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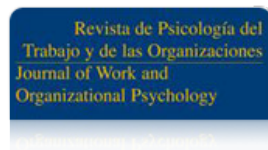
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Follower Strengths-based Leadership and Follower Innovative Behavior: The Roles of Core Self-evaluations and Psychological Well-being

El liderazgo basado en las fortalezas de los subordinados y su
comportamiento innovador: el papel de las autoevaluaciones y
del bienestar psicológico

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the relationship between followers strengths-based leadership (FSBL) and innovative behavior and the mediating role of psychological well-being (PWB) and the moderating role of core self-evaluations (CSE) in the relationship. In order to test our hypotheses data from Chinese enterprises were used. Results of multiple linear regression and bootstrapping analyses showed that FSBL is positively related to follower innovative behavior and PWB significantly mediates the FSBL-innovative behavior relationship. In addition, CSE negatively moderates the direct effect of FSBL on PWB and the indirect effect of FSBL on innovative behavior via PWB such that the direct effect of FSBL on PWB and the indirect effect of FSBL on innovative behavior via PWB will be stronger for followers with a low level of CSE rather than for followers with a high level of CSE. Theoretical implications, practical implications and future research were also discussed.

Keywords: Followers strengths-based leadership, Psychological well-being, Core self-evaluations, Innovative behavior.

RESUMEN: Este estudio analiza la relación entre el liderazgo sustentado en las fortalezas de los subordinados (FSBL), su comportamiento innovador y el papel mediador del bienestar psicológico (PWB), así como el papel que juegan en dicha relación las autoevaluaciones principales (CSE). Para poner a prueba nuestras hipótesis se dispuso de datos emparejados de empresas chinas. Los resultados de la regresión lineal múltiple y de los análisis *bootstrapping* mostraron que el FSBL se relaciona positivamente con el comportamiento innovador de los subordinados y el bienestar psicológico mediatiza de modo significativo la relación entre el FSBL y el comportamiento innovador. Por otra parte, las evaluaciones principales moderan negativamente el efecto directo del FSBL en el bienestar psicológico y el efecto indirecto del FSBL en el comportamiento innovador a través del bienestar psicológico, de modo que dichos efectos directo e indirecto del FSBL serán mayores en los subordinados con un bajo nivel en las autoevaluaciones principales que en los subordinados que tienen un nivel elevado en las mismas. Se comentan las implicaciones teóricas y prácticas y la investigación futura.

Palabras clave: Liderazgo sustentado en las fortalezas de los subordinados, Bienestar psicológico, Autoevaluaciones principales, Comportamiento innovador.

Introduction

Innovation has been demonstrated to be an important driving force of organizational success and sustainability (Gu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). To optimize the functions of innovation, numerous researchers have made greater efforts to identify antecedents to innovative behavior (e.g., Janssen, 2011; Li & Wu, 2011; Vinarski-Peretz et al., 2011). Therein, the influence of leadership on innovative behavior has received a great deal of attention (Aryee et al., 2012). A substantial body of literature has shown that follower innovative behavior can be positively affected by leadership such as transformational leadership (Feng et al., 2016), entrepreneurial leadership (Miao et al., 2018), ethical leadership (Dhar, 2016), benevolent leadership (Gumusluoglu et al., 2017), and humorous leadership (Pundt, 2015). Yet, we still have little knowledge about whether there is a positive linkage between strengths-based leadership (SBL) and follower innovative behavior.

