Reciprocal Care in Hierarchical Exchange: Implications for Psychological Safety and Innovative Behaviors at Work

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The emerging literature on relational leadership views leadership as a multidirectional social influence process in which relationships are a key source of leadership effectiveness. The core assumption in this line of research shifts the focus from a top-down influence to a process in which both leaders and followers mutually influence each other's perceptions and actions. In a view complementary to the social exchange perspective, this stream also considers work relationships as generative in nature. This study develops and tests a conceptual model in which reciprocal care in leader–member relationships helps shape the perceived climate of participative psychological safety, which in turn fosters innovative behaviors among employees. The results of time-lagged data collected from both employees and their direct managers lend general support to this model and hypotheses. Specifically, reciprocal care had both a direct and an indirect influence on innovative behaviors through the perceived climate of participative psychological safety. Our model specifies how a humanizing leadership approach in which leaders and members interact in ways that convey a sense of genuine care for each other's inner needs can help foster innovative behaviors through the creation of a "holding environment" in which members feel psychologically safe to admit errors, voice dissent, and enter into potentially conflictual discussions about alternatives. In so doing, we shed light on how care in relationships can also be linked to negatively valenced dynamics that involve innovative behaviors.

Keywords: caring, participative psychological safety, innovative behaviors, relational leadership, leader–member exchange

Leaders play a key role in creating a work environment that enables employees to fulfill their creative and innovative potential, generate new ideas, and implement those ideas (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; Mumford & Licuanan, 2004; Scott & Bruce, 1994). This is a challenging task because generating and developing novel ideas often involve behaviors that "defy the norm" (Sternberg, 2006); thus, they entail a high level of risk that individuals and groups need to overcome. Scholars have acknowledged this challenge and underscored leaders' need to create a work environment and context in which employees can overcome the risks associated with displaying creative and innovative behaviors at work. This type of work environment or climate for creative efforts may range from the administrative system (e.g., creating an explicit reward system) to the social system (e.g., encouraging experimentation; embracing diverse influences, open communication, and active participation; tolerance for both changing efforts and innovation failures; Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Carmeli, Sheaffer, Binyamin, Reiter-Palmon, & Shimoni, 2014; Hunter, Bedell, & Mumford, 2007; Kanter, 1983; Van de Ven & Chu, 1989).

A substantial body of research has taken a top-down leadership perspective in which leaders, through specific behaviors, influence followers' creative and innovative efforts (for a review, see de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Tierney, 2008). However, recent theorizing about leadership and creative behaviors suggests that integrating two emerging streams of organizational research—positive work relationships (PWRs) and relational leadership—may contribute to revealing the mechanisms by which leaders foster creative work involvement (Stephens & Carmeli, in press). PWR scholars have underscored the generative nature of interpersonal interactions between people that allows them to develop a sense of belongingness and meaningfulness and to grow and thrive in the workplace (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). Beyond motivational theories, the PWR lens emphasizes the development of quality relationships between people that are "psychological resourceful" (Owens, Baker, Sumpter, & Cameron, 2016, p. 37). The relational

leadership perspective views leadership as a multidirectional social influence process in which relationships are a key source of leadership effectiveness (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fletcher, 2004, 2007; Stephens & Carmeli, in press; Uhl-Bien, 2006). This perspective stresses processes of coinfluence and codevelopment in which leaders and followers influence each other and enable their growth and development (Fletcher, 2004, 2007; Stephens & Carmeli, in press).

There is an extensive body of literature on leader–member exchange (LMX; Day & Miscenko, 2015; Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016). Although its theoretical sources are rooted in Social Exchange Theory, which focuses on mutual interests and reciprocity (Blau, 1964), we believe that much can be gained from emphasizing a different mode of relationship that is generative in nature. Generative workplace relationships do not have to be based on reciprocal exchanges in which people aim to satisfy their self-interests and the need to reciprocate with others (i.e., give-and-take interactions). Rather, work relationships can also resource individuals who are in a connection such that they are better able to develop and grow (Baker & Dutton, 2007; Ragins & Dutton, 2007).

Hence, by building on the integration of these two streams of research (relational leadership and PWR), we specify relationships that make employees feel cared for during their daily interactions (Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000). These forms of high-quality relationships help individuals to develop positive psychological experiences that are crucial to their growth and development. We focus on what we term *reciprocal caring relationships* as a specific form of positive leader–member relationships. Reciprocal caring refers to mutual expressions of genuine concern for the other person's inner needs.

