Article

JHP

Journal of Health Psychology
2023, Vol. 28(1) 61–76

DOI: 10.1177/13591053221091039
journals.sagepub.com/home/hpq
SAGE

Quality of social sharing of emotions alleviates job burnout: The role of meaning of work

Stephanie Delroisse[1], Bernard Rimé[1] and Florence Stinglhamber[1]

Abstract

Past research has demonstrated that finding meaning in work is a dynamic process during interactions with colleagues and supervisors and protects against job burnout. At the same time, past studies have shown that the need to achieve meaning motivates people to share their emotions. Building on this, we hypothesized that workers who have more experience of quality social sharing of emotions about their work with relatives, colleagues, and supervisors are less at risk of job burnout. A cross-sectional survey of 611 working-aged adults in Belgium (mean age 39.25 years) supported this primary hypothesis. In addition, the hypothesis that meaning of work mediates the relationships between experience of quality social sharing of emotions and job burnout was also supported. The study provides evidence that social sharing of emotions reduces job burnout by helping to make sense of work situations and reinforcing relationships with others.

Keywords

social sharing of emotions, BURNOUT, MEANING of work, sensemaking, emotional expression

Job burnout follows a long period of chronic occupational stress and is likely to affect any worker whose job demands exceed resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli, 2017). Addressing burnout is critical for both employees and organizations because it is associated with negative health consequences for individuals (e.g. long-term sickness absence, depression, decreased job satisfaction, and family difficulties) and companies (e.g. decreased organizational commitment and job performance, increased absenteeism; Hakanen and Bakker, 2017; Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Burnout is characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment (Maslach, 2017). Emotional exhaustion refers to extreme tiredness, lacking energy, feelings of emotional depletion due to work overload. Cynicism refers to negative attitudes toward work, withdraw from one's work, feeling of detachment of others and losing interest and meaning at work. Personal accomplishment is characterized by feelings of self-efficacy and self-depreciation. Job burnout is characterized by high levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism and low levels of personal accomplishment.

[1]Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

Corresponding author:
Stephanie Delroisse, Université catholique de Louvain, Place Cardinal Mercier 10, Louvain-la-Neuve 1348, Belgium.
Email: stephanie.delroisse@uclouvain.be

In an 8-year longitudinal study, Mäkikangas et al. (2020) provided evidence of two distinct within-person developmental profiles of burnout symptoms. For some of the participants, sustained exhaustion resulting from high job demands was the first primary symptom of the burnout process. This profile "exhaustion instigated, increasing burnout" (2020, p.9) sustains the process model proposed by Leiter (1993) and Leiter and Maslach (1988). Other workers, however, first showed symptoms of cynicism and reduced personal accomplishment and experienced a significant demotivation from work (i.e. the "Cynicism and reduced professional efficacy dominated, inverted U-shaped burnout" profile; 2020, p.9). Those individuals displaying this cynicism profile reported low job resources and low job control leading to "a state of demotivation, low confidence on one's capability to perform work and perceiving little meaning in work, which are triggered and maintained by low levels of job control" (Mäkikangas et al., 2020, p.9). This profile fits the existential psychology and logotherapy perspective according to which burnout is characterized by a loss of existential meaning in one's work and life (Längle, 2003; Pines, 2002).

Existential meaning at work emerges from individual's inner fulfillment in which activities and experiences are lived as valued (Längle, 2003; Riethof and Bob, 2019). Inner fulfillment enables workers to engage in their activities with pleasure and interest and to protect them from exhaustion by giving strength and persistence. In contrast, burnout is described as a "disorder of well-being, caused by a deficit of fulfillment" (Längle, 2003, p.111) and burnout workers are engaged in their activities because they have to or because of external motivation (e.g. money) without experiencing inner fulfillment. Instead, they experience feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness (Längle, 2003; Riethof and Bob, 2019). Indeed, studies have shown that a lack of existential meaning is associated with higher burnout (Barzoki et al., 2018; Ben-Itzhak et al., 2015; Currier et al., 2013).

Meaning of work, meaningfulness, and sensemaking

Meaning of work is defined as a sense of coherence (i.e. professional function matching with the identity of the worker), direction (i.e. a sense of direction and guidance through work), significance (i.e. the impact of actions on others), and belonging (i.e. being part of an organizational community and contributing to something bigger than the self) in the working life (Schnell et al., 2013). Meaning of work is associated with motivation (Steger and Dik, 2010), engagement (Johnson and Jiang, 2017; Steger et al., 2013), satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2015), and performance at work (Allan et al., 2018). Importantly for the present research, meaningful work is correlated to less work stress (Allan et al., 2015), less burnout (Fairlie, 2011), and reduces the risk of long-term sickness absence (Clausen et al., 2010).

