Can servant leaders reduce burnout in their followers through meaningfulness?

Diana Sarghi

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By: **Diana Sarghi**

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____	Chair
Dr. Charles Draimin	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Ingrid Chadwick	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Linda Dyer	
_____	Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Alexandra Panaccio	

Approved by: _____
                     Graduate Program Director

_____2017   _____
                     Dean of School

Abstract

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The present study investigates whether servant leaders inspire a sense of meaningfulness in their followers, and whether deriving meaning from work will then help to reduce emotional exhaustion, the core dimension of burnout. Previous literature has found that meaningfulness will help to reduce burnout in followers, but has not documented the antecedents to this process. Given that leaders play an important role in the wellbeing and behaviours of their teams, it is crucial to look at how they may influence this relationship. We proposed that servant leaders, because of their focus on serving their followers and their community, and for their ability to empower their teams, might be just the types of leaders to inspire a sense of meaning in their employees. Meaningfulness was also proposed as a mediator in the effects of servant leadership on emotional exhaustion at the individual and team level, a relationship that has not yet been looked at in the literature. To collect the data for this study, we administered online questionnaires to employees comprising teams at various companies. Results showed that servant leadership did reduce emotional exhaustion in followers at both levels of analysis. Meaningfulness, however, only mediated the relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion at the individual level. Our findings also add to the current management literature in providing a direct relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness at both the individual and the team level.

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Introduction

It has been suggested that humans need to derive meaning from work in order to maintain motivation (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). From an evolutionary perspective, we can see why meaning is important. In preindustrial societies, individuals worked and lived within the same communities. They were able to see how their work directly affected everyone else in the community. Furthermore, the work was connected to the well-being of the individual and his peers. With the start of the industrial era, the individual's work was suddenly separated from the community. This disconnect made it difficult for individuals to create meaning from work, as they could no longer see the effect of their work on the community (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009).

As leaders are responsible for ensuring that their team remains consistently motivated and productive at work, one way they can do this is by instilling in them this sense of meaning. Meaningfulness reflects an employee's perception of the value of their work and how much they intrinsically care about the tasks they perform, and has been shown to have positive consequences for individuals, teams and organizations. Tummers & Knies (2013), for example, have shown that teams who feel more meaningfulness are also more successful. In their study, meaningfulness mediated the relationship between leadership and team outcomes (Tummers & Knies, 2013). These findings show that leaders have the ability to create meaningfulness in their teams.

In the current study, we propose that servant leaders may be the types of leaders who can help their teams attain just that. These are the kinds of leaders who place great importance on their followers and expend a lot of time and effort to help their followers grow (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This desire to put others first is motivated by a drive to serve. This need to

serve leads these individuals to commit themselves to others, to benefit the organization and also to create a positive impact on the community (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The desire to impact the community in positive ways may be analogous to the concept of meaningfulness that was previously described. It seems these individuals are motivated from a sense of belonging to the community and the desire to bring back to their community and individuals that are part of their environment. Moreover, one of the qualities of servant leaders that is suggested in the literature is that they empower and develop people (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Empowerment is a state that includes four sub-dimensions, one of which is meaning. The others are self-determination, impact and competence (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser & Wayne, 2014). In the current study, however, we will focus exclusively on meaningfulness. Liden et al. (2014) suggest that meaning reflects the extent to which employees care about the tasks they are involved in, and perceive it to be valuable. The qualities of servant leaders are such that they are better able to communicate the importance of the work on the lives of others, give followers greater decision-making power, and inspire them to engage in servant leader behaviours themselves. These aspects can lead followers to a greater understanding of the role of their work in the lives of others and thus, increase its meaning.

One of the follower outcomes that is linked to meaningfulness is burnout. People experiencing burnout from their job tend to feel depleted emotionally, develop negative attitudes towards their work and clients, and begin to view themselves and their accomplishments in a negative way (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Such feelings can lead to deterioration in the quality of one's work, and eventually to absenteeism and turnover (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The consequences of burnout are obstructive for both the individual and the organization. Interestingly, a lack of meaningfulness was found to be an antecedent of this outcome (Leiter,

Harvie, & Frizzell, 1998; Boudrias, Morin, & Brodeur, 2012; Pizam & Neumann, 1988).

Moreover, servant leadership was found to correlate negatively with burnout (Babakus, Yavas, &

Ashill, 2011). This suggests that meaningfulness may be a mechanism through which servant

leaders affect burnout.

Currently, no studies have looked at the way servant leaders affect their team through

meaningfulness. This study will look firstly at whether servant leadership is associated with

meaningfulness in individuals and secondly at whether servant leadership could create a

meaningfulness climate in teams. In other words, we expect servant leaders to affect

meaningfulness at both the individual and the team level. Moreover, the present study will

investigate the effects of servant leadership on emotional exhaustion, which is the core

dimension of burnout (Shirom, 2003), with meaningfulness as a mediator. At the individual

level, perceiving and experiencing servant leadership may enhance the employee's

meaningfulness, and in turn reduce the likeliness that he or she will experience emotional

exhaustion. At the team level, servant leadership is predicted to create a climate of

meaningfulness, which will reduce the likeliness of team emotional exhaustion.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Meaningfulness

Researchers are beginning to look more into the idea that Western society is changing

along with the role that work plays in people's lives (Catwright & Holmes, 2006). Globalization,

international competition, growing consumerism, increasing use of outsourcing, technological

advances are among the many factors changing the way our work lives are structured. With

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these, workers have seen more job uncertainty and ambiguity, leading inevitably to higher levels of stress (Catwright & Holmes, 2006). Moreover, employees work longer hours, have more responsibilities and must learn to effectively deal with constant change. Catwright & Holmes (2006) suggest these issues have caused individuals to look for jobs that are more personally fulfilling or meaningful, instead of settling for financial or security reasons.

Bibby (2001) has also found that the younger generation of workers are changing in their views and attitudes toward work. Participants in his study reported that interesting work, feelings of accomplishment and impact on the lives of others were more important than other aspects of one's job that prevailed in previous generations, such as job security and pay (Bibby, 2001). Caudron (1997) has obtained similar results in his survey, in which workers ranked significance and meaningfulness of work above external rewards.

Given these findings, it seems there is a growing emphasis on extracting meaning or purpose from one's work. Havener (1999) insisted that organizations must work to keep their employees motivated, by understanding and addressing this concept. The author believes that talented people will leave, if they are not provided with meaningful work (Havener, 1999). This idea was indeed reinforced in a study by Scroggins (2008) who has shown that meaningfulness was strongly related to intentions to leave the company. Those who reported more meaning in their jobs, were also less likely to leave the company (Scroggins, 2008).

Meaningfulness also appears in the literature as a component of the larger psychological construct referred to as empowerment. Empowerment is based on the employees' or team's perceived self-efficacy, voice, and control over their work (Spreitzer, 1995). Those advocating for this concept believe it to be beneficial for the employee's well-being and performance at work (Maynard, Gilson & Mathiew, 2002). The predominant view is that empowerment is

composed of four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and choice. Meaning, the focus of the present study, relates to how an employee believes his values relate to their work and how much they intrinsically care about the tasks they perform (Maynard et al., 2012). Much research has found that empowerment benefits performance at all levels of analysis (Maynard et al., 2012). Maynard et al. (2012)'s review reveals that dimensions of psychological empowerment show differing patterns when analyzed independently. For example, the meaning dimension was shown to be the strongest predictor of job satisfaction (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000). Meaningfulness also mediated the relationship between job characteristics and organizational commitment (Liden et al., 2000).

Meaningfulness has also been seen in the literature on the job characteristics model of Hackman and Oldham (1976). They proposed experienced meaningfulness as a critical psychological state of the employee that ties core job characteristics to work outcomes. In their model, experienced meaningfulness is described as the degree to which the individual finds his work to be of value, and was one of three psychological states that maintained intrinsic motivation (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). A meta-analysis by Humphrey, Nahrgang, and Morgeson (2007) have found that experienced meaningfulness was the main component to mediate the relationship between job characteristic and outcomes.

Meaningfulness also appears in the literature on work engagement. The way meaningfulness is defined in these studies corresponds to the definition we adopt in the current study: employees feel their work is meaningful when they are able to understand its value and purpose, and that these are perceived to be in accordance with their own values or standards (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). This experience may stem from employees' perception that their work offers a contribution to the organization and to society. A study by May et al. (2004)

looked at the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and how these may relate to engagement at work. Though all these conditions were found to significantly relate to engagement, meaningfulness was the strongest predictor. Meaningfulness was also found to fully mediate the relationships between job enrichment and work role fit, and engagement (May et al., 2004).

Other studies have also linked meaningfulness to several positive outcomes, such as improved performance (Neck & Milliman, 1994), increased organizational commitment and engagement (Holbeche & Springett, 2004; Milliman, Czapleurski & Ferguson, 2003).