Although numerous studies have linked care in relationships to positively valenced dynamics and behaviors, much less is known about why and how caring relationships that involve negatively valenced dynamics can be translated into innovative behaviors. We believe that this type of exploration can advance theory because scholars have long recognized the importance of the psychological concept of a "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1965) that enables people to feel safe in situations where the level of anxiety may be high (Kahn, 1990, 2001, 2007; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014) and shown it to be particularly conducive to innovative behaviors (e.g., Stephens & Carmeli, in press; Vinarski-Peretz, Binyamin, & Carmeli, 2011; Vinarski-Peretz & Carmeli, 2011). Here, we examine the power of caring in hierarchical relationships (between leaders and followers) and the importance of a climate that enables followers to exhibit innovative behaviors that involve risks and often negatively valenced dynamics. Specifically, we develop and test a conceptual model, shown in Figure 1, in which we posit that when employees feel reciprocal care in leader–member relationships that this helps to shape a perceived climate of participative psychological safety, which in turn enhances members' innovative behavior.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Reciprocal Care in Hierarchical Exchanges

The concept of LMX was developed to tap "the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader and a follower" (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p. 827). Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, theorists have suggested that these relationships require that "both parties accept their mutual interests and agree to pursue shared superordinate goals" (Fisk & Friesen, 2012, p. 3) and manifest loyalty or trust, respect, and affect in the exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). In such relationships, the leader builds unique or "differentiated" relationships with a particular follower within a group. These relationships shape the follower's work experience, which has implications for various behaviors and outcomes in the workplace (Day & Miscenko, 2015).
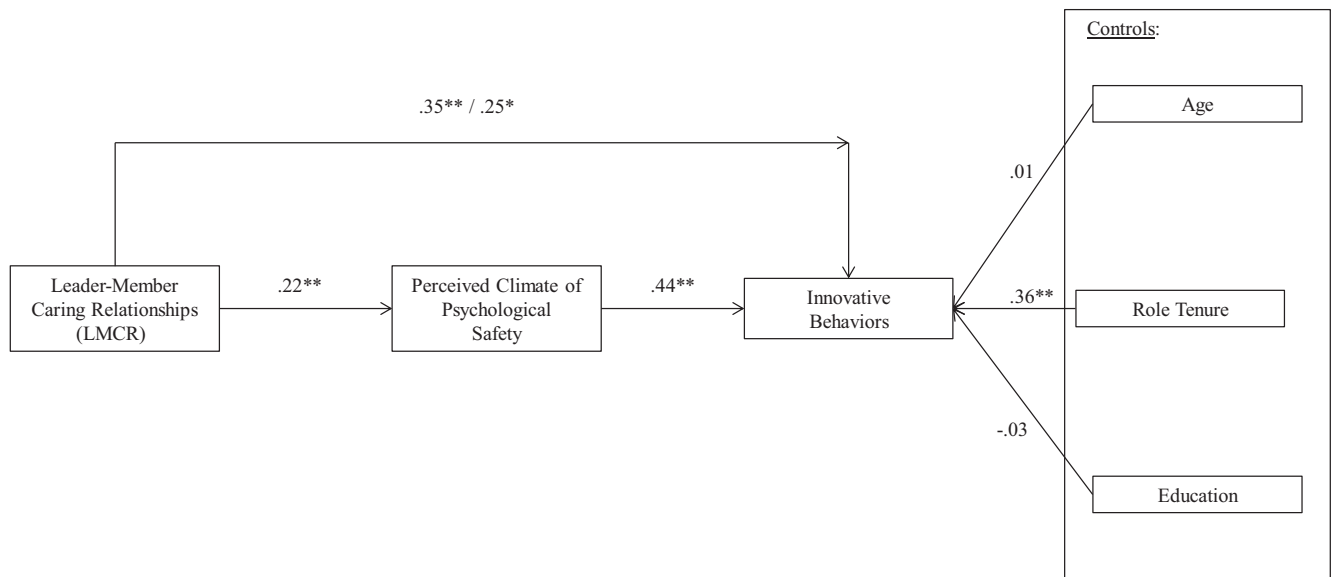

Figure 1. Illustrating PROCESS results for the links among leader–member caring relationships (LMCR), perceived climate of psychological safety, and innovative behaviors. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

However, our interest in this line of research draws on what we see as complementary perspectives; namely, a relational approach to leadership (Fletcher, 2004, 2007) and PWRs (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007). These perspectives emphasize more humanizing relationships that can be generative in nature (Stephens et al., 2011) and enable people to grow (i.e., "growth-in-relationships"; Fletcher, 2007; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976; Miller & Stiver, 1997). For relationships to be defined as "positive" or "high-quality," both interaction partners must experience a sense of mutuality in the connection and growth (see Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Fletcher, 2007; Jordan, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011, in Stephens & Carmeli, in press).