Meaningfulness is a dynamic process that individuals build from work tasks and activities as well as from interactions and relationships with colleagues, supervisors, communities, organizations, and family and friends (Berg et al., 2013; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). In particular, colleagues and supervisors contribute to meaning by showing care and support for one another (Pavlish et al., 2019; Schnell et al., 2013, 2019) and by having a space in which they can receive feedback, share values, and develop a sense of community (Bailey and Madden, 2016). Employees use interpersonal cues (i.e. the behaviors and attitudes of colleagues and supervisors) to construct a sense of their work, role, and identity and shape their interactions with others in the organizational context (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). In particular, interpersonal positive cues are used to confirm the significance of employees in their work environment "through providing resources, offering emotional support, simply listening, being polite, conveying trust, including them in group activities, or offering help" (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003, p.109).

Weick (1995) stressed that in organizations, the process of sensemaking finds its optimal conditions of emergence when the flow of activity is interrupted, such as when forecasts fail, when expectations are contradicted, or when the activity in progress is interrupted by some obstacle. These are moments when meaning meets its zero level. Such moments are systematically signaled by emotion, which stimulates the production of meanings. According to Weick, an emotion results essentially from the violation of expectations. It acts as a tool for allocating attention to the production of meaning. When emotion occurs, the situation is immediately identified as problematic, it takes its place among the current concerns, and it stimulates the search for a resolution. The implementation of such efforts operates through the analysis of the situation and its explicit understanding through language, talk, and communication in the interaction of involved people. Each episode subjected to this process provides an opportunity for the organization and its members to enrich their cognitive map of their environment. In an observation of particular relevance to burnout, Weick (1995) pointed out that when people are under pressure or stress, the meaning-making process is likely to be lacking.

Sensemaking and social sharing of emotions

Emotional experiences are followed by an intrapersonal process which takes the form of involuntary and recurrent cognitive access to elements of the emotional episode. Everyday life emotions elicit event-related thoughts in the subsequent days and weeks in 95% of cases (Rimé et al., 1992). The frequency and temporal extent of such thoughts is a direct function of the level of disruptiveness experienced in the emotional episode (Rimé et al., 1992). When respondents were asked to rate on a scale the type of cognitive activity that they experience after an emotion, the most endorsed items were "trying to understand what happened" and "trying to find meaning" (Finkenauer and Rimé, 1998). These empirical findings thus provide considerable support for the sensemaking process advocated by Weick (1995) as resulting from emotion. Livet (2016) argued that emotions stem from a discrepancy between characteristics of the situation and implicit expectations for the immediate future resulting from the person's beliefs systems. Emotions also generate motivation to reduce this differential and make it imperative to revise the beliefs systems. As long as the necessary revision is not carried out, the associated episode resurfaces (Finkenauer and Rimé, 1998).

The involuntary cognitive re-access to emotional episodes is paralleled by an interpersonal process which was labeled "social sharing of emotion" (SSE; for reviews, Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 2020). Studies demonstrated that the person who has experienced emotion feels the need to talk about it and does so in more than 80% of cases (Rimé et al., 1991). SSE was thus defined as the compelling need to share emotional experiences in the form of a socially shared language. Early studies (reviewed in Rimé et al., 1992, 1998) demonstrated that SSE is initiated soon after an emotion (in 60% of cases, it begins on the day of the episode), that it is modally repetitive (the person shares the event several times) and addressed to several targets, and that SSE targets are mainly intimate persons such as spouses, family members, and friends, or in the case of a professional context, close colleagues. When people were asked why they share an emotional episode, two types of motives emerged (Duprez et al., 2015). The first motive relates to sensemaking, as respondents cited the need to achieve clarification and meaning, together with the need to receive advices and solutions. The second motive is affiliative in that respondents expect to obtain from others empathy and attention, as well as assistance, support, comfort, and/or consolation.

Bernaud et al. (2019) pointed out that meaning is not given, but is elaborated, particularly through narrative. Analyzing and interpreting life events requires distancing from one's own view and appealing to the perspective of other persons. In this respect, the process of SSE

seems well to be a primary contributor to the production of meaning. Talking plays a critical role in the construction of meaning because it allows the implicit to be unveiled (Rimé, 2015). As was stated by Weick, meaning is "the product of words combining into sentences in order to convey something about the experience at hand" (Weick, 1995, p. 106).

Social sharing of emotions as a protective factor of burnout

The loss of meaning at work appears to be a major component in the development of job burnout. Work meaningfulness is a dynamic process taking place during work situations in interactions with colleagues and supervisors. Weick's (1995) insistence that emotions open the way to sensemaking precisely because they signal situations where meaning has been lacking. Research on SSE has largely confirmed this view since it demonstrated that an emotion systematically arouses in the subject both a cognitive activity and a social sharing process which are both oriented toward the production of meaning. Taken together, these observations led us considering that the practice of SSE, with its potential for the production of meaning, could be a protective factor against job burnout.