SBL is a type of positive leadership styles, and it represents a specific application of positive psychology in leadership (Linley et al., 2007; Welch et al., 2014). The construct of SBL is proposed based on the assumption that the greatest room for employees growth and development resides in the areas of strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Burkus, 2011). Strengths-based leaders are always investing in their strengths and strengths of followers including strengths identification, development, and deployment so that strengths can be fully applied in the workplace, thereby improving the efficiency, productivity, and success of organizations (Burkus, 2011). In fact, the primary target of SBL lies in achieving personal and organizational goals by leveraging their own strengths and facilitating followers strengths use. It is important to note that strengths-based leaders do not ignore their own and followers weaknesses, but rather focus on maximizing the functions of strengths and minimizing the negative effects of weaknesses (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Aguinis et al. (2012) suggested that leaders can manage employees weaknesses by re-designing jobs for employees who are deficient in certain talents or creating a support climate that make it easier for employees to work with partners who possess the talents that they lack. In short, SBL is a unique positive leadership style focusing on their own strengths and followers strengths.

In the current study, we aim to investigate followers strengths-based leadership (FSBL). FSBL can be defined as a style of positive leadership that seeks to deliberately promote the identification, development, and deployment of strengths of a follower so as to cultivate followers positive subjective experience, ultimately resulting in an improvement in organizational effectiveness. Prior research has shown that FSBL can unleash potential in followers, enhance goal achievement, and foster high performance (Lee, 2015). Given that it is reasonable to postulate that FSBL has a positive effect on followers innovative behavior, the first purpose of this study is to empirically test the relationship between FSBL and innovative behavior.

In addition, we also investigate the mediating role of psychological well-being (PWB) and the moderating role of core self-evaluations (CSE) in the FSBL-follower innovative behavior relationship by establishing a moderated mediation model. Previous literature has concluded that strengths-based intervention can facilitate an individuals well-being (Proctor et al., 2011; Proyer et al., 2015) and subjective well-being can positively predict an individuals innovative behavior (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, we posit that FSBL can enhance followers PWB and, in turn, innovative behavior. The second purpose of this study is to examine speculation. More importantly, substitutes for leadership theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978) described that individual characteristics like CSE may make leadership unnecessary and impossible. That implicitly means that CSE might attenuate the effects of FSBL. Hence, the third purpose of this study seeks to investigate the moderating effect of CSE on the relationship of FSBL, PWB, and innovative behavior.

The current study adds to the existing literature on FSBL and innovative behavior in three aspects. First, this study is the first to empirically investigate the effect of FSBL on innovative behavior, which provides a new perspective of understanding the driving force of innovative behavior. Second, we explicate the underlying process mechanism through which FSBL influences follower innovative behavior by examining the mediational effect of PWB on the relationship between FSBL and innovative behavior. Third, this study can help us to understand the boundary condition of the relationships between FSBL, PWB, and innovative behavior by exploring the moderating effect of CSE.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

FSBL and Follower Innovative Behavior

Innovative behavior has been defined as the intentional creation, introduction, and application of new ideas within a work role, group, or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005, p.143). Innovative behavior includes three discontinuous processes: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization (Janssen, 2011). Employees can engage in any combination of these behaviors at any time (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Moreover, innovative behavior is not expected of the employees in their formal role as employees but purely discretionary behaviors (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005). Due to the importance of innovation for long-term survival of organizations and organizational effectiveness (Shalley, 1995; Woodman et al., 1993), many researchers in the field of organization and management have paid more attention to identifying the antecedents to innovative behavior and have achieved a number of valuable conclusions (Jason & Geetha, 2019; Yuan & Woodman, 2010). For example, leadership, employee problem-solving style, and work group relations have been found to have a significant impact on

innovative behavior (Scott & Bruce, 1994); Prieto and Perez-Santana (2014) pointed out that ability-enhancing and opportunity-enhancing human resource practices can positively affect employees innovative behavior directly and indirectly through their impact on management support and coworkers support; a recent study also confirmed the positive effect of organizational intellectual capital on frontline service employee innovative behavior (Chou et al., 2018).

