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### **Servant Leaders as Facilitators of Couple's Meaningfulness at Work and Home**

Kristine Milorava

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## **Servant Leaders as Facilitators of Couple's Meaningfulness at Work and Home**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of having a servant leader (SL) at work on individuals' and their partners' work and family meaningfulness (WM) and to explore whether work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between SL and family meaningfulness (FM). SL theory accentuates how leaders simultaneously improve work and family lives by focusing on their employees' development and this research provided further evidence of this notion. Data were collected from 155 dual-earning couples (310 respondents) and the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) was applied to analyze the effects of SL on the work meaningfulness of the employees and their life partners. The actor-partner interdependence mediation model (APIM-M) investigated whether work meaningfulness mediated the relationship between SL and FM. Our findings reinforced our general hypothesis, as we found evidence for intraindividual indirect effects from SL to family meaningfulness by work meaningfulness and interpersonal indirect effects from SL to spouse's family meaningfulness through their work meaningfulness. These results provide empirical evidence for that service-oriented leaders increase work meaningfulness in their employees, but also shows its effects on both follower's and their spouses family meaningfulness.

### **Keywords:**

Servant Leadership; Work Meaningfulness; Family Meaningfulness; Mediation; APIM

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Servant Leaders as Facilitators of Couple’s Meaningfulness at Work and Home

by

Kristine Milorava

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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SERVANT LEADERS AS FACILITATORS OF COUPLE'S MEANINGFULNESS AT  
WORK AND HOME

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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2020

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## **Servant Leaders as Facilitators of Couple's Meaningfulness at Work and Home**

Studies of leadership consider the direct impact of the leader on the follower and promote its holistic approaches to create developmental experiences at work ((Northouse, 2019). But less attention has been paid to more distal relationships such as leadership profoundly impacting outside of working lives through the coherence of purposeful pursuits for the broader search of meaningfulness (Steger, 2012). Or even more distal relationships such as SL effects on the employee's partner's family lives (Demerouti, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2005) and how it contributes to both employees and their partners lives. The purpose of this research is to provide further evidence on how SL affect the search of work meaningfulness and to explore if work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between the SL and family meaningfulness for the followers and their spouses.

First, this paper describes servant leadership and its unique characteristics promoting rounded employee developmental experiences. Second, the impact of servant leadership on employees increased levels of work meaningfulness and then its direct contribution to the follower's search of family meaningfulness, which leads to the spillover and crossover effects to the family meaningfulness. Implications are discussed.

### **Servant Leadership**

Eva and colleagues (2019) defined Servant Leadership as an "(1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community." (p. 114). While theories of SL focus on different behavioral dimensions that SL enact, most of them

coincide with Eva's, et al., (2019) in their characterization of SL as other-orientated prioritization of followers needs to develop followers and their contribution to the goal attainment processes.

van Dierendonck (2014) explains that the one-on-one prioritization of followers' needs to influence goal attainment results from a nuanced balance of task and relationship-oriented behavioral components of SL. While SL can demonstrate many behaviors as necessitated by the developmental level and characteristics of followers and the nature of the situation and goal(s), researchers of SL suggest the core characteristics as such *empowerment, humility, authenticity, acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship* are particularly central to both (a) prioritizing the needs of followers and (b) to developing and influencing them to contribute to goal attainment (van Dierendonck, 2010).

*Empowering and developing others or standing back* involves determining the level of standing back needed to empower followers (van Dierendonck, 2010). It nurtures self-confidence and self-efficacy, which enables followers to achieve personal and organizational goals and a sense of control (van Dierendonck, 2010); *humility* helps SL stay humble and admit that followers may know more, and to use their own vulnerabilities to help connect with and develop followers (van Dierendonck, 2011); *authenticity* defines SL consistent with their actual self who represent themselves persistently and honestly to others (van Dierendonck, 2011) and promotes similar processes in followers; *interpersonal acceptance/empathy* refers to SL acceptance of their follower's uniqueness and empathy to foster a psychologically safe environment, where individuals feel secure to make mistakes (van Dierendonck, 2011); *stewardship* relates to how SL choose to serve rather than use power to control and manipulate and to believing that each follower is capable of

development, and, as such, involves taking responsibility of self, followers and the institution as a whole (van Dierendonck, 2011). It also involves balancing the concern of followers' current desires and needs (e.g. their needs to support themselves) with their needs to develop and grow to contribute to goal attainment, and with balancing the needs of the followers with the those of the common good. In order to balance their follower-orientation with the necessity of reaching goals, SL also *provide direction* to their followers with the direction to complete goals and hold them accountable for reaching them (van Dierendonck, 2011).

SL style of leadership is associated with various positive outcomes for followers and the organizations. When there is SL in the company performance improvements are found at individual, organizational as well as team levels (Liden et al., 2008; Sousa, et al., 2016; Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013). SL is found to increase satisfaction as well as commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) in employees (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000) because SL create a learning culture where each member of the organization is found valuable (Rodríguez-Carvajal, 2019). Moreover, SL are fostering work meaningfulness by empowering employees' strong sides while developing them in areas of need (van Dierendonck, et al., 2010). When employees are given opportunities to develop and attain the goal(s), it motivates and engages them (van Dierendonck, et al., 2016) and increases the meaningfulness of their work (Khan, Khan, & Chaudhry, 2015). There is substantial evidence that SL significantly reduces turnover (Hunter et al., 2013) and positively affects the employee's work-life balance (Tang, Kwan, Zhang, & Zhu, 2016).

The supportive nature of SL nurtures a helping culture in the organizations that positively affect followers' collaborative attitudes (Garber, Madigan, Click, & Fitzpatrick, 2009), perceptions of leaders' trustworthiness and their effectiveness (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011; Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, & Jinks, 2007). Additionally, it serves on nurturing meaningful relationships between the leaders and employees (Hanse, Harlin, Jarebrant, Ulin, & Winkel, 2016). Research shows the evidence of maximized employee capacities like creativity and innovation (Yoshida et al., 2014), where SL is oriented to develop their followers towards the organizational goals, by providing autonomy and empowerment to employees in order to achieve organizational and individual goals (Liden, et al., 2008).

As a function of the positive effects of individual one-on-one relationships with direct followers, servant leadership has macro effects on the organization (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). Empirical evidence suggests broader effects of SL's individualized support on followers' sustainable performance in the organizations (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003) that enhances human resources management processes. Sustainable performance outcomes differentiate SL from other leadership styles because it is able to bring long term behavioral changes in the organizations beyond their followers (Sendjaya, 2015), unlike performance-oriented leadership styles. In a sample of 71 restaurants, Liden, Wayne, Liao, and Meuser (2014) found SL promoted unit-level performance by building a servant culture, which also indirectly promoted employee's identification with their unit and improved customer service behaviors.

There is further evidence that SL's influence on followers and the broader organization, in turn, influences customer satisfaction and pro-customer behaviors (Yang,

Zhang, Kwan, & Chen, 2018; Chen, Zhu, & Zhou, 2015). Multiple dyadic relationships between the servant leader and followers become the cornerstone not only for the goal achievement but for “improving both people’s relationship qualities” (Canevello, Crocker, 2010) which has its roots in both caring for one another and meaningfulness “tied to a broader mission or purpose” (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). But research finds that operational performance increases when organizations have SL (Overstreet, Hazen, Skipper, & Hanna, 2014) and that that organizations with such cultures at the helm are more profitable (Aguinis & Glavas, 2017).

Research suggests that SL can empower personnel who do not work with them directly, by maximizing everyone’s abilities in the whole organization, which creates a more inclusive and effective cycle of service-oriented culture (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2012). SL’s prosocial behavior models the other-oriented leadership to followers in the organization, which contributes to the cyclical development of relationships between SL and incumbents (Hanse, Harlin, Jarebrant, Ulin, & Winkel 2015) such that followers and peers may begin to enact in a similar style.

