Emotions and salesperson propensity to leave: The effects of emotional intelligence and resilience

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ABSTRACT

Emotions constitute a powerful psychological force that can significantly influence the behavior and performance of salespeople. However, emotions in the workplace still constitute an under-developed area of study, mainly in the field of sales. Sales turnover is also particularly important in relation to sales management due to the nature of sales positions, their historically high turnover levels, and the difficulty involved in filling them.

In view of the need to broaden knowledge on how to more successfully retain valuable salespeople, and the fact that B2B selling jobs are not the same across the board, this paper, while controlling the type of selling situation, analyzes the influence of two emotional skills (i.e. emotional intelligence and resilience) on salesperson propensity to leave their organization, both directly and indirectly, through their impact on work–family conflict and emotional exhaustion. The moderating effect of servant leadership perceived by salespeople on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and intention to leave is also addressed. Information provided by 209 salespeople from 105 enterprises from various industries confirms the hypotheses put forward and highlights the importance of encouraging the development of emotional skills as a way of alleviating work stress and reducing salesperson turnover. In addition, the results confirm the contribution of servant leadership towards reducing the effect of emotional exhaustion on salesperson intention to leave.

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1. Introduction

Emotions are a strong psychological force that can significantly influence salesperson behavior and performance (Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, & Sheng, 2011). Although it is generally accepted that emotions are an inherent part of the workplace, job-related emotions still constitute an under-developed area of study, particularly in relation to sales.

This study attempts to broaden existing literature by exploring the influence of two variables of an emotional nature (emotional intelligence (EI) and resilience) on salespeople's intention to leave their organization. Research has addressed the issue of turnover for decades. However, recent literature confirms that this problem persists (Aggarwal, Tanner, & Castleberry, 2004; Fournier, Tanner, Chonko, & Manolis, 2010). In the sales domain, the retention of talented salespeople has proven to be one of the most on-going and confusing problems currently facing managers (Boles, Dudley, Onyemah, & Rouzies, 2012).

In fact, sales positions are subject to the highest turnover rate and are the most difficult positions to fill (Rivera, 2007). Given that sales force turnover has become a great concern for sales organizations because of its impact on business results (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011), recent studies encourage researchers to improve their understanding of how to more successfully retain valuable salespeople (Boles et al., 2012).

Emotional intelligence (EI) was initially proposed in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and is defined as the ability to acquire and apply knowledge from one's emotions, as well as those of others, to produce beneficial outcomes. Although EI has received a substantial amount of attention from organizational behavior, human resources, and management literature, this ability-based conceptualization has been largely ignored by marketing literature (Kidwell et al., 2011). In their recent meta-analysis, O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story (2011) suggested that researchers analyze the contribution of EI to jobs that require emotional effort and customer interaction (e.g. sales jobs). However, despite having been suggested as an important factor in sales efficiency, very few studies have analyzed this variable within a sales context (Kidwell et al., 2011). In addition, although the EI construct is universal, the individual behaviors arising there can vary depending on the individual's specific culture (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004).

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The ability to handle one's own feelings and impulses is a reflection of high EI and, according to the American Psychological Association, a characteristic of a resilient personality. *Resilience* is a component of psychological capital[4] and refers to a process that facilitates overcoming difficulties, emerging from experiences as a stronger person, and developing skills despite being exposed to high levels of psychological stress (León García-Inquierdo, Ramos-Villagrasa, & García-Izquierdo, 2009). This state-like construct is a strategy used for surviving and prospering in the face of workplace adversity. Although research on resilience within an organizational context is limited, there is evidence to suggest that this variable positively influences performance (Coutu, 2002; Harland, Harrison, Jones, & Reiter-Palmon, 2005; Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Luthans et al., 2007).

This study analyzes WFC and salesperson emotional exhaustion as mediating variables in the influence of EI and resilience on salesperson propensity to leave. WFC can arise in any kind of job, but the stressful nature of sales positions makes salespeople more likely to suffer from this conflict than other employees. Sales literature confirms that WFC has a more negative effect on job satisfaction within a sales context than in other employment contexts (Boles, Johnston, & Hair, 1997; Boles, Wood, & Johnson, 2003). This research paper considers one of the two dimensions of WFC, i.e. work interference with family (WIF), since this dimension is mostly associated with job satisfaction and exhaustion (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991).

Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling emotionally worn out as a result of chronic work-related stress and is characterized by professional debilitation. The unique characteristics of the sales profession contribute towards emotional exhaustion, which is considered as the key dimension of the burnout syndrome (the three dimensions are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishments), and of which depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishments are predictors.

The model presented also addresses the relationship between emotional exhaustion and salesperson intention to leave, as well as analyzing the moderating role of the *servant leadership* exercised by the supervisor and perceived by the salesperson. Servant leadership is currently considered a promising area of study for organizational research (Van Dierendonck, 2011), represents immense managerial commitment to employees, and is defined as "a way of understanding and carrying out leadership by prioritizing the welfare of followers over the leader's interests" (Laub, 1999, p. 25).

Up to now, research on workplace emotions and turnover, carried out within the sales context, has analyzed a single sales organization (which gives rise to external validity problems) and an aggregate sample obtained by mixing heterogeneous sales populations (which involves the risk of obtaining inaccurate and restricted results). In both these cases, the fact that B2B selling jobs are not the same across the board (Moncrief, 1986) is ignored. As Avila and Fern (1986) affirm, different sales positions are characterized by diverse situational and environmental constrains, which implies that salesperson objectives, roles, and activities vary largely across the various selling situations (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006). In this respect, previous research has underlined the importance of controlling the type of selling situation when analyzing interrelationships among salesperson characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985).

In short, the main purpose of this study is to contribute towards existing literature by exploring the influence of resilience and EI on both emotional exhaustion and turnover, and on WFC, EI, and turnover, respectively, while controlling the type of selling situation (see Fig. 1). As we are aware that combining diverse sales populations into an aggregate sample can give rise to inaccurate conclusions, the initial model proposed is compared with a second model in which the selling situation acts as a moderating variable in the relationships proposed. In addition, an analysis of perceived servant leadership as a moderator of the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover is performed in order to provide new insights into the relationship between this core dimension of the burnout syndrome and sales turnover.