However, we are still far from a good understanding about the relationship between leadership and innovative behavior (Pieterse et al., 2010). To further extend our understanding of the relationship between leadership and innovative behavior, in the current study we seek to examine the relationship between FSBL and follower innovative behavior. It is posited that FSBL exerts a positive effect on follower innovative behavior. First, leaders focusing on followers strengths are experts in leveraging followers strengths. When followers consciously or unconsciously play to their strengths at work, they are more likely to seek out more creative solutions to problems (Lee et al., 2016) and then exhibit more innovative behaviors. Besides, FSBL would encourage followers to recognize, develop, and use their strengths related to performing work tasks, which in turn contributes to the satisfaction of followers need for competence (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Such satisfaction with competence will stimulate followers intrinsic motivation to innovate at work, ultimately leading to increased innovative behavior. Second, FSBL can create a positive climate for mobilizing followers to invest more efforts and energy in their strengths. Van Woerkom and Meyers (2015) suggested that employees who perceive a high level of support for their strengths identification, development, and deployment from organizational policies and practices tend to perform higher innovativeness. In this sense, it is possible to expect FSBL to positively relate to follower innovative behavior. Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize:

H1: FSBL is positively related to innovative behavior.

The Mediating role of PWB

PWB refers to employees global judgement of the overall effectiveness of their psychological functioning, including the relative presence of positive emotions and the relative absence of negative emotions (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). From the theoretical perspective, the concept of PWB is different from happiness (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000) because it contains intrapersonal features associated with adaptation and self-actualization (Jena et al., 2018). Generally, PWB and happiness can also be believed to be identical (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). In existing literature, lots of antecedents to PWB have been identified (e.g., Daniels, 1994; Karremans et al., 2003). It is worth noting that research on the influence of leadership on PWB is still a key research direction emphasized by organizational researchers (Kelloway et al., 2012). Extant studies on the leadership-PWB relationship have achieved

some valuable conclusions. For instance, transformational leadership (Nielsen et al., 2008), empowering leadership (Park et al., 2017), and benevolent leadership (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016) have been proved to have positive impact on employees PWB. Yet, no previous research is found to explore the relationship between FSBL and PWB. In the current study, we anticipate that FSBL is positively related to PWB.

PWB has been found to be significantly impacted by numerous environmental events (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). FSBL as an important environmental event might have a positive effect on PWB. More specifically, when leaders provide followers with the opportunity to let them know what they are good at, followers will experience enhanced PWB as strengths knowledge can beneficially influence PWB (Govindji & Linley, 2007). In a similar vein, if leaders are adept at deploying followers strengths at work, followers will feel more authentic self in the process of using their strengths (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018), which in turn leads to increased PWB (Govindji & Linley, 2007). In addition, when leaders provide followers with more autonomy, followers intrinsic motivation to use strengths can be spurred and, in turn, followers will exhibit more strengths use behaviors (Kong & Ho, 2016). These behaviors, ultimately, bring about higher levels of PWB like positive affect (Wood et al., 2011). Based on the above claims, thus, it is reasonable for us to believe that FSBL can exert a positive influence on PWB.

In addition to research on antecedents to PWB, the effects of PWB have already received much attention among organizational researchers. A substantial body of empirical research has shown that PWB can enhance job performance (Daniels & Harris, 2000; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). Considering that employee innovative behavior can be regarded as one of crucial extra-role performance (van Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), it is possible to assume PWB to positively affect innovative behavior. According to broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, a number of positive emotions, including the experience of PWB, all share the capacity to broaden an individuals momentary thought-action repertoires through expanding the selection of potential thoughts and actions that come to mind (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004, p. 343). More specifically, employees high in PWB have a stronger desire to explore and encounter new information and tend to think outside the box and be creative. In addition, Joo et al. (2016) also pointed out that happy employees (or employees higher in PWB) are known to be more creative and possess high level of extra-role performance like innovative behavior. As demonstrated earlier, environmental event resulting from FSBL might positively affect employees experience of PWB. Taken together, FSBL might have an indirect effect on innovative behavior through the mediating effect of PWB. Thus, the following hypothesis is obtained:

H2: PWB mediates the relationship between FSBL and employee innovative behavior.