People can develop various forms of positive relationships at work. Our focus here is on a particular type of relationship characterized by a high level of care for each other in which a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) is cultivated and enables members to feel safe to participate, voice, and take interpersonal risks (Kahn, 1990, 2005; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Caring for another person is about expressing concern about his or her needs beyond instrumental outcomes (Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, & Margolis, 2012; Solomon, 1998). As mentioned, this conceptualization suggests that caring is behavior in which one party shows genuine concern for the inner needs (e.g., empathy, compassion, and appreciation) of the other person (Kahn, 1990). Care is a fundamental human need; organizations such as hospitals or schools attempt to respond to people's needs (see Kahn, 2005). Consistent with relational leadership theory, we refer here to reciprocal care in leader and follower relationships (hereafter leader–member caring relationships [LMCRs]) and define it as the *extent to which work relationships between the leader and his or her followers are characterized by expressions of genuine concern for each other's inner needs*. In such relationships, individuals are attentive, express active empathy, and show genuine interest in each other's needs. However, it is important to note that what influences employees' sense of psychological safety at work is how they perceive their relationship with their leaders. This involves the meaning and interpretation that employees attribute to these relationships or connections, which influence their own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Ibarra, 2005). In what follows, we theorize about the indirect influence of LMCRs on followers' innovative behaviors through the perceived climate of participative psychological safety.

LMCRs and the Perceived Climate of Participative Psychological Safety

We posit that reciprocal care in leader–member relationships is likely to enhance a climate in which members develop a sense of participative psychological safety. Participative psychological safety taps two elements: (a) it manifests a nonthreatening atmosphere and (b) it reflects a safe psychological space in which members are actively involved in a social group (Anderson & West, 1998). This is in line with Kahn's (1990) view that in a psychologically safe environment, employees feel that situations are trustworthy, secure, predictable, and clear in terms of behavioral consequences; thus, they feel free to express concerns, self-doubts, failures, and different opinions to more fully engage and better perform.

We suggest that reciprocal care is likely to help members feel more psychologically safe in their organizations for three reasons. In caring relationships, a holding environment is more likely to be shaped (Kahn, 2005, 2007; Stephens & Carmeli, in press). In such environments, "people demonstrate care and concern for others in particularly skillful ways" (Kahn, 2001, p. 265; see also Weiss, 1982) and thereby augment a sense of worth that enables them to maintain and strengthen the self within a social group (Kahn, 1990). Second, when people reciprocate care, they are likely to develop positive meaning such that they have a place in a social context (Alderfer, 1972; Frost et al., 2000; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) and play an important role in what they experience and how they make sense of these experiences (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Finally, we suggest that reciprocal care builds trusting relationships in which the micromoves of showing how much individuals look after each other's needs remove barriers and enable them to make themselves vulnerable.

Although there is little empirical work, studies have provided some evidence to support this line of thinking. Caring relationships were shown to encourage organizational members to voice their feedback as part of the process of helping others (von Krogh, 1998), build psychological conditions that are conducive for personal engagement (Vinarski-Peretz & Carmeli, 2011), and create a generative space that enables group members to better adapt (Carmeli, Jones, & Binyamin, 2016). Thus, we suggest that care for each other's needs resources members (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Worline & Dutton, 2017) by creating a safe environment in which people are comfortable to voice and engage (Kahn, 2001, 2005, 2007; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). This leads to the first hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1:* LMCRs (as perceived by employees) are positively related to a perceived climate of participative psychological safety.