These studies show that meaningfulness is an important concept to study, because of its unique and consistent positive effects on work outcomes. Moreover, in many of the studies looking at empowerment, meaningfulness often comes out as a stronger predictor than any of the other dimensions (Liden et al., 2000; Humphrey et al., 2007; May et al., 2004). Prior studies have, however, focused on examining meaningfulness at the individual level. We believe that there are reasons to expect that team-level meaningfulness, in other words a "climate" of meaningfulness, also has important consequences in organizations, for instance on team-level outcomes. We develop this idea in the next section.

Team meaningfulness

Though no research has examined meaning at the team level, the overall psychological construct of empowerment has been researched extensively. A meta-analysis by Seibert, Wang & Courtright (2011) found that leadership was significantly related to team empowerment. In terms of the effects of leadership on meaningfulness in particular, Seibert et al. (2011) explain that leaders may supply followers with enough information about the goals and values of the

organization, which allows employees to see how their own values match with those of their company. This will then lead to enhanced feelings of meaningfulness. They also proposed and found that empowerment would be affected similarly at both the individual and team levels (Seibert et al., 2011). We can thus expect that meaningfulness at the individual level will also show paralleling results at the team level. Our proposed team-level construct of meaningfulness would encompass the group's shared perception about the value of the work performed by the team and the positive effect of this work on the community.

Team-level meaningfulness is also distinct from individual meaningfulness, as it relates to feelings that collective team efforts will lead to valuable and impactful work. Individuals may perceive that their own tasks are not in themselves particularly meaningful, but that the team's work and goals as a whole are. As such, we can also see how individuals may feel more or less meaning from their work as compared to that of their team. If individuals can experience different level of meaningfulness thinking about their own work and that of the group, then it is worthwhile to examine the impact of meaningfulness at the two levels of analysis.

Team-level research has become paramount in the management literature, given the fact that most organisational life is built upon team-oriented work (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). In particular, the effect of leaders on the team has received increasing attention. Leadership is essentially a tool for satisfying team needs and enhancing team effectiveness (Morgeson et al., 2010). In the present study we choose to look at servant leadership as the potential vehicle for increasing meaningfulness in teams. Research has shown that servant leaders can in fact affect followers at the team level. For example, servant leadership has shown to predict team effectiveness (Irving & Longbotham, 2007) and team potency (Hu & Liden,

2011). Similarly, we can expect that servant leaders will affect team processes within our study; that is, team meaningfulness and team emotional exhaustion.

Servant leadership

The concept of servant leadership was proposed by Greenleaf (1977). It is based on the idea that the best leaders do not lead from self-interest, but from a desire to help or "serve" their followers, the organization and the community (Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008). To do this, servant leaders develop close relationships and continuing communication with their followers, in order to discover their needs and abilities so they could better assist them (Liden et al., 2008). They motivate followers to grow and eventually become servant leaders themselves. Liden et al. (2008) have developed a measure of servant leadership and have proposed and validated seven dimensions in the process. These are emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically (Liden et al., 2008).

Much of the current literature on servant leadership is focused on the outcomes of this leadership style. Studies have shown positive effects of servant leadership on individuals in terms of performance and reduced turnover intention (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko & Roberts, 2009a; 2009b). In teams, servant leadership was positively related to team effectiveness and team potency (Hu & Liden, 2011; Irving & Longbotham, 2007).

Servant leaders also affect followers by increasing their sense of self-actualization, which is the drive to grow as a person, and to realize one's potential (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This idea compliments the current study, since it is suggested that self-actualization "gives life meaning", or creates a sense of purpose in life (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Another study (Mayer,

Bardes & Piccolo, 2008) aimed to find whether servant leaders could help satisfy followers' needs, and found that servant leadership was related to job satisfaction, a relationship that was moderated by organizational justice and need satisfaction.

Why not study transformational leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX), which have also been found to impact performance, and are quite popular in the management research on leadership? There are several reasons why servant leadership may be a better choice for the current study. While there may be similarities between servant and transformational leaders in that they are both very socially oriented and engaged in their followers' growth, servant leaders also focus on serving the community and inspire their followers to do the same (Liden et al., 2008). Moreover, servant leaders put followers' needs before their own (Liden et al., 2008). Because servant leaders focus on forming quality relationships with their followers, the concept is also similar to LMX theory. Unlike servant leadership, however, LMX does not discuss how leaders may inspire service to the community and motivate followers to become these types of leaders themselves (Liden et al., 2008). In a study by Liden et al. (2008), they found that servant leadership was in fact correlated to transformational leadership and LMX, but not so much as to render it redundant. They also found that servant leadership explained unique variance in community citizenship, in-role performance and organizational commitment (Liden et al., 2008). The study suggests that servant leadership contributes something unique beyond transformational leadership and LMX (Liden et al., 2008). Furthermore, although both servant leaders and transformational leaders had positive effects on team performance, a study by Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng (2011) showed that after controlling for the variance explained by transformational leadership, servant leadership was still explaining another 10 % of the variance in team performance (Shaubroeck et al. 2011).

These studies show the importance of studying servant leadership. These leaders affect the behaviour of their followers in positive ways at both the individual and the team level. In fact, it seems to contribute something unique to other forms of leadership; mainly, a desire to serve others and the community. This quality may be an important predictor of meaningfulness.

Mechanisms through which servant leaders inspire meaningfulness in followers

There are several ways through which leaders could shape the perceived meaning of their followers' work. Framing is one process that has been proposed as a medium through which meaningfulness can be inspired in followers (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). This concept refers to the ability to highlight specific aspects of a situation in order to enhance the way it is perceived, while simultaneously minimizing the importance of other aspects (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). Leaders could use framing in order to emphasize certain features of work that will make it appear more meaningful to employees (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). In a series of studies by Grant (2008), managing the meaning of work created positive effects on employees' performance. In his first experiment, fundraising callers were told stories about how their work helped other students. One month later, these callers' performance had significantly increased, as measured by the number of weekly pledges and donation money that they gained (Grant, 2008). In a second experiment, lifeguards were used as participants and were told stories about other lifeguards that have saved lives. Their helping behaviour and perceptions of social impact and social worth had increased significantly one month later (Grant, 2008). The author used stories to change the employees' perception of their job, by emphasizing the significance or impact of their work on the lives of others. Task significance increases job performance, as employees derive more meaning from the work they do (Grant, 2008). These studies show that in order for

employees to perform well, they need to be reminded about the way their work impacts the community. Servant leaders may be better able to communicate the impact of the work on the community and the lives of others because they are types of leaders who also focus and dedicate themselves to factors beyond the organization. If employees understand how their work affects other people, this may help them see how their work is connected to their values and become more intrinsically interested in the tasks, thus increasing the meaning of their work.

Another way through which leaders could increase meaningfulness in followers is by giving them more decision-making opportunities and ability to make greater contribution to the organization. Tummers & Knies (2013) argue that this would make followers feel more positively about their role within the organization and their ability to have a greater impact through their work. Similarly, Seibert et al. (2011) mention that leaders can provide employees with the right information and control that would allow them to see their work as meaningful. Having information regarding the goals and strategies of the organization gives employees the ability to see whether their own values fit with those of their company (Seibert et al., 2011). Liden et al. (2014) argue that servant leaders in particular, make followers feel that they can influence outcomes by giving them more decision-making power.

Tummers and Knies (2013) examined work meaningfulness as a potential mediator between LMX and job outcomes. They chose to test employees in the public sector in which it is assumed that people choose to work primarily for the contribution they make to society, in hopes that this might emphasize differences in meaningfulness. LMX, which describes the quality of the relationship between leader and follower, was proposed to relate positively to the meaningfulness experienced by followers. When employees have good relationships with their leaders, they may benefit from the greater insight into the work, the company and given more

responsibilities as well. These benefits may cause employees to feel that their work is making a difference. This in turn was hypothesized to lead to more positive work outcomes, such as organizational commitment and work effort. The results of their study showed that meaningfulness was in fact mediating the relationship between LMX and outcomes, such that relationships between leaders and followers that were high LMX were more positively related to employee meaningfulness and this in turn caused employees to show more organizational commitment and greater work effort (Tummers & Knies, 2013). Clearly, the quality of the relationship between leader and follower has an effect on meaning. In a similar manner, the high-quality relationships created by servant leaders should lead followers to experience greater meaningfulness. The Tummers & Knies (2013) study shows great insight into the phenomenon; however, there are a few drawbacks we hope to overcome with our proposed study. For example, it would be important to look at several other job types outside the public sector, to see if this type of relationship is generalizable to all industries. The current study also adds a group-level of analysis in order to see how meaning might be affected at the team level. Finally, servant leadership has been associated with a focus on the community, an aspect that is not mentioned in the LMX literature. This emphasis on serving the community may add an important variable in influencing followers' perceived meaning of work. In fact, a study by Liden et al. (2008) showed that servant leadership explained unique variance beyond LMX, in terms of subordinates' community citizenship behaviours, in-role performance and organizational commitment.

