a holistic approach to well-being, sport organizations should incorporate social and physical well-being into leadership development initiatives. An innovative technique would be to engage employees in co-created organizational interventions (Nielsen & Noblet, 2018) which incorporate a comprehensive picture of sport employee well-being from multiple spheres. While there is no one size fits all leadership style, the servant leadership approach appears well-positioned to enhance employee well-being perceptions across multiple areas of their lives.

Sport managers should also be mindful of the role of social well-being and the added benefits of teamwork for psychological and physical well-being. Of particular relevance is how teamwork is perceived and learned at different levels within the organization (Weldy & Gillis, 2010). For example, while teamwork may be discussed broadly at the organizational level and operationally experienced at the group level, the current findings suggest teamwork perceptions at the departmental level can make a positive contribution to employee health.

This research also highlights managerial tradeoffs (Grant et al., 2007) as a significant takeaway for sport managers. Being conscious of this phenomenon can support strategic planning around employee well-being initiatives. Sport managers should first be aware of what dimensions of employee well-being their managerial and leadership styles prioritize, and then balance or mitigate the possibility of one well-being area detracting from another.

Finally, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is useful to consider the impact this has had on employee well-being and the leadership process. As organizations consider the challenges posed by COVID-19, employee well-being should be a significant factor in that process. For example, newly altered job arrangements (e.g., working from home) impact the meaning and perceptions of the work environment, and can have disproportionate effects on

employees throughout the organization (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). While our study was conducted prior to the start of the current pandemic, it raises the question of how sport employees perceive well-being under the current environment, and how managers can be most effectual in their leadership approaches. As sport leaders navigate times of crisis, being contextually aware and conscious of how their leadership practices can mobilize resources to promote employee well-being will be important (Inoue et al., 2021).

4.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The cross-sectional nature of the research design does not allow for conclusions to be made on causality or change over time. Future research could therefore take a longitudinal approach to gain insight on servant leadership as a developmental influence. In addition, while there was representation across multiple leagues in professional sports, future studies should look to cross-validate the research model within other sectors of the sport industry. For example, it could be that our servant leadership model for multidimensional well-being is also useful in the sport for development and positive youth development contexts.

It is worth noting that closeness of relationship may have varied between leaders, followers, and group members within our sample. While our study utilized the department as the unit-level of focus (Anthony, 2017; Ehrhart, 2004), some employees may have had more distal relationships with their department managers and other colleagues due to department size and hierarchy. In addition, our data did not capture the duration of these relationships, which could also impact the quality of assessments provided by the participants. Although distal-proximal relationship variance and duration are limitations of many leadership studies, future leadership research may wish to minimize these concerns by focusing only on direct-report relationships and those that have existed beyond a minimum period of time.

Although our data collection procedure addressed representativeness through proportional random sampling across leagues, we cannot draw the conclusion that the current

sample is a perfect representation of the actual population. However, comparing participant demographics in the present study with those in the RGRC data (Lapchick, 2021) provides support for the current sample being broadly similar to the population of employees working in major professional sports leagues in North America.

The strong positive relationship between servant leadership and teamwork identified in the current investigation warrants additional attention. Servant leadership's focus on social connection (Greenleaf, 1977), combined with the social domain's potential for shaping both the psychological and physical domains (Haslam et al., 2019), provide a promising nexus for future research. Beyond teamwork, focusing on additional social mechanisms in the sport workplace (e.g., OCBs and coworker support) could therefore prove a productive pathway for understanding leadership's role in the well-being process (Inoue et al., 2019).

As the current study did not address the length of time employees have worked in the sport industry, future research may wish to consider occupational tenure as part of their focus. For example, it could be that sport employee perceptions of career and life satisfaction evolve throughout their work life journey (Erdogan et al., 2012). In addition, future studies may wish to consider sport employee well-being in relation to the length and intensity of the sport season. For example, one implication could be that certain leadership approaches are more effective in certain leagues or specific times of the year. Furthermore, given the continual growth of women's sports, we would encourage future studies to confirm and extend our findings by conducting research with employees of women's professional sport leagues.