Caring Relationships, Perceived Climate of Participative Psychological Safety, and Employee Innovative Behaviors

We theorize that caring relationships are likely to shape a psychologically safe environment, which in turn facilitates employee innovative behaviors. Whereas creativity captures the ideation process by which people come up with new and useful ideas, innovative behaviors include not only idea generation, but also championing these new ideas and building support to facilitate their implementation (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

Participative Psychological Safety and Employee Innovative Behaviors

Promoting modern innovations is characterized by an increased focus on interdependency, personal responsibility, autonomy, and flexibility (Baer & Frese, 2003). Displaying innovative behaviors requires employees to take actions that are more interpersonal in nature; hence, feeling safe in interactions is crucially important (Baer & Frese, 2003). Generating and implementing novel or unorthodox ideas entail risks and require certain supportive conditions (Edmondson, 1999). In a psychologically safe environment, people are likely to come forward and suggest new ideas,

and even exceptional ideas are deliberated in a lenient way rather than being disregarded or left unnoticed. Participative psychological safety manifests in a work environment in which there is positive communication as well as a sense of acceptance and collegiality, which are keys to reducing resistance to change (Yuan & Jing, 2014). This is instrumental to build legitimacy and support for these ideas. Furthermore, psychological safety encourages employees to participate in decision-making processes such that they are more likely to invest in the outcomes of these decisions and engage in the implementation process (West, 1990). This allows for a fuller realization of the potential of new ideas (Baer & Frese, 2003). This leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The perceived climate of participative psychological safety is positively related to employee innovative behaviors at work.

The Indirect Influence of Perceived Climate of Participative Psychological Safety

The question of how quality work relationships can enhance members' innovative behaviors at work has recently attracted increased research interest. For example, Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli (2011) showed that felt care between coworkers is, inter alia, a key to developing a sense of psychological safety, which in turn motivates employees to engage in innovative behaviors.

Caring relationships are a catalyst of developmental processes because this type of positive relationship resources individuals (Dutton, Debebe, & Wrzesniewski, 2015; Frost et al., 2000) and helps them grow and develop their self (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 1). Caring for others is also about helping them to learn and nurture their knowledge creation while encouraging them to give feedback and share their insights (von Krogh, 1998). Caring relationships are generative in that they can be energizing and imaginative and allow people to see things differently, thus leading to more enduring expansive and transformative outcomes (Carlsen, 2006; Dutton & Carlsen, 2011; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). When people form reciprocal caring relationships with others, they feel valued (Kahn, 2001, 2007). Such positive emotions may expand cognitive and social resources; thus, they broaden the cognitive variation of associations (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005) as well as the thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004), which are conducive to innovative behaviors.

Here, we suggest a complementary perspective. Although it is clear why care should be linked to a strong positive affective valence, we suggest that care can also be linked to negatively valenced dynamics and behaviors (admitting errors, voicing dissent, and entering potentially conflictual discussions of alternatives; Edmondson, 1999). When care is displayed in relationships between leaders and followers, it helps creating a context in which followers can feel psychologically safe and display behaviors that defy the norms (i.e., innovative behaviors). This leads to our third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: LMCRs exercise an indirect influence on employee innovative behaviors at work through the perceived climate of participative psychological safety.

Method

Sample and Procedure

This study is part of a larger research project. We approached 300 employees and their direct managers and asked them to participate in a time-lagged study in which we examined how work relationships can foster discretionary behaviors. The employees worked for 13 organizations (2 additional organizations declined our request) with which we had some familiarity, which helped us obtaining access to their members (employees and their managers). To obtain their consent, we met with the executives (chief executive officer and/or director of human resources) of each organization and explained the study as well as its goals and potential contributions. The organizations contacted are small to medium sized and compete in a variety of industries, which allowed us to some extent to increase the generalizability of the findings (Cook & Campbell, 1979). However, because we were also interested in the study of reciprocal care and innovative behaviors, we examined whether there were differences between jobs that require higher and lower levels of creativity. We assumed that in all jobs some level of creativity is required, but there are jobs that may entail higher levels. Administrative, manufacturing, inventory management, and accountancy jobs were categorized as jobs that require lower levels of creativity (noncreative jobs) compared with engineers, programmers, educators, and managers, who were categorized as employees whose jobs require a higher level of creativity (creative jobs). We ran an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and found no statistical difference between jobs with higher and lower expectations for creativity with regard to innovative behaviors, $F = .482, p = .488$.