The Moderating role of CSE

CSE is a higher-order construct consisting of self-esteem (worthy of respect and regard), generalized self-efficacy (belief in ones capability of solving problems), locus of control (responsible for what happens to oneself), and emotional stability or low neuroticism (optimistic and free from doubts and worries) (Aryee et al., 2017). Compared with the four-dimensional construct, CSE as a single overall construct has been shown to have a stronger predictive value for individual outcomes (Judge et al., 2002). Existing empirical studies have confirmed the significant relationship between CSE and employee outcomes such as voice behavior (Aryee et al., 2017), supervisor ratings of performance (Kacmar et al., 2009), career decision self-efficacy (Jiang, 2015), objective and subjective career success (Stumpp et al., 2010), and job and life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2005). More importantly, CSE has been demonstrated to relate to self-determination (Bono & Colbert, 2005).

Situational and contingency models of leadership illustrated that a variety of follower, task, and organizational characteristics can moderate the influence of leadership on outcomes related to work (Nübold et al., 2013). As described in the substitutes for leadership theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978), leadership under certain conditions might have few or no benefits as many alternative factors can substitute leadership in predicting outcomes (Howell, 1997). CSE as a positive personality trait might be an important substitute factor for leadership. The reasons for the notion might lie in two aspects. In the first place, followers scoring high on CSE may not need support from leaders (e.g., transformational leadership) for exhibiting positive outcomes as CSE itself is positively associated with valuable outcomes like creativity (Chiang et al., 2014), organizational commitment (Joo et al., 2012), and job performance (Kacmar et al., 2009). In the second place, higher levels of CSE can stimulate an employees motivation and make leadership unnecessary in resulting in positive outcomes (Nübold et al., 2013).

Following the above logic, we anticipate that CSE can substitute FSBL in predicting PWB. On the one hand, followers high in CSE are more likely to be proactive, tend to view their work as important, autonomous, and interesting work (Joo et al., 2011), and are more willing to pursue aims consistent with intrinsic motivation (Judge et al., 2002). That is, followers scoring high on CSE are less likely to depend on leaders in obtaining a high level of PWB. On the other hand, for followers with low levels of CSE, they do not have the competencies to identify, develop, and leverage their strengths and, hence, their motivation and efforts to focus on strengths are low (Judge et al., 1998). In this case, followers show a stronger need for FSBL (Nübold et al., 2013). Specifically, followers low in CSE are more likely to experience higher levels of PWB resulting from FSBL. Therefore, based on the above arguments, we postulate:

H3: CSE negatively moderates the relationship between FSBL and PWB, such that the relationship is more positive for employees with low level of CSE than for employees with high level of CSE.

The previous predictions represent an integrated framework in which PWB mediates the relationship between FSBL and innovative behavior and the effect of FSBL on PWB depends on CSE. Based on this, we further assume that CSE also moderates the strength of the mediated relationship between FSBL and innovative behavior through PWB, that is, a moderated mediation effect. As such, we posit:

H4: CSE negatively moderates the indirect effect of FSBL on employee innovative behavior through PWB in such a way that the indirect effect is more positive when CSE is low than high (Figure 1).



Figure 1

The Proposed Model.

Note. FSBL = followers strengths-based leadership; PWB = psychological well-being; CSE = core self-evaluations.