With their ability to empower their followers, communicate the importance of helping others and the community, and their encouragement of employees towards greater autonomy and decision making, servant leaders likely help followers see whether their own values relate to the

tasks they perform. Servant leaders thus likely help their followers create meaning from their

work. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership relates positively to followers' perceptions of

meaningfulness.

Mechanisms through which servant leaders affect meaningfulness at the team level

We know that servant leadership can also impact followers at the team level (Hu &

Liden, 2011; Irving & Longbotham, 2007). Thus, it is possible that servant leaders may create a

climate of meaningfulness in their teams, with high agreement between individual group

members. The link between leadership and team-level meaningfulness has not yet been

investigated, so we hope our study will shed some light on this relationship. Some researchers

did explain however, the way meaningfulness can arise as a team construct. Wrzesniewski,

Dutton & Debebe (2003), for example, have looked at the way perceived meaningfulness is

shared between employees through social interaction. Their model explains that individuals pick

up on certain social cues from those around them, in order to shape the meaning of their work.

The authors drew from social information processing theory, which proposes that workers

influence each other's job attitudes through information sharing and emotional cues relating to

their work tasks (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Essentially, they argue that meaning can be created

or disintegrated through our interactions with others (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Through daily

interaction with those at work, individuals constantly try to understand and interpret the actions

of their colleagues. These actions provide pieces of information that will eventually be used to

make judgments. They can be direct cues, or more subtle non-verbal behaviors (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

While these social encounters help to build their perception of meaning, it is also reinforced by their seeking out interactions that match their views (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Thus, while influenced to some degree by those around them, employees also help to shape their views and attitudes towards work by choosing whom and how they interact. One particularly salient relationship within a team is that between a follower and his supervisor. Sy, Cote and Saavedra (2005) argue that supervisors are more likely to transmit their moods to their followers than vice versa. Lewis (2000) provided evidence that a higher-status' individual is more likely to affect the moods of lower-status individuals. In a team-level study by Sy et al (2005), the authors have added evidence to the idea that teams will display the same moods as their leaders following a brief interaction with those leaders, through a process they term mood contagion. Furthermore, research suggests that leaders may be able to impact their team through other mechanisms. Beyond moods, research has shown that leaders can have a significant impact on their teams through more cognitive processes. For instance, in a study by Hu & Liden (2011), servant leaders were shown to positively affect team potency. Hu & Liden (2011) suggested that servant leaders could do so by revealing to followers the strengths and potential of the team as a whole. It may be through similar mechanisms that teams will begin to share the same perception of meaning. Indeed, servant leaders may be better able to provide a clear understanding of the connections between members' tasks and communicate the collective goals in an effective way, which should help team members perceive the value and impact of the work they perform as a whole. As such, we expect servant leadership to be positively associated with team-level meaningfulness.

Moreover, we expect to find high agreement between group members regarding the existence of a climate of meaningfulness within the team. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Servant leadership relates positively to team meaningfulness climate.*

Burnout

The current study will also look at an important employee outcome – burnout. Burnout is "a process in which the professional's attitudes and behaviour change in negative ways in response to job strain" (Cherniss, 1980). It consists of three dimensions: (a) emotional exhaustion, which refers to how depleted one's physical and emotional resources are; (b) cynicism, which is the indifferent attitude one has towards their work; and (c) professional efficacy, the competence one feels towards their work (Leiter et al., 1998). Exhaustion and cynicism are increased during burnout, whereas professional efficacy decreases (Leiter et al., 1998).

Besides the obvious negative effects on the individual's physical and psychological health, burnout is also very costly for the organization, as it causes decreases in performance and deterioration in the quality of the employees' work (Garden, 1991; Jones, 1981; Maslach, 1982). Those suffering from burnout will generally take long absence/sickness leaves or even quit their jobs. In a longitudinal study, Toppinen-Tanner (2011) have found that burnout predicted hospitalizations related to mental and cardiovascular disorders in workers who were healthy at the study's inception. Burnout scores also predicted the number of sick leaves a worker will take over time (Toppinen-Tanner, 2011). As such, burnout becomes a very important issue to

consider. Knowing the underlying mechanisms for its occurrence could give practitioners clues on how to better tackle this problem.

In a study that looked at nurse burnout, Leiter et al. (1998) found significant correlations between nurse's work meaningfulness and the three aspects of burnout: exhaustion (-.77), cynicism (-0.71) and professional efficacy (0.52). Another study on healthcare workers looked at the role that psychological empowerment might play in reducing burnout (Boudrias et al., 2012). They found that only job meaningfulness was significantly related to all burnout symptoms (Boudrias et al., 2012). They also discovered that meaningfulness helped decrease the negative effect that one type of stressor (i.e. daily hassles) had on employee cynicism (Boudrias et al., 2012). In a study of hotel employees, Pizam & Neumann (1988) found experienced meaningfulness to have a significant negative relationship with emotional exhaustion.

In the present study we will focus on the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout, which is the most important facet of burnout (Shirom, 2003). The cynicism and personal accomplishment dimensions are indeed only relevant for employees who serve clients or patients on a daily basis, as they focus on a "recipient" other. For example, nurses working with patients could experience cynicism when they treat their patients like objects. Computer programmers, on the other hand, would not be working with any individuals who they may treat in such ways. Given the current study does not focus on employees in the service industry working with "recipients" we focused on the emotional exhaustion dimension. Emotional exhaustion can relate to any employee, as it is characterized by feelings of tiredness or extreme fatigue that is associated with one's strenuous work tasks. Moreover, according to Maslach (1982), the individual feels that his or her emotional resources are drained.

In a review by Shirom (2003), the author concludes that emotional exhaustion is the core symptom of burnout. (Toppinen-Tanner, 2011) also suggested that emotional exhaustion is the one scale on which research should focus since intervention studies have shown it to be the most easily reversible. The results of their study also showed that emotional exhaustion preceded the two other sub dimensions in the course of burnout's evolution (Toppinen-Tanner, 2011).

Given that previous studies have revealed the importance of meaningfulness in reducing burnout, we expect that by creating meaningfulness in their employees, servant leaders are also decreasing the likeliness that their followers experience emotional exhaustion. Recent research has shown that meaningfulness mediated a positive relationship between authentic leadership and wellbeing (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2013). As authentic leadership shares many similarities with servant leadership (such as self-awareness, authentic behavior, developing trusting relationships with their followers), it seems reasonable that meaningfulness would also mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employee wellbeing in our study. In fact, research has shown that servant leadership had a stronger effect than authentic leadership on employee's positive work attitudes (Ling, Liu, & Wu, 2017). Similarly, we expect to find that meaningfulness will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, while there is little research showing the link between servant leadership and burnout in followers, one study found that servant leadership is a significant factor in reducing burnout (Babakus et al., 2011). Based on the above reasoning, we expect meaningfulness to mediate a negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Meaningfulness mediates a negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion.

Team-level burnout

Bakker, Emmerik, and Euwema (2006) have shown that burnout can exist at the team level. As the current study aims to examine the impact of servant leadership at both the individual and the team level, we investigate whether team meaningfulness climate acts as a mediator between servant leadership and team-level burnout (emotional exhaustion).

Bakker, Black & Schaufeli (2005) have looked at the process through which burnout is communicated between workers. Results of their study showed that teams of nurses showed agreement in burnout scores, with significant differences between teams. They concluded that nurses within the same teams become increasingly burnout through a process of contagion (Bakker et al, 2005). Contagion can happen on a subconscious level through mimicking the expressions of others. It may also occur on a more conscious level, by empathizing with others and trying to see things from their perspective. By doing so, workers may take on their colleagues' negative emotions or attitudes towards their jobs (Bakker et al. 2005). Several controlled experiments have also added evidence to the concept of emotional contagion (Hsee, Hatfield, Carlson & Chemtob, 1990; Uchino, Hsee, Hatfield, Carlson & Chemtob, 1991). Another study by Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli (2003) has examined burnout contagion in a sample of banking and insurance company employees, and have revealed a relation between team-level and individual members' burnout. Finally, Rountree (1984) looked at several task groups in different organizations and found that employees within the same task groups tended

to experience the same level of burnout. That is, employees who scored very highly on burnout seemed to work within the same groups as other employees who also scored highly. The same observation occurred for employees who scored very low on burnout (Rountree, 1984).

These past studies suggest burnout can be shared in teams and propose mechanisms to explain how this may occur. Having shown how meaningfulness climate could exist at the team level, we propose that such a climate mediates a negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion at the team level. We thus propose the following remaining hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Team meaningfulness climate mediates a negative relationship between servant leadership and team-level emotional exhaustion.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

To recruit participants for the study, we sent an email to 2250 companies within Canada, which were selected from online directories. The email asked for their willingness to participate in the research, and included a short description of the research question. Thirty-seven companies agreed to participate. Upon acceptance, the managers were sent links to online questionnaires that they were to submit to employees at their organization. Within each organization, all employees were invited to participate in the study, and were informed that participation was completely voluntary. The online questionnaire included measures of perceived meaningfulness of work, perceived meaningfulness climate, servant leadership, the three

dimensions of burnout, as well as role ambiguity, role overload, role conflict, resource constraints, task interdependence, task significance, and demographic variables. As the study involved team-level variables and hypotheses, we also asked participants to indicate the name of their immediate supervisor, as well as the name of the organization for which they worked.