We collected data on site to ensure accessibility to each respondent and increase the response rate. Overall, we used matched surveys from 251 employees and their managers. We collected the data at two points in time with a lag of 1 month between the surveys. In the first wave, we collected data from the employees on the control and independent variables (i.e., caring relationships). In the second wave, we collected data on the mediating variable (participative psychological safety) from the employees and then from the managers on employee innovative behaviors.

The average age of the employees was 39.53 years ($SD = 9.48$); the employees had been in their positions for an average of 5.99 years (SD 5.64). Twenty-four percent had a high school education, 9% had a technical degree, and the majority (67%) had an academic degree.

Measures

LMCR. We adapted the three-item scale used by Carmeli et al. (2016) derived from research on care in organizations by McAllister and Bigley (2002). We constructed the items to capture employees' perception of reciprocal caring in their relationships with their leaders. Note that one's perception or interpretation of a relationship with another person may not necessarily align with how the other person really sees the relationship or experiences it. However, we believe that there may not be alignment in short-term interactions (e.g., meeting people at conferences). However, our focus here was on leaders and followers who have worked together for a relatively longer period; in this type of relationship we expect

that both parties are likely to more fully realize what kind of relationship they have formed, their relationship experience, and whether they see the relationships in a similar way. Thus, we expected that followers' perceptions of high or low levels of caring would be likely to reflect the perceptions of their superiors. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *to a very large extent*) their perception of the extent to which in the interactions with their unit leader they (a) "pay attention to each other's needs," (b) "are attentive to each other's concerns," and (c) "show empathy for each other's needs." The Cronbach's α was .68.

Perceived climate of participative psychological safety. To assess this measure, we used five items from the eight-item scale by Anderson and West (1994; in Edmondson, 2004) to assess participative psychological safety. Sample items are "Everyone's view is listened to, even if it is the minority" and "We all influence each other." We did not use the item from the original scale of "There is a lot of give and take" because the pilot study indicated that respondents differently interpreted it. Responses were on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very large extent*). The Cronbach's α was .76.

The results of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated that LMCR and perceived climate of psychological safety were distinct measures. The results of a two-factor structure indicated a better fit with the data (χ^2 = 54.9, *df* = 19; comparative fit index [CFI] = .950; Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = .926; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .087; consistent Akaike information criterion [CAIC] = 165.868) than a one-factor structure (χ^2 = 379, *df* = 20; CFI = .500; TLI = .299; RMSEA = .268; CAIC = 483.445).

Employee innovative behaviors. We utilized the six-item scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994) to assess individual innovative behaviors in the workplace and capture the multistage process in which an individual recognizes a problem for which she or he generates new (novel or adapted) ideas and solutions, works to promote and build support for them, and produces an applicable prototype or model for the use and benefit of the organization or parts of it. Managers were asked to report on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very large degree*) the extent to which an employee (a) "generates creative ideas at work," (b) "promotes and champions ideas to others," and (c) "(seeks) and secures funds needed to implement new ideas." The Cronbach's α was .94.

Control variables. We controlled for employees' age because previous research has suggested that younger employees may be more inclined to take risks, which are part and parcel of the innovative process. In addition, we controlled for both role tenure and education because these can be used as proxies for knowledge and expertise, which have previously been linked to creativity and innovative behaviors.

Results

As suggested by Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Culpepper (2013), we calculated the intraclass correlations (ICCs) for the two dependent variables (M and Y) as the first step in the model building process of the hierarchical linear model (HLM). A value of ICC near zero suggests that there may be no need to use multilevel modeling. Instead, a simpler ordinary least squares (OLS) regression approach may be more appropriate. Specifically, ICC values for the mediator (psych safety; ICC1 = −.025; ICC2 = −.911) and for the dependent variable (innovative behaviors; ICC1 = −.040; ICC2 = −2.993) were practically zero; hence, there was no need to use multilevel modeling. We also tested the ICCs for the independent variable and found that the second item did not justify an aggregation (ICC1 = .025; ICC2 = .329). The means, standard deviations, and correlations between the research variables are presented in Table 1.

Hypothesis Testing

We used the computer program PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) to estimate the hypothesized path model. The PROCESS program generates OLS estimates for mediation models with multiple mediators. It also provides standard tests and bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) for individual regression coefficients and for indirect effects. In this study, we followed the conventional practice of having the bootstrap CIs based on 10,000 samplings.