Method

Participants and Data Collection

This study is part of a large project investigating antecedents to SBL and its consequences. All participants were Chinese employees working in various Chinese enterprises, such as healthcare, financial organizations, educational and training institutions. Convenience sampling method and self-administrated online questionnaire were utilized to gather data. Data collection was implemented at two points in time, spaced by a two-month interval. Experienced graduate students performed the data collection process according to the standardized process of data collection. The present study received approval from participants before collecting data. We promised that all information filled in questionnaires would be kept confidential strictly, and participants had the right to terminate the investigation at any time. Participants completed a questionnaire regarding demographical variables, FSBL, and CSE scales at the first phase. We distributed 440 questionnaires in this phase; 399 questionnaires were received, showing 90.68 percent response rate. After two months, the 399 participants were instructed to complete FSBL, PWB, and innovative behaviour scales. This phase obtained 314 questionnaires, indicating 78.70 percent response rate. Finally, a total of 314 valid paired data were applied to examine our hypotheses. Of the 314 participants, 46.5 percent were male, the average age was 35.17 ($SD = 7.86$), 36.9 percent were from healthcare industry, 76.8 percent had worked in the present organization for more than 5 years. With respect to the level of education, 6.7 percent had Doctors degree, 28.3 percent had Masters degree, 45.5 percent had Bachelors degree, and 19.5 percent had lower levels of education.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Measures

All items of key variables were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Prior to using all English-based measures for Chinese participants, scales of PWB, CSE, and innovative behavior underwent a translation-back translation procedure to ensure item equivalence (Brislin, 1970).

FSBL. To the best of our knowledge, no prior scale can be used to measure follower strengths-based leadership. Based on the definition of FSBL and referred to strengths-based psychological climate (van Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), strengths use, and perceived organizational support for strengths use scales (van Woerkom et al., 2016), we formed five items to assess followers perceptions of FSBL. The five items were initially developed in Chinese, translated into English by a professional translator, and then translated back into Chinese by two associate professors in the field of managerial psychology. Items included: My leader provides me with the opportunity to let me know what I am good at, My leader encourages me to further develop my potential, My leader is good at using my strengths, My leader gives me more autonomy to use my strengths at work, and My leader discusses with me how I can improve my strengths. Results of exploratory factor analysis showed that the five items explained 69.91 percent of variance in FSBL construct and loadings of five items ranged from .79 to .89. The composite reliability (CR) value was .91 and the average variance extracted (AVE) was .57. Cronbachs for this scale in the current study was .89. In order to test the stability of the FSBL scale, we also measured the FSBL construct at the second phase. The correlation between FSBL (T1) and FSBL (T2) was .69, $p < .01$. In sum, the five-item scale of FSBL reported appropriate reliability and validity.

PWB. We evaluated psychological well-being using 6-item scale developed by Zheng et al. (2015). Sample items included I feel I have grown as a person and I generally feel good about myself, and I'm confident. Cronbachs for this scale in the current study was .86, CR was .90, and AVE was .59, suggesting appropriate reliability and validity.

CSE. Core self-evaluations were assessed with a 12-item scale developed by Judge et al. (2003). Example items included On the whole, I am satisfied with myself and When I try, I generally succeed. Cronbachs for this scale in the current study was .77, CR was .93, and AVE was .53, suggesting appropriate reliability and validity.

Innovative behavior. Innovative behavior was evaluated with the six-item scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994). Example items included At work, I always promote and champion ideas to others and I always investigate and secure the funds needed to implement new ideas. The Cronbachs of the scale in the current study was .92, CR was .94, and AVE was .72, suggesting appropriate reliability and validity.

Control variables. In the work exploring the role of justice and support within organizations in promoting innovative behavior at work (Young, 2012), gender, education, and organizational tenure were regarded as control variables. As such, we also controlled for the three variables to rule out their possible influences on results of this study. Gender was coded as follows: 1 = male, 2 = female. Education was coded as follows: higher vocational and below = 1, college graduation = 2, Bachelor degree = 3, Master degree = 4, Doctors degree = 5. Organizational tenure was coded as follows: 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1-3 years, 3 = 3-5 years, 4 = 5-7 years, 5 = 7-10 years, 6 = 10-20 years, and 7 = 20 years and above.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for research variables are reported in Table 1. The results indicated that FSBL is significantly and positively related to PWB ($r = .26, p < .01$), CSE ($r = .26, p < .01$) and innovative behavior ($r = .40, p < .01$), PWB is positively related to CSE ($r = .45, p < .01$), and innovative behavior ($r = .38, p < .01$). Moreover, results also demonstrated that CSE is positively related to innovative behavior ($r = .36, p < .01$).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	1.54	0.50	-					
2. Education	3.18	0.91	-.35**	-				
3. Tenure	4.87	1.76	.06	-.23**	-			
4. FSBL	3.63	0.89	.00	-.09	.10	-		
5. PWB	3.80	0.63	.00	.07	.18**	.26**	-	
6. CSE	3.49	0.51	-.07	.10	.14*	.26**	.45**	-
7. IB	3.78	0.69	-.13*	.03	.08	.40**	.38**	.36**