To our knowledge, no research has been conducted on the link between SSE and burnout. There is, however, some preliminary evidence in the literature to support the hypothesis of a relationship between these two variables. McCance et al. (2013) have shown that SSE reduces the anger (i.e. a feature constantly associated with the clinical expression of burnout) provoked by difficult interactions with disrespectful customers. The literature on SSE shows that sharing emotions contribute to the fulfillment of the need to belong (Gable et al., 2004; Marc et al., 2011; Pennebaker et al., 2001; Rimé, 2009) and this is well documented in the context of teamwork in particular (Yang and Kelly, 2016). Sharing emotions strengthens the intimacy and quality of the links between members of a new team. It creates and maintains a positive emotional climate (i.e. cohesion, identification, interpersonal attraction, solidarity) that will subsequently determine its frequency, quality, and extent. A positive work atmosphere allows employees to be authentic, to know themselves better, and to better manage their emotions, which improves their adjustment abilities (Marc et al., 2011; Yang and Kelly, 2016) and preserves them from burnout (Grandey et al., 2012). Moreover, close to the concept of SSE, support seeking as a coping strategy (i.e. establishing contact with others for comfort and advice) has been found to reduce burnout among firefighters (Huang et al., 2022).

However, our question of the potential protective role of SSE against burnout clashes with empirical observations that, in contrast to a much widespread cathartic or discharge view of emotional expression simply, talking about an emotion fails to bring emotional relief (e.g. Nils and Rimé, 2012; Zech and Rimé, 2005). To be beneficial for the person who shares an emotional experience, the listener's response—named quality of social sharing of emotion—was demonstrated to play a critical role. Indeed, when listeners manifest positive feelings, understanding, validation, and attention, they contribute to benefits of both actors (Delelis and Christophe, 2016; Gable et al., 2004; Panagopoulou et al., 2006). For sharing to be effective (i.e. high quality of SSE), the partner has to stimulate emotional expression, express empathy, and offer emotional and concrete help. Conversely, low quality of SSE refers to the sharing of more superficial topics, in a less private and more judgmental context, where the interlocutor's reactions are perceived as negative or inappropriate (Panagopoulou et al., 2006).

Spouses and friends usually are the preferred targets of sharing among adults when they experience emotions (Rimé, 2009, 2015). However, in the context of professional emotional events, colleagues and supervisors are also ideal interlocutors for SSE and sensemaking because they share the same work processes and are members of a same

organization (McCance et al., 2013). They not only know the organizational processes but they are also interested in what is happening within their organization (Meisiek and Yao, 2005). Therefore, sharing with employees of the same organization makes it possible to cognitively reconstruct the situation, to understand it, and to diminish negative emotions related to an unpleasant professional situation (McCance et al., 2013).

Based on the findings reviewed above, the study to be reported in this article will address the following two hypotheses: *Hypothesis 1*: The more employees experience quality of SSE in their work, the less they are at risk of job burnout. *Hypothesis 2*: Meaning of work mediates the negative relationship between quality of SSE and job burnout.

Method

Participants

A survey was circulated to French-speaking workers and of 1176 who responded, 611 completed the entire questionnaire. In this final sample, 77.6% were female ($n = 474$) and 22.4% were male ($n = 137$), and the overall average age was 39.25 years (SD = 12.20). With regard to marital status, 19.6% were single ($n = 120$), 72.2% were married or in a relationship ($n = 441$), 7.7% were separated or divorced ($n = 47$), and 0.5% were widowed ($n = 3$). More than the half of our sample (39.8%) were parents ($n = 368$). With respect to occupational variables, 71% were employed ($n = 434$), 22.3% were self-employed[1] ($n = 136$), and 6.7% were not working at the time of the survey ($n = 41$). Of the participants, 40.7% were caregivers ($n = 247$). Among the 59.6% ($n = 364$) who were not caregivers, the most represented sectors were personal assistance services ($n = 139$), education and training ($n = 83$), distribution/commerce ($n = 14$), public administration ($n = 13$), banking and insurance ($n = 12$). Finally, participants worked an average of 38.67 hours per week (SD = 10.46).

Procedure

The various scales of the study were assembled and preceded by an introduction in a Limesurvey format that was posted online. The link to access the questionnaire and the invitation to answer it were posted on social networks and sent by e-mailed to the care personnel of several hospitals and nursing homes in the province of Hainaut, 1 of the 10 provinces of the French-speaking part of Belgium. The survey was accessible to participants for a 2-month period that began on January 30, 2018 and ended on March 29, 2018. The survey questionnaires were preceded by a brief introduction stating the purpose of the study, explaining current mental health concerns about burnout and work-related stress and emphasizing that participation in the study could contribute to a better understanding of burnout in order to reduce its risks. Respondents were informed of the guarantee of anonymity of the answers, and of the possibility of interrupting participation at any time. Participants were subsequently invited to sign an informed consent form. Next, participants completed socio-demographic questions, occupational variables, and the following psychological variables.