Sousa and van Dierendonck (2014) argue that the organizational success resulting from servant leadership occurs partially as a function of how SL infuse meaningfulness in followers and through the broader context where they are working (e.g. teams, departments, organizations, community depending on the number and scope of SL) through nourishing follower’s psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and by providing a sense of psychological safety. In like manner, van Dierendonck (2010) proposes that the main mechanism through which SL affects follower and organizational positive outcomes is by

increasing followers' perceptions of meaningfulness through the goals and the work they are completing.

SL provides meaningfulness to their subordinate's work by prioritizing follower developmental needs (van Dierendonck, et al., 2016) over the leader's own desire for achievement through reaching immediate organizational goals (Rodriguez-Carvajal, et al., 2019). In a paradoxical twist, this outward focus of the leader directs and motivates followers to empower and achieve performance goals that foster organizational success (Hunter, et al, 2013). Servant leaders serve overall meaning-making and finding one's work meaningfulness (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009) through empowering followers to reach goals in their own way and developing the ability to lead others in a similar way. Covey (as cited in van Dierendonck, 2010) suggests that SL arises out of the principled balance of power and freedom which also contributes to the sense of work meaning for the employees.

### **Meaningfulness**

Meaning in life is commonly recognized as well as one of the dominant concerns that drive human behavior (Yalom, 1980). Individuals search for meaningfulness throughout their lives and it is a central motivation to much of our behavior (Steger, 2012). Meaningfulness, in general, has been discussed by many eminent psychologists since the mid-1900s. According to Maslow's needs theory (1971) finding meaningfulness in life is central to the self-actualization processes. Another eminent psychologist, Karl Rogers (1961), explains how a central theme in various stages of human development is to find purpose in life.

Meaningfulness is a complex concept because the meaning itself could derive from multiple domains in life (Rosso, et al., 2010) where potential sources provide purpose, significance, and coherence (Martela & Steger, 2016) entailing the global meaning in life (Krause & Hayward, 2014). The degree of meaningfulness is determined by “the amount of significance something holds for an individual” (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The purpose or general meaning in life is determined through multiple domains and through the degree of balance and integration between the meaningfulness in specific domains (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Because we spend much of our time in paid employment and because work is one of the dominant ways through which we contribute to the functioning of society and the world, the meaningfulness we derive at work is a major factor in influencing our general-purpose (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Or in other words, people derive their meaning from work (Steger and Dik, 2009), therefore it has more specific significance for individual’s existence (van Dierendonck, et al., 2016). It influences the general sense of one’s purpose (Ryff & Singer, 2002), helping individuals to identify overall significance and purpose in life (Seligman, 2002). It is reaffirming for employees to gain a sense of meaningfulness through the leaders, organizations, communities or customers they serve (Chalofsky, et al., 2009) because both (1) their assessments of meaningfulness and (2) their leader's actions to find meaning at work provide employees with a sense of purpose or a common good (van Dierendonck, 2010).

When employees believe that they have a positive impact in the wider world, this creates purpose in their lives (Martela and Ryan, 2015). Work meaningfulness can reverberate into the broader pursuit of meaningfulness because work that is experienced as

significant through SL's approaches is counted meaningful by employees (Chalofsky, et al., 2009) guiding them to be more empowered by achieving substantial work outcomes (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

*How Servant Leaders engender meaningfulness at work.* According to Chalofsky (2003) perceptions of the meaningfulness of work are influenced by *the work itself*, *the sense of self* that is influenced by work, and the *sense of balance* and integration between work and other domains. *The work itself* denotes the good that people do through their job because it makes them feel good, it brings benefits for the common good (Chalofsky, et al., 2003). The *sense of self* implies sets of beliefs, values, and purpose in life that also covers searching for own potential and trusting one's own abilities in reaching the full potential, which aligns one's purpose of life and their purpose of work (Chalofsky, et al., 2009). A *sense of balance* "at its ideal is that life is so integrated that it does not matter whether what one is doing so long as it is meaningful" (Chalofsky, et al., 2009).

Through the individualized other-oriented focus on followers, servant leaders can facilitate meaningfulness of work. Servant Leaders support employees in finding their *sense of self* by giving them space for development, expression of their talent and by empowering them to do this in their own unique manner (van Dierendonck, 2010). Servant leaders who are authentic with followers use their vulnerabilities to support and provide them with honest feedback, that increases self-efficacy and helps to understand how their work relates to the overall organization's purpose. This can increase the meaningfulness of *the work itself* but demonstrating authentic concern for each follower and all of their responsibilities can increase employees' *sense of balance* (Chalofsky, et al., 2009).

Servant leaders' interpersonal acceptance and empathy for followers' current level of development and performance, and empowerment molds a learning culture that encourages self-development (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Providing necessary resources to their employees and the psychological safety to make mistakes motivates employees to persevere through failure when they are trying to determine their paths. This selfless behavior on the part of the SL encourages and empowers employees to search for their meaningfulness in what they do within the organization and beyond organizational goals and their own self-interests (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Choudhary, et al., 2012).

How SL's shape the organizational goals and employees' purposes imbue followers' perceptions of work with meaningfulness (Martela & Pessi, 2018). While goals are important for motivating and directing performance (Locke and Latham's, 2004), SL willingness to allow employees to set and accomplish their own goals in their own ways (Liden, et al., 2008) through empowerment and interpersonal acceptance increases the goal achievement rate and this engenders meaningfulness at work. Furthermore, empowering servant leaders help their employees widen the behavioral repertoire that serves to achieve individual, team, or organizational goals (van Dierendonck, 2016).

Since humans have a need to feel valuable, Ayers et al. (2008) connect work meaningfulness to caring relationships, which can be attributed through the frames of SL's caring and supportive nature. Followers' feeling of being supported and trusted by their leaders can result in the maximization of employee capacities like creativity and innovation, which can yield benefits for the organization (Yoshida et al., 2014). Psychological safety that SLs create at work by utilizing safe space for mistakes or allowing power-sharing (Liden et al, 2008) enacts "*interpersonal acceptance*" of each

follower facilitating a psychologically safe work environment for the employees (Wanless, 2016), which motivates them to express their talent and seek meaning at work (van Dierendonck, 2010). This acceptance, in conjunction with SL's characteristic of "*empowering and developing others*" (Van Dierendonck, 2010), stimulates employees to exceed their personal goals. When SL give feedback to followers that clarify how their efforts contribute to the organization's mission and purpose, this increases the perceived meaningfulness of their job as well (Chalofsky, et al., 2009).

In contrast to transformational leaders, SL assists followers to find work meaningfulness through heightened purpose and need satisfaction (Yang, Zhang, Kwan & Chen, 2015). Transformational leaders (TL) attempt to manage and mobilize followers' perceived meaning to be in alignment with their (the leader's) or the organizations' goals (Parolini, Patterson & Winston, 2009), while servant leaders encourage their employees to find their *own* meaningfulness (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012) through empowerment, which is linked to better goal attainment (Judge et al. 2005) and overall organizational success.

SL's *authentic* concern for providing support can foster meaningfulness for the employees because it nurtures their needs to create a valuable impact for each other and broader organization or the community (Martela, et al., 2015). By nurturing a shared sense of connection with co-workers and serving others, SLs answer the existential question of "why I am here" which fulfills communal aspects of discovering meaning at work (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). In sum, we suggest that SL's explicit purpose to serve, support and focus on employees' needs become the sources of meaningfulness at work for the followers.