Note. FSBL = followers strengths-based leadership; PWB = psychological well-being; CSE = core self-evaluations; IB = innovative behavior.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Discriminant Validity

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS 23.0 to check the measurement model fit. To control for inflated measurement errors resulting from multiple items for the latent variable and enhance the reliability and normality of the resulting measure (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Wisenbaker, 2006; Shi et al., 2015), two item parcels for CSE were created with the factorial algorithm (Rogers & Schmitt, 2004). All other scale items were regarded as indicators for theoretical constructs. In addition, six indices including X^2/df , the root mean square error

of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), incremental fit index (IFI), and root of the mean square residual (RMR) were selected to assess the overall model fit.

The baseline model was a four-factor model including FSBL, PWB, CSE, and innovative behavior. To test the distinctiveness of the proposed model, we compared the baseline model with three alternative models. The analytical results were shown in Table 2. As indicated in Table 2, the proposed model had a good fit to the data: $X^2 = 286.79$, $df = 146$, $X^2/df = 1.96$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, IFI = .96, RMR = .04. Besides, there was a significant difference in X^2 of baseline model and three alternative models, which demonstrated that respondents could differentiate the four constructs very well. More importantly, all items of the key constructs showed good and significant factor loadings, which signified that each variable had a good convergent validity. In sum, the main constructs of the present study, respectively, had a good validity.

Table 2
Results of CFAs: Comparison of Measurement Models

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMR	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$
Four-factor model (baseline model)	286.79	146	1.96	.06	.96	.95	.96	.04	-
Three-factor model ¹	402.99	149	2.71	.07	.92	.91	.92	.05	116.20*** (3)
Two-factor model ²	1042.38	151	6.90	.14	.73	.69	.73	.10	755.59*** (5)
One factor model ³	1532.67	152	10.08	.17	.57	.52	.58	.13	1245.88*** (6)

Note. 1FSBL and CSE merged; 2FSBL, CSE and PWB merged; 3all merged in one factor.

Common Method Variance

Since the present study adopted a cross-sectional research design and self-report questionnaire survey, there might be concern about the common method variance in the present study. In order to test the degree of common method variance, controlling for the effects of a single unmeasured latent method factor method was deployed (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In line with prior studies (e.g., Ng et al., 2014; Xu & Lv, 2018), we created a new measurement model including a common method factor and four focal variables, and all items of the key constructs were loaded on the method factor. The results demonstrated that the new measurement model showed a good fit to the data ($X^2 = 257.46$, $df = 145$, $X^2/df = 1.78$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, IFI = .97, RMR = .04). However, variance interpretation of method factor was 19.98 percent, less than 25 percent (Williams et al., 1989). As such, the common method variance would not affect the accuracy of our results.

Main and Mediation Effect

Multiple regression analyses, together with bootstrapping analyses with 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 1,000 bootstrap samples, were conducted to test the direct and indirect effect (i.e., *H1* and *H2*). *H1* assumed that FSBL is positively related to follower innovative behavior. As indicated in Table 3, the regression coefficient was significant ($= .31$, p

< .01, Model 5), providing support for *H1*. Moreover, *H2* postulated that PWB mediates the relationship between FSBL and innovative behavior. Model 7 in Table 3 revealed the associations of FSBL and PWB with innovative behavior are significant (FSBL, = .25, $p < .01$; PWB, = .33, $p < .01$), offering support for *H2*.