Measures

Job burnout. The French version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Dion and Tessier, 1994) was used in order to assesses the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (e.g. "I feel emotionally drained by my work"), cynicism (e.g. "I feel that I deal with some patients/customers/students impersonally, as if they were objects"), and personal accomplishment (e.g. "I deal very effectively with my patients/customers/students problems"). Responses were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 6 (*Daily*). Respondents' ratings were summed for each dimension.

Quality of social sharing of emotions. We have used a modified version the Quality of Sharing Inventory Questionnaire (QSI, Panagopoulou

et al., 2006), a 19-item scale initially developed in the healthcare field (e.g. preoperative distress) in order to evaluate respondents' experience of social sharing of emotion with members of the clinical staff. The QSI assesses how far the respondent felt intrapersonal benefits (i.e. feeling relief; experiencing ventilation) and interpersonal benefits (i.e. feeling understood; feeling supported) in such sharing situations. In the present study, we wished to evaluate the quality of social sharing of emotions for three types of targets, that is, the respondent's relatives, colleagues, and supervisor(s). From the original 19 items of the QSI, we selected the 12 that were suitable for all three target categories (see Appendix 1). These items were preceded by an instruction asking participants to indicate the extent to which they encounter each of these propositions when talking about their professional life with their relatives, colleagues and supervisor(s). For each item, there were thus three 5-point Likert-type response scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Quality of SSE scores with relatives, with colleagues and supervisor(s) were calculated respectively by adding up the corresponding items.

Meaning of work. The Meaning of Work Inventory (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2017) assesses the extent to which respondents subjectively experience their work as meaningful. This assessment is based on four dimensions: (1) the importance of work in the respondents' life, (2) the respondents' understanding of work in terms of personal meaning, (3) how far the work is part of the respondent's life over the long term, (4) how purposive the work is, including the positive impact the work can have on other people and society. Respondents rate each of the 15 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). This scale is particularly reliable for assessing meaning of work in the French-speaking context. The addition of scores on each item provides a general indicator of the meaning of work.

Additional measures. For purposes other than those of the present study, the survey also included both a quantitative and a qualitative assessment of Meaning in life, using respectively (1) a 10-item questionnaire accompanied each with 7-point rating scales anchored with "totally wrong" and "totally true" and (2) an open-ended question formulated as "What is it that makes your life meaningful? Please list hereafter all the things that give meaning to your life." The data collected with these instruments were not included in the present analyses.

Data analyses

Descriptive statistics, internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha), and Pearson's correlations were computed using SPSS 27. We then conducted hierarchical linear regression to examine the links between quality of SSE with each target and the three dimensions of burnout (Hypothesis 1). Finally, we run Model 4 of Hayes (2018) process macro for SPSS to examine the mediational role of meaning of work in the relationships between quality of SSE with all three targets and burnout dimensions and compute the significance of the indirect effects (Hypothesis 2).

Results

Table 1 displays the means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), internal reliabilities, and correlations for the study variables. Each of the three dimensions of job burnout correlated significantly with all three scores of quality of SSE. Supporting our first hypothesis, these correlations were systematically negative between quality of SSE and the job burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, whereas they in all three cases positive between quality of SSE and personal accomplishment. Further, emotional exhaustion and cynicism were negatively and significantly correlated with meaning of work, which means that the less meaning individuals find in their work the more exhausted they are

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, internal reliabilities, and correlations among study variables.

Measures	*M*	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*
1. Emotional exhaustion	23.71	12.99	(0.90)												
2. Cynicism	7.74	6.18	0.481**	(0.70)											
3. Personal acc.	37.26	7.73	–0.225**	–0.117**	(0.75)										
4. QSSE relatives	41.45	8.98	–0.299**	–0.189**	0.281**	(0.90)									
5. QSSE colleagues	40.76	9.15	–0.306**	–0.160**	0.236**	0.232**	(0.91)								
6. QSSE supervisors	33.29	10.37	–0.450**	–0.242**	0.176**	0.255**	0.394**	(0.92)							
7. Meaning of work	81.06	17.12	–0.505**	–0.360**	0.465**	0.334**	0.381**	0.375**	(0.90)						
8. Gender	0.22	0.42	–0.253**	0.012	0.077	0.09*	–0.006	0.109*	0.123**	(--)					
9. Age	39.25	12.20	–0.042	–0.70	0.060	–0.139**	–0.061	0.48	0.062	0.264**	(--)				
10. Marital status	0.72	0.45	–0.037	–0.116**	0.039	0.073	–0.028	–0.016	0.064	0.062	0.114**	(--)			
11. Parental status	0.60	0.49	0.007	–0.051	0.008	–0.147**	–0.062	0.006	0.007	0.076	0.648**	0.272	(--)		
12. Non-caregivers vs. caregivers	0.40	0.49	0.044	0.038	0.194**	–0.013	0.026	–0.160**	0.097*	–0.155**	–0.165**	0.013	–0.148**	(--)	
13.No. of hours per week	38.67	10.46	–0.096*	0.026	0.056	–0.004	0.011	0.071	0.121**	0.337**	0.178**	0.023	0.052	0.004	(--)