## **Enhancing Work Meaningfulness Through Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1970) was the first to propose that servant leader (SL) differed from other leaders in that their approach entails a conscious choice of making sure that followers' needs were prioritized over their own and organizational goals (Northouse, 2019). While there have been different versions of SL theory, with each espousing different behavioral dimensions that SL enact, the general concept of service-oriented leadership has gained momentum as research has found this style of leadership contributing to the incremental validity of a variety of follower and organizational outcomes above and beyond transformational leadership (Banks et al., 2018; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn & Wu, 2016).

Moreover, Graham (1991) argued, that SL is much more transformative than the “transformational” leadership itself (TL), due to its nature of serving good for all stakeholders involved in the organization. Compared to TL the SL further enhances the moral development of the followers since employees are supported to become the “autonomous moral agents” that TL does not foster as much (Graham, 1991). Furthermore, specific SL mechanisms such as the empowerment of employees transform individuals’ purpose at work (van Dierendonck, et al., 2016).

Servant leadership is a holistic leadership style that engages employees through meeting their needs in relational, spiritual, emotional, and moral domains (Eva, et al., 2019). Researchers have suggested that one of the effects that SL may bring about on followers is to help them find meaningfulness in their work (van Dierendonck, 2011). It is suggested that SL provide purpose by making the work environment a meaningful place, where employees are free to express their talents and are provided with the support necessary to fulfill their organizational purpose (Northouse, 2019).

*Hypothesis 1:* SL will have a positive effect on their followers' perceived meaningfulness of work.

### **Servant Leadership Spill Over to Family Meaningfulness**

While work meaningfulness is a significant component of overall meaningfulness, home and family can be interconnected source of meaningfulness in life (Brown & Lent, 2016; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Work meaningfulness is not just about work, but also about the influence work has on employees' lives (Grady & McCarthy, 2008) and that's how it spills over to family lives. 'Spillover' refers to the linkages between work and family that implies the transmission of emotion and experiences from one domain to another (Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005), for example from work to family life.

SL relationship allows leaders to understand their followers so they can correctly empower them (van Dierendonck, et al., 2010). Empowered employees who find more meaning at work through their leader's influence, would spill over meaningfulness at home through changes and improvements in organizational skills or communication abilities that are fostered by SL and practiced by the followers at work. These processes overall can increase the ability to find FM at home. WM is possible to initiate a "transfer of developed skills and efficiencies at work such that they are reinforced at home and vice versa" between partners (Bragger, et al., 2019).

SL's selfless acts of support and empowerment provide true care of who followers are rather than what they can do for the organizations (van Dierendonck & Paterson, 2010). The deeper connection that is activated through empowerment is fostering service-oriented characteristics and individual relationships between SL and followers (van Dierendonck, 2010). When an employee perceives that the SL holds unconditional regard for them, and

it is not based only on the follower's work performance or goal attainment it introduces SL effects on work meaningfulness. But this reciprocal relationship between followers and leaders affect meaningfulness for employees in both domains – work and family (Brief & Nord, 1990d).

Spillover of WM to family meaningfulness (FM) can occur through improving followers' WM perceptions of the *work itself*, *sense of self*, and *sense of balance* (Chalofsky, et al., 2003). SL increases the meaningfulness of the *work itself* through encouraging nature that helps employees find their own meaning in their work and inspiring them to set their own goals in addition to those set for them (Martela, et al., 2018). The *sense of self* means bringing whole selves to the workplace and a *sense of balance* is achieved if individuals feel that they are doing something meaningful (Chalofsky, et al., 2003). Because these aspects contribute to their general sense of meaning, it is expected that employees who achieve meaningfulness at work through these characteristics return to their families fulfilled and ready to serve outside of work (Chalofsky, et al., 2009).

The interpersonal acceptance, humility, empathy, and authenticity demonstrated in daily interactions with SL and the fact that they give followers the freedom to choose their own path (van Dierendonck, 2010) may be contributing to the increase of followers' meaning at work. The authentic and empowering nature of SL that generates similar relationship tendencies within their followers, may then create the same behaviors in and out of the workplace (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Followers emulate their SL within and outside of the organization by developing meaningful one-on-one relationships with a partner, or other family members (Rodriguez-Carvajal, et al., 2018). Given how relationships increase meaningfulness in followers with behavioral outcomes (Hunter, et

al., 2013), “daily encounters with servant leaders’ behaviors will impact subordinates’ daily meaning in life” (Rodriguez-Carvajal, et al., 2018).

Additionally, SL concern for the follower’s well-being means they consider not only how employees are faring at work but how to navigate obligations and responsibilities at home (Northouse, 2019). SL wholistic concern for the followers means that supervisory support shapes the employee’s ability to flex work boundaries (Ferguson, Carlson & Kacmar, 2014). When employees have supportive leaders, they understand that supervisory care will be given not only to the employees’ needs at work but to the responsibilities they may have outside of work (Dunn & O’Brien, 2013) that for example requires them to leave work earlier to support a family emergency and allocate necessary resources to support their family demands (Chalofsky, et al., 2009).

Therefore, we predict that employees’ increased perceptions of work meaningfulness will relate to their increased perceptions of family meaningfulness. We hypothesize that the degree to which supervisors or managers practice SL will relate to employees’ perceptions of family meaningfulness. Moreover, we predict that employees’ perceived work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between their perceptions of their manager’s service-oriented practices and their experienced family meaningfulness. The interconnected nature of family and work domains (Brown, et al., 2016) determine that intrapersonal effects of employees’ work meaningfulness positively transfer to family meaningfulness.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Employees experienced work meaningfulness will have a positive effect on the employees’ sense of family meaningfulness.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Employees who rate their leaders higher on servant leadership behaviors will report higher levels of experienced family meaningfulness.

*Hypothesis 2c:* Employees' experienced work meaningfulness will mediate the effect of SL on employee's experienced family meaningfulness.

### **Crossover Effects and SL Effects on Partner's Meaningfulness**

*Work and family meaningfulness crossover effects.* 'Crossover' is a term that connotes the effect of transmitting positive as well as negative emotionality, values, attitudes, and behaviors from one partner to another (Demerouti, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2005; Bakker, et al., 2009). Bragger & colleagues (2019) suggest that when partners' jobs are interconnected in regard to shared values this meaningfulness can crossover to their life partner. Likewise, Bakker and Demerouti's (2013) were able to demonstrate spillover between two domains (work and family) that also cross over to employees' life partners. Because partners communication is often not only regarding daily events of the family lives but about their values, plans and goals, the meaning that each partner perceives at home is shaped by their partner (Demerouti, et al., 2005).

Given the interdependence of experiences in work-family domains, it is likely that one partners' work meaningfulness crossover to influence the other partner's family meaningfulness (Bakker, Demerouti & Burke, 2009). Song and colleagues (2008) found that when one has a positive effect at work it spills over to their life partner. Moreover, research investigating the transmission of emotional states has found that both job satisfaction and work engagement crossover between dual-earning working couples (Demerouti et al., 2005; Rodriguez-Muñoz, et al., 2014). Empirical evidence where positive experiences that employees gain at work can crossover to family members through

their well-being (Liao, Liu, Kwan, & Li, 2015), suggest that mechanisms of transmitting WM to FM may work similarly.

Since close relationships dissolve the psychological boundaries between life partners, it becomes difficult to distinguish “where one partner ends and the other begins” (Finkel, et al., 2015). Moreover, responsive behaviors that are typical of relationships promote the quality of the relationship for self and the partner (Finkel, et al., 2015). Dunn, et al., (2013) applied an enrichment theory framework to explain how individuals who find happiness at work, may reflect similar contentment at home and transpose these feelings to their partners.