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Variables	Model 1	PWB Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Innovative behavior		
					Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender	.04	.05	.09	-.18*	-.16*	-.20*	-.18*
Education	.09*	.11*	.08*	.01	.03	-.03	.00
Organizational tenure	.08**	.07**	.05*	.04	.04	.01	.00
FSBL		.18**	.11*		.31**		.25**
PWB						.42**	.33**
CSE			.47**				
FSBL × CSE			-.07*				
R^2	.05	.11	.26	.03	.18	.17	.26
Adjusted R^2	.04	.10	.25	.02	.17	.16	.25
ΔR^2	-	.06	.15	-	.15	.14	.08
F	5.27**	9.95***	17.90***	2.65*	17.25***	15.36***	21.81***

Note. FSBL = followers strengths-based leadership; PWB = psychological well-being; CSE = core self-evaluations. Unstandardized coefficients are reported here. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Moderation Effect

Moderated regression analysis was performed to examine the moderating effects (i.e., *H3*). We created the interaction term of standardized FSBL and CSE. *H3* posited that CSE moderates the relationship between FSBL and PWB. The results of Model 3 in Table 3 demonstrated that the two-way interaction term (i.e., FSBL CSE) is significant (= -.07, $p < .05$). In addition, to further interpret the moderation result, simple slopes for the relationship between FSBL and PWB at high (Mean + *SD*) and low (Mean - *SD*) level of CSE were depicted in Figure 2. The results illustrated that FSBL has a more positive influence on PWB when followers have lower levels of CSE (effect = .17, $t = 4.04$, $p < .001$) rather than higher levels of CSE (= .03, $t = .71$, $p > .05$). Hence, *H3* received support.

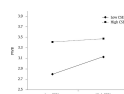


Figure 2

Interaction Plot of FSBL and CSE on PWB.

Note. FSBL = followers strengths-based leadership; PWB = psychological well-being; CSE = core self-evaluations.

Moderated Mediation Effect

In the present study, PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013) was deployed to examine the moderated mediation effect (*H4*), and we also calculated the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals with 5,000 bootstrap samples. *H4* proposed that CSE moderated the mediational effect of PWB on the relationship between FSBL and follower innovative behavior. As demonstrated in Table 4, PWB had a stronger mediational

effect on the association of FSBL with innovative behavior for followers low in CSE (effect = .06, *SE* = .03, 95% CI [.02, .13]) rather than for followers high in CSE (effect = .01, *SE* = .02, 95% CI [-.02, .06]), and the index of moderated mediation was significant (index = -.05, 95% CI [-.12, -.005]), which was supportive of *H4*.

Table 4
Results of Moderated Mediation Analysis

Conditional indirect effects of FSBL on employee innovative behavior at values of the moderator				
CSE	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<i>M</i> - 1SD	.06	.03	.02	.13
<i>M</i>	.04	.02	.01	.09
<i>M</i> + 1SD	.01	.02	-.02	.06
Index of moderated mediation	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Psychological well-being	-.05	.03	-.12	.00 (-.005)

Note. FSBL = followers strengths-based leadership; CSE = core self-evaluations.
Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. LL = lower limit; CI, confidence interval;
UL = upper limit. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

Discussion

SBL has been widely applied in leadership development in the past several years (Linley et al., 2007; Seita, 2004). However, no prior literature was found to empirically investigate the effects of SBL. The current study is to narrow this gap by examining the relationship between FSBL and follower innovative behavior as well as the mediating role of PWB and the moderating role of CSE in the FSBL-innovative behavior relationship with a sample of 314 Chinese employees. Findings of this study showed that FSBL has a positive association with follower innovative behavior and PWB plays an important mediational role in the relationship between FSBL and innovative behavior. In addition, we also found that CSE significantly and negatively moderates the direct effect of FSBL on PWB and the indirect effect of FSBL on innovative behavior via PWB. Our study has several theoretical and practical implications which are discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

The current study suggests several theoretical implications for FSBL and innovative behavior literature. First, our study is the first to empirically examine the effect of FSBL on innovative behavior. Although SBL has been widely applied in leadership development and achieved numerous benefits (Lee, 2015; Welch et al., 2014), there remains a paucity of empirical research on the effect of SBL on innovative behavior. The current study empirically examined the impact of FSBL on follower innovative behavior and the results showed that FSBL plays a crucial role in enhancing follower innovative behavior indeed, which provides a new perspective for understanding the antecedents to innovative behavior and expands our knowledge on consequences of FSBL.