Note. Cronbach's alphas are presented in parentheses on the diagonal. Gender was coded 0 for women and 1 for men. Marital status was coded 0 for single (being single, separated, divorced, or widowed) and 1 for in couple (married or in a relationship). Parental status was coded 0 for no children and 1 for having children. Workers who were non-caregivers were coded 0 while caregivers were coded 1. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$.

and the more they distance themselves from their work. Personal accomplishment was positively and significantly correlated with the meaningful work thus indicating that the more meaning individuals find in their work, the more they feel a sense of accomplishment. Finally, meaning of work correlated positively and significantly with all three quality of SSE variables.

Using regression analyses, we examined the links between quality of SSE and the three dimensions of job burnout (i.e. Hypothesis 1) by controlling for socio-demographic (gender, age, marital status, and parental status) and occupational (non-caregivers vs. caregivers, and number of hours of work per week) variables. The model including all the sociodemographic and occupational variables and quality of SSE explained 28.5% of the variance of emotional exhaustion. This variable was significantly associated with quality of SSE with relatives ($B=-0.24$, $t(474)=-3.98$, $p=0.00$), quality of SSE with colleagues ($B=-0.20$, $t(476)=-3.24$, $p=0.00$), and quality of SSE with supervisor(s) ($B=-0.42$, $t(476)=-7.61$, $p=0.00$). Results also show that female respondents were more likely to report emotional exhaustion than male respondents ($B=-6.10$, $t(476)=-4.34$, $p=0.00$). The model including all the sociodemographic and occupational variables and quality of SSE explained 10% of the variance of cynicism, which was significantly associated with quality of SSE with relatives ($B=-0.08$, $t(476)=-2.64$, $p=0.00$) and quality of SSE with supervisor(s) ($B=-0.12$, $t(476)=-4.13$, $p=0.00$) and marital status[2] ($B=-1.47$, $t(476)=-2.35$, $p=0.02$). Finally, a model including all the socio-demographic and occupational variables and quality of SSE explained 14.5% of the variance of personal accomplishment. This variable was significantly associated with quality of SSE with relatives ($B=0.17$, $t(476)=4.90$, $p=0.00$) and quality of SSE with colleagues ($B=0.13$, $t(476)=3.58$, $p=0.00$). Further, age ($B=0.12$, $t(476)=3.34$, $p=0.00$) and non-caregivers versus caregivers ($B=1.98$, $t(476)=2.96$, $p=0.00$) are significantly related to personal accomplishment.

To examine our second hypothesis predicting that meaning of work mediates the relationship between quality of SSE and job burnout dimensions, we made use of Hayes (2018) process macro (Model 4). With respect to emotional exhaustion, meaning of work partially mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with relatives and emotional exhaustion (see Figure 1); the indirect effect of quality of SSE with relatives via meaning of work was −0.10 and was significant (SE=0.03; 95% CI=[−0.15; −0.05]). In addition, meaning of work fully mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with colleagues and emotional exhaustion; the indirect effect of quality of SSE with colleagues via meaning of work was −0.12 and was significant (SE=0.03; 95% CI=[−0.18; −0.06]). Lastly, meaning of work partially mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with supervisor(s) and emotional exhaustion; the indirect effect of quality of SSE with supervisor(s) via meaning of work was −0.09 (SE=0.02; 95% CI=[−0.14; −0.05]).

With respect to cynicism, meaning of work fully mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with relatives and cynicism (see Figure 2); the indirect effect of quality of SSE with relatives via meaning of work was −0.04 and was significant (SE=0.01; 95% CI=[−0.06; −0.02]). In addition, meaning of work fully mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with colleagues and cynicism; the indirect effect of quality of SSE with colleagues via meaning of work was −0.04 and was significant (SE=0.01; 95% CI=[−0.07; −0.02]). Finally, meaning of work partially mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with supervisors and cynicism; the indirect effect of quality of SSE with supervisors via meaning of work was −0.03 and was significant (SE=0.01; 95% CI=[−0.06; −0.02]).

With respect to personal accomplishment, meaning of work partially mediated the relationship between the quality of SSE with relatives and personal accomplishment (see Figure 3); the indirect effect of quality of SSE with relatives via meaning of work was 0.06 and was significant (SE=0.02; 95%