Research has demonstrated how experiences like burnout, depression, work-family conflict, job satisfaction and work engagement crossover to our partners’ lives (Westman and Etzion 1995; Westman and Vinokur 1998; Hammer et al. 1997; Demerouti et al., 2005; Rodriguez- Muñoz, et al., 2014; Liao, Liu, Kwan, & Li, 2014). A similar process of transmission can affect how individuals influence their partners in finding family meaningfulness. Crossover of meaningfulness between partners is likely because couples who share emotional bonds with each other can influence one another’s values and purpose in their relationship (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013).

*SL effects on partner’s work and home meaningfulness.* Given the proposed effects of positive crossover between life partners for work meaningfulness, if SL positively influences their employees’ perceived meaningfulness of work as predicted (Dunn, et al., 2013), then SL positive influence on employees’ family meaning is likely to influence the employee’s partner’s meaningfulness of work and family (Greenhouse, et al., 2006). When one partner has experiences at work that influence the perceived meaningfulness of their

*sense of self* it can influence their relationship with their partners too. For example, if a manager's empowering behaviors increase their direct employee's self-evaluations, or self-efficacy, and affect self-identity at work, this could then be reflected through followers' behaviors and communications at home with their life partner, which would, in turn, affect their partner's FM.

Cross over is particularly possible when SL stops follower's demands at work from influencing his ability to meet family responsibilities (Burke, 2000). "As people make choices or tradeoffs between the work and family domains, they likely do so based on the meaning of their work, and these choices, in turn, may influence the perceived meaningfulness of that work," (Rosso, et al., 2010, *p. 103*). A SL who encourages his employees to meet his family responsibilities and who prevents organizational pressures from interfering on employees ability to meet family demands can result in an understanding that work-family life fit and flow into a larger, more general-purpose in life (van Dierendonck, et al., 2016). This understanding of purpose is communicated and discussed with one's partner and becomes part of their shared model of life's purpose, which effects the partner's work and family meaning (Aguinis, et al., 2017).

SL that enriches individuals to find their job meaningfulness beyond work boundaries spills over to family purpose (Greenhouse, et al., 2006). Employees that get assisted by the SL in solving family difficulties exhibit similar supportive behaviors to their family members (Zhang, Kwan, Everett & Jian, 2012) and this is how the cross-over is initiated. The fact that the SL denote their attention to their employees' out-of-work obligations by supporting an integrated balance between work and home can spill and cross over to both the employee's family life and to how they treat their partner (and family),

which can influence the partner's family and work meaningfulness (Hanson, et al., 2006; Bragger, et al., 2019).

When individuals with WM are able to demonstrate FM, it provokes similar emotional processes in them by validating perceptions of meaningfulness in their life partners (Gable & Reis, 2006; Canevello Crocker, 2010). Moreover, this is exactly what may be facilitating the spread of work meaningfulness to the partner's work meaningfulness from the follower's work domain (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Our prediction that followers increased WM could be contributing to their life partner's WM, is based on this overall notation that partnership initiates similar processes and "it seems that when one finds meaning in developing oneself and balancing various sources of stress and tensions at work, then this meaningfulness can influence family outcomes" (Bragger, et al., 2019, p.19). So the further transfer happens to the partner's work meaningfulness showing a distal effects of found WM to it employees partner's WM.

Hence, we propose that SL is positively related to an employee's *partner's* family meaningfulness through the empowering nature of work meaningfulness that generates employee's family meaningfulness (spillover), and then crosses over to their partner's increased levels of work and family meaningfulness.

*Hypothesis 3a:* An employee's experienced work meaningfulness will positively influence their spouse's experienced family meaningfulness.

*Hypothesis 3b:* An employee's experienced work meaningfulness will positively influence the spouse's experienced work meaningfulness.

*Hypothesis 4:* The effect of an employee's SL on their partner's experienced work and family meaningfulness is mediated by the employee's experienced work meaningfulness.

### **Actor Partner Interdependence Model and Mediation**

In order to analyze the effect of SL on employees' and their partner's work and family meaningfulness, we employ the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Because our analysis is based on the couple's data, relationship partners will be treated as dyads, or in other words analyzed in pairs that are nested within one *dyad* (Cook & Kenny, 2005).

When partners in a couple interact with each other in a relationship, "the outcome of each person can be affected by both his or her own inputs and his or her partner's outputs" (Loeys, et al., 2014). Therefore, APIM is an effective way of measuring the couple's levels of meaningfulness in our research since it would analyze the data without averaging or summing up individuals scores (Cook & Kenny, 2005) that can sometimes lead to misinterpretations. But dyadic analysis allows us to see "within-dyad influences, relations, interactions, and exchanges as well as cross-level effects of dyad-level and higher-order factors on such interactions and dyad member's outcomes" (Krasikova & LeBreton, 2012).

We also employ the actor-partner interdependence *mediation* model (APIM-M; Ledermann, Macho & Kenny, 2011). Mediation refers to the explicit mechanism that shows processes of  $X$  influencing the outcome for  $Y$  by the mediated variable  $M$  (Lederman, et al., 2011). The APIM-M is structured like APIM but includes a third variable -the mediators, to get an  $X$ ,  $Y$ , and  $M$  for both partners (Olsen & Kenny, 2006).

## Method

### Sample

Participants were sampled through Qualtrics Panel Services and via snowball sampling resulting in a total of 310 participants (155 couples). Qualtrics is an online platform used for research that allows selection of participants based on specific criteria that for this research involved a requirement of a romantic partnership, living together and raising children in the same household, with at least one child under the age of 18 and a dual-income where both partners had a full time or part-time positions. Participants qualifying these standards were tested and compensated \$7.50 per couple for their time. In addition, snowball sampling was conducted at local daycare centers where couples qualifying for selection criteria were recruited and other families meeting this qualifying criterion were invited to participate.

Sample's ages fluctuated between 20 to over 60 years old with an average age of 30-39; 56% of participants were female. In regard to employment, 86% reported working between 36 and 40 hours per week, and the remaining participants had part-time positions. Most participants (81%) were White, 7% African American, 6% Asian, 2% multiple races, and 1% American Indian. Most of the couples (95%) were married and the rest of them in a domestic partnership (5%). On average each couple had two children (ranging 1-5) within the ages of three months to 17 years. 32% of participants had a college degree, 22% had an associate degree and 15% had a graduate degree. Only 4% had less than a high school degree and 14% had some college but no degree.

## Procedure

Qualified participants recruited through Qualtrics or a daycare received a link detailing the purpose of the study. The estimated time of completion among the informed consent statement was shared with a link to a survey. Couples were instructed to complete the survey in privacy without their partner in the room to improve the chances of honest responses. Survey administration conducted quality checks to ensure that participants were attentive to the survey items and a suitable amount of time was allocated for responses.

## Measures

The survey collected information about demographic and personal background including gender, age, education, marital status, income, the number of children, and their ages.

**Servant Leadership.** Van Dierendonck & NuiJten's (2010) 30-item measure assessed a composite SL by Servant Leadership Scale (SLS). SLS measures these dimensions of SL: *empowerment, standing back, humility, authenticity, stewardship, courage, forgiveness/interpersonal acceptance, and accountability* where all items are positively framed, except the ones checking the interpersonal acceptance in the forgiveness dimension (van Dierendonck, et al., 2010).