The proposed model does not represent a comprehensive model of all the antecedents of salesperson turnover intention, but instead focuses on the influence of a series of affective variables on salesperson turnover intention, while analyzing the interrelationships between them. These affective variables are: emotional skills (EI and resilience, which have been identified as important in a sales context but scarcely analyzed until now); emotional state (emotional exhaustion, which is a key dimension of burnout, especially when it comes to salespeople); work–family conflict; and the perception of supervisor behavior (i.e. service leadership) in terms of importance placed on human capital and consideration shown towards others.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

2.1. Resilience

According to Jackson, Firtko, and Edenborough (2007), the development of resilience as a concept began in the 1800s and continues today. However, the majority of resilience studies carried out to date have focused on children and young people (Bonanno, 2004). In organizational literature, an awareness of the benefits of resilience for organizations and employees has recently surfaced through studies on positive dispositions (e.g. Harvey, Blouin, & Stout, 2006), demonstrating that this construct is applicable and related to performance in the workplace (Yousef & Luthans, 2007). Studies that analyze resilience within a sales context are almost non-existent. However, the nature of the sales position itself, and the fact that salespeople tend to be more reliant on their own abilities to manage the challenges facing them and less reliant on external support, highlight the importance of resilience to the work of salespeople. In this respect, the study conducted by Krush, Krishnakumar, Agnihotri, and Trainor (2012) confirmed that this variable is positively related to adapted sales and salesperson motivational control, and negatively related to salesperson anxiety levels.

Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from hardship, recover, emerge stronger than before, and develop social, academic, and vocational skills despite having been subjected to severe physiological stress[5] (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Considered as one of the dimensions of psychological capital (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008), resilience has

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[4] Psychological capital is defined as an individual's positive psychological state of development and is characterized by: (a) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the effort required to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) positively regarding success now and in the future (optimism); (3) trying to reach goals in order to succeed (hope); and (4) when affected by problems and adversity, carrying on and bouncing back and possibly even beyond (resilience) in order to achieve success (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007, p. 3).

[5] Resilience is closely related to the concept of ego strength (Block & Block, 1980). In fact, characteristics such as hardiness, competence, resilience, and ego strength have sometimes been used synonymously to characterize individuals who have the abstruse ability to endure stress without allowing it to permanently affect them (Kolar, 2011). In this respect, for some authors (Block & Kremen, 1996), the term resilience is considered as modern jargon for what an earlier generation of psychologists labeled ego strength. For others, however, resilience refers to the observed phenomenon of survivorship, a positive psychological capacity to bounce back from adversity (Luthans et al., 2007), and ego strength, like spirituality or work–team cohesion for example, is considered to be one of the factors that contribute to resilience at individual level (Reich, Zautra, & Stuart Hall, 2010). It has also been suggested that resilience includes the personal quality of ego strength (Kadner, 1989), and that resilient individuals possess an internal focus of control (Block & Block, 1980), self-efficacy, and/or ego strength (Casella & Motta, 1990; Markstrom & Marshall, 2007).
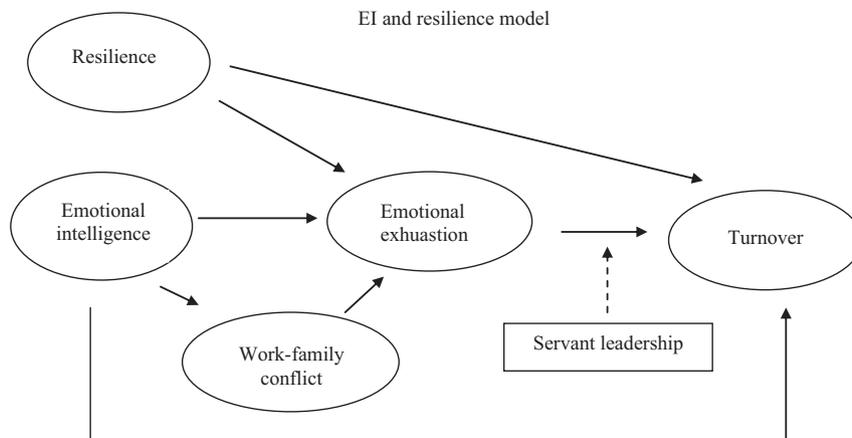
Fig. 1. EI and resilience model.

been confirmed as a different yet related variable to constructs such as hope, optimism, or confidence (Luthans et al., 2006). A sense of recovery and bouncing back despite adversity or change is associated with resilience (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007), suggesting that it is the ability not only to cope with a stressful or challenging situation but also to emerge from that situation victoriously and better equipped for future challenges.

2.1.1. Resilience and emotional exhaustion

Employees who get emotionally exhausted experience "a lack of energy and a feeling that their emotional resources have been used up" (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, p. 623). Emotional exhaustion, defined as the extent to which employees feel emotionally overwhelmed and drained by their work (Leiter & Maslach, 1988), is considered as the core dimension of the general burnout construct. Emotional exhaustion has been identified as being particularly common in work environments where contact with other people constitutes a significant part of the job (e.g. sales environments). In this respect, when examining salesperson burnout, researchers have primarily focused on emotional exhaustion versus depersonalization and personal accomplishment (e.g. Jaramillo, Mulki, & Locander, 2006; Rutherford, Park, & Han, 2011).

Emotional exhaustion is often identified as a response to organizational factors. However, environmental factors are only relevant to the extent to which individuals are able to express their stress levels. In this respect, it has been suggested that certain individuals are better at adapting to stressful situations and restoring their original levels of wellbeing (Piedmont, 1993). Resilience promotes the recognition and acknowledgment of the destructive impact that overwhelming events (even positive ones) can have, allowing the affected individual the time, energy, and resources required to recover, bounce back, and return to a balanced emotional state (Yousef & Luthans, 2007).