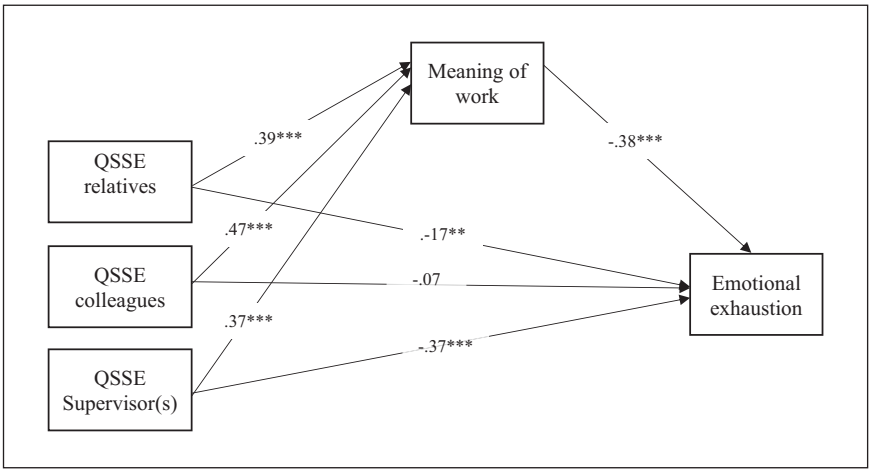

Figure 1. Meaning of work as mediator between quality of social sharing and emotional exhaustion.
Note. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.5$.

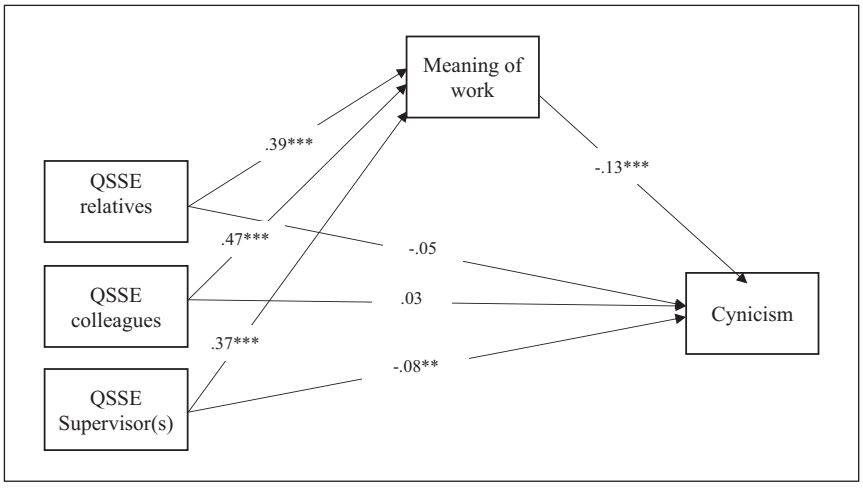

Figure 2. Meaning of work as mediator between quality of social sharing and cynicism.
Note. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.5$.

CI = [0.03; 0.11]). In addition, meaning of work fully mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with colleagues and personal accomplishment; the indirect effect of quality of SSE with colleagues via meaning of work was 0.08 and was significant (SE = 0.02; 95% CI = [0.04; 0.12]). Third, meaning of work fully mediated quality of SSE with supervisor(s) and personal accomplishment; the indirect effect of quality of SSE with supervisors via meaning of work was 0.06 and was significant (SE = 0.02; 95% CI = [0.03; 0.09]).

Discussion

The first objective of this study was to determine whether the quality of SSE reduces the workers' risk of job burnout, and this was found to be the case for SSE with relatives, colleagues,

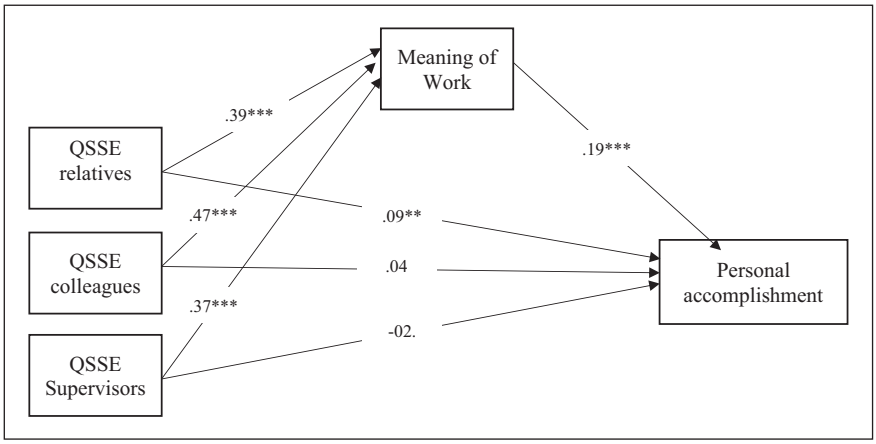

Figure 3. Meaning of work as mediator between quality of social sharing and personal accomplishment.
Note. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.5$.

and supervisors. A second objective of this article was to examine meaning of work as a mediator in the relationship between quality of SSE and burnout, and evidence for full or partial mediation was found across aspects job burnout and those involved in SSE. Overall, the findings add insight into how quality of SSE relates to job burnout.