SLS has a stable factor structure and 84% of items stay in the range of SL construct with the strongest indicators of leadership dimensions in the following constructs: empowerment, humility, standing back and stewardship with a factor loading of .80 and higher defining the core features of SLS (van Dierendonck, et al., 2010). The other 4 dimensions (of the 8 dimensions) have strong factor loadings as well (between .70-.80). Additionally, SLS shows a robust internal consistency with good evidence for criterion-

related validity, which makes this scale a valuable measure for SL that has a valid and reliable psychometric property (van Dierendonck, et al., 2010). An example item of SLS: “My manager appears to enjoy his/her colleagues’ success more than his/her own.” Item responses ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always) scale and a total of 30 items measured 8 different SL dimensions. Overall SLS measure helps us to determine SL’s influence on individuals and organization levels and is a strong psychometric inventory for this construct.

**Work Meaningfulness (WM).** Lips-Wiersma and Wright's (2012)'s 28-item measure was used as an aggregate for WM construct. This scale has seven significant dimensions that are linked to WM and include: *Service to others*, *Reality*, *Developing the Inner Self*, *Expressing Full Potential*, *Unity with Others*, *Achieving Balance*, and *Inspiration*. *Service to others* indicates a contribution to the well-being of others which can be associated with help or making a difference in the world and responses ranged from 1 (very infrequently) to 5 (very frequently). An example item is ( $\alpha = .85$ ) “I often look back on a day of work with great satisfaction. I feel I truly helped our customers.” *The reality* was presented with an example item ( $\alpha = .92$ ): “We contribute to products and services that enhance human well-being and/or the environment”. *Developing the Inner Self* describes the process or desire of wanting to be a decent or the best version of one’s self can be. An example of this item is ( $\alpha = .91$ ) “We have a good balance between focusing and noticing how people are feeling”. *Expressing full potential* describes dimension where expressing one’s talents is outward directed with an item ( $\alpha = .94$ ) “I feel I truly help our customers/clients”. *Unity with others* describes meaningfulness as a group where shared values and sense of belongingness is accentuated with an item ( $\alpha = .001$ ) “The vision we

collectively work towards inspires me”. *Achieving Balance* represents the conflicts individuals face between being and doing with an item ( $\alpha = .96$ ) “The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future”. *Inspiration* indicates the motivation and creative outlook in order to achieve balance and goals with an item ( $\alpha = .96$ ) “What we do is worthwhile”.

This scale has a suitable convergent and discriminant validity that also demonstrate other work-related outcomes of WM (Lips-Wiersma, et al., 2012). The instrument shows an overall Cronbach alpha of  $\alpha = .92$  and test-retest reliability of  $.80 (p < .01)$  providing the stability of the measure over time. It also has internal consistency and reliability properties that can be well counted for measuring WM.

**Family Meaningfulness.** To address the lack of a family meaningfulness measure, a modified 28-item of work meaningfulness tool was used to narrate to family life (Bragger, et al., 2019). For example, the WM item, “*The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future,*” was rewritten as, “*Regarding my family/personal life, how we live makes me feel hopeful about the future.*” Additionally, work-family life faces similar dilemmas between self and the others (Methot & Lepine, 2016), making the parallel measure of WM feasible. Although, to ensure the scientific evidence of such usage a nested confirmatory factor analysis was conducted that found items fit the same 7-factor solution as the WM scale (Bragger, et al., 2019).

Internal consistencies of these items ranged from  $.77$  to  $.94$  showing reliability of the measure. *Developing Inner Self*  $\alpha = .88$ , *Unity with Others*  $\alpha = .94$ , *Expressing Full Potential*  $\alpha = .87$ , *Serving Others*  $\alpha = .83$ , *Inspiration*  $\alpha = .88$ , *Reality*  $\alpha = .76$ , and *Balancing Tensions*  $\alpha = .89$ . For the index of similarity between the factors, Tucker’s congruence

coefficient was used with the range from .66 to .98, which provides further evidence about similar loadings across the domains. Covariation across sources of FM was found with a modest fit of:  $\chi^2(343) = 1267.99$ , CFI = .89, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .09. Moreover, correlations were conducted to compare empirical profiles of WM and FM that resulted in a little overlap ( $r=.05$ ), providing the fact that WM and FM scales share comparable content but are discrete predictors (Bragger, et al., 2019).

### **Data Analyses**

The Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) allows us to analyze the interdependence of two-person relationships (Cook, et al., 2005). We included same-sex pairings, assessing the data by indistinguishable characteristics (Kenny, et al., 2006). The independent variable in this analysis is SL and the dependent variable is family meaningfulness (FM). The mediation we used is driven by the work meaningfulness (WM) to test if WM is the process variable in the relationship between the SL and FM.

APIM-M mediation analysis shows the direct and indirect effects (APIM-M; Ledermann, et al., 2011) between WM and SL and FM. The APIM-M is structured like APIM but includes a third variable pair (the mediator) to get an  $X$ ,  $Y$ , and  $M$  for both partners. APIM allows us to look at the total effects of the relationship whereas APIM-M further decomposes the relationship into direct and indirect associations. Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation steps were used to establish the mediation of our data.

In APIM *actor* effects describe intra-individual associations among an employee's leader and a single outcome (e.g., my leader's style linked to my own sense of work meaningfulness) (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). In contrast, *partner* effects describe interpersonal associations among a target person's own leader and *their partner's* outcome

variable (e.g., my leader's style linked to my spouse's sense of work meaningfulness). Furthermore, work meaningfulness helps us understand the indirect effect of SL on employees' spouse's work and family meaningfulness.

Correlations that APIM creates between the individual and their spouse's FM are in place to control *actor* effects when evaluating *partner* effects and to control for *partner* effects when measuring *actor* effects. This approach also considers residual errors of the DV in order to control interdependence sources (Cuperman, et al., 2009).

The standard errors and confidence intervals for simple, direct, indirect and total effects are based on normal theory, which assumes normal distribution in case of indirect effects or mediation (MacKinnon, 2008). In mediation analysis, the normal distribution may not always follow the normal distribution curve because it is the product of two coefficients, bootstrapping with 5000 trials was used to correct for the inaccuracy of the normal theory's confidence interval limits (Fritz, Taylor & MacKinnon, 2012). This allowed us to assess the significance of the mediator variable on the outcome variable (e.g., my work meaning linked to my partner's family meaning). All analyses were carried out using structural equation models estimated in the R package *lavaan*.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlation matrix for the variables of interest (Servant Leadership (SL), Work Meaningfulness (WM) and Family Meaningfulness (FM)). An analysis of variance revealed that gender and demographics do not significantly influence the dependent variables in our research.

The multiple correlations for the WM and FM equations are .631 and .440, respectively showing the total effects of SL on WM and FM. This is the evidence of the

causal network for these three constructs. The measurement instruments showed excellent internal consistency and alphas are shown in table 1 as well. The dyadic interdependence of our data was accounted for by structural equation modeling (SEM) and each hypothesis of the research was tested using APIM and APIM-M analysis.

Results for a basic APIM model appear in Table 2, which presents the effects of SL on WM and FM for both direct (“Model 1”) and mediation (“Model 2”) models, where model 2 provides effects for the entire mediation model (visualized in Figure 1). Mediation is analyzed using Baron and Kenny (1986) steps for mediation. This method requires meeting all 4 steps of the mediation process to consider full or complete mediation, although partial and inconsistent mediation is met when 2 or 3 steps qualify the process. Our data shows inconsistent mediation since the path from SL to FM is opposite in sign to paths from SL to WM and FM relationship.

Step 1 for the mediation model seeks to find the correlations between SL and FM that shows the total effect of significance between the independent variable and an outcome variable. Starting with total effects in Model 1, we found significant actor ( $\beta = .11$ ) and marginally significant partner effect ( $\beta = .10$ ) on family meaningfulness, establishing effects for SL on FM for both self and one’s partner. Although marginally significant, the partner effects suggest a possible carryover effect of one partner’s SL to the other’s family meaningfulness. These analyses provide supporting evidence for hypothesis 2b suggesting that followers who have SL report the higher levels of experienced family meaningfulness.