In total, we obtained usable data from 264 participants from 37 different companies. However, given the study design, we only included in our analyses to test the study hypotheses participants who were part of a team, a team being composed of two or more individuals reporting to the same supervisor. The final sample for hypothesis testing was thus composed of 135 employees nested in 43 teams, with an average size of 3.14 participants per team. The size of the actual work teams (i.e., the number of employees working under the same supervisor) ranged from 2 to 90, with an average size of 12.75. There were 44.8% women and 55.2% men who participated, ranging in age from 20 to 61 years old with an average age of 33.10 years ($SD =$ 16.63). The majority of companies operated within the Software development (22.8%), Advertising & Marketing (20%) and Communications & Public relations (11.4%) industries. Other industries included healthcare & bio pharmacology, video game development, finance, recruiting, consulting, mining, engineering and environmental services. Participants were also given the option of answering the survey in English or French. Of the final sample to test our hypotheses, 89% completed the survey in English and 11% in French.

Measures

We used Likert-type scales for all study variables. The questionnaire was available in both English and French. All measures that were not available in French were translated to French using a standard translation back-translation procedure.

Servant leadership. Team members assessed their supervisors' servant leadership using the Liden et al. (2008) 28-item Servant Leadership Scale, which captures the seven dimensions of servant leadership: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering subordinates, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically . Some examples include "I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem" and "My manager cares about my personal well-being" (Liden et al., 2008). Participants answered these using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha was .96.

Team level perception of servant leadership. After having assessed the level of agreement within teams, individual scores on servant leadership were aggregated to the group level in order to obtain a team-level measure of servant leadership. This provided us an overall team-wide perception of the supervisor on his servant leadership qualities.

Meaningfulness. To measure meaningfulness, we used a revised 6-item scale from Spreitzer (1995) and May (2003), as used in the study by May et al. (2004). Examples of these items include "The work I do on this job is very important to me" and "My job activities are personally meaningful to me". Answers were presented on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha was .95.

Team Meaningfulness. A referent shift meaningfulness scale was created for the purposes of this study, by changing the items on the meaningfulness scale to refer to the team. Klein, Conn, Smith & Sorra (2001) have discovered that the use of referent-shift items to refer to the team, increased within-group agreement. They concluded that referent-shift scales may be superior to other methods in capturing group level phenomena (Klein et al., 2001). Examples from our scale include "The work we do on this job is very important for my team" and "Our job

activities are significant to my team". As with the meaningfulness scale, a 7-point Likert-type scale was used (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .97.

Emotional exhaustion. The 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory was used to assess the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism/depersonalization and professional efficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). For our analyses, we used the emotional exhaustion subscale, which included 9 items. Example items on this scale are "I feel emotionally drained by my work" and "I feel frustrated by my job". Participants answered these items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = never to 7 = every day. Cronbach's alpha was .91.

Team emotional-exhaustion. As with servant leadership, after having assessed the level of agreement within teams, we aggregated individual level scores from the emotional exhaustion subscale, to the group level. This provided us a team-level measure of emotional exhaustion.

Control variables. A number of other variables were initially considered as potential control variables: age, gender, tenure with the team, tenure with the supervisor, tenure with the organization, and number of people on the team. We also included known predictors of emotional exhaustion: role conflict and role ambiguity (a revised Rizzo, House, Lirtzman, 1970), role overload (revised Schaubroeck , Cotton, & Jennings, 1989), and resource constraints (Spector & Jex, 1998). Indeed, these have previously been shown to relate to burnout (Acker, 2003; Birch, 1986; Capel, Sisley, & Desertrain, 1987; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Tunc & Kutanis, 2009), and emotional exhaustion in particular (Barling & Macintyre, 2007). We also measured task significance (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), as it appeared to have a similar definition to the meaningfulness construct within the management literature (Grant, 2008), and in some cases the terms have even been used interchangeably (Raub

& Blunschi, 2014). Lastly, we measured task interdependence (Major & Kozlowski, 1997) as we thought it could also affect how meaningfulness climate is spread through the team. However, due to sample size, these variables were not included in the model testing our hypotheses.

Ethical considerations

The research proposal was reviewed and approved by Concordia University's ethics committee. We have also included within the questionnaire an introduction page informing participants of the purpose of the research, and of its confidential nature. Individuals were made aware that their participation was entirely voluntary, and withdrawal from the study at any point in time could be done without consequence. Participants agreed to these terms by moving on the next page and commencing the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Strategy

We first calculated descriptive statistics and conducted reliability analyses for the scales used in our study. Next, we assessed whether variables could be aggregated at the team level using an intraclass correlation coefficient, the ICC (1) as an index of interrater reliability and the r_{wg} index to assess within-group agreement. We then conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén 1998) to test the distinctiveness of the study variables. Finally, we tested our study hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM), also in Mplus. Several goodness-of-fit indices were used to evaluate the fit of our model: the chi-square statistic divided by degrees of freedom (X^2/d.f.), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Criteria used to assess fit were based on Joreskog & Sorbom (1993) and Kline (1998). These are

recommended to be: less than 3 for the X^2/d.f. ratio, greater than .90 for the CFI and TLI, and less than .05 for the RMSEA (or acceptable if less than .08).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables in our study. The bivariate correlations show that, as would be expected, servant leadership was positively related to meaningfulness ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), role clarity ($r = .64$, $p < .01$) and task significance ($r = .27$, $p < .01$), and negatively related to emotional exhaustion ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$), role conflict ($r = -.51$, $p < .01$) and role overload ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$). Also as would be expected, meaningfulness was positively related to role clarity ($r = .51$, $p < .01$) and task significance ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), and negatively related to emotional exhaustion ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$), role conflict ($r = -.42$ $p < .001$) and role overload ($r = -.23$, $p = .01$). Emotional exhaustion was positively correlated with role conflict ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), role overload ($r = .58$, $p < .01$) and task interdependence ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), and negatively related with role clarity ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$).

Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations and correlations among the group level variables. Team servant leadership was positively correlated with team meaningfulness ($r = .29$, $p < .01$) and negatively related with team level emotional exhaustion. ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among individual level variables.

Note. Ns = 127-136. For Gender: 1 = Male, 2= Female. For Language: 1 = English, 2 = French. Tenure: in number

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Servant leadership	5.38	0.93	-							
2. Meaningfulness	5.90	1.09	.460**	-						
3. Emotional exhaustion	2.67	1.25	-.383**	-.422**	-					
4. Age	34.79	20.66	0.119	0.071	-0.108	-				
5. Gender	1.53	0.50	0.033	-0.032	-0.021	0.013	-			
6. Supervisor tenure	20.47	27.22	-0.033	0.043	0.049	0.037	0.130	-		
7. Team tenure	25.29	42.22	-0.026	0.108	0.005	0.077	0.058	.374**	-	
8. Company tenure	35.04	58.68	-0.094	0.082	0.100	0.134	0.100	.330**	.682**	-
9. Resource constraints	2.36	1.14	0.034	0.128	0.070	.202*	-0.121	-0.067	-0.072	-0.067
10. Role conflict	3.03	1.31	-.508**	-.421**	.611**	-0.043	-0.01	0.072	-0.021	0.083
11. Role clarity	5.37	1.16	.644**	.513**	-.342**	0.125	-0.068	-0.037	0.096	-0.069
12. Role overload	3.68	1.54	-.220*	-.229**	.578**	-0.002	0.011	0.071	-0.010	0.008
13. Task significance	5.37	1.31	.269**	.482**	-0.103	0.099	-0.08	-0.006	0.024	0.029
14. Task interdependence	5.45	1.29	0.031	0.066	.257**	0.037	0.052	-0.005	-.267**	-.175*
15. Language	1.11	0.31	0.015	0.036	0.000	0.027	0.144	0.061	0.116	0.031

of months. *p < .05 **p< .01

Table 1. *Continued.*

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
9. Resource constraints	-						
10. Role conflict	0.016	-					

11. Role clarity	0.084	-.545[**]	-		
12. Role overload	-0.009	.544[**]	-0.137	-	
13. Task significance	0.134	-0.079	.375[**]	-0.001	-
14. Task interdependence	0.019	0.162	0.114	.260[**]	.192[*]	-
15. Language	-0.156	-0.153	-0.029	-0.090	-0.087	-0.075	-

Note. Ns = 127-136. For Gender: 1 = Male, 2= Female. For Language: 1 = English, 2 = French. Tenure: in number of months. *$p < .05$ **p$< .01$

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among team level variables.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Team servant leadership	5.37	.62	-		
2. Team meaningfulness	5.73	1.05	.291**	-	
3. Team emotional exhaustion	2.67	.79	-.416**	-.155	-

Note. n = 43 teams. *$p < .05$ **p$< .01$

Aggregation Analyses

In order to assess the relationships between our variables of interest at the team level, we first ensured that there was sufficient agreement between team members. ICC(1) values obtained for our measures were as follows: .33 for servant leadership, .85 for team meaningfulness, and .41 for emotional exhaustion. These values fall above conventional standards based on Bliese (2000); and as such, justify aggregation of individual scores to the team-level.