We can draw from our results that relatives showing empathy, listening, and support alleviate all three job burnout dimensions. Indeed, as Rimé (2009) points out about SSE in daily life showing, spouses and friends are the preferential targets and quality of SSE with relatives is associated with physical and mental health (Cantisano et al., 2015). Moreover, Tremmel et al. (2019) have shown that interpersonal work experiences (i.e. positive impact on others, interpersonal conflicts, etc.) were shared at home. Besides relatives, colleagues are also ideal interlocutors to understand the professional difficulties encountered by a worker insofar as they share same work processes involved in a given organization and a given job (McCance et al., 2013). Our study demonstrates that empathetic colleagues as listeners of SSE mostly help in reducing emotional distress (i.e. emotional exhaustion) and, as McCance et al. (2013) posits, in legitimizing self-identity and self-worth to the worker who is sharing their emotion (i.e. personal accomplishment). Finally, concerning supervisors, while giving listening and support to team members, they help in reducing emotional exhaustion, but also cynicism. The critical role of supervisors in emotion regulation at work has already been highlighted in past research. Pescosolido (2005) has indicated about emergent leaders: "By modeling an emotional response to the situation, the leader resolves ambiguity and provides the group with the direction needed for action. At the same time, this leadership action can increase group solidarity by creating both shared emotion and shared action within the group" (p.317).

Besides the effect of quality of SSE, age, gender, marital status, and type of professional sector (non-caregivers vs caregivers) impacted job burnout. These results are consistent with those in the literature showing that women have higher level of emotional exhaustion than men (Purvanova and Muros, 2010), that age affects burnout (Brewer and Shapard, 2004) and that being single is more at risk for burnout than being in a couple (Al-Turki et al., 2010). Moreover, our findings add to past research showing help and service professionals are more at risk of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2016).

In terms of the second objective of this article, our findings demonstrate that meaning of

work acts as a mediator in the relationship between quality of SSE and job burnout. First of all, our results support and extend those of correlational studies (Allan et al., 2015; Fairlie, 2011) by showing that meaningful work explained less emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and more personal accomplishment. Secondly, quality of SSE with each target influenced meaning of work. Social relationships with colleagues and supervisors are known to be sources of meaningful work (Berg et al., 2013; Dik et al., 2013; May et al., 2004; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), but family members may also play an important role in the meaning of work (Duffy and Dik, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010). Indeed, the family can provide time and support to help the person recover from the demands of work and also express admiration and respect, thus confirming the role of work in the person's life. Therefore, work acquires meaning when it is recognized by others, including family members.

In addition, meaning of work mediates the relationship between quality of SSE with each target and the three dimensions of burnout. In particular, meaning of work fully mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with colleagues and the three dimensions of burn out. From these results, we can conclude that sharing emotions with colleagues contributes to meaning of work which, in turn, is associated with less burnout (i.e. less emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and more personal accomplishment). As Berg et al. (2013) have emphasized, employees can craft their relationships with colleagues in a way that makes sense to them by building (i.e. having new relationships, changing the purpose of relationships) or adapting (i.e. helping and giving support in carrying out their jobs, encouraging others, etc.). This is in line with the interpersonal dynamics of SSE developed by Rimé (2009): imagine two people who are sharing an emotional professional situation, A and B. "When sharing an emotional experience, person A arouses interest and emotions in B; their reciprocal stimulation of emotion sets both partners on the same wavelength; as recipient of B's attention, interest, empathy, and support, A experiences enhanced liking for B" (Rimé et al., 2020, p. 130). By sharing their experiences, employees can build new relationships or adapt them in order to create or maintain a meaningful workplace. This leads to a virtuous loop because as Lee (2015) has highlighted, employees who find meaning at work will have behaviors that contribute to a better work environment by bringing humanity, trust, honesty, and integrity to the workplace.

Meaning of work fully mediated the relationship between quality of SSE with relatives and cynicism, but partially with the two other dimensions of burnout. Talking with relatives as well as receiving empathic listening and support on work issues intervene to find meaning of work which, in turn, prevents detachment and acting coldly with others. For emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, other variables than meaning of work come into play in their relationships with quality of SSE. One can reasonably argue that in addition to meaning, the socio-affective mode intervenes to decrease emotional exhaustion and increase personal accomplishment while sharing with relatives. Indeed, the present study has explored the cognitive side of SSE (i.e. sensemaking; Rimé et al., 2020) but future studies need to examine the socio-affective side of SSE. This side represents the relational component in which the reciprocal emotional stimulation while sharing emotions leads to emotional communion and improve social integration. Indeed, while sharing their emotion, the narrator will receive empathy, social support and validation and, as a consequence, their feeling of loneliness will be reduced (Nils and Rimé, 2012). We assume that besides sensemaking, these variables should be examined in the relationship between the quality of SSE with relatives and the dimensions of burnout.