Second, by testing the mediating role of PWB in the linkage between FSBL and innovative behavior, this study contributes to better understanding the underlying mechanism through which FSBL affects innovative behavior. Our findings indicated that leaders can facilitate followers perceptions of PWB by exhibiting more FSBL behaviors, which in turn leads to increased follower innovative behavior. The results can be explained by the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). That is, enhanced PWB including positive affect (McCullough et al., 2000) induced by FSBL can broaden followers momentary thought-action repertoires promoting discovery of novel and creative actions, which in turn build followers personal resources needed to innovate (Fredrickson, 2004). In a word, examining PWB as a mediator between FSBL and innovative behavior contributes to a better understanding of how and why FSBL can facilitate follower innovative behavior.

Third, the current study identified CSE as a crucial contingent factor which moderates the direct impact of FSBL on PWB and indirect impact of FSBL on innovative behavior via PWB. According to the substitutes for leadership theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978), leadership under certain conditions might have few or no benefits as many alternative factors can substitute for the effects of leadership (Howell, 1997). The current study provides effective evidence for the argument by revealing the negative moderating effect of CSE on the relationships between FSBL, PWB, and innovative behavior in such a way that positive effects of FSBL will be stronger when CSE is low rather than high. In conclusion, our study suggested that the level of followers CSE should be taken into consideration to better understand the effects of FSBL.

Practical Implications

The current study also has some important managerial implications. First, findings of this study demonstrated FSBL to relate to follower innovative behavior. That is, FSBL acts as an important role in enhancing follower innovative behavior. We propose that organizations should recruit and promote employees with characteristics of FSBL. Moreover, organizations can also help the present leaders to learn more knowledge on strengths identification, development, and deployment by training and education to cultivate strengths management skills of the present leaders. Second, in the current article, we found that followers PWB can significantly mediate the effect of FSBL on innovative behavior. Further, increasing followers PWB is an important way of enhancing their innovative behavior. Given that, we recommend that organizations can arrange training about how to improve the quality of sleep to help employees being optimal sleepers as past research has found that optimal sleepers have higher levels of PWB (Hamilton et al., 2007). Moreover, organizations can also promote employees PWB by alleviating their experience of job strain (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Third, our study results illustrated that CSE can lessen the positive effects of

FSBL. Therefore, organizations should exhibit more FSBL behaviors for followers with low level of CSE rather than for followers with high level of CSE.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study is not without its limitations. First, we assessed the FSBL using single dimension scale with five items. Although these items were proposed according to an existing scale related to strengths including perceived organizational support for strengths use, strengths-based psychological climate, and strengths use, and we also confirmed that the FSBL scale shows a good reliability and validity, the grounded theory should be adopted to develop a more comprehensive FSBL scale to accurately measure followers perception of FSBL behaviors in the future. Second, data used in this study were collected from a single source. Although the common method variance test indicated that there is no serious common method variance issue in the current study, future research should also try to apply experimental methods or collect data from multi-source to replicate the results of our study. Third, the current study considered PWB as a mediator in the relationship of FSBL and follower innovative behavior. In the workplace, maybe work-related well-being is a more valuable mediator in the FSBL-innovative behavior relationship. Therefore, future research should attempt to examine the mediational effect of work-related well-being on the relationship between FSBL and follower innovative behavior.

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Notes

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Conflict of interest declaration

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.