People with low levels of resilience show less emotional stability when faced with problems (Bonanno, Papa, & O'neill, 2001), are less flexible when it comes to change, and are less open to new experiences (Fredrickson, 2004). Within an organizational setting, it has been confirmed that people showing signs of emotional exhaustion are more emotionally unstable and less resilient (León García-Inquierdo et al., 2009). Similar findings were obtained for the general burnout construct (Carvalho Menezes De Lucena, Fernández Calvo, Hernández Martín, Ramos Campos, & Contador Castillo, 2006; Edward, 2005). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1. Salesperson resilience negatively influences salesperson emotional exhaustion.

2.1.2. Resilience and turnover intention

Salesperson turnover has been extensively researched in sales literature. Managers grow anxious when successful salespeople resign, as this leaves the market wide open to competitors (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2013). As regards the relationship between resilience and turnover intention, there is evidence to suggest that highly resilient employees are very committed to their job, while less resilient employees generally adopt a more indifferent attitude towards their work (Carvalho Menezes De Lucena et al., 2006).

Resilience contributes towards reducing employee vulnerability to job-related risks such as occupational exhaustion. It proactively allows for the use of setbacks as "springboards" or opportunities for growth, development, and future progress (Yousef & Luthans, 2007). As Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, and Conway (2009) state, resilience is partly effective by generating positive emotions. When faced with stress, individuals with high levels of resilience experience more positive emotions than their less resilient peers (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Essentially, resilient people frequently use humor as a coping strategy (Wolin & Wolin, 1993) and tend to generate humor under stressful circumstances (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Having positive emotions explains a resilient individual's greater ability to bounce back from hardship and stress, avoid depression, and continue to move forward (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). People who experience frequent positive emotions are more satisfied not only because they enjoy themselves but also because they have built resources to help them deal with many of life's challenges. A study by Cohn et al. (2009) concluded that life satisfaction was related to positive emotions but ultimately depended on an increase in resilience. Resilience can thus lead to more subjective assessments of happiness and well-being, which include aspects such as job satisfaction and job engagement. Both job satisfaction and job engagement are predictors of organizational commitment (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Fu, Deshpande, & Zhao, 2011). This feeling of greater commitment to the organization would discourage resilient individuals from leaving. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H2. Salesperson resilience negatively influences salesperson propensity to leave.

2.2. Emotional intelligence

EI is defined as a type of social intelligence involving the ability to control one's own emotions, as well as those of others, in order to separate emotions and use them to guide actions and feelings (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). The following four abilities make up this construct:

(a) perceiving emotions: the ability to detect and decipher emotions in faces, pictures, voices, and cultural artifacts, including the ability to identify one's own emotions; (b) using emotions: the ability to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities, such as thinking and problem solving; (c) understanding emotions: the ability to comprehend emotional language and appreciate the complex relationships involved in emotions; and (d) managing emotions: the ability to regulate emotions in both oneself and others.

EI is considered to be a skill possessed by successful leaders of organizations and it has been shown that employees with greater levels of EI achieve greater teamwork success (Farh, Chien, Myeong-Gu, & Tesluk, 2012) and perform better at work (O'Boyle et al., 2011). In a sales context, EI has been proposed as a key factor in achieving successful sales (Ingram, Laforge, Locander, Mackenzie, & Podsakoff, 2005; Shepherd, Lassk, & Ridnour, 2003). However, few studies have been carried out on EI in relation to the management of salespeople. Two noteworthy exceptions are the work of Kidwell et al. (2011), which confirms the influence of EI on sales performance and customer relationships, and the work of Rozell, Pettijohn, and Parker (2004), which provides evidence of a relationship between EI and customer-orientated sales.

2.2.1. EI, WFC, and emotional exhaustion

WFC is defined as a form of inter-role conflict where the demands created by the job interfere with carrying out family-related responsibilities (Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, & Boles, 2004). Although organizations can be blamed for WFC, employees are partly responsible for establishing their own work–life balance. In this respect, it has been suggested that high EI prevents WFC from the onset as it helps employees to recognize the degree to which their family plays an emotional role for them and gives them an insight into how these emotions should be managed. As regards conflict management, it has been proven that employees with high EI levels tend to show lower levels of conflict and higher levels of enthusiasm when it comes to creating and innovating (Suliman & Shaikh, 2007).

The ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions is an integral part of EI; thus, it seems that people with more EI should experience less WFC (Lenaghan, Buda, & Eisner, 2007). In this respect, organizational literature has confirmed that more emotionally intelligent people are capable of achieving a better work–life balance and preventing family issues from interfering with their working life (Carmeli, 2003). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H3. Salesperson EI negatively influences WFC.

Emotional exhaustion is a type of occupational stress that arises when individuals are faced with obligations that consume all their time and energy (Boles et al., 1997). Emotional exhaustion is recognized as the main dimension of burnout. It is considered the first stage of the burnout process and a factor that can be regulated by management in order to minimize the harmful effects of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

Employees with elevated levels of EI tend to have superior interpersonal skills and can better tolerate emotional pressure, which makes them less likely to experience emotional exhaustion and burnout (Van Rooy & Visweswaran, 2004). EI enables individuals to regulate their emotions and quickly and efficiently process emotive information (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). In this regard, emotionally intelligent salespeople are able to choose appropriate strategies to help them deal with frustration and respond more efficiently to the emotional demands of various situations. As indicated by Carmeli (2003), emotionally intelligent employees avoid dysfunctional and angry emotions that would result in burnout. Huang, Chan, Lam, and Nan (2010) confirmed this by demonstrating that certain dimensions of EI reduced the burnout suffered by service workers. In relation to emotional exhaustion, research carried out within an organizational setting confirmed a negative relationship between EI and emotional exhaustion (Lee & Ok, 2012; Liu & Zhang, 2009). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H4. Salesperson EI negatively influences salesperson emotional exhaustion.

Individuals who suffer WFC are subject to emotional exhaustion as a result of conflict between work and family domains, which is likely to cause a drain on their emotional and physical energy (Golden, 2012). High levels of WFC imply excessive and continuous work and family demands and are therefore very demanding on individual coping strategies (Lewig, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, & Metzer, 2007). Both excessive demands and the overconsumption of resources in order to meet incompatible work and family obligations are strongly related to exhaustion levels (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Organizational and sales literature supports this argument since it confirms that WFC is an antecedent of emotional exhaustion (Boles et al., 1997; Karatepe & Tekinkus, 2006; Zhang, Griffeth, & Fried, 2012). Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H5. Salesperson WFC positively influences salesperson emotional exhaustion.