As for r_{wg} values, they averaged .88 for servant leadership, and .84 for team meaningfulness and .79 for emotional exhaustion. These values fall within or very close to the .80 cut-off that is typically considered acceptable for aggregation, as values between .71 and .90

have been considered to indicate a strong level of agreement between team members (LeBreton & Senter, 2008),

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

In order to avoid testing a too complex model, we averaged out the items for each of the seven dimensions of servant leadership. The results of the CFA analysis show a good fit with the data: $\chi^2(381) = 516.73$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .05. These results suggest the study variables are distinct.

Hypothesis Testing

The structural model also yielded a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(381) = 516.73$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .05. Beta coefficients associated with the hypothesized structural model are reported in Figure 1. Our first hypothesis stated that servant leadership would be positively related to meaningfulness at the individual level. The SEM model showed a significant relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness, thus supporting our hypothesis (β =.46, $p < .01$). Our second hypothesis predicted the same positive relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness, but at the team level. The SEM results provided support for the hypothesis, showing a significant positive relationship between team level servant leadership and team meaningfulness ($\beta = .61$, $p < .01$). Our third hypothesis stated that meaningfulness would mediate the relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion. As predicted, meaningfulness was negatively related to emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$). However, servant leadership was also directly and negatively related to emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .05$), suggesting servant leaders may reduce emotional exhaustion in their employees through

mechanisms other than meaningfulness. Our fourth hypothesis proposed a similar mediation

effect at the team level. Contrary to predictions, results showed that the relationship between

team meaningfulness and team emotional exhaustion, while in the expected direction, was not

significant (β = -.11, *ns*). These results suggest that servant leadership does reduce team

emotional exhaustion (β = -.48, *p* < .05), although not through meaningfulness.

Figure 1. Structural equations modeling coefficients for the hypothesized model.
Note. *p<.05, **p<.01
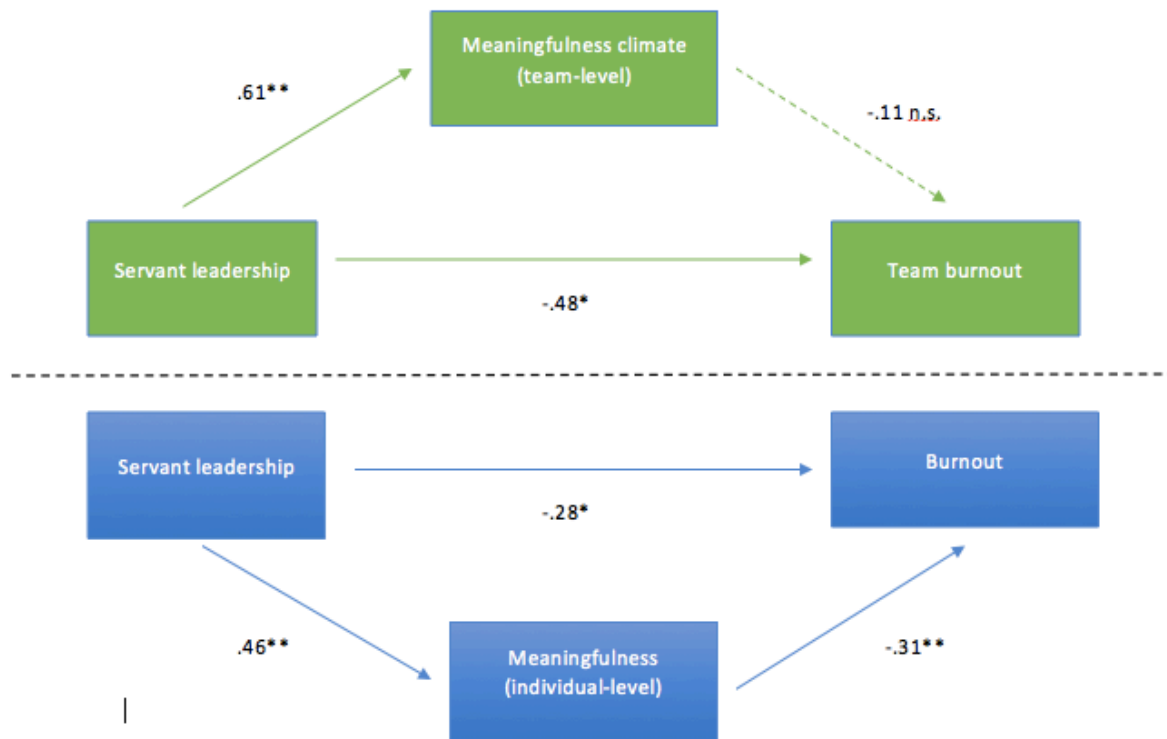
Discussion

The current study explored the effects of servant leadership on meaningfulness, at both the individual and team level. We also tested a possible mediation of meaningfulness on the relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion at both levels of analysis. One of the major reasons for studying this phenomenon was to discover the mechanisms through which leaders can improve employee's work lives. It is clear that leaders have the power to affect the attitudes of their followers. Knowing this, it becomes important to look at ways through which leaders can reduce negative and costly outcomes, such as burnout. The current study fills certain gaps in the management literature. One of these is the study of meaningfulness as a group phenomenon. This study looked at whether such a meaningfulness climate can be created in a group, with high agreement between members. Moreover, research has not yet looked at whether servant leaders are directly tied to followers' perception of meaningfulness or whether these leaders can create such a climate in their teams. Finally, this study is the first to look at the effects of servant leadership on burnout (emotional exhaustion) with meaningfulness as a mediator. Findings add to the current management literature by providing answers to these questions. Our study results showed, firstly, that servant leaders can affect meaningfulness in their followers at both the individual and team levels. Moreover, meaningfulness mediated the negative relationship between servant leaders and emotional exhaustion at the individual level.

Our first hypothesis proposed a positive relationship between meaningfulness and servant leadership at the level of the individual. Servant leadership was found to significantly predict meaningfulness in followers, suggesting that these types of leaders do inspire a higher sense of meaning in their employees. This result was expected due to servant leaders' focus on

bringing value to the organization and the community (Liden et al., 2008). Meaningfulness is experienced when one understands the value and purpose of one's work and perceives these to be in accordance with one's own values and goals (May et al., 2004). This experience may stem from a perception that one's work has an impact on the lives of other people, not only within the firm but also in external environment (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), which corresponds to servant leaders' emphasis on the well-being of organization as well as of the broader community. Servant leaders are also known for their ability to communicate or express the importance of giving back and serving others, which may be an effective means through which followers learn the value of their work (Liden et al., 2008). Moreover, task significance correlated highly with meaningfulness ($r= .48^{**}$, $p<.01$), showing that in fact feelings of one's work as impactful on the lives of others is an important component and perhaps a necessary precursor to meaning, in line with previous research (Mat et al. 2004, Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009) As with the study by May et al. (2004), feelings that one contributes to the lives of others would lead one to report their job as having value or significance.

Our second hypothesis suggested a positive relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness at the team level. Results mirrored our findings at the individual level; that is, servant leadership significantly predicted team meaningfulness. These findings are in agreement with other research showing that servant leaders can affect team processes, such as team effectiveness and team potency (Hu & Liden, 2011; Irving & Longbotham, 2007). Given that servant leaders tend to develop high quality relationships with all their employees, it is expected that they would have a similar impact on all members of the team. As such, the team members should share much of the same attitudes relating to the nature of their jobs, including shared feelings of meaningfulness.

The significant relationship uncovered between servant leadership and meaningfulness at the individual and team level, suggest that servant leaders are the types of leaders who help enhance their followers' experiences at work, by shaping the significance of one's day to day tasks in order for employees to feel their jobs are valuable.

Our third hypothesis stipulated that meaningfulness would mediate the negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion. That is, servant leaders would increase meaningfulness in their followers, which in turn would decrease the likeliness of emotional exhaustion in those employees. The results of our SEM analyses showed that our data fit the proposed model, suggesting a mediation effect of meaningfulness on the relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion.

Previous studies have shown that meaningfulness is associated with a decreased likelihood of experiencing emotional exhaustion (Leiter et al., 1998; Boudrias et al., 2012; Pizam & Neumann, 1988). We also know that servant leaders help reduce burnout symptoms in their employees (Babakus et al., 2011). We were able to replicate these findings in our current research, and also show that meaningfulness mediated the negative relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion. As predicted, it seems that servant leaders communicate to their followers the value of their work, which promotes feelings that one's job is meaningful. These attitudes, in turn, prevent employees from developing emotional exhaustion at work. These findings are concurrent with previous research showing that meaningfulness mediated the relationship between LMX and such outcomes as organizational commitment and greater work effort (Tummers & Knies, 2013). That is, good quality relationships between leaders and followers will increase employees' motivation and improve their experience at work. It is thus

easy to see how emotional exhaustion could be reduced as a result of increased feelings of meaningfulness, as the employees are motivated and dedicated to their jobs.