The results lent support to Hypothesis 1, which posited a direct link between LMCRs and perceived climate of psychological safety (.19; *p* < .01). Hypothesis 2, which predicted a direct link between perceived climate of psychological safety and innovative behaviors, was also supported (.40; *p* < .01). In addition, although age and education were not significantly related to innovative behaviors, there was a negative significant relationship between role tenure and innovative behaviors and a positive and significant association between education and innovative behaviors.

Table 2 presents the results of the indirect influence of LMCR (through perceived climate of participative psychological safety) on innovative behaviors while controlling for age, tenure, and

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	39.53	9.48	1.00					
2. Role tenure	5.99	5.64	.68**	1.00				
3. Education	2.42	.86	−.06	−.08	1.00			
4. LMCR	4.16	.77	.11	.09	−.06	1.00		
5. Perceived climate of psychological safety	3.82	.65	−.04	.01	.08	.24**	1.00	
6. Innovative Behaviors	3.26	1.10	−.04	−.13*	.27**	.22**	.29**	1.00

Note. N = 251. LMCR = Leader–member caring relationship.
* *p* ≤ .05.   ** *p* ≤ .01.

education. The results (coefficients) illustrated in Figure 1 indicate that LMCR was directly and indirectly, through the perceived climate of psychological safety, associated with innovative behaviors. However, the bootstrap CI for the indirect influence of psychological safety did not include zero (95% CI [.0219, .1002]), and the normal theory test for indirect effects was 2.5903 ($p = .0096$), suggesting a significant indirect influence (see Hayes, 2013). However, the results indicated that the direct influence of LMCR on innovative behaviors remained significant (.34; $p < .05$), which thus did not lend support to a full indirect effect model. This suggests partial support for Hypothesis 3, which posited an indirect effect of LMCR on innovative behaviors, but does not allow inferences regarding full mediation.

Discussion

In this study, we examined how reciprocal care in leader–member relationships can influence members' innovative behaviors. The findings from the time-lagged data indicate that when leaders and members care for each other's inner needs (as perceived by members), they report a more psychologically safe work climate, which in turn results in higher levels of members' innovative behaviors. These findings have several theoretical implications.

We stressed that a relational perspective to the study of leadership and creativity (Stephens & Carmeli, in press; Zhou & George, 2003) may help advance research and theory. However, we took a perspective that differs from the two dominant streams in the literature—top-down leadership influences and Social Exchange Theory—and shifted the discussion to focus on multidirectional social influences as well as humanizing and generative workplace relationships (Stephens & Carmeli, in press).

Nevertheless, we do not claim that leadership style, which has been the main focus in the leadership literature (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014), is not important for members' creative and innovative efforts. However, if we embrace the notion that followers play a major role in the exercise of leadership (Howell & Shamir, 2005) and adopt a relational view on the study of leadership (Zhou & George, 2003), then new ways to advance research and theory should clearly be explored. In particular, we see promise in the relational leadership perspective, which assumes a social influence process in which leaders and followers influence each other and coshape their perceptions and behaviors (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fletcher, 2004, 2007; Stephens & Carmeli, in press; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Through a mutual influence process, leaders and members can grow and develop (Fletcher, 2004, 2007). This coinfluence process can take many forms; however, the ways

Table 2

Results of Mediation Analyses: The Indirect Influence of LMCRs on Innovative Behaviors (Through Perceived Climate of Psychological Safety)

Predictor variable	B	SE	t	R^2
Model 1: LMCR → Perceived climate of psychological safety				.07
LMCR	.19**	.06	3.28	
Age	−.01	.01	−1.25	
Role tenure	.01	.01	.85	
Education	.06	.05	1.22	
Model 2: LMCR → Innovative behaviors				.16
LMCR	.42**	.09	4.48	
Age	.01	.01	1.10	
Role tenure	−.04*	.02	−2.86	
Education	.39**	.08	5.08	
Model 3: LMCR → Perceived climate of psychological safety → Innovative behaviors				.21
Perceived climate of psychological safety	.40**	.09	4.42	
LMCR	.34*	.08	4.06	
Age	.01	.01	1.49	
Role tenure	−.05**	.01	−3.53	
Education	.36**	.08	4.72	
Bootstrap results for direct effects	Effect	Boot *SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Direct effect of LMCR on innovative behaviors	.34	.084	.1744	.5034
Bootstrap results for indirect effects	Effect	Boot *SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Indirect effect of LMCR through perceived climate of psychological safety on innovative behaviors	.05	.0194	.0219	.1002
Normal theory tests for indirect effects	Effect	SE	z	p
Indirect effect of LMCR through perceived climate of psychological safety on innovative behaviors	.08	.0300	2.5903	.0096