2.2.2. EI and turnover

EI can significantly reduce employee turnover intention because it enables individuals to better control their emotions. People with a great deal of EI are more capable of ending up in a positive affective state since they are aware of emotional determinants and can develop strategies to help them overcome negative emotional states. Employee EI would be beneficial when it comes to emotional information that tends to emerge within the workplace (Krishnakumar, 2008). This information is first perceived as positive or negative according to the specific workplace event. The perceived emotion is assimilated into the employee's thoughts and this further affects the formation of turnover intention. People with higher levels of EI are able to prioritize their thoughts well, adjust them to fluctuating emotions within the workplace, and ultimately procure lower levels of turnover intention.

Salespeople with increased EI are more likely to see the positive side of things by shaping perceptions of their environment in order to take advantage of and regulate their emotions, and they are less likely to leave their job. Several studies have empirically supported this finding in organizational settings (Carmeli, 2003; Jang & George, 2011). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H6. Salesperson EI negatively influences salesperson propensity to leave.

2.2.3. Emotional exhaustion and turnover

Emotionally exhausted individuals attempt to minimize a further loss of resources and, when unsuccessful, they engage in withdrawal coping mechanisms (Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2002). Such employee withdrawal may take a number of forms. From an organizational perspective, one of these forms is increased turnover intention (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). A growing mass of research advocates that emotional exhaustion is directly related to propensity to leave (Boles et al., 1997; Jaramillo et al., 2006; Rutherford, Wei, Park, & Hur, 2012; Rutherford et al., 2011). Thus, the following relationship is hypothesized:

H7. Salesperson emotional exhaustion is positively related to salesperson propensity to leave.

2.3. Servant leadership

The term *servant leadership* was introduced by Greenleaf (1970) to denote a kind of leadership that is centered on creating opportunities for subordinates to progress within the organization. Organizations currently prioritize innovation and employee wellbeing, and consider leadership a

key factor in shaping committed members of staff and prosperous organizations (Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009). In recent years, the importance of human capital in leadership has also been recognized within a sales context, since it contributes towards the creation of a positive, less stressful working environment, greater job satisfaction, and more organizational commitment (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009).

The importance of consideration towards others in leadership positions has been recognized by salespeople themselves since they define the most competent sales managers as those that create a working environment characterized by open communication and a concern for employee morals, beliefs, and professional growth (Deeter-Schmelz, Goebel, & Kennedy, 2008). In this respect, leadership based on ethical and caring behaviors, such as service leadership, is especially important (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

There is evidence to suggest that service leadership contributes towards the creation of a positive organizational environment in which salespeople develop feelings of commitment and loyalty towards the organization (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Moreover, service leaders are modest and sincere, and act as examples to be followed in terms of behavior since they strive for a common good (Van Dierendonck, 2011). As Jaramillo et al. (2009) indicate, servant leadership behaviors are likely to be emulated by salespeople; thus, a servant leader's concern for others is likely to give rise to salespeople with a greater desire to serve both customers and the organization itself. As a result, salespeople that work under the supervision of service leaders will show more commitment towards their organization either by showing loyalty towards their service leaders as thanks for the treatment they have received or by following their service leader's example and this, in turn, will mitigate the effect of emotional exhaustion on salesperson intention to leave. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H8. The effect of emotional exhaustion on intention to leave the organization is weaker for salespeople that perceive their supervisors to demonstrate a high level of service leadership. In contrast, the effect of emotional exhaustion on intention to leave the organization is stronger for salespeople that perceive their supervisors to demonstrate low levels of service leadership.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and survey procedure

The participants included in this research paper comprised 209 industrial salespeople working at 105 Spanish enterprises belonging to 15 different industries (see Table 1). The four industries with the highest participation rate were: wholesale and retail (21.5%); motor-vehicle sale, maintenance, and repair (20%); food and beverages (13.4%); and construction (10%). The average sales experience of the respondents was 11.4 years. Males accounted for 73.2% of the sample and females accounted for 26.8%. The mean age of the respondents was 39 and their mean organizational tenure was 7.7 years.

The study population used to select the sample comprised a list of enterprises belonging to three industrial parks in the most populated municipalities of Galicia (Coruña, Vigo and Santiago de Compostela), the Spanish region in which the study was performed. Out of the total number of enterprises initially included in the list (a total of 1056), 126 were considered adequate. Sample inclusion was based on the following criteria: (1) firms were commercially recognized and had been in business for at least 10 years, (2) the firm had full control over its "own" sales force for at least 5 years, (3) salespeople performed sales activities described in Moncrief (1986) and Marshall, Moncrief, and Lassk (1999), and (4) salespeople served business customers. Confirmation of the first condition is based on an analysis census data from the local chamber of commerce. The second and third conditions were verified by means of phone calls to the participating companies. In addition, we verified that the selected firms represented various industries and sectors. The 15 industries ultimately included in the sample reflect the particular characteristics of Galicia's industrial and commercial fabric. Finally, variability in relation to salesperson age, tenure, and gender was ensured. The data collection process initially involved contact by telephone with the 126 enterprises. During this first point of contact, the Sales Director and/or Human Resources Director of each enterprise was furnished with information on the study and asked to participate therein; 21 out of the 126 enterprises initially contacted refused to partake in the study and 105 agreed to take part. Thanks to the information provided by these 105 enterprises, 213 salespeople were contacted by telephone and email in order to arrange a suitable date on which to conduct the questionnaires via a personal interview. In the end, 210 personal interviews were carried out since three salespeople refused to cooperate at the last minute. One of the final questionnaires was discarded since it included evident perfunctory responses. As a result, the final sample was made up of 209 salespeople belonging to 105 enterprises.