Our fourth hypothesis presented the same mediation effect at the team level. We proposed that team meaningfulness would mediate the effects of servant leadership on the team's emotional exhaustion. Our analyses showed that higher servant leadership scores did reduce the likeliness that the team would experience emotional exhaustion, but not through team meaningfulness. The relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness was still significant at the team level, as well as the effects of servant leadership on emotional exhaustion. The difference between the two levels of analysis was the relationship between team meaningfulness and team level emotional exhaustion. It is possible that the effects of a shared perception of meaningfulness in the team, acts as a buffer that prevents team members from developing burnout. In other words, individuals may feel connected with their team members in their shared attitudes towards their job, and these feelings of social connection decrease the negative impact that a job with little meaning would have on the group's burnout. Other studies have in fact shown that high team identification buffers the negative effects of occupational stress on one's job satisfaction (Jimmieson, McKimmie, Hannam & Gallagher, 2010; Onyett, Pillinger, & Muijen, 1997).

Theoretical Implications

The role that servant leaders play in increasing perceived meaningfulness in their followers has not been looked at before. The present study fills this gap in the literature by showing that servant leadership is in fact a significant predictor of meaningfulness. Moreover, this relationship was shown to exist at both the individual and team level. It is important to test

these phenomena at several levels of the organization, as the workplace is a dynamic interpersonal context. In this case, we see that servant leaders do not simply affect each individual in part, but also help to promote a shared climate of meaningfulness in their teams.

In much of the literature, studies have focused on either the micro or marco perspective to study organizational behavior (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). By looking strictly at higher level processes, researchers neglect the ways in which individuals' perceptions and attitudes give rise to those phenomena. On the other hand, when looking only at the individual level, studies may not account for ways in which attitudes manifest themselves as collective responses (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). In recent years, however, there has been more focus on studying phenomena from different levels of analysis (Ostroff, 1993). Many researchers have expected to see homologous relationships across levels of analysis. That is, the relationship between variables we observe at the individual level should also be seen at higher levels of analysis, such as team or organization (Ostroff, 1993). In support of this view, our study showed a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness at both the individual and team level. The current study has also found that meaningfulness mediated the effect of servant leadership on emotional exhaustion at the individual level, but not the team level. Once again, these results point to the importance of studying phenomena at different organizational levels. In particular, it reinforces the idea that we cannot assume from individual level studies that the same relationships will manifest between variables at higher levels (i.e. teams, departments, organizations). Relationships at the team level do not always develop in the same way as they do at the individual level of analysis (Ostroff, 1993). Although the relationship between servant leadership and meaningfulness at the team level reflected our observation at the individual level,

when added in the mediation model with emotional exhaustion as an outcome – the effects were no longer homologous.

Ostroff (1993) has insisted on the importance of looking at whether processes operate similarly or differently across levels of analyses, especially when looking at aggregated data. In particular, researchers must establish whether phenomena are homologous or whether different processes are operating across levels. Moreover, in the case that they do differ, it is important to see whether relationships are weaker, stronger or opposite. Our study suggests that the relationship between meaningfulness and emotional exhaustion manifests itself differently at the individual and at the team level. This finding provides interesting directions for future research, in order to examine why and how meaningfulness plays a different role at the individual, and at the team level.

Finally, the results of our mediation model add to the scientific literature in explaining the ways through which leaders reduce burnout. In this case, we have seen that at the individual level, meaning was an important factor through which leaders reduced the likelihood of emotional exhaustion in their employees. It is important to understand the mechanisms through which leaders enhance their follower's work lives, and in turn decrease the negative effects that are created by the demands of the job. By studying these, we can begin to look at ways to tackle and prevent such costly issues as burnout. Although one previous study has looked at the link between servant leadership and burnout (Babakus et al., 2011), none have looked at the ways through which they reduce these symptoms in their followers. The current study adds to the management literature by providing a potential mechanism through which leaders help prevent emotional exhaustion; that is, by inspiring an increased sense of meaningfulness.

Managerial Implications

In workers, the prevalence of burnout in the population is approximately 3-7% (Toppinen-Tanner, 2011). Given the long term costs associated with burnout, companies must look into ways to reduce or prevent its occurrence in their employees. Treatment for burnout, however, is a very slow process (Toppinen-Tanner, 2011). In a longitudinal study, Toppinen-Tanner (2011) have shown that employees who displayed burnout symptoms, were also likely to take long leaves of absence and quit their jobs.

Leaders can play a crucial role in the wellbeing of their followers when these are faced with demanding work tasks. If people feel that the results of their work are valued and rewarded by their superiors, they will be able to handle bigger workloads that would otherwise lead to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The current study has shown that perceiving one's work as meaningful mediated the relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion. This may point to the possibility that leaders who score highly on servant leadership will also help their followers identify meaning from the work they do, who will in turn be less likely to burnout. One potential approach would be to train leaders to communicate their values and those of the organizations to their teams. As part of such training, leaders should also learn ways in which they can make their followers feel that their work is meaningful in relation to their own goals, to those of the company, and to those of society at large. Such communication would require that leaders spend more time understanding the values of each of their followers, a quality that servant leaders would generally already have. Servant leadership values could either be instilled during such trainings or companies can learn to identify these types of individuals when hiring into lead positions.

There are several ways through which leaders can create a sense of meaningfulness in their teams. One effective way through which leaders have shown to inspire meaning, is by highlighting those aspects of the employees' work that appear to create value or are aligned with the goals of the organization, while simultaneously minimizing the importance of less significant parts of one's job (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). Moreover, providing followers with stories or examples in which their job has created impact on the lives of others has also shown to improve feelings of meaningfulness and thus increase motivation (Grant, 2008). Servant leaders, in particular, may be able to inspire meaning by reminding followers of the value and impact of their work on the broader community. Indeed, their focus on serving the community may add the necessary context to shape employee's perception of the influence of their jobs on the lives of others. Managers who wish to avoid the negative influence of work stress on the wellbeing of their employees may look to adapt some of these servant leadership qualities.

Limitations & Strengths

One of the most significant limitations of this study is that participants were restricted to those whose leaders had agreed to let his/her employees participate. Though the study targeted every type of industry and contacted several different companies, those who responded and agreed to participate may differ significantly from those who were not willing. For example, supervisors who lack servant leadership qualities may be just the kind who did not chose to participate, as they do not put any emphasis on the wellbeing of their employees, or are not interested in the results of a study concerning burnout or meaning of work. Moreover, they may be concerned that the findings would reveal the attitudes their employees have towards them. Some industries were less likely to participate than others, which is understandable considering

there are industries that are not able to dedicate even 15 minutes of their work time to complete such a survey (e.g. finance or health service industries). Smaller companies were more willing to participate. This may be due to the fact that they do not have strong, if any, corporate policies against participation in studies. They also do not have the same corporate hierarchal system that makes it difficult to know who has the proper authority to send out the link to their employees. As such, we cannot generalize these results to all company sizes. We may find that bigger firms do not yield the same results, as the connection between employees and their supervisor may not be as close or direct. In fact, many companies have employees who do not come into contact with their supervisor on a daily basis, or nearly at all – as for example, in the case where one's manager is supervising from a different country.

Another limitation to consider is related to the response rate. We reached out to a wide range of companies within many different industries. To do this, we sent out invitations to the email addresses that were included in the contact information of the companies' websites. However, many of these emails may not have been received by decision makers in the company, or disregarded as spam. As such, the number of companies who agreed to participate among those contacted was quite low. Importantly, we were not able to calculate the response rate precisely, as we were unable to obtain information from participating organizations regarding how many employees received the invitation to participate. With the difficulty in getting responses, our sample size also did not allow us to conduct more in depth analyses that included controlling for the other variables measured.

Despite these limitations, the current study includes a wide range of industries and company sizes to bring great value to management research. Indeed, participants in the final sample worked in a variety of different industries, allowing our results to be more generalizable.

Other strengths of the study include the analysis on both the team and individual level. The importance of studying phenomena on different levels of the firm is revealed in the results of this study. Companies do not exist as a summation of individuals; they are an amalgamation of complex relationship between employees, teams, departments, and multiple layers of organizational structure.

Future directions

Given our methods of analysis, we did not control for several factors that may account for some of the variance in our proposed relationships. The literature has suggested that role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict and resource constraints can affect burnout (Acker, 2003; Birch, 1986; Capel, Sisley, & Desertrain, 1987; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Tunc & Kutanis, 2009), and emotional exhaustion in particular (Barling & Macintyre, 2007). We have included these as part of our measures, and have observed strong correlations between these factors and our variables of interest. As such, future studies should look at the effects of servant leadership and meaningfulness on burnout, while controlling for these factors. There may be additional variables through which servant leaders reduce burnout, and they should be added to the model to obtain a more robust picture.