Concerning supervisors, meaning of work fully mediates the relationship between quality of SSE and personal accomplishment, but partially between quality of SSE and emotional exhaustion as well as cynicism. We can imagine

that when employees share some difficulties or professional situations they deal with, they received in return (i.e. quality of SSE) from managers some advice, understanding about issues they are facing, managers also encourage them and demonstrate confidence in their ability and effectiveness. Indeed, according to Bailey and Madden (2016), managers play a critical role in terms of meaning of work: by listening carefully to employees, managers recognize employee involvement, reinforce the feeling of doing useful work, consider the opinions of workers, and strengthen the correspondence between individual and organizational values. Therefore, giving meaning to employees help them to reinforce personal accomplishment. Concerning the other dimensions of burnout, other variables than meaning of work play a role in their relationships with quality of SSE. Future research needs to shed light on the benefits and resources that positive attitudes and listening from the supervisor have on emotional exhaustion and cynicism. For example, it could be organizational commitment (i.e. attitude toward organization), which is known to reduce the risk of burnout (Peng et al., 2016; Wright and Hobfoll, 2004).

Practical implications

The concrete implications for Human Resources practitioners and managers based on this research are first of all to foster a work climate conducive to social interaction tinged with honesty, openness, and respect. This climate encourages the sharing of difficult professional experiences with colleagues, which increases trust and intimacy with colleagues. Therefore, SSE in teams work could be encouraged by managers in informal settings because simply talking contributes to sensemaking through the cognitive side of SSE. Moreover, managers play an important role in reducing job burnout by providing compassion to his/her team members. Taking time to share about how job demands affect employees could show benefits for employees and the organization. In their model, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) have shown that unity with others is a powerful source of meaning at work and sharing emotions contribute to this unity at work. In addition, since meaning of work is a dynamic process that is being built (Berg et al., 2013; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), HR practitioners and managers play a critical role by creating a pleasant climate, by contributing to the employees' definition and achievement of objectives and by emphasizing employees' importance and the social usefulness of their work.

Limitations and future directions

Despite its originality and strengths, our research also has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, we relied on cross-sectional data that exclude any insight into cause-and-effect relationships. Future studies using longitudinal designs with repeated measures should be conducted to replicate our findings. Second, our findings are based on self-reported measures which leads to a potential common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To minimize this bias, we followed several scholars' recommendations and took several precautions (e.g. Conway and Lance, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). For instance, we assured potential participants of the anonymity or confidentiality of their responses and stressed that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. We also used validated and reliable scales to measure our study variables and took great care to ensure that there is no conceptual overlap in items used to measure different constructs. Overall, it therefore reduced our concerns regarding this potential bias in our data. Having said this, future research could benefit from using more objective measures to assess, for instance, quantitative SSE with relatives, colleagues, and supervisors: what, when and how employees share their emotional episodes with all three targets.

Moreover, a limitation of our study is that we have examined only one source of meaning of work, the quality of SSE as a factor that contributes to social interactions. Other social

variables such as concrete help from colleagues, recognition, respect, contacts with beneficiaries, shared values, etc. should be measured alongside the social sharing of emotions to examine how it contributes to the meaningful work and to reduce the risk of burnout.

Conclusion

The findings of our study add evidence about how sharing one's emotions protects against burnout because discussing one's difficulties gives meaning to work. While social sharing with relatives has been previously documented in the literature, our results highlight that workers also benefit from regularly sharing the emotions that emerge in a work context with colleagues and supervisors.

Data sharing statement

The current article is accompanied by the relevant raw data generated during and/or analysed during the study, including files detailing the analyses and either the complete database or other relevant raw data. These files are available in the Figshare repository and accessible as Supplemental Material via the SAGE Journals platform. Ethics approval, participant permissions, and all other relevant approvals were granted for this data sharing.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Stephanie Delroisse https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9199-1070

Notes

1. Note that this information refers to the type of employment contract so that being self-employed does not mean working without colleagues and supervisor(s). Participants who had no supervisor(s) ($n=132$) skipped the items about the quality of SSE with supervisor(s). Thus, for the latter variables, the analyses were conducted with $n=475$.
2. To be included as control in the analyses, marital status was recoded as follows: 0 for single (being single, separated, divorced, or widowed) and 1 for in couple (married or in a relationship).

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Appendix 1

For each proposition, indicate the extent to which you agree with it when discussing your work life with your family, colleagues and supervisor(s) using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. You can then add up your scores for each proposition to get a total score for your family and friends, your colleagues and your supervisor(s)

When you share with your relatives/colleagues/supervisor(s)

1. I always find an attentive ear at the right time.
2. Conversations are superficial. (R)
3. Conversations make me feel better.
4. I feel heard.
5. I feel understood.
6. I feel uncomfortable with the person I am talking to. (R)
7. I know I can share all my thoughts and feelings.
8. People always say the same thing. (R)
9. I feel that the person I am talking to is trying to cut the conversation short. (R)
10. I feel that there is a distance between others and me. (R)
11. I feel relieved.
12. I feel that the person I am talking to is interested in me.