Step 2 of the mediation model investigates the relationship between SL and WM, investigating Hypothesis 1. The actor effect in this relationship equals 0.628 ( $p < .001$ ) with a standardized effect of .618 showing significant effects of SL effecting WM. These

findings provide support for Hypothesis 1, which predicts that SL has a positive intrapersonal effect on their followers WM.

Step 3 of the mediation model investigates Hypotheses 2a and 3a which predicts that WM mediates the effect of SL on FM for the actor (employee) and partner effects (his/her spouse/life partner). The actor effect in this relationship equals 0.460 ( $p < .001$ ) with a standardized effect of .487 and the partner effect equals 0.127 ( $p = .034$ ) with a standardized effect of .135 both showing the significant effects of WM on FM and providing support for Hypotheses 2a and 3a which predict that employees experienced work meaningfulness will have a positive intrapersonal effect on the employees' experienced family meaningfulness and an employee's experienced work meaningfulness will positively influence their spouse's experienced family meaningfulness, respectively.

Step 4 of the mediation process involves finding the effects of SL on FM by controlling for the WM variable. The actor effect equals -0.190 ( $p = .002$ ) with a standardized effect of -.198. The partner effect equals -0.006 ( $p = .919$ ) with a standardized effect of -.006 (Kenny, 2015). Because the direct actor and total indirect effect differ have opposite signs, it indicates an inconsistent mediation (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000) where WM could be acting as a suppressor variable. Despite this indication though, we can claim that there is some mediation between SL showing evidence for Hypothesis 2c and 4, which predicted that employees' experienced work meaningfulness will mediate the effect of SL on employee's experienced family meaningfulness and the effect of an employee's SL on their partner's experienced work and family meaningfulness is mediated by the employee's experienced work meaningfulness, respectively.

Additionally, we ran a bootstrap test (a random sampling with replacement) to

determine if the couple parameter,  $k$  (partner effect divided by actor effect), suggests a couple model ( $k = 1$ ), actor-only model ( $k = 0$ ), or contrast model ( $k = -1$ ).  $K$  was estimated as .91 [95% CI -.73, 5.43], indicating for these partners both the couple ( $k = 1$ ) and actor-only models ( $k = 0$ ) are plausible. The ratio of the partner to the actor effect or  $k$  is 0.276 with a confidence interval from 0.021 to 0.504. It can be concluded that the model is between the actor-only ( $k = 0$ ) and the couple ( $k = 1$ ) models. While not presented, the covariation between the couple's WM was not significant ( $B = .04$ ; 95% CI [-.003, .090]) providing no support for H3b where one member's WM influences the other's WM.

Tests of the two total indirect effects and four simple indirect effects of SL on FM are in Table 3. The total actor indirect effect is significant ( $\beta = .31$ ), with nearly 100% of this due to the actor-actor indirect effect ( $\beta = .30$ ). This confirms the effects of SL on one's work meaning spillover to family meaningfulness, hence supporting Hypotheses 2c and 4.

Next, we evaluate the crossover hypotheses. We planned to fit a bidirectional mediation effect from one partner's WM to the other, but the residual covariance was non-significant suggesting no indirect association. While not presented, the covariation between the couple's WM was not significant ( $B = .04$ ; 95% CI [-.003, .090]) providing no support for H3b, which suggests that one partner's WM influences the other's WM.

And finally, in regard to limitation, our research showed suppression or inconsistent mediation which is characterized by the opposite relationship sign between the SL and FM, depicting WM as a suppressor variable. Although, under the contemporary approach of mediation (Frazier, et al., 2004) our research meets the partial mediation effects by satisfying Step 2 and 3 in the mediation analysis. The direct effect of SL on FM ( $c' = -.19$ ) was opposite its total effect ( $c = .105$ ). This suggests negative suppression or inconsistent

mediation, hence not meeting the Step 4 in the process (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). This finding can be revealing sides of the SL that causes the negative relationship. Just like any other leadership style, SL also has some possibility of negative impacts on its followers. Once the elevating effects of SL are partialled out, the remaining effects of SL may lead them to abandon commitments at home in favor of dedication to their boss. This carries some distinct characteristics of manipulation or a dark side of the SL. It also suggests two opposing mediational pathways through which SL operates: one improving family purpose and the other thwarting it. Although, positive outcomes of SL outweigh this possible negative effect, further research should look into that as well.

In summary, based on these results this study makes three major contributions to work-family literature. First, it extends the SL influence on employees and investigates how it engenders meaningfulness and purpose (van Dierendonck, 2010). Second, whether the meaning that is found at work through SL can spillover to produce meaning in the family domain. Lastly, while prior research focuses on how leaders of direct reports correspond with their own work-family experiences, we investigate whether the degree to which an employee views his manager/supervisor to be an SL will influence their partners' reported perceptions of work and family meaningfulness as well.

## **Discussion**

The present study aimed to add to the work-family literature by examining the influence of servant leadership on increased levels of work and family meaningfulness as well as by examining how SLs' influence the work and family meaningfulness of their follower's life partners. We investigated how employees' perceptions of their managers'

SL behavior directly influenced the employees' WM and their FM and also investigated whether the relationship between SL and FM was mediated by WM. We also investigated how the degree to which an employees' manager practiced SL influenced the employee's spouse FM.

### **Summary of findings**

We examined the relationship between the SL, WM, and FM, and through APIM explored the effects of SL on employees' partners' meaningfulness. The results of our research support our predictions that servant leaders increase work meaningfulness in their employees and that this increase in employees WM mediates both followers' and their spouses' family meaningfulness. Our analyses found that when employees have SL, they experience higher WM that spills over to their family lives and in turn increases their family meaningfulness as well as their spouse's family meaningfulness, providing support for Hypothesis 1, 2a, b, c, 3b and 4. We also hypothesized that employees increased sense of WM crosses over to the WM to their spouses, but our findings did not support this prediction. The results of the present study suggest that managers practices of SL promote followers finding meaning in home and work domains. Our findings suggest that servant leaders support employees' search for WM, which provides pathways of searching for meaning outside of work, particularly at home with their families. It proposes that these pathways may also spill over to influence their spouse's perceived family meaningfulness.

### **Implications**

*Theoretical.* To our knowledge, this is the first study that connects SL to both work and family meaningfulness, speaking to its transcendent potential in helping employees

find coherence in life meaning across work and family domains. Our research examined SL effects on the phenomenon of meaningfulness for their followers and their partners'. Our findings build on bodies of research in a) Servant Leadership (van Dierendonck, 2010; Martela, et al., 2015; Eva, et al., 2019) b) meaningfulness of work and family life (Lips-Wiersma, et al., 2012; Hunt, et al., 2013, Bragger, et. al., 2019) and c) employee's spillover of work experiences to their spouse's perceptions and behaviors (Chalofsky, et al., 2009; Ferguson, et al., 2014; Bragger, et. al., 2019).

Our findings contribute to the SL literature by providing evidence that servant leaders foster increased levels of WM in their followers that mediate the relationship to FM for their subordinates and their subordinates' life partners. We found that SL effectively enhances meaningfulness by empowering employees to find meaningfulness within the job context itself, and our findings suggest SL influence spans outside of the organization to influence FM for followers and their life partners. These results support SL research suggesting that SL's concern for their employees extends beyond their followers' work performance to a wholistic concern for their employees (van Dierendonck, 2011).