The survey used in this study was originally written in English and then it underwent a back-translation process. It was first translated into Spanish and then translated back into English. This translation procedure complies with the framework established by Brislin (1986) regarding the equivalence of language translations. Once the translation process had been completed, all the measurement items were pre-tested following two steps. Firstly, several experts were asked to examine the questionnaire in order to identify any questions that may have been confusing or difficult to answer; and secondly, a pre-test was carried out by applying the questionnaire to ten pairs of supervisors and salespeople belonging to ten enterprises. These tests gave rise to certain changes aimed at improving the wording and understanding of various items included in the questionnaire.

We tested for potential demographic differences with respect to the construct measures in our model. Following Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006), summative scale values were calculated using the constructs and these values were compared in one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) models. No significant differences were observed in any of the model constructs for gender or age.

3.2. Measures and measure assessment

Appendix A Table A1 describes the constructs used in this study. All the indicators of the self-report scales used a seven-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). All the dependent and

Table 1
Participation rates according to the industry.

Sector	Firms participating in the study	Questionnaires received	%
Advertising	6	10	4.8
Agricultural products	1	2	1
Banking	4	7	3.3
Computer materials manufacture	3	6	2.9
Construction	13	21	10
Editing, graphic arts	6	11	5.3
Food and beverages	13	28	13.4
Insurance	6	14	6.7
Metallurgical industry	3	6	2.9
Motor-vehicle sale, maintenance, and repair	21	42	20
Optics	1	3	1.4
Security	1	2	1
Telecommunications	3	6	2.9
Transport	2	6	2.9
Wholesale and retail	22	45	21.5
Total	105	209	100

independent variables were measured using information provided by the salespeople.[6]

3.2.1. Emotional intelligence

We assessed salesperson EI using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002). The WLEIS is a short 16-item instrument based on the Mayer and Salovey (1993) 4-branch survey, which has been successfully used in previous research (e.g. Deshpande & Joseph, 2009; Huang et al., 2010; Kim, Cable, Kim, & Wang, 2009). In line with Law et al. (2004), we considered EI as a second-order factor with four dimensions: self-emotions appraisal, regulation of emotion, use of emotion, and other–emotion appraisal. Cronbach's alpha for the self-emotions appraisal dimension was 0.80; for the other–emotion appraisal dimension it was 0.79; for the use of emotion dimension it was 0.80; and for the regulation of emotion dimension it was 0.79.

3.2.2. Resilience

Following Luthans et al.'s (2006) recommendation, we considered resilience as a one-dimensional construct, assessing salesperson perceived resilience with the six items included in the Brief Resilience Scale developed by Smith et al. (2008). In order to refine the scales, we eliminated any items with a total correlation of less than 0.3 (i.e. the commonly accepted minimum value) (Nurosis, 1993) or any items whose elimination would lead to the obtainment of a substantially higher alpha. After following these criteria, three items from the measurement scale of resilience were eliminated. Cronbach's alpha for the three-item final scale was 0.76.

3.2.3. Work–family conflict

WFC was measured using three items adapted by Netemeyer et al. (2004) from the original scale developed by Netemeyer, Boles, and Mcmurrian (1996). Cronbach's alpha was 0.91.

3.2.4. Emotional exhaustion

We measured emotional exhaustion using four items from a scale developed by Kreitner and Kinicki (1992), adapted by Rutherford, Boles, Hamwi, Madupalli, and Rutherford (2009). Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

3.2.5. Turnover intention

Turnover intention was measured using three items adapted from a scale developed by Fournier et al. (2010). We decided to use this scale because of its psychometric properties and because turnover has been significantly linked to intention to leave (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006). Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

3.2.6. Servant leadership

Five items from Ehrhart (2004) were used to measure salesperson perception of servant leadership. The five items with the highest factor loadings reported in Jaramillo et al.'s (2009) study were selected. Cronbach's alpha was 0.91.

We used CFA[7] to assess the properties of the resulting latent variables (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The parameters of the latent construct CFA model were estimated using the maximum likelihood method AMOS 20.0. The results suggest a good fit: $\chi^2 = 744.39$; d.f. $= 505$; $\chi^2/d.f. = 1.474$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA $= .048$; GFI $= 0.83$; TLI $= 0.94$; CFI $= 0.94$; IFI $= 0.94$.

In relation to the *convergent validity* of the scales, all indicator loadings were significant ($p < 0.01$), thus providing evidence of validity in favor of the items used to represent the constructs. As shown in Table A1, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were both above 0.7, which provides evidence of adequate reliability (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). In addition, average variance extracted statistics were above the desirable value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In order to assess *discriminant validity*, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) approach was used. The confidence intervals for the correlation between pairs of variables were calculated. Given that none of the intervals included the value of one, discriminant validity between the constructs was assumed to exist. Additionally, we compared the AVE for each construct with the shared variance between latent variables. The AVE for each construct was greater than its shared variance with any other construct. The means, standard deviations, alphas, and correlations of all of the variables in the study are provided in Table 2.

3.3. Common method variance

Researchers have shown that part of the shared variance of construct relationships can be explained by using the same method. Common method bias threatens the validity of research findings because it can either exaggerate or understate correlations. In order to minimize the possibility of common method bias among the constructs, we applied procedural methods (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) consisting of positioning the items pertaining to the dependent and independent variables in different sections of the survey and guaranteeing the survey participants that their responses would remain anonymous. The use of personal interviews to obtain information from the respondents also contributed towards minimizing the risk of common method bias.

Harman's one-factor test was conducted in order to determine the extent of method variance in the data. Results from a single factor CFA model were compared with findings from a CFA model where item responses were related to their respective constructs. Results showed that the single-factor model did not fit the data well ($\chi^2/d.f. = 4.033$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA $= 0.12$; AGFI $= 0.52$; GFI $= 0.57$; TLI $= 0.58$; CFI $= 0.61$; IFI $= 0.62$). In fact, the one-factor model was significantly worse than the measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1312.97$ d.f. $= 15$ vs. critical $\chi^2 = 24.99$ at $p = 0.05$).