Note. $N = 251$. LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

leaders and members relate to each other is the most fundamental part of this social influence process (Fletcher, 2004, 2007; Stephens & Carmeli, in press). This perspective is better explained by integrating notions from the theory of PWRs (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Stephens et al., 2011) and can further inform research on LNMS in a fundamental way (Stephens & Carmeli, in press). In particular, the rich body of literature on LMX (Day & Miscenko, 2015) posits self-interest motives in the exchange between leaders and their members, an assumption that draws on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). PWRs emphasize a different form of relationship that is more humanizing and generative in nature (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007). Our research contributes to this line of thinking by calling for an examination of specific ways of interrelating. Thus, our focus on reciprocal care shifts the debate in leadership research by pointing to the importance of cosocial influence in the exchange between leaders and members and the more humanizing and generative workplace relationships that they form.

Furthermore, we contribute to the literature by showing what these relationships enable members to do. We provided additional evidence for the notion that generative relationships resource individuals in a connection (Ragins & Dutton, 2007) and indicated why positive ways of interrelating can be a powerful way to augment members' capacity to display creative and innovative behaviors (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015). We specified why care is particularly important for members' innovative behaviors at work. We pointed to the power of caring relationships in creating a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) and explained why this environment shapes a safer and more secure psychological space for members to self-express and engage (Kahn, 2005; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). To contextualize a holding environment, we specified participative psychological safety (West, 1990) and explained that it taps two fundamental conditions—nonthreatening situations and encouragement to engage actively. Drawing on previous research (Frost et al., 2000; Kahn, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), we then discussed three mechanisms—the development of a sense of worth, self-expression, and positive meaning—that may show why reciprocal care is likely to nurture such a holding environment. This paper also sheds light on a particular humanizing mode of interaction between leaders and followers characterized by caring relationships, which may be a key to building a holding environment (cf. Winnicott, 1965). This is made even more complex by the fact that innovative behaviors not only require engagement in the ideation process but also building legitimacy and support for new ideas, a process that often involves negatively valenced dynamics. Thus, caring relationships shape holding environments, where people develop a sense of participative psychological safety through actively paying attention to the other person (containment), expressing genuine interest in the other person's experiences (empathic acknowledgment), and helping the other person make sense of his or her experiences (enabling perspective; see Kahn, 2001).

The findings indicate that reciprocal care in leaders–member relationships at work plays a powerful role in developing a psychologically safe environment in which employees generate, champion, and build support for implementing their ideas (i.e., innovative behaviors). Our findings showed that although there are power differences in organizations that might prevent employees from taking interpersonal risks and looking for new ideas and innovations, caring relationships can mitigate this issue by creating a psychologically safer climate in which members are more comfortable and encouraged to actively engage and display their innovative efforts. Specifically, when employees feel psychologically safe, particularly when they are "floundering in anxiety" (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p. 87) and receive responses from significant others, their ability to maintain their capacity to carry on and adapt to uncertain situations increases (see also Frost et al., 2000; Kahn, 2001, 2007). Innovative behaviors entail situations in which people need to defy common patterns of behavior or courses of action. This is likely to build up a high level of anxiety about others' reactions to these initiatives. By engaging in innovative processes, employees and managers can both channel their energy into this complex role activity and express their self-concept. Thus, we hope to pave the way for relaunching research on "the relational contexts that shape how, when, and to what extent people disclose and express their selves in the course of role performance" (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p. 83).

Our findings also have some important practical implications. We believe that it is crucial to inform managers about new ways of developing a relational context that can drive employees to express their full innovative potential by generating new ideas, championing them, and building support for their implementation. However, to motivate employees to overcome the inherent hesitation derived from hierarchical relationships that characterize their interactions with their managers, it is often the manager who needs to take steps that shape a relational context in which the level of fear and anxiety are significantly alleviated. Managers may perceive acts of caring as "soft" management, which can be counterproductive in hierarchical relationships because they might create the impression of weakness. Furthermore, many managers do not pay attention to the inner needs of their followers, not because they do not want to, but because they lack the interrelationship capacity to connect. Therefore, we believe that leaders should invest more efforts in cultivating the capacity to care and respond to followers' emerging needs. By demonstrating caring leadership, we envision leaders who can create a safer and enabling work environment where there are more opportunities to build positive connections; these quality connections help cultivate a more innovative workforce where leaders and members can coengage in making a transformational change and thereby coshape a healthier organization. The capacity to build relationships that allow for mutual influence is critical because leaders not only influence their followers, but they also open themselves up to new influences from their followers to create a more engaging, energizing workplace in which members can see new opportunities for growth and development and seize them. In many ways, this mode of interaction can create an upward spiral and enable both leaders and followers to overcome structural hierarchical differences to more fully realize their potential.