Moreover, we could not control for the effects of task interdependence on our variables of interest. It is possible that members of less interdependent teams may not be able to identify the exact impact of their team's work on the lives of others, and as such, derive any meaning from it. Perhaps it would provide us with the reason we did not see an effect of team meaningfulness on team level emotional exhaustion. We may find that task interdependence would moderate this relationship, if meaningfulness only affects emotional exhaustion in those

teams that are highly interdependent. Therefore, future studies should address the dynamics in the team, as these may explain the differences we see across levels of analysis.

Our fourth hypothesis, regarding the mediating role of meaningfulness in the relationship between servant leadership and emotional exhaustion at the team-level, was not supported, leaving us to ask ourselves an important question about the consequences of meaningfulness at the team level. This phenomenon should be studied in more depth, as it does not seem to parallel the effects seen at the individual level. That is, team meaningfulness did not relate to team-level emotional exhaustion. As discussed, a possible reason for this discrepancy could be due to the buffering effects of team identification. Studies that will explore and provide deeper understanding regarding the difference between individual and team level meaningfulness, would add great value to the literature on this subject.

Given our industry sample, we did not explore the effects of servant leadership on the other two sub dimensions of burnout (depersonalization and personal accomplishment). This was due to the fact that many of the roles we surveyed did not include interaction with recipient others, as implied in these scales. However, we know that burnout is a problem that evolves in an individual over time. Studies have shown that it may potentially start off as emotional exhaustion, which eventually leads to depersonalization as a way of coping. These lead to a deterioration in the quality of one's work and thus, to lower levels of personal accomplishment (Toppinen-Tanner, 2011). As such, a longitudinal study would be the ideal design for deeper insight into this phenomenon. It would be interesting to see how the syndrome develops over time in teams, and identify the strategies that leaders use at each stage of the process. Longitudinal studies would also help assess a causal relationship, and allow us to see the long-term effects of servant leadership and meaningfulness on burnout.

Conclusion

Essentially, reminding one's employees of the meaning or value of one's work is an important quality of any good leader. If burnout can be avoided with the simple reminder of the effect of one's work on the lives of others, then it is an important factor to consider. We must train leaders to bring out the value in even the most mundane of tasks. Work should be linked to a feeling that one contributes to others' lives, to the community, or to the general good of society.

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Servant leadership (Liden et al., 2008)
Scale: 1 - strongly disagree to 7 - strongly agree

1. I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem.
2. My manager cares about my personal well-being.
3. My manager takes time to talk to me on a personal level.
4. My manager can recognize when I'm down without asking me.
5. My manager emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.
6. My manager is always interested in helping people in our community.
7. My manager is involved in community activities.
8. I am encouraged by my manager to volunteer in the community.
9. My manager can tell if something is going wrong.
10. My manager is able to effectively think through complex problems.
11. My manager has a thorough understanding of our organization and its goals.
12. My manager can solve work problems with new or creative ideas.
13. My manager gives me the responsibility to make important decisions about my job.
14. My manager encourages me to handle important work decisions on my own.
15. My manager gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.

16. When I have to make an important decision at work, I do not have to consult my manager first.
17. My manager makes my career development a priority.
18. My manager is interested in making sure that I achieve my career goals.
19. My manager provides me with work experiences that enable me to develop new skills.
20. My manager wants to know about my career goals.
21. My manager seems to care more about my success than his/her own.
22. My manager puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.
23. My manager sacrifices his/her own interests to meet my needs.
24. My manager does what she/he can do to make my job easier.
25. My manager holds high ethical standards.
26. My manager is always honest.
27. My manager would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.
28. My manager values honesty more than profits.

Meaningfulness (May et al., 2004)
(5 point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)

1. The work I do on this job is very important to me.
2. My job activities are personally meaningful to me.
3. The work I do on this job is worthwhile.
4. My job activities are significant to me.

5. The work I do on this job is meaningful to me.
6. I feel that the work I do on my job is valuable.

Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)
Scale: 1- never to 7 – every day

(a) Emotional Exhaustion
1. I feel emotionally drained from my work
2. I feel used up at the end of the workday
3. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job
4. Working with people all day is really a strain for me
5. I feel burned out from my work
6. I feel frustrated by my job
7. I feel I'm working too hard on my job
8. Working with people directly puts too much stress on me
9. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope

Q. Does your job involved working with other people who receive a service or a treatment from you? *(if No is selected: skip "personal accomplishment" and "depersonalization" measures)*

(b) Personal Accomplishment
10. I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things
11. I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients
12. I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work
13. I feel very energetic
14. I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my recipients
15. I feel exhilarated after working closely with my recipients
16. I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job
17. In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly

(c) Depersonalization
18. I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal 'objects'
19. I've become more callous toward people since I took this job
20. I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally
21. I don't really care what happens to some recipients
22. I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems

Role Conflict (revised – Rizzo, House, Lirtzman, 1970)
Scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree

At work…
1. I must do things that I think should be done differently.
2. I work under incompatible policies and guidelines.
3. I receive assignments without the manpower to complete them.

4. I have to oppose a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.
5. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.
6. I have to work under vague directions or orders.
7. I receive assignments without adequate resources and materials to execute them.
8. I work on many unnecessary things.

Role ambiguity (clarity)
Scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree

9. I feel certain about how much authority I have on the job.
10. I have clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.
11. I know what my responsibilities are.
12. I know exactly what is expected of me.
13. Explanation to me is clear of what has to be done.

Role overload (revised – Schaubroeck, Cotton, Jennings, 1989)
Scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree

14. The amount of work I am expected to do is too great.
15. I never seem to have enough time to get everything done at work.
16. It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do.

Task Significance (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)
Scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree

1. The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people
2. The job itself is very significant and important in the broader scheme of things
3. The job has a large impact on people outside the organization
4. The work performed on the job has a significant impact on people outside the organization

Task Interdependence (Major, Kozlowski, 1997)
Scale: 1 - very small extent to 7 - extremely large extent

1. To what extent must your job activities be coordinated with those of your work group?
2. To what extent do you have to work with your work group to get your job done?
3. To what extent do the tasks your perform require you to check with or collaborate with others in your work group?
4. To what extent do other work group members depend on your work in order to complete their own tasks?
5. To what extent is the work you do a result of the combined efforts of several individuals?

Resource constraints (Spector & JEx, 1998)
Scale: 1 – never to 7 – every day

How often do you find it difficult or impossible to do your job because of... ?
1. Poor equipment or supplies.
2. Organizational rules and procedures.
3. Other employees.
4. Your stakeholder(s).
5. Lack of equipment or supplies.
6. Inadequate training.
7. Interruptions by other people.
8. Lack of necessary information about what to do or how to do it.
9. Conflicting job demands.
10. Inadequate help from others.
11. Incorrect instructions.

Team meaningfulness scale (referent-shift; revised May et al. 2004)
Scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree

1. The work we do on this job is very important to my team.
2. Our job activities are personally meaningful to my team.
3. The work my team does on this job is worthwhile.
4. Our job activities are significant to my team.
5. The work we do on this job is meaningful to my team.
6. My team feels that the work we do on our job is valuable.

Supervisor "promotes" the organization to employees
Scale: 1- strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree

1. "My supervisor often praises the organization to me"
2. "My supervisor tries to get me to adopt the organization's goals"
3. "My supervisor often talks to me about the organization's culture in positive terms"
4. "My supervisor spends energy to convince me of this organization's values"
5. "Most information I get about this organization's activities are given to me by my immediate supervisor"
6. "Information about this organization is often shared with me by sources other than my immediate supervisor" (reverse-coded).

Demographic Q's

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What industry does your company operate in?
4. What is your current job title?

5. How long have you been part of your current work team? _____ years _____ months
6. How long have you worked at your current organization? _____ years _____ months
7. How long have you worked for your current supervisor? _____ years _____ months
8. How many people make up your current work team? _____ people
9. In what department does your work team operate in?
10. Briefly explain what types of tasks you perform at your current job? (open)
11. What is the name of your immediate supervisor?
12. What is the name of the company you currently work for?