In addition, the variance attributed to the method was controlled using Lindell and Whitney (2001). This approach, which consists of adding a marker variable linked to all the exogenous variables in a model, has been previously used in sales research (e.g. Fang, Palmatier, & Evans, 2008; Jaramillo et al., 2009). The marker variable is used to extract any variance that could be attributed to common method variance. Exemplification tactics (Bolino & Turnley, 1999) served as marker variables since they were not related to any of the variables presented in the model. The items used were: "You stay at work late so people know you are hardworking"; "You try to appear busy, even at times when there is not much to do"; "You arrive at work early in order to appear dedicated"; and "You go to the office at night or at the weekend in order to show that you are dedicated". The coefficient alpha for the scale was 0.87. As shown below, the results of testing the hypotheses did not change when CMV was controlled.

Finally, CMV was also controlled by estimating a structural model that included a method factor (e.g., Homburg, Muller, & Klarmann, 2011). This procedure is highly conservative and "a strong indication" that model findings "are not merely due to the use of the same data source for all constructs" (Homburg, Klarmann, & Schmitt, 2010, pp. 206–207). All survey items in the structural model were allowed to load on: 1) the respective construct, 2) the method factor, and 3) a random error estimate. This method partitions the variance of survey responses into its components (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Results indicate that all hypothesized path estimates remained significant after controlling from the common methods factor.

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[6] Self-reports are appropriate here as all the constructs analyzed in this study are perceptions of salespeople since they can best appreciate aspects such as extent of work interference with family life, degree of emotional exhaustion, or level of supervisor servant leadership perceived. Moreover, most previous studies have also used self-reports to examine the variables included in our model.

[7] In order to avoid problems due to the possible non-fulfillment of the conditions of multivariate normality, the bootstrapping technique was used.

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables.

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. EI	5.72	0.68	(0.90)					
2. Resilience	3.49	1.29	0.21**	(0.76)				
3. Emotional exhaustion	3.91	1.47	−0.34**	−0.41**	(0.86)			
4. WFC	3.47	1.62	−0.30**	−0.15*	0.36**	(0.91)		
5. Turnover	2.86	1.80	−0.44**	−0.35**	0.55**	0.26**	(0.94)	
6. Servant leadership	5.45	1.09	0.45**	0.03	−0.30**	−0.27**	−0.34**	(0.91)

Note: Alphas appear diagonally.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

3.4. Hypothesis testing

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothetical relationships. SEM is useful here as it enables several hypothetical relationships to be tested simultaneously, provides an indication of the match between the hypothetical model and the actual data, and allows for the assessment of alternative models. The maximum likelihood structural estimates of the hypothetical model are presented in Fig. 2. The proposed structural model had the following levels of fit: $\chi^2 = 530.57$; d.f. = 362; p = <0.01; χ^2/d.f. = 1.46; RMSEA = 0.04; GFI = 0.85; TLI = 0.94; CFI = 0.95; IFI = 0.95. The structural model had acceptable levels of fit in terms of sample size and model complexity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The squared multiple correlations were 0.123 for WFC, 0.30 for emotional exhaustion, and 0.37 for turnover.

We also used a second structural model containing exemplification tactics in order to control CMV. As a result, the fit of the model deteriorated, χ^2 increased by 178, and the degrees of freedom increased by 117. However, as shown in Fig. 2, the CMV control did not alter the results of the hypothesis tests and the marker variable did not have a significant effect on the endogenous variables.

As expected, salesperson resilience was negatively related to emotional exhaustion and turnover. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. We predicted a direct impact of salesperson EI on emotional exhaustion, WFC, and turnover. EI was negatively related to these three variables, thereby supporting H3, H4, and H6. In addition, as hypothesized, WFC was positively related to salesperson emotional exhaustion, thus supporting H5. Finally, as predicted, salesperson emotional exhaustion

was positively related to salesperson propensity to leave, thereby confirming H7.
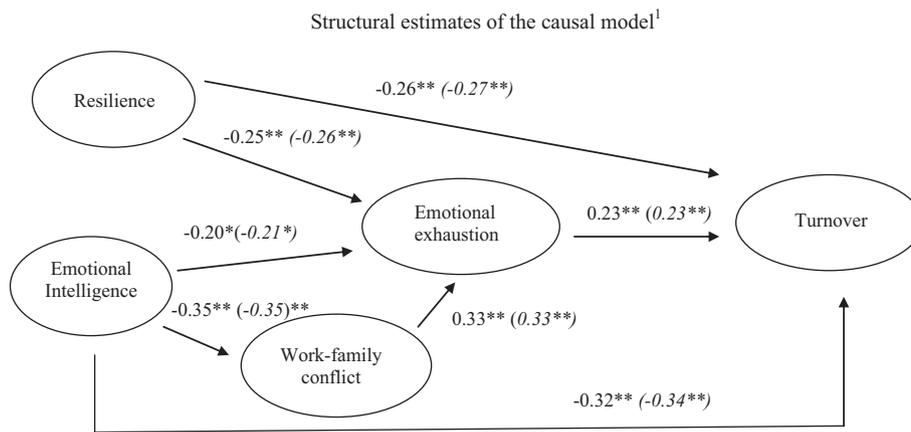
3.4.1. Moderating effects of servant leadership

We used multi-group analysis within AMOS 20.0 to assess the moderating effect of servant leadership on the structural model. Before conducting the analysis, however, we created two separate samples: a relatively "high" (N = 98) and "low" (N = 111) perception of servant leadership sample based on median splitting of the data according to the servant leadership moderating variable. Results of the multi-group analysis are shown in Table 3.

For salespeople that work under the supervision of servant leaders, emotional exhaustion does not have a significant influence on their intention to leave the organization. However, for salespeople whose leaders exercise less service leadership, emotional exhaustion has a positive and significant influence on intention to leave. As a result, service leadership not only contributes towards reducing the effect of emotional exhaustion on intention to leave, as proposed in H8, but can also be a deciding factor in an emotionally exhausted salesperson's choice to leave their organization.