Caring in leader–member relationships is especially crucial in the rapidly changing and uncertain environments that characterize contemporary organizations. As technology skyrockets, relationships at work more often become virtual and replace face-to-face interactions. In such environments, giving more attention to humanizing interactions at work to meet both employees' and managers' sociopsychological needs is imperative to enhance their well-being and ultimately the viability of the organization as a whole. Caring in leader–member relationships signals to both parties that they are treated not as a resource for the organization,

but as human beings. This may enhance their self-worth, help find meaning, and provide more opportunities for self-expression, which in turn can facilitate their growth.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Some limitations of this study call for caution in interpreting the findings. First, we cannot be certain about the generalizability of the results because we collected data in a particular context—small- to medium-sized organizations in Israel. We suspect that there may be differences across different types of organizations as well as across cultures. For example, in some cultures showing acts of caring may be perceived as signs of weakness whereas in others it may be more acceptable. In addition, organizational norms develop over a long period of time, and in some organizations such social gestures may be less fully embraced than in others.

Second, we examined employees' perceptions when assessing both caring relationships and psychological safety. To fully capture reciprocal care, it would be helpful to observe similarities and differences in how both leaders and their followers view their relationships. For example, leaders may believe they are acting with a sense of caring toward followers, but followers may not perceive these leader's acts as genuinely showing concern but rather as more instrumental. Although we believe that such dissimilarities in leaders' and followers' perceptions may well be observed in short-term interactions (e.g., encountering people at conferences) and think that they are less likely to emerge in long-term relationships (such as in work relationships between a leader and a follower), we consider that this issue should be further pursued. One way would be to investigate short- and long-term relationships and observe whether both parties report caring relationships and experience them. Another approach would be to use both parties' perceptions and assess whether there are differences in the ways they evaluate their relationships with each other and if so why these differences have emerged. In addition, we call for further refinements and improvements in assessing care and its facets; for example, we encourage studies that capture the emotional and cognitive facets of care in a connection. This can help advance research and theory by enabling researchers to identify different ways in which emotional and cognitive care translates into discretionary behaviors in general and innovative behaviors in particular. This issue, however, brings up other challenges such as what happens when one conveys a sense of caring toward the other person and he or she does not reciprocate or at least not as the caring person expects; in some situations the relationships may be sustained but in others that can be broken and the people in the connection will find themselves in a downward spiral. The entire discussion on recovering and rebuilding relationships can be further developed. Furthermore, we believe that different followers vary in their needs for caring relationships. This clearly opens up new opportunities to unravel how different levels of need for caring influence the indirect relationships of caring, psychological safety, and innovative behaviors. We also did not control for how long the leader and member worked together, and future research should take this into account because the length of work relationships between leaders and followers may influence the kind of psychological space that is shaped over time. Although we collected data from both employees and their managers at different points in time, we cannot make any causal inferences. We did not test an alternative mediation model in which variables come in reverse order because both the independent variable and mediator were collected at Time 1 and the supervisory rating of employee innovative behavior was assessed at Time 2. A longitudinal experimental field study would be helpful in capturing some causal relationships. Finally, although we theorize about caring as a powerful relational mechanism that elevates members (Worline & Dutton, 2017), and cultivates generative workplace relationships which resource members to engage and act (Ragins & Dutton, 2007) we believe that this line of research is still in its early stages of development and can benefit from both conceptual and empirical endeavors. For example, if we assume that through relationships people are more empowered to do things and engage, researchers can explore more systematically what types of resources are produced through work relationships - cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. We suspect that resilience and self-efficacy are the key capacities that are likely to develop through PWRs in general and reciprocal care in particular. However, this requires further research to explain how reciprocal care develops greater resiliency and more efficacious beliefs among individuals in the workplace.

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