Finally, the current study provides a framework for a new generation of thinking (Ferkins et al., 2018) by focusing centrally on the development of well-being across multiple dimensions operating both in and out of the sport workplace. Leader group prototypicality (Van Knippenberg, 2011) appears a promising avenue due to its focus on group values and pursuing group interests. The social construction of leadership could also be an area of

attention, which maintains the concept of leadership is socially constructed and technically resides in the minds of observers (Billsberry et al., 2018). While the current results suggest a servant leadership style is conducive to facilitating multiple domains of employee well-being, future research should continue to gain insight on preferred approaches and how effective leadership is viewed in the sport context (e.g., Swanson & Kent, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The current study provides new insight for the connection between leadership and sport employee well-being. Moreover, this study extended beyond a single aspect of well-being by more appropriately assessing leadership's simultaneous influence on multiple domains. The results demonstrate that servant leadership facilitates psychological, social, and physical health, with the mediating role of employee teamwork emerging as an important factor in this context. Collectively, the findings underscore the important role that leadership plays in positively influencing sport employees' lives both in and outside the workplace. The results can inform the promotion of multidimensional sport employee well-being to scholars and practitioners, and it is hoped that this research provides a foundation for further investigation of the connection between leadership and the well-being of sport employees.

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Table 1. Correlation matrix

	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. Servant Leadership	.90	.55				
2. Life Satisfaction	.90	.65	.30			
3. Teamwork	.94	.75	.53	.31		
4. Physical Health	.90	.75	.12	.42	.17	

All correlation values significant ($p < .05$); CR = construct reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.
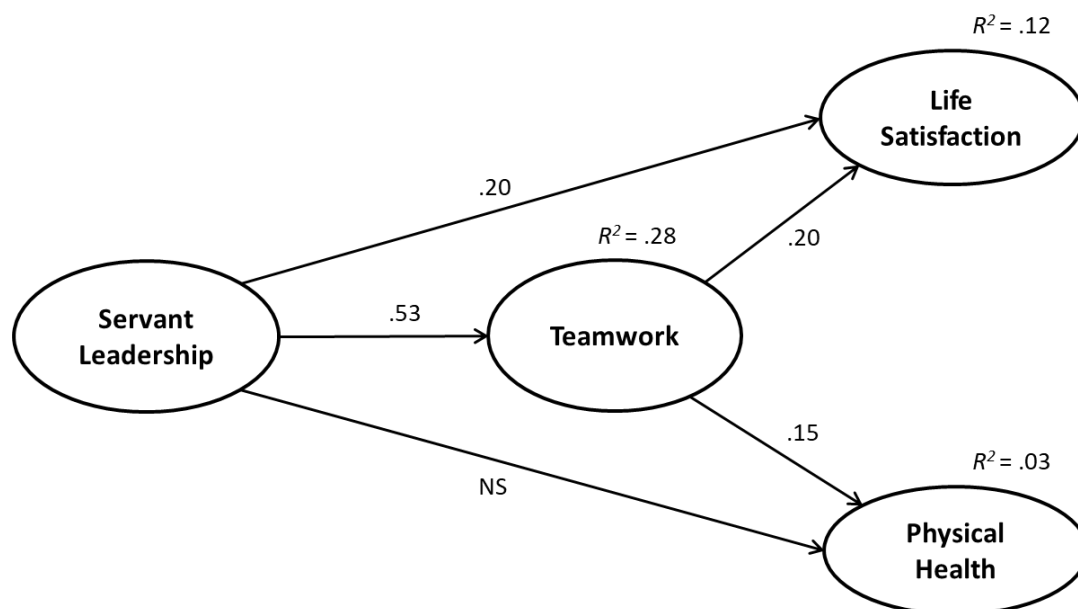

Figure 1. Structural Model *Note.* All values significant ($p < .05$). NS = Nonsignificant.