3.5. Type of selling situation

The objectives, activities, and roles of salespeople differ greatly based on the particular selling situation in which they find themselves (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006). As suggested by Moncrief (1986), the diversity of selling jobs can lead each type of salesperson to respond

Structural estimates of the causal model[1]

Resilience → Turnover: -0.26** (-0.27**)
Resilience → Emotional exhaustion: -0.25** (-0.26**)
Emotional Intelligence → Emotional exhaustion: -0.20*(-0.21*)
Emotional exhaustion → Turnover: 0.23** (0.23**)
Emotional Intelligence → Work-family conflict: -0.35** (-0.35)**
Work-family conflict → Emotional exhaustion: 0.33** (0.33**)
Emotional Intelligence → Turnover: -0.32** (-0.34**)

Notes: [1] *Values in parentheses correspond to a model that controls for CMV.*
*Significance level: ** p < 0.01; *p<0.05*

Fig. 2. Structural estimates of the causal model.[1]. Notes: [1]Values in parentheses correspond to a model that controls for CMV. Significance level: **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

Table 3
Estimated coefficients in the multi-group analysis.

Path	Estimated parameters		Test of χ^2 differences	Moderating effect (99%)
	High servant leadership	Low servant leadership		
Emotional exhaustion ➜ turnover	0.021 (0.221)	0.604 (4.248)[*]	$\chi^2 (1) = 11.57$ p = <0.01	Yes

Note: t-Values are in brackets.
  [*] p < 0.01.

differently to organizational climate, as well as to other factors that might influence their performance, satisfaction, and motivation.

In view of the practical and theoretical importance of analyzing how different types of salespeople behave and feel, and of earlier studies highlighting potential problems that may arise when combining different selling situations into a single sample (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006), we developed a multi-group analysis to test for invariance across the various sales jobs in the relationships previously confirmed. We categorized the different sales jobs used in our sample into three groups: trade seller (n = 80); technical seller (n = 69); and consultative and intangible product seller (n = 60). After categorizing the sales jobs, we applied multi-group structural equation modeling and estimated the conceptual model simultaneously for each type of selling situation. Once full metric invariance had been established (all the loadings estimates were equal across the three groups) and in order to detect a moderating effect on the type of selling situation, we only allowed the hypothetical structural paths to vary across the three sub-samples and compared the match of this model with one that we had constrained in order to make the structural paths equal across all three sub-samples. The resulting chi-square difference was significant ($\chi^2 = 31.887$ and 16 degrees of freedom; p = 0.010), implying that some structural paths were different across the three sub-samples. To be specific, we found that the selling situation had a moderating effect on the relationship between EI and WFC ($\chi^2 = 8.628$ and 2 d.f.; p = 0.013). The impact of EI on WFC was greater for the technical seller group ($\beta = -0.503$; p < 0.05) than it was for the trade seller group ($\beta = -0.445$; p < 0.05). We speculate that this difference can be attributed to the greater complexity and novelty that characterizes technical sales. Salespeople in the technical seller group are responsible for selling high-end machinery and customized technical capital equipment (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006). Technical sales require finding solutions to complex business problems and extensive interactions with customers over lengthy sales cycles (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006). In sales jobs with higher demands, emotional intelligence is likely more important in helping salespeople avoid the spillover effect that strain originating at work has on employees' relationships with their families.

With a view to detecting any possible differences among the three groups with regard to WFC perception, we carried out an ANOVA using the summative scale values calculated using the WFC construct (F = 4.350; p = 0.014). The analysis revealed that the group of consultative and intangible products sellers perceived less WFC (mean = 3.07; st.dev. = 1.62); followed by the group of trade sellers (mean = 3.49; st.dev. = 1.66); and finally the group of technical sellers (mean = 3.94; st.dev. = 1.72).

4. Conclusions

Our findings highlight the importance of promoting the development of emotional skills as a way of alleviating work-related stress and reducing salesperson intention to leave the organization, which is of particular importance in this day and age. Sales jobs are known to be stressful because salespeople are often faced with conflicting and ambiguous situations while, at the same time, trying to meet increasingly demanding customer needs (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009). However, in the current competitive and strenuous sales environment, modern-day salespeople are obliged to deliver more using

fewer resources, and are thus likely to experience work overload. In addition, interpersonal conflict may be considerably more prevalent than is presently recognized (Jaramillo, Mulki & Boles, 2011). In relation to turnover, the retention of sales talent has been identified in recent literature as one of the most enduring and perplexing problems currently facing managers (Boles et al., 2012), which suggests that the loss of a high performer would constitute a serious setback for any organization, but especially for a sales organization (DeConinck, 2011).

This paper responds to O'Boyle et al.'s (2011) call for research investigating the effects of EI in jobs requiring major emotional strength and frequent customer interaction such as sales jobs. In particular, this study expands upon existing sales literature on EI by empirically demonstrating the importance thereof in reducing WFC, emotional exhaustion, and intention to leave. Retaining talented and experienced salespeople has become a chief concern for many sales organizations. When many employees leave a sales organization, it must contend with selection-process and training costs, as well as costs associated with leaving the market wide open to competitors (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011). A ten-year study (1996–2006) of 3700 publicly traded US enterprises found that salesperson turnover averaged an annual 39% and turnover costs averaged three to four times salesperson annual remuneration (Hrehocik, 2007). Differences exist among the various industries, e.g., voluntary turnover reaches over 15% among exclusive pharmaceutical product salespeople and runs as high as 61% at new car dealerships and special-product retailers (Darmon, 2008; Joetan & Kleiner, 2004).

Hiring salespeople with a great deal of EI may have a positive impact on the extent to which an organization succeeds in holding onto its valuable workforce. Organizational literature has recognized that by helping employees to effectively deal with the inherent emotions of juggling work and family life, employers also benefit. Organizations that offer suitable training in areas related to EI ultimately attain more committed employees (Lenaghan et al., 2007). In order to reduce organizational WFC, emotional exhaustion, and turnover, organizations should gear their selection processes towards recruiting and hiring salespeople who exhibit emotionally intelligent behaviors. Since individual EI levels can be improved through training (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003), sales organizations may also consider implementing EI training or development programs to foster salespeople's emotional competence. As Gignac, Harmer, Jennings, Halas, and Palmer (2012) demonstrated, EI training programs could be particularly effective at increasing EI within a group of salespeople and improving sales performance.