Our findings suggest that SLs' understanding of their followers outside of work-life as well as their accommodation of their expectations to consider employees' demands of their out-of-work-life positively influences the employees through their family meaningfulness and that of their spouse. Our findings also suggest that SLs' one-on-one focus on follower needs result in the development of the employee such that their increased understanding of the meaningfulness of their work generalizes into an increased understanding of family meaningfulness and perhaps also to an integrated wholeness

between these two domains as suggested by Ilies, et al., (2017). Our findings also support van Dierendonck, et al., (2010), Liden, et al., (2014) and others (Thompson, et al., 2001; Grzywacz, et al., 2005; Greenhaus, et al., 2006, Bragger, et al., 2019) who have found that dyadic relationships between SL and their followers can create a service-oriented culture whereby the positive benefits of the relationship extend beyond the dyad to other follower relationships.

With regard to meaningfulness research, our findings contribute to the literature by further demonstrating the usefulness of Lips-Wiersma, et al., (2012) scale in studying work meaningfulness and by providing further evidence of construct validity for the FM scale developed to parallel the sources of meaningfulness of Lips-Wiersma scale (Bragger, et al., 2018). Our research supports the notion that positive experiences at work influence family life at home due to its interconnected nature (Brown, et al., 2016) providing evidence for Chalofsky, et al., (2003) three dimensions of WM and its contribution to the general search of meaningfulness in life. Employees who find meaningfulness at work, initiate their search of family meaningfulness because it benefits their general sense of meaning.

Our research builds on literature looking at how employees' experiences crossover to influence their life partners by providing further evidence that positive effects at work cross over to their life partners (Song, et al, 2008). Bragger, et al. (2019) provided that work meaningfulness influences work-family outcomes. Moreover, other research found that employees experiences at work that are directed towards finding meaning in their jobs, provide a strong sense of coherence in other domains because professional growth is a significant interdependent relationships builder (Demerouti et al., 2005; Rodriguez-Muñoz, et al., 2014). The sense of fulfilment that increased WM bring in individuals opens

availability and energy investment in family obligations that influences employees' spouses at home (Tang, et al., 2016). The empirical evidence about work-life crossover effects (Liao, Liu, Kwan, & Li, 2015), support our conceptualization of WM influencing FM. Our findings continue this theme and expand the literature by the relative connections between partners influencing each other's lives and discussing numerous work and family benefits.

One unexpected and interesting finding is inconsistent mediation between the SL and FM. Inconsistent mediation is when mediator acts like suppressor variable and paradoxically contributes to predictive validity of another variable. In our case when SL increases WM for the employees that WM then actually can result in increased FM, but when WM is not increased SL can have a negative effect on FM. This could be related to the research in leader member exchange theory, which suggests leaders who pay attention to specific followers have followers who feel more responsible to their leaders (Richards, & Hackett, (2012); our findings suggest having SL who empower followers to find their *own* meaningfulness (as opposed to managing the meaning of the organizational goals) may more readily crossover to FM. Future research should further investigate the possibility that the relationship between servant leaders and their followers can in some cases negatively influence their out of work lives.

Inconsistent mediation in our data can also be adding to the research by outlining some negatives sides of SL. Of course, service-oriented leaders have the best motives by serving others and do not think about manipulation, but the nature of leadership and reciprocity might be influencing this relationship negatively. It might happen because employees fall into the psychological trap where they feel obliged to serve back and stay

overtime at work by spending less time with family. This could become problematic for the individuals who have partners that seek more family meaningfulness at home but because SL reciprocates on the exchange of service-oriented relationships, invested employees might dedicate their free time to serving back their bosses and spending less time at home.

***Practical.*** The results of this study show multiple benefits of having an SL in the workplace. Our findings emphasize the importance of leadership behaviors that support their employees as a significant reminder that organizational outcomes are often connected to leadership processes. Organizational practices that promote servant leadership as well as increased levels of meaningfulness, could bring countless individual and companywide outcomes for the employees and employers. Specifically, SL tends to bring abundant positive outcomes for its companies through employee empowerment, support, authentic relationships and attention to the follower's personal needs and development. Employee satisfaction, commitment, as well as organizational citizenship behaviors are positively affected by such practices and each employee finds their value in such work cultures (Rodriguez-Carvajal, 2018). Our study extends these findings by showing that servant leaders are direct contributors to employees' increased levels of work meaningfulness, but furthermore, we found that SL effects between the leader and follower expands beyond the effects on the dyads to influence their out of work life and that of their partner.

Our findings also have implications for HR policies by suggesting that practices that develop a service-oriented leadership culture can result in the empowerment of employees that build more meaningful workplaces, which can then extend beyond workforce boundaries. Our findings suggest that because servant leaders do not coerce or

control employees' perceptions of meaning, but rather empower them to find their own meaning (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009) that employees find more meaningfulness at work and that this meaning extends to other people and other life domains. Our research suggests that SL can be catalysts of finding meaningfulness and that this may be one of the mediators through which servant leadership influences positive employee and organizational outcomes (Chalofsky, et al., (2009). As such, HR departments should focus on practices that develop a service-oriented culture.

These findings are particularly relevant to the new generation of workers (millennials) who care about finding a sense of purpose and choose to remain in employment with organizations that enable their search for meaningfulness. SL support of their followers' needs increases the achievement of the individual as well as organizational goals through a trust-based relationship where mistakes are considered part of the developmental. Our findings suggest that because SL provides a safe space for new ideas, employees find a sense of meaningfulness and a better space for development. As such, our findings that SL increases WM suggests a path through which organizations can reduce turnover and facilitate the development of their employees and the creation of a service-oriented culture that can be passed on to customers and the surrounding community. The reciprocal nature of SL motivates employees to act similarly and return to the leaders and organizations through their service.

Prior research supported the idea of SL influencing the work domain, but our research suggests that the effects of SL go beyond the workplace, spilling over to family lives both for employees and their spouses. Because millennials care about work-life-balance, as working professionals increasingly coordinating joint careers, it may be the

case that their joint ability to see value in their work helps the other appreciate what their family lives bring to this equation. Our findings suggest that SL improves the lives of their direct followers at work and at home too; this is likely to attract and retain qualified employees that excel in their careers, but who also want a balanced and enriching homelife.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The present study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of our data inhibits our ability to make strong conclusions about the causal nature of the relationships we found. The relationships that we found between SL, WM and FM does not necessarily underline the causal relationship between these variables, however the nature of our complex hypothesis on predicting the SL influences on FM, which was based on well-conceptualized theory and our sophisticated analyses found support for these theoretically based predictions. In the future, longitudinal designs could more effectively determine causality between these variables.

Second, indistinguishable dyads did not allow us to investigate the influence of gender of the employee and their spouse on the predications. Gender roles, as well as gender identity, stimulate the way relationships to form for men and women. Future research should illustrate how gender determines the difference between how SL influences WM and FM for the employee and their spouse. In addition, future research might investigate whether the gender of the SL influenced the power dynamics between followers of the same and different genders. Additionally, future studies should look into the difference between heterosexual and homosexual couples and how their relationship dynamics differ in regard to SL, WM and FM.

Third, the FM measure used for this research has been modified from the Lips-

Wiersma, et al., (2012) WM inventory to address a lack of FM measure in the meaningfulness literature (cite Lips-Wiersma). Bragger, et al., (2019) found that this measure fits the same 7-factor CFA as WM and it shows a good internal consistency between the items that share comparable questions but are discrete predictors of work and family meaningfulness. Another study by Reeves, et al., (2018) shows that it factors similarly to the with Lips-Wiersma, et. al., (2012) WM measure. Future studies should investigate further this measure's validity.