Servant leadership (Liden et al., 2008)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. Je demanderais de l'aide à mon supérieur si j'avais un problème personnel.
2. Mon supérieur se soucie de mon bien-être personnel.
3. Mon supérieur prend le temps de me parler de sujets plus personnels.
4. Lorsque je suis démoralisé, mon supérieur s'en aperçoit sans avoir à me le demander.
5. Mon supérieur accorde de l'importance au fait d'apporter quelque chose à la communauté.
6. Mon supérieur est toujours intéressé à aider les gens dans la communauté.
7. Mon supérieur est impliqué dans des activités communautaires.
8. Mon supérieur m'encourage à faire du bénévolat dans la communauté.
9. Mon supérieur s'en aperçoit lorsque quelque chose ne va pas dans notre travail.
10. Mon supérieur sait réfléchir à des problèmes complexes de manière efficace.
11. Mon supérieur a une compréhension approfondie de notre organisation et de ses objectifs.
12. Mon supérieur peut résoudre des problèmes au travail par des idées nouvelles ou créatives.
13. Mon supérieur me donne la responsabilité de prendre des décisions importantes concernant mon travail.
14. Mon supérieur m'encourage à prendre par moi-même des décisions importantes au travail.
15. Mon supérieur me laisse libre de gérer des situations difficiles de la façon que je crois la meilleure.
16. Lorsque je dois prendre une décision importante au travail, je n'ai pas à consulter d'abord mon supérieur.
17. Le développement de ma carrière est une priorité pour mon supérieur.
18. Mon supérieur s'intéresse vraiment à ce que j'atteigne mes objectifs de carrière.
19. Mon supérieur me procure des expériences de travail qui me permettent de développer des habiletés nouvelles.
20. Mon supérieur veut connaître mes objectifs de carrière.
21. Mon supérieur semble se soucier davantage de ma réussite professionnelle que de la sienne.
22. Mon supérieur place mes intérêts avant les siens.
23. Mon supérieur sacrifie ses propres intérêts afin de répondre à mes besoins.
24. Mon supérieur fait ce qu'il (elle) peut pour me faciliter la tâche.
25. Mon supérieur a des standards éthiques élevés.
26. Mon supérieur est toujours honnête.
27. Mon supérieur n'irait pas à l'encontre de principes éthiques pour réussir.
28. Mon supérieur valorise davantage l'honnêteté que les profits.

Meaningfulness (May et al., 2004)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. Le travail que je fais dans cet emploi est très important pour moi.
2. Mes activités professionnelles ont un sens pour moi.

3. Le travail que je fais dans cet emploi en vaut la peine.
4. Mes activités professionnelles sont importantes pour moi.
5. Le travail que je fais dans cet emploi a un sens pour moi.
6. Je sens que le travail que je fais dans mon emploi a beaucoup de valeur

Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)
Scale: 1 – jamais to 7 – chaque jour

(a) Emotional Exhaustion
1. Je me sens émotionnellement vidé par mon travail
2. Je me sens épuisé après une journée de travail
3. Lorsque je me lève le matin et que je dois affronter une nouvelle journée de travail, je me sens fatigué
4. Travailler avec des gens toute la journée me demande énormément d'effort
5. Mon travail m'épuise
6. Mon travail me frustre
7. J'ai l'impression de me surmener au travail.
8. Travailler directement avec des gens me stresse trop
9. Je sens que je suis au « bout du rouleau »

Q. Votre emploi implique-t-il de travailler avec d'autres personnes qui recoivent de vous un service ou un traitment quelconque?

(b) Personal Accomplishment
1. Je comprends facilement les sentiments des bénéficiaires de mon travail
2. Je gère très efficacement les problèmes des bénéficiaires de mon travail.
3. Je sens que j'ai une influence positive sur la vie des autres grâce à mon travail
4. Je me sens plein d'énergie
5. Je peux facilement créer une atmosphère détendue avec les bénéficiaires de mon travail
6. Je me sens vivifié après avoir travaillé en étroite collaboration avec les bénéficiaires de mon travail.
7. J'ai accompli de nombreuses choses utiles dans cet emploi.
8. Dans mon travail, je gère les problèmes émotionnels très calmement

(c) Depersonalization
1. Je sens que je traite certains bénéficiaires de mon travail comme s'ils étaient des objets impersonnels
2. Je suis devenu(e) plus dur avec les autres depuis que j'occupe cet emploi
3. Je crains que cet emploi ne soit en train de m'insensibiliser sur le plan émotionnel
4. Je ne me soucie pas vraiment de ce qui arrive à certains des bénéficiaires de mon travail
5. Je sens que les bénéficiaires de mon travail me tiennent responsable de certains de leurs problèmes.

Role Conflict (revised – Rizzo, House, Lirtzman, 1970)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

Au travail…
1. Je suis contraint de faire les choses d'une manière différente de ce qu'il faudrait normalement faire
2. Je dois suivre des politiques et directives contradictoires
3. Je dois effectuer des tâches sans recevoir le personnel nécessaire pour en venir à bout
4. Je dois parfois contrevenir à une politique ou une règle afin de mener une tâche à bien
5. Je reçois parfois des demandes incompatibles de la part de plusieurs personnes différentes
6. Les instructions ou les ordres de mes supérieurs sont vagues
7. On me confie des tâches sans me donner les ressources nécessaires pour les exécuter
8. Je dois faire beaucoup de choses inutiles

Role ambiguity (clarity)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. L'autorité qu'on me donne au travail est clairement établie
2. Mon emploi comporte des objectifs clairs et planifiés
3. Mes responsabilités au travail sont clairement définies
4. Je sais exactement ce qu'on attend de moi
5. Les explications de ce que je dois faire sont claires

Role overload (revised – Schaubroeck, Cotton, Jennings, 1989)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. La quantité de travail qu'on me demande de faire est trop importante
2. On dirait que je n'ai jamais assez de temps pour faire ce que je dois faire, au travail
3. J'ai souvent l'impression d'avoir trop de travail pour une seule personne

Task Significance (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. Les résultats de mon travail sont susceptibles d'affecter considérablement la vie des autres.
2. Ce travail en soi est très important de manière générale dans le monde.
3. Ce poste a beaucoup d'impact sur les gens à l'extérieur de l'organisation
4. Le travail accompli dans cette fonction a un impact significatif sur les gens à l'extérieur de l'organisation

Task Interdependence (Major, Kozlowski, 1997)
Scale : 1- très peu to 7 – très fortement

1. Jusqu'à quel point vos tâches professionnelles doivent-elles être coordonnées avec celles de votre groupe de travail?
2. Jusqu'à quel point devez-vous travailler avec votre groupe de travail pour accomplir vos tâches?
3. Jusqu'à quel point vos tâches nécessitent-elles une vérification ou une collaboration avec des collègues de votre groupe de travail?

4. Jusqu'à quel point les autres membres de votre groupe de travail dépendent-ils de votre travail pour terminer leurs propres tâches?
5. Jusqu'à quel point le travail que vous faites est-il le résultat des efforts combinés de plusieurs personnes?

Resource constraints (Spector & JEx, 1998)
Scale: 1 – jamais to 7 – chaque jour

À quelle fréquence trouvez-vous difficile ou impossible de faire votre travail à cause de…?

1. Approvisionnement ou équipement de mauvaise qualité
2. Règlements et procédures organisationnelles
3. Autres employés
4. Partie(s) prenante(s)
5. Approvisionnement ou équipement insuffisants
6. Formation inadéquate
7. Interruptions à cause d'autres personnes
8. Manque d'information sur la nature de la tâche et la manière de l'accomplir
9. Exigences de travail contradictoires
10. Aide inadéquate des autres
11. Instructions incorrectes

Team meaningfulness scale (referent-shift; revised May et al. 2004)
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. Le travail que nous faisons est très important pour mon équipe
2. Nos tâches professionnelles ont un sens sur le plan personnel pour mon équipe
3. Le travail que mon équipe accomplit en vaut la peine
4. Nos tâches professionnelles ont de l'importance pour mon équipe
5. Le travail accompli a un sens pour mon équipe
6. Mon équipe sent que le travail que nous réalisons a beaucoup de valeur.

Supervisor promotion of the organization scale
Scale : 1 – pas du tout d'accord to 7 – tout a fait d'accord

1. Mon supérieur immédiat me vante souvent les mérites de cette organisation
2. Mon supérieur immédiat cherche à obtenir mon adhésion aux objectifs de l'entreprise
3. Mon supérieur immédiat me parle souvent de la culture de cette organisation dans des termes positifs
4. Mon supérieur immédiat met de l'énergie pour me convaincre des valeurs de cette organisation
5. La plupart des informations à propos des activités de cette organisation me sont données par mon supérieur immédiat
6. Les informations à propos de cette organisation me parviennent souvent par d'autres sources que mon supérieur immédiat

Demographic Q's

1. Quel est votre sexe?
2. Quel est votre age?
3. Quel est le domaine d'activité de votre entreprise?
4. Quel est votre titre d'emploi actuel?
5. Depuis combien de temps faites-vous partie de votre équipe de travail actuelle?
   _____ années _____ mois
6. Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous pour cette entreprise?
   _____ années _____ mois
7. Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous pour votre superviseur actuel?
   _____ années _____ mois
8. Combien de personnes font partie de votre équipe de travail actuelle? _____ personnes
9. De quel service votre équipe de travail relève-t-elle?
10. Décrivez brièvement le genre de tâches que vous accomplissez dans votre emploi actuel (ouvert)
11. Quel est le nom de votre superviseur actuel?
12. Quel est le nom de la compagnie dont vous travaillez pour actuellement?