This study's findings demonstrate the positive influence of salesperson resilience on reducing emotional exhaustion and intention to leave. This is an important contribution to the sales literature since there are very few studies that have analyzed this construct. According to Luthans et al. (2006), resilience is more of a state than a characteristic and, therefore, it is modifiable. In this respect, it has been suggested that resilience can be developed through asset-, risk- and process-focused strategies adapted to the workplace (Masten & Reed, 2002). Bonanno (2005) also maintains that state-like resilience can be developed through training.

Worthy of note in this respect is the work of Luthans et al. (2008), which empirically demonstrates that resilience can be developed through a short web-based training program, which is an inexpensive, practical, and potentially effective means of delivering information. In addition, it has been suggested that individuals can develop and strengthen personal resilience through self-developing strategies such

as building positive, nurturing, and professional relationships and networks, maintaining optimism, or becoming more insightful (Jackson et al., 2007). According to literature on building family strength (e.g. Darbyshire & Jackson, 2005), resilience can be applied to building the strength of salespeople on both an individual and a work-groups basis. In fact, when used in relation to families, resilience enables a family to carry on in spite of difficulties (Silberberg, 2001).

In relation to the moderating role of perceived servant leadership on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention, it was confirmed that servant leadership might be particularly effective in instilling a genuine incentive to serve the organization. Servant leaders are committed to developing long-term relationships with their followers and to building a sense of community. They cultivate an honest and fair working environment and are receptive to the personal concerns of their subordinates. Subordinates are likely to imitate the behavior of servant leaders in their interactions with one another, thus strengthening the sense of mutual respect and support among members of sales organizations. This sense of group cohesiveness could palliate the negative consequences of emotional exhaustion and, in turn, increase commitment to the organization and reduce intention to leave. In short, servant leadership not only contributes towards reducing the effect of emotional exhaustion on intention to leave, but can also be a deciding factor in an emotionally exhausted salesperson's choice to leave their organization.

This study also confirms the importance of acknowledging that not all B2B selling jobs are the same since the results thereof indicate that type of sales situation moderates the influence of EI on WFC. To be specific, EI does not appear to reduce the WFC of consultative salespeople or sellers of intangible products such as insurance agents or computer software salespeople. These findings confirm that researchers should be careful when generalizing about sales positions. In addition, sales managers supervising different sales forces should focus their attention on different issues when it comes to, for example, contributing towards reducing salesperson WFC.

5. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study is of a cross-sectional nature. Data were collected at one point in time, making it difficult to arrive at any conclusions regarding the causal nature of the relationship examined in this study (Bobko & Stone-Romero, 1998). In addition, and although actual turnover is related to intention to leave, it would be useful to test the model using objective measures of turnover. Moreover, the model constructs were assessed with self-reported measures and, therefore, future research using dyadic or triadic data are warranted. Concerning the composition of the sample and although efforts were made to include different enterprises belonging to various industries in the sample analyzed, finally, certain industries were represented only by one enterprise (e.g. optics).

Finally, we focused on moderated relationships between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention, but other moderated relationships may well exist. In this respect, previous research has recognized that individual differences such as personality can also influence emotional exertion. For example, a more optimistic salesperson may respond to negative events more strongly and, therefore, may need to adopt a higher level of emotional exertion at work (Grandey, 2000). It would be interesting to analyze which sales factors, especially organizational support and self-leadership, influence salesperson resilience (see Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Another possible area of interest in relation to future research would be to analyze the nature of the relationship between EI and resilience. Our results support the existence of a positive relationship between these two variables ($r = 0.30$; $p < 0.05$), and recent studies in psychological literature (i.e. Armstrong, Galligan, & Critchley, 2011) have confirmed the importance of EI in predicting psychological resilience against many of life's tough challenges. It would also be interesting to analyze the effect of resilience on salesperson identification with the organization. As a final suggestion, future research should explore the relationship between EI and marketing exchange variables in relation to adaptive selling or self-efficacy.

Appendix A

Table A1
Measurement properties.

Measure	Factor loading[*]	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Emotional intelligence			
Self-emotion appraisal	0.78	0.80	0.84
I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time	0.67		
I have a good understanding of my own emotions	0.83		
I really understand what I feel	0.84		
I always know whether or not I am happy	0.64		
Other–emotion appraisal	0.77	0.79	0.81
I always know what my friends are feeling based on their behavior	0.69		
I am a good observer of others' emotions	0.73		
I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others	0.71		
I have a good understanding of the emotions of those around me	0.74		
Use of emotion	0.81	0.80	0.81
I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them	0.67		
I always tell myself I am a competent person	0.65		
I am a self-motivating person	0.78		
I always encourage myself to try my best	0.77		
Regulation of emotion	0.76	0.79	0.77
I am able to control my temper so that I can handle difficulties rationally	0.73		
I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions	0.76		
I can always calm down quickly after I get very angry	0.60		
I have a lot of control over my emotions	0.62		
Work–family conflict		0.91	0.90
Because of my job, I can't involve myself as much as I would like in maintaining close relationships with my family	0.82		
I often have to miss important family activities because of my job	0.91		
Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands of my job	0.85		
Emotional exhaustion		0.86	0.82
I feel emotionally drained from my work	0.65		

Table A1 (continued)

Measure	Factor loading[*]	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
I feel drained at the end of my working day	0.58		
I feel exhausted when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at work	0.81		
I feel worn out as a result of my job	0.86		
Turnover intentions		0.94	0.94
It is likely that I will actively look for another job next year	0.91		
I often think about quitting	0.93		
I will probably look for another job next year	0.93		
Resilience		0.76	0.75
I have a hard time making it through stressful events (R)	0.85		
It is hard for me to bounce back after something bad happens (R)	0.81		
I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life (R)	0.47		
Servant leadership		0.91	0.90
My department manager spends time to form quality relationships with departmental employees	0.84		
My department manager creates a sense of community among departmental employees	0.82		
My department manager makes the personal development of departmental employees a priority	0.82		
My department manager balances concern for day-to-day details with projections for the future	0.85		
My department manager works hard at finding ways to help others be the best they can be	0.79		

[*] Factor loadings from the measurement model are standardized and significant at p < 0.01.

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