Fourth, the survey we used to collect our data was lengthy and could have caused test fatigue in our participants. Precautionary steps were taken by injecting quality checkpoints throughout the measurement that removed the participants with shorter survey times. Mean response time was used as an average and one standard deviation below the mean response was excluded from the analysis. Although measurement fatigue or attention deficit to the test items is a complicated matter to control, the length of the survey is something to be considered while interpreting these results.

In summary, our research has added to the body of knowledge to the scientific and practical research on servant leadership, work meaningfulness, and work-family relationships for employees and their life partners by finding further linkages between these constructs. Our research found that SL has a significant impact on how much meaningful employees experience at work and that there are indirect effects of these leadership styles on their family's meaningfulness. While the cross-sectional nature of our findings provide limitations to the conclusions we can draw, our study is important in suggesting both how SL increase employees' ability to find meaningfulness at work and their ability to transfer this meaningfulness to the relationships and activities beyond the workplace suggesting the

mechanisms through which servant leaders improve organizational functioning but also how they may improve the societies we live in.

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## Appendices

**Table 1**

*Means, standard deviations, and correlations*

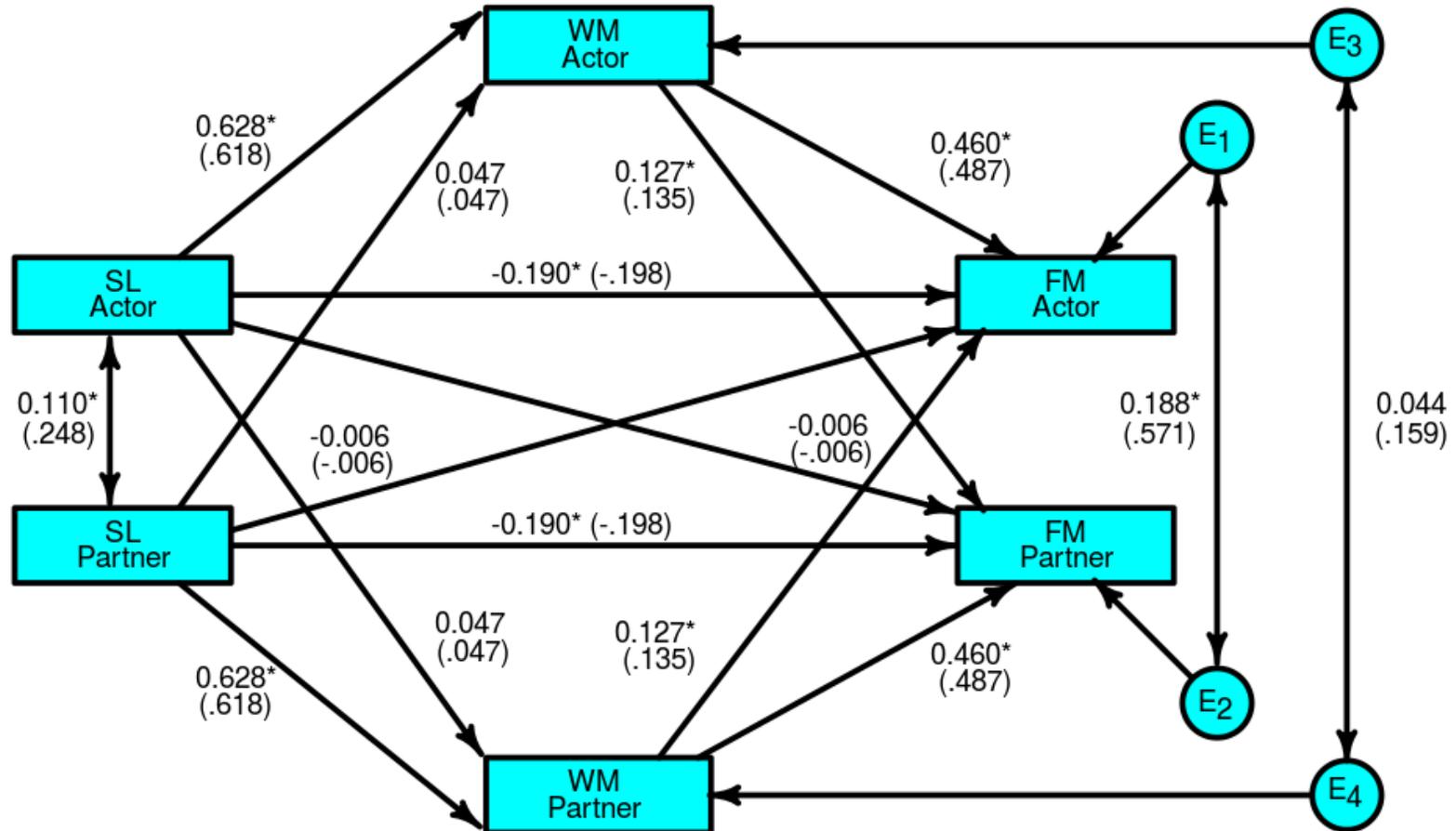
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	3.31	0.91	-				
2. Education	4.06	1.43	-.00	-			
3. SL	3.70	0.67	-.17**	.04	<b>.95</b>		
4. MoW	3.97	0.68	-.08	.10	.63**	<b>.94</b>	
5. MoF	4.28	0.64	-.05	.01	.13*	.39**	<b>.95</b>

*Note.* SL = Servant Leadership; WM = Work Meaningfulness; FM = Family Meaningfulness. Age measured with a six-category ordinal scale ranging from “20 or younger” to “60 or older”. Education measured with ordinal scale ranging from “less than high school degree” to “graduate degree”. Cronbach’s alpha for each scale reported on the diagonal.

*M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Figure 1: APIM Mediation (Standardized coefficients)**



**Figure 1.** Actor-partner interdependence models for the direct (Panel a) and mediated (via WM; Panel b) associations between Servant Leadership and Family meaningfulness for 155 couples. Standardized coefficients reported inside parentheses (see Table 3 for indirect effects tests). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2**

APIM results for SL for both direct (“Model 1”) and mediation (“Model 2”) models

Variable	MoF			MoW		
	<i>B</i> [95% CI]	<i>Wald test</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i> [95% CI]	<i>Wald</i>	$\beta$
<i>Model 1</i>						
Actor SL	.105 [.004, .205]	2.04*	.109	-	-	-
Partner SL	.095 [-.005, .196]	1.86 <sup>†</sup>	.099	-	-	-
<i>Model 2</i>						
Actor SL	-.190 [-.310, -.071]	-3.12***	-.198	.628 [.539, .716]	13.85***	.618
Partner SL	-.006 [-.126, .113]	-.10	-.006	.047 [-.042, .136]	1.04	.047
Actor WM	.460 [.343, .578]	7.67***	.487			
Partner FM	.127 [.010, .245]	2.12*	.135			

Note. WM= Work Meaningfulness; FM= Family Meaningfulness; SL = Servant Leader; Actor = Intra- or individual effects; Partner = Interpersonal or crossover effects

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 3**

APIM Indirect effects test results for WM mediating the effects of SL on WM

Indirect effects	<i>B</i> [95% CI]	<i>Wald Test</i>	$\beta$
Actor Total Indirect Effect	.295 [.215, .390]	6.65***	.307
via Actor’s WM	.289 [.225, .354]	6.71***	.301
via Partner’s WM	.006 [-.006, .019]	.94	.006
Partner Total Indirect Effect	.102 [.017, .197]	2.29*	.106
via Actor’s FM	.080 [.023, .134]	2.10*	.083
via Partner’s FM	.022 [-.019, .063]	1.03	.023

Note. WM= Work Meaningfulness; FM= Family Meaningfulness; SL = Servant Leader; Actor = Intra- or individual effects; Partner = Interpersonal or crossover effects. 4000 bootstraps.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

\* $p < .05$ ; \* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .