AN EXAMINATION OF SKIP-LEVEL MEETINGS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH

JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

by

Micaela Zebroski

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. George Banks

_____
Dr. Linda Shanock

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Dr. Camille Endacott

ABSTRACT

MICAELA ZEBROSKI. An Examination of Skip-Level Meetings and Job Embeddedness.
(Under the direction of DR. GEORGE BANKS)

A growing body of research documents the importance of studying job embeddedness in order to predict turnover, or conversely, why employees stay at their jobs. However, little is known about how meetings—one of the most time-consuming practices at work—might be related to job embeddedness. Grounded in job embeddedness theory, I examine how the occurrence of a particular type of meeting—skip-level meetings, or meetings with one's supervisor's supervisor, relate to job embeddedness.

The present cross-sectional study examines this relationship along with detailed descriptive information concerning skip-level meetings. Additionally, a moderation analysis was conducted to ascertain the potential moderating effect of discussion content on the skip-level meetings and job embeddedness relationship. The implications of these findings for organizational practices and employee engagement are discussed, emphasizing the role of skip-level meetings in fostering job embeddedness and overall employee well-being.

Keywords: skip-level meetings, job embeddedness, employee perspective

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ANOVA   analysis of variance

FIW   family interfering with work

JE   job embeddedness

WIF   work interfering with family

Chapter 1. An Examination of Skip-Level Meetings and Job-Embeddedness

A growing body of research demonstrates the importance of studying job embeddedness in order to understand retention and turnover of employees (Harris et al., 2001; Mitchell et al., 2001; Jiang et al., 2012; Rubenstein et al., 2018; William Lee et al., 2014). Job embeddedness refers to the forces at work (on-the-job) and life outside of work (off-the-job) that make employees feel enmeshed and consequently decide to stay (Li et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2001). More specifically, factors contributing to their enmeshment are comprised of links (connections to other people), fit (compatibility with the individual's environment), and sacrifice (what that individual would be giving up if they were to quit) (Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Job embeddedness has been important to study for a host of reasons. Apart from its theoretical significance, research has consistently documented that job embeddedness predicts turnover beyond traditional predictors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived availability of other employment opportunities (Jiang et al., 2012; Rubenstein et al., 2018).). In addition, job embeddedness has been shown to predict organizational citizenship and job performance (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Lee et al., 2004). Given all of this, researchers have looked for factors that positively predict job embeddedness. These predictors can be categorized into (1) job- and work-related attitudes and (2) individual difference variables. However, there remains significant gaps in the literature in terms of what types of leadership practices are related to perceptions of job embeddedness.

This study seeks to advance the literature by exploring a particular leadership practice that aligns with theorizing around job embeddedness, and has seldom been studied: skip-level meetings. These can be defined as meetings between employees and their manager's manager (skip-level leader), without the immediate manager being present. Namely, as discussed in detail

below, I proposed that skip-level meetings are positively related to perceived job embeddedness as they serve to activate the three job embeddedness tenants of links, fit, and sacrifice. For links, they provide opportunities to build connections and personalized relationships with people in the organization at a level higher than one's supervisor that would otherwise be inaccessible without skip-level meetings. In terms of fit, they have the potential to allow employees to assess their level of organizational fit by interacting with their skip-level leaders. Lastly, they may provide a unique ability to help employees better understand the costs and benefits associated with staying at the organization given that career advancement is often part of these conversations (sacrifice).

The current study contributes to the meetings and job embeddedness literature in two major ways. First, I explored a topic of research—skip-level meetings—that has not been explored to date and provided a wealth of descriptive data to support future research. Second, I examined the extent to which participating in skip-level meetings is related to job embeddedness—and the conditions under which this relationship may be stronger.

The Concept of Job embeddedness

Born out of studying voluntary turnover, job embeddedness focuses on why people stay at jobs, rather than why people leave. Researchers have found that turnover and job embeddedness are closely related to each other, as job embeddedness has been shown to negatively predict turnover intentions as well as actual turnover (Jiang et al, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001). In other words, job embeddedness helps reduce turnover intentions and actual turnover. Moreover, researchers found that job embeddedness explained the variance in turnover intentions over other key predictors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived job alternative opportunities (Mitchell et al., 2001). Thus, studying job embeddedness is key to understanding why employees stay. At the time of its inception as a concept, job embeddedness

was theoretically grounded in field theory (Lewin, 1951), referring to the notion that individuals are affected by a "broad constellation of influences" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 7) that compel individuals to stay at their organizations and how they can become stuck as a result of these influences (Young, 2012). Field theory posits that behavior is a product of interdependent life forces (work, family, community, etc.) that compose an individual's psychological field. Essentially, field theory highlights the impact that interpersonal connections and social context have on an individual's cognitions and behaviors (Lewin, 1951; Li et al., 2022). Naturally, job embeddedness fits into field theory in that—at its core—it is a collection of forces on and off the job (Holtom et al., 2006).

Some examples of these forces can be categorized into two major groups: on-the-job and off-the-job. On-the-job factors are influences such as bonds with coworkers, one's fit with the job in terms of qualifications, skills, having one's own values align with that of their organization, and career advancement opportunities. Off-the-job factors include connections to the community, or proximity to one's family or commitments outside of work that are compatible with the demands of the job. Consequently, job embeddedness captures a more holistic view of factors that influence employee retention than studying turnover intentions alone (Holmes et al., 2013; Holtom et al., 2006).

Job embeddedness Theory

Job embeddedness theory proposes three on-the-job and off-the-job forces (tenets) that explain why employees decide to stay and feel enmeshed in their jobs: links, fit, and sacrifice (Holtom et al., 2018; see Figure 1).

Links

Links are the "formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1104). This tenet of job embeddedness theory suggests that when individuals have more links to their organization, they are less likely to leave. Thus, the more ties, the more embedded they are (Mitchell et al., 2001). For example, on-the-job links might include having a "buddy" at one's job, being part of a closely-knit work team, or having mentors at one's organization. As for off-the-job, this may be living in a neighborhood that allows for frequent contact with one's social circle.

Fit

Research suggests that in conjunction with compensation and benefits, individuals need to feel as though they fit in their organization (i.e. mission, values, people) in order to stay (Slavin, 2015). This is often understood as person-organization fit, referring to the "degree of congruence between the organization and the person" (Team, 2015). At the organizational level, it is the "perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1104). For example, an employee may feel as though they fit well into the organization because of the company's demonstrated prioritization of work-life balance, or the company's goals align with one's own (such as working for environmental change). As for off-the-job, fit is concerned with an individual's environment outside of work, such as their neighborhood or culture (e.g., being involved in one's religious home or other community group).

Sacrifice

Lastly, sacrifice is "the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1105). Off-the-job in this case refers to factors such as moving children from their schools or enjoying their current living situation (Mitchell et al., 2001). On-the-job factors, include things like benefits and compensation, time

spent in training and certifications, those who depend on them to do their jobs, and opportunities for career advancement. Evidence has shown that considering the sacrifices of leaving one's job discourages them from leaving (Mobley, 1977; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983; Shaw et al., 1998). While some benefits will be available at different jobs, some are non-transferrable, such as training to do a particular type of role (Mitchell & Lee, 2001. Thus, employees engage in a process of assessing the associated sacrifices of *not* staying at their job (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

Correlates and Predictors of Job embeddedness

Most of the research on job embeddedness has focused on on-the-job embeddedness, rather than off-the-job embeddedness. While there has been some recent attention to the off-the-job element of the theory, it tends to be viewed as less relevant to workplace research. However, a meta-analysis examining job embeddedness demonstrated a negative relationship between both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness and turnover intentions as well as actual, subsequent turnover. They also controlled for job alternatives and job attitudes to demonstrate the strength of this relationship (Jiang et al., 2012). The job embeddedness literature suggests that while on-the-job embeddedness may be perceived as more relevant to studying organizational concepts (such as job attitudes), behaviors and events at work may also be related to off-the-job factors as well.

Given the six dimensions of job embeddedness (links-community, fit-community, sacrifice-community, links-organization, fit-organization, and sacrifice-organization), there are many potential correlates. They generally can be sorted into two broad categories: job/work-related variables and individual difference variables.

Job/Work-Related Variables

Discussed below, research on job embeddedness has generally focused on controlling for job satisfaction, affective commitment, and job alternatives to ensure that job embeddedness

predicts turnover above and beyond these job attitudes. To garner an understanding of what relates to job embeddedness, scholars have also measured other job/work related variables as correlates or predictors of job embeddedness including perceived corporate social responsibility (Ng et al., 2018), pride in work (Nigili & Joseph, 2017), job stress (Fasbender et al., 2019), work family conflict (Karatepe, 2013; Kismono, 2011; Treuren, 2019), number of work teams and committees (Hopson et al., 2018), and whether an employee's organization is public or private (Bellante & Link 1981; Buelens & Van den Broeck 2007; Schneider 1987).

Job and Work Satisfaction. Findings suggest that employees' satisfaction in regard to training and development opportunities, career opportunities, job characteristics (i.e. autonomy and variety of challenges), and satisfaction with supervisor support are significant predictors of perceived job embeddedness (Van Dyk et al., 2013). Furthermore, job satisfaction has been found to be a moderator of the relationship between job embeddedness and unfavorable organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational deviance, interpersonal deviance, and customer-directed deviance) such that when job satisfaction is low, there is a positive link between job embeddedness and these outcomes. However, when job satisfaction is high, there is a negative relationship between job satisfaction and these deviance outcomes (Darrat et al., 2017). In addition, a meta-analysis on job embeddedness found a moderate overall positive correlation between job satisfaction and job embeddedness (Jiang et al., 2012).

Affective Commitment. In the same meta-analysis that measured the correlation between job satisfaction and job embeddedness, the authors also measured the relationship between job embeddedness and affective commitment. Results indicated a moderate positive correlation between the two variables (Jiang et al., 2012).

Perceived Job Alternatives. Perceived job alternatives have also been found to be correlated with job embeddedness in that a higher rating of perceived job alternatives (i.e., an employee feeling as though he or she can find a similar job) is negatively related to job embeddedness. Thus, feeling as though one does *not* have equivalent or similar jobs available to them is related to higher ratings of job embeddedness (Jiang et al., 2012).

Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility. Perceptions of corporate social responsibility have been found to be related to job embeddedness. For example, an experiment demonstrated that participants who envisioned working for an organization that engaged in corporate social responsibility activities reported higher ratings of job embeddedness as well as greater organizational pride. To address the limitations of a sample that is just "envisioning" this scenario—rather than a real experience at work—the researchers conducted field studies and found the same results (Ng et al., 2018).

Pride in Work. Pride in work is a concept that measures how much pride an employee has in performing their work as well as being a member of a given organization. Researchers have demonstrated a significant positive correlation between pride in work and job embeddedness (Nigili & Joseph, 2017).

Job Stress. In terms of job stress, researchers have demonstrated that both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness are negatively correlated with job stress, suggesting that employees who are more embedded report lower levels of job stress (Fasbender et al., 2019). Further, evidence shows that off-the-job embeddedness weakens the positive relationship between job stress and turnover intentions for a sample consisting of nurses. This suggests that those who are more embedded in their communities will be less likely to intend to leave their jobs due to job stress (Fasbender et al., 2019).

Work Family Conflict. Work family conflict can be understood in two parts: work interfering with family (WIF) and/or family interfering with work (FIW) (Kismono, 2011). With that conceptualization, Kismono examined the extent to which on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness were correlated with both WIF and FIW, respectively. Findings demonstrated a significant negative correlation between on-the-job embeddedness and WIF, suggesting that higher levels of job embeddedness were related to lower levels of WIF. In terms of off-the-job embeddedness, there was also a significant negative correlation with FIW. This indicates that participants who have higher levels of off-the-job embeddedness have reduced FIW (Kismono, 2011). It is also possible that job embeddedness can moderate the relationship between work-family conflict and turnover, although the evidence for this is somewhat unclear. One study examined this model and found that the on-the-job link dimension of job embeddedness lessened the relationship between work family conflict and turnover, suggesting that—for example, having a friend at work—will make it less likely for an individual who is experiencing work family conflict to leave their job (Treuren, 2019).

Number of Work Teams and Committees. Given that one of the core aspects of job embeddedness is links (connections), the number of work teams and committees one is a member of may be related to job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001). One study found a significant relationship between job embeddedness and (1) number of work teams, and (2) number of work committees (Hopson et al., 2018). This suggests that employees who are more involved in work groups will be more embedded.

Public Versus Private Organizations. Evidence has also shown that the type of organization—public versus private—can have an impact on job embeddedness. More specifically, results indicated that employees at public organizations reported higher on-the-job

embeddedness as opposed to those at private organizations (Jiang et al., 2012). This is perhaps due to the associated security of working at public organizations, hard-to-come-by benefits such as pensions, and the fact that there tends to be less risk associated with joining public organizations than private organizations (Bellante & Link 1981; Buelens & Van den Broeck 2007; Schneider 1987).

Individual Difference Variables

Research on predictors of job embeddedness document a variety of individual difference variables that significantly correlate with job embeddedness including gender, nationality, and psychological capital (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Mallol et al., 2007; Marsden et al., 1993; Luthans & Jensen, 2005; Larson & Luthans, 2006; Luthans et al., 2007; Oladeji et al., 2018; Schneider 1987, Sun et al., 2011).

Gender. Job embeddedness scholars postulated that women might be more influenced by both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness due to a particular value on social and community-based ties, as opposed to men who tend to be more individualistic at work (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Marsden et al., 1993). Results partially validated this hypothesis—gender served as a moderator (it strengthened the relationship) between on-the-job embeddedness and actual and intended turnover such that the negative relationship was significantly stronger among women than men (Jiang et al., 2012).

Nationality. In the same meta-analysis (Holtom & Darabi, 2018), findings suggested that there may be cultural factors involved. While they tested for a variety of cultural factors, the only significant finding was that in collectivist countries—as opposed to individualistic countries—the relationship between off-the-job embeddedness and turnover intentions was significantly stronger (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). This suggests that in individualist countries, relationships

with others are of less importance than those in collectivist countries in which closer relationships are part of a sense of belongingness (Oyserman et al., 2002).

      Psychological Capital. Rooted in positive psychology, the term "psychological capital" refers to the collection of self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, and optimism (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans et al., 2007). When grouped together as this overall concept of psychological capital, it is found to be predictive of organizationally relevant outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, organizational citizenship, stress, and turnover intentions (Luthans & Jensen, 2005; Larson & Luthans, 2006; Luthans et al., 2007). Thus, job embeddedness researchers evaluated the extent to which psychological capital is related to job embeddedness. Findings indicated that job embeddedness was positively correlated with each aspect of psychological capital (i.e., self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, and optimism), as well as psychological capital as a construct on its own (Sun et al., 2011).

Meetings and Job embeddedness

      Meetings research has received considerable attention (Allen et al., 2021; Bennett et al., 2021; Flinchum et al., 2022; Kreamer et al., 2021; Kreamer & Rogelberg, 2020; Shockley et al., 2021; Standaert et al., 2022). Given the increasing amount of time spent in meetings, this is not a surprise. Conservative research estimates that average employees spend approximately six hours per week in scheduled meetings, while some estimates suggest that executives spend roughly 23 hours per week in scheduled meetings (Rogelberg et al., 2007). In the era of remote work since the COVID-19 pandemic, the hours individuals spend in meetings is on the rise (DeFilippis et al., 2020; Microsoft, 2021), making studying meetings an increasingly salient issue. For example, the most recent Future of Work report by Microsoft shows that time spent in meetings

has increased by 252% (Microsoft, 2021), demonstrating that meetings are occupying more and more of the workday.

Evidence has shown that perceived meeting effectiveness is related to job attitudes and well-being. For example, after controlling for number of meetings attended, country source, gender, supervisory status, and the size of the organization, ratings of meeting effectiveness were found to be related to job-related comfort, job-related enthusiasm, and one's intention to quit (Rogelberg et al., 2006). In addition, meetings have the potential to promote engagement (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). In the case that managers structure their meetings so that they are relevant to attendees, employees feel encouraged to speak, and the time is managed well (i.e., it starts and ends when scheduled and allows time for employees to fulfull their work duties outside of meeting times), they can further engage their employees (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). The Allen and Rogelberg (2013) study sparked more research that supported the relationship between effective meetings and engagement with a focus on group meetings (; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016; Yoeger et al., 2015). Researchers have begun to focus on one-on-one (1:1) meetings specifically and suggest that 1:1 meetings have the opportunity to increase engagement (Flinchum et al., 2022; Knight, 2016). In sum, there is an established body of research that demonstrates the impact that meetings can have on employee experiences and job attitudes.

Despite its theoretical relevance, there is a type of meeting that had yet to be systematically studied based on an extensive review of the literature: skip-level meeting. A skip-level *leader* is "any leader in the organization's formal chain of command above the informant's immediate supervisor" (Detert & Treviño, 2010). In other words—your manager's manager. Skip-level *meetings* can be defined as any meeting that involves meeting with one's manager's manager where one's immediate manager is *not* present (see Figure 1). This style of meeting can

occur in a group or 1:1 format. Skip-level meetings—while noticeably absent from the academic meetings literature—are extensively discussed in practice articles, despite the dearth of data. To be exact, a Google search as of January 31, 2023 of "skip level meetings" yields 31,600 headlines including "How to Use Skip-Level Meetings Effectively" (The Management Center, 2021), "Getting a Leg Up: Mastering the Craft of Skip Level Meetings" (Corbin, 2022), "Skip-Level Meetings: A Powerful Leadership Tool" (Weeks, n.d.), "The Art of the Skip Level Meeting" (Boulton, 2014), "Preparing for a Skip Level Meeting" (Falcone, 2021), among many others. These articles discuss that the purpose of skip-level meetings is to allow employees and leaders to build relationships with those that do not directly report to them/they do not directly report to, to allow employees and leaders to gain insights on the organization (for both the leader and the employee), to give and receive feedback, and to discuss career development/ enhancement opportunities (Boulton, 2014; Falcone 2021, Weeks, n.d.).

Skip-Level Interactions

Adjacent to skip-level meetings, research on skip-level *interactions* exists. This work generally focuses on employee voice (Detert & Treviño, 2010) and how leadership behaviors influence team or firm performance (Matsunaga, 2018). The extant literature on skip-level leaders has begun to show that skip-level *interactions* (an employee interacting with their manager's manager) mainly occur during meetings (e.g., team meetings) as opposed to other work contexts such as informal "run-ins" or through online communication platforms (Detert & Treviño, 2010). The direction of that influence was mixed with some participants reporting that their skip-level leaders encouraged speaking up, while others reported that they served as inhibitors (Detert & Treviño, 2010).

Through a process of conducting interviews alongside pre-existing data containing employees' scores on an employee voice survey, Detert and Treviño (2010) examined how leaders influence employee voice at a Fortune 500 technology corporation. While the meetings themselves were not analyzed in this qualitative study (Detert & Treviño, 2010), they were cited by participants as one of the direct interactions they had with their skip-level leaders. Many participants reported feeling intimidated by their skip-level leaders due to status differences, and that their contributions to conversations with skip-level leaders in regards to employee voice tended to be futile. They found that large meetings where a skip-level leader was present (e.g., a town hall) typically inhibited employee voice and left participants feeling negatively towards their respective skip-level leaders, while informal interactions were reported to be more positive, such as a casual conversation outside of their office. However, neither of the types of interactions (direct or indirect) were reported unanimously as positive or negative, with differing experiences across participants (Detert & Treviño, 2010).

Detert and Treviño (2010) also cited various factors that contributed to feelings of safety—or lack thereof—in these larger meetings where skip-level leaders were present such as the layout of the furniture, the size of the meeting itself, and the structure of the meeting. Multiple participants reported that incorporating a specific time for employee questions and input during their monthly all-employee meetings was a good practice, leading to reviews that the skip-level leader "listens carefully," "reports back to us," and "deals with the issue" (p. 261). In contrast with their positive experiences, one skip-level leader did not hold all-employee meetings and canceled them when there were insufficient agenda items, conveying to employees that the purpose of those meetings was to disseminate information rather than a bi-directional flow of communication (Detert & Treviño, 2010). In another interview with a participant, skip-level

meetings seemed to reinforce hierarchical boundaries and status. In this instance, there were monthly meetings that were held in "a board room where you are seated at a square table" and participants found it to be "very formal" (Detert & Treviño, 2010, p. 264) leading to an atmosphere where no one feels comfortable speaking up, despite the meeting leader's inquiry about relevant issues people may be having. These subtle cues can leave employees feeling as though the meeting is a test, reinforcing latent authority structures (Schein, 1992). Ultimately, this research shows that employees have frequent direct contact with skip-level leaders, such as in meetings, and that skip-level leaders influence the employee experience (Detert & Treviño, 2010).

Relatedly, Matsunaga (2018) examined the effect of a skip-level leader's presence and communication during meetings (while the supervisor was present). This was measured by asking participants two questions: "Does a "big boss," or your direct supervisor's supervisor, usually attend meetings of the team or business unit you belong to?," and "Does the "big boss" actively intervene during meetings to support your trying to work on innovations?" Results showed that the "big boss's" intervention (but not mere presence) was associated with higher levels of supervisor psychological safety and supervisor support. In addition, evidence showed that the active intervention during a meeting by a "big boss" was associated with higher levels of employee psychological safety and innovative work behaviors. In sum, skip-level leaders merely attending meetings did not have an impact, but their active participation during meetings did (Matsunaga, 2018). These findings suggest that the way in which skip-level leaders interact with others during meetings have a connection with job-related outcomes.

Similarly, Peng and colleagues (2020) examined the effects that "humble" skip-level leaders can have on lower level leaders. They defined humble leadership as those who

acknowledge personal flaws, appreciate follower contributions/employee voice, and model teachability (Hekman, 2012). Given the ability of skip-level leaders to model organizational norms, they found that when skip-level leaders exhibit humble leadership, other members of the organization are more inclined to exhibit the same behaviors. Thus, the behavior of skip-level leaders has been shown to relate to norms in an organization (Peng et al., 2020).

Chapter 2. The Current Study

The present study has three components, each of which are meant to be primarily exploratory. First, extensive descriptive data were gathered on skip-level meetings to explore typical practices carried out in skip-level meetings. Second, the extent to which participating in skip-level meetings is related to job embeddedness is examined. Third, theoretically and empirically grounded moderators of the relationship between participating in skip-level meetings and perceptions of job embeddedness were analyzed.

Descriptive Data

Prior to this study, there was no existing data on cadence, length, location, topics discussed, questions that employees ask, purpose, how many attendants are typically present, if and how the manager in the middle is informed or involved, or the presence of an agenda during skip-level meetings. Many practice articles outline questions one should ask during their skip-level meetings. While this guidance may be helpful to readers, it is likely based on the author's personal experiences with skip-level meetings, and perhaps misrepresenting them at large. By gathering this data from hundreds of participants, future research can have descriptive data to reference. Given this dearth of insight, this study aimed to better understand what is currently happening with regard to skip-level meetings.

> **RQ 1:** What appear to be the typical practices in skip-level meetings with regard to cadence, length, scheduling, topics discussed, purpose, how many attendants are typically present, if and how the manager in the middle is informed or involved, location, and the presence of an agenda?

Skip Level Meetings Main Effects on Job embeddedness

While the research question above is designed to enhance our understanding of what is happening in practice, another goal of this study was to examine a potential consequence associated with skip-level meetings – job embeddedness, by leveraging job embeddedness theory. Namely, skip-level meetings are grounded in job embeddedness theory in the following three ways.

Links. First, meetings can serve as catalysts for connection building between individuals and teams in an organization (Tracy & Dimock, 2016). Additionally, literature concerning links to an organization is centered around social capital and the ability to broker relationships. Skip-level meetings may provide an opportunity for relationship building that enhances social capital as well as an organized outlet for enhancing relationships with senior leadership. As mentioned earlier when discussing the practice literature, one of the documented purposes of skip-level meetings is to build relationships, or links. A meta-analysis conducted by Zhang and colleagues (2012) that examined measurement issues with job embeddedness theory criticized the notion that links are strictly about quantity—rather than quality—and proposed that there is perhaps a curvilinear relationship between links and embeddedness in that too many links–and thus, social demands–could lead to challenges with work-life balance and could become too taxing on the individual. The authors suggested that future research should focus on the quality of these links, rather than just the quantity (Zhang et al., 2012). However, the purpose of skip-level meetings has yet to be documented empirically.

Fit. Second, senior leaders are often the individuals who set cultural norms and perceptions at an organization (Simons et al., 2015). Meeting with senior leaders can be an effective way to evaluate one's compatibility with an organization as well as establish and

develop comfort with an organization beyond what is possible from meeting with a direct manager. Skip-level meetings may provide a unique opportunity for assessing and reinforcing fit with one's organization because of their ability to reinvigorate their connection to the mission and values of an organization, especially when the skip-level leader has a transformational leadership style (Khalid et al., 2021). In addition, skip-level meetings may allow leaders to assess an employee's level of fit within an organization.

Sacrifice. Third, skip-level meetings may address the key aspect of job embeddedness theory concerning awareness of costs and benefits associated with leaving a job. By meeting with a skip-level leader—during which discussions of career advancements at the organization may occur—there is consequently a heightened awareness of opportunity costs of leaving their job, as well as the associated benefits of advancing at the given organization. This is supported by research examining the antecedents of organizational support for development. Evidence has shown that interacting with leaders (leader-member exchange) and career mentoring were positively related to employees' perceptions of organizational support for development. Even more related to skip-levels and job embeddedness, support for development was positively associated with reduced voluntary turnover when perceptions of career opportunities were high. Additionally, when perceived opportunities for career advancement were low, turnover increased (Kraimer et al., 2011). Thus, skip-level meetings may provide an opportunity for increasing perceptions of career development as well as access to senior leadership that would be otherwise unavailable.

In sum, job embeddedness theory provides a theoretical framework for how skip-level meetings are related to job embeddedness. Therefore, I hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1. There will be a positive relationship between participating in skip-level meetings within the last year and self-ratings of job embeddedness.

Moderation Effects

Skip-Level Discussion Content. Given that meetings in general involve interacting and having social contact with other meeting participants (Rogelberg et al., 2010), and that skip-level meetings are conversationally-based practices, the content discussed in these meetings is another factor to consider. One cannot assume that skip-level meetings are universal regarding the content discussed. Rather, the relationship that skip-level meetings have with job embeddedness may depend on what is discussed during those meetings. This content includes discussions of career advancement, feedback, recognition, and life outside of work. According to job embeddedness theory, perceived sacrifices (e.g., career advancements/opportunities) and feeling as though one fits in their organization (person-organization fit) are critical aspects of employees being embedded (Mitchell et al., 2001). Rooted in those tenets, I argue that discussions of career advancement/ feedback, recognition, and life outside of work may moderate the relationship between participating in skip-level meetings and job embeddedness.

First, discussions of career advancement are likely to occur during skip-level meetings, as more senior managers are higher up in an organization and can provide mentorship to employees. Kraimer and colleagues (2011) found that support for development was positively associated with reduced voluntary turnover—a variable highly related to job embeddedness— when perceptions of career advancement opportunities were high. Additionally, when perceived opportunities for career advancement were low, turnover increased (Kraimer et al., 2011). While this is evidence of a main effect between development and turnover, it provides support for the

notion that when employees receive support for development from leadership, there is an impact on turnover outcomes. Given that skip-level meetings are a direct conversation between leadership and an employee, these findings suggest that discussion content around development support/career advancement is a factor that may influence job embeddedness through skip-level meetings.

Second, drawing on the person-organization fit and trickle-down literature, there are two explanations for this suggestion: first, there is a large body of research demonstrating that leaders—including skip-level leaders—have trickle-down effects on their followers (Byun et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2020; Wang & Xu, 2015; Zhang et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2019), meaning in this case that leaders have the ability to model behaviors such as building personal relationships/discussing life outside of work, demonstrating recognition, and providing feedback that could enhance the skip-level meeting's relationship with employee feelings of job embeddedness (Huang et al., 2005; Kezar, 2001; Vondey et al., 2010). Thus, the trickle-down effect of leadership is the phenomenological basis of this potential moderation effect. This is directly related to the second explanation for this moderator: fit is a core tenet of job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). Fit, in the context of job embeddedness theory, is defined as one's compatibility with their environment (Mitchell et al., 2001). Given that skip-level meetings may provide a setting to develop one's understanding of their own level of person-organization fit through discussions of life outside of work, feedback on their work, and recognition for their work, I expect that these discussion topics may influence the relationship between skip-level meetings and job embeddedness.

Taken together, this suggests that the content of the conversations had during skip-level meetings may moderate the relationship between participating in skip-level meetings and job

embeddedness. Further, if the content consists of (1) discussions of career advancement/opportunities, (2) life outside of work, (3) feedback, and (4) recognition for one's work, then the relationship may be stronger.

Hypothesis 2. The discussion content of the skip-level meetings will moderate the relationship between participating in skip-level meetings and their ratings of job embeddedness such that the relationship will be stronger among those who report that they discuss/have discussed career advancement/ opportunities, life outside of work, feedback, and recognition than those who did not discuss those things.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through Prolific. The goal of the sampling pool was to have a relatively equal representation of those who participate in skip-level meetings and those who do not in order to test for differences in their relationships to job embeddedness. This was achieved to the satisfaction of the study. A G*Power analysis was conducted to determine an adequate sample size. Using the "Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 increase" option with the power set at 0.80 ($\alpha = .05$; effect size = 0.02) for a two-way interaction and three control variables, it was determined that at least 395 participants were needed to have a large enough sample size for a two-tailed correlation test and regression model. Inclusion criteria consisted of participants being at least 18 years of age, work full time (>35 hours per week), fluent in English in order to prevent issues with construct validity of the units of study, and have been at their current job for at least the last 12 months (Stone-Romero, 2011).

Procedure and Design. Using a cross-sectional design, participants were asked to complete a one-time survey. This study is not designed and does not attempt to make causal inferences, but rather to establish preliminary descriptive and correlational evidence between job embeddedness and participating in skip-level meetings. A "bogus item" was included within the survey to assess for careless responding. Following the procedure by Eyal and colleagues (2021), participants will see an item that reads, "I currently don't pay attention to the questions I'm being asked in the survey." Responses other than "disagree" or "strongly disagree" did not pass and thus were excluded from analyses (Arthur et al., 2021).

Due to this study being cross-sectional and the inferences being non-causational, it may be susceptible to the six types of endogeneity bias: omitted variables, simultaneity, selection effects, consistency of inference, measurement error, and common method bias (Antonakis et al, 2010). According to Antonakis and colleagues (2010), correlation can *in fact* mean causation (despite the popular term "correlation does not mean causation") under a particular set of design circumstances. As explained below, the following study does *not* meet the requisite criteria to make causal claims for several reasons. However, they were attempted to be addressed in the following ways with the further caveat that this work is preliminary and exploratory in order to facilitate future research with causally identified models.

Omitted Variables. Omitting variables could be involved in the relationship being tested could lead to omitted variable bias (Antonakis et al., 2010). In the current work, this was partially addressed by including a number of control variables in order to account for confounding variables. These are discussed in detail below.

Simultaneity. Simultaneity refers to the potential for reverse causality, (i.e., y is in fact causing x as opposed to x causing y) (Antonakis et al., 2010). In the present study, it can

certainly be the case that any relation that participating in skip-level meetings has to job embeddedness could in fact be interpreted as those who are embedded at their jobs participate in skip-level meetings. Regardless of the direction, the current work is still interested in the overall magnitude of the relationship between variables.

Selection Effects. Selection effects refer to the issue of participants who self-selected into a study being skewed towards a certain subset of the population (Hill et al., 2021). Precautions were taken to account for this by using a survey platform that attempts to mitigate this bias. In addition, the presented material of the study to potential participants was limited in order to prevent selection bias.

Consistency of Inference. Consistency of inference refers to, essentially, consistency of standard errors. This type of endogeneity bias has greater implications for causational models as opposed to correlational models. However, it is possible to address this concern statistically by checking to see if residuals are homoscedastic. This can be further explored as a concern with future research.

Measurement Error. Measurement error refers to errors within variables, leading to inconsistency of what is in fact being measured. Given that this study measures constructs such as perceptions of job embeddedness, this was addressed by computing reliabilities of the constructs measured. However, the study is inherently at risk of measurement error.

Common Method Bias. Common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), refers to the relationships found between variables that may be inflated as a result of the measurement process itself rather than the true relationship between the variables. Podsakoff et al. (2003) provide five remedies to control for common method variance. I attempted to accomplish psychological separation by making the survey instructions vague in the consenting step. The "cover story" (p.

887) will be that the survey is to assess participation in work practices, as opposed to skip-level

meetings and job embeddedness, specifically. The authors also suggest using different response

formats for different scales. This was executed by using different likert-type scales and some

open-ended responses for skip-level questions (see Appendix A). Second, Podsakoff et al. (2003)

recommend ensuring anonymity and reminding respondents that there are no right or wrong

answers in order to reduce evaluation apprehensions such as social desirability. This was

addressed by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in the consenting process as well as in the

survey instructions. Third, common method bias can be mitigated by counterbalancing question

order. To accomplish this, the order of the measures was distributed randomly using the

Qualtrics feature for participants to prevent priming. Lastly, all concepts being directly asked

about (ex. skip-level meetings and skip-level leaders) were clearly defined (Podsakoff et al.,

2003).

When incorporating common method bias remedies, it is important to note that more

recent discussions of common method bias suggest that assuming that relationships between self-

report variables will be routinely inflated is a misconception (Conway et al., 2010; Spector,

2006), and that same-method observed score (self-report) correlations are "accurate

representations of their true score counterparts" (Conway et al., 2010, p. 326). While this

discussion around common method bias provides support for the use of self-report measures in

cross-sectional surveys, the remedies discussed above were implemented in order to ensure high

quality measurement and best practices.

Measures

Job embeddedness Scale (JES). Job embeddedness was measured using the Job

embeddedness Scale (JES), Short Form consisting of 18 items (Holtom et al., 2006). This scale

was adapted from the Mitchell and Lee (2001) Job Embeddedness Scale consisting of 40 items. Holtom et al. (2006) found a strong product moment correlation (r = 0.92) between the long and short versions of the JES, in addition to no differences in the amount of variance in turnover explained. Additionally, the composite measure of job embeddedness (as opposed to the global measure) is regarded as having more "theoretical richness" (Zhang et al., 2012, p. 222). Modeled after the methods employed by Oladeji et al. (2018) and Felps et al. (2009), I employed the Felps et al. (2009) measure of job embeddedness. Felps and colleagues (2009) used the 18-item version of the short form scale and reported a reliability coefficient of 0.86 (Felps et al., 2009; Holtom et al., 2006; Oladeji et al., 2018). Higher scores on the JES indicate higher job embeddedness, whereas lower scores indicate lower job embeddedness. In order to ensure that individuals included their skip-level leaders when answering items 13, 14, and 15 on the job embeddedness scale, definitions of "work group" and "coworkers" were included in the instructions.

Skip-Level Meeting Descriptive Questions. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a series of questions were created to measure practices involved in skip-level meetings. To ensure content validity, the themes and topics written about in practice articles (i.e. Boulton, 2014; Corbin, 2022; Falcone, 2021; The Management Center, 2021; Weeks, n.d) were compiled, as well as informal interviews with colleagues to gather insights into the practices around skip-level meetings. This led to the inclusion of the following topics of inquiry: participating in skip-levels (yes/no), cadence, size/ number of attendants, manager in the middle knowledge/ involvement in the process, which topics are discussed during the meetings, purpose of the meetings, location, agendas, length, and questions that employees ask. After confirming these topics with two meetings subject matter experts and comparing them to similar surveys on one-

on-one meetings, questions were created that corresponded to each topic informed by best practices in survey construction (e.g., avoiding double-barreled items).

To enable skip-logic in the formulation of the survey, the first item asked participants whether they have ever participated in a skip-level meeting. If participants selected "Yes," then they were presented with the rest of the skip-level meeting items. If they selected "No," then they proceeded to the next measure. The initial yes/no question was used as the measure of whether or not participants engage in skip-level meetings. Each item was designed to gain insight into the practices involved in skip-level meetings. For example, some items include, "How often do you participate in skip-level meetings at your current job?," "When was your last skip-level meeting? Please select the option that most closely applies," "How often do/did you have "follow-up" meetings with your direct manager after your skip-level meetings to discuss what happened/how it went?," and "How long are your skip-level meetings typically?" Following this, a 7-point likert-type response scale was assigned ranging from "Never" to "Always" in order to allow for variability in the responses.

Lastly, in order to gain clarity around how recently participants had skip-level meetings, there were two sets of the skip-level questions presented to participants. First, participants were asked to answer the items based on their most recent skip-level meeting. Following this, participants were asked to answer the items based on their skip-level meetings in general.

Moderator Variable.

Discussion Content. A list of discussed topics was measured in the skip-level survey questions. Participants were asked, "How often do you discuss each of these discussion topics during your skip-level meetings?" Participants had the option to indicate that they discuss career advancement/opportunities, life outside of work, feedback, and recognition, along with other

discussion topics. If participants selected that they discussed those topics at any frequency (as opposed to never), then they will be included in the moderation analyses. More specifically, participants received one 'point' per discussion topic that they reported at any frequency other than 'never'. Thus, participants included in this moderation analysis had scores that ranged from one to four to allow for variability in the data (as opposed to treating this as a binary).

Control Variables

Given that the surveys were collected without having experimental control, it was important to statistically control for extraneous variables by partialling out variance associated with the control variables in the model used to assess the relationships of interest (Carlson & Wu, 2012). However, in compliance with guidelines on selecting control variables carefully (Spector & Brannick, 2011), I only included control variables that are closely related to both skip-level meetings and job embeddedness. Research suggests (Detert & Treviño, 2010) that there are a variety of potential confounding variables including relationship quality, interaction frequency, and interdependence. This is rooted in the notion that skip-level meetings inherently involve interacting and having social contact with other meeting participants (Rogelberg et al., 2010). This suggests that one's experience of meetings are influenced by those they interact with. In accordance with the links tenet of job embeddedness theory, which states that one's relationships impact their level of embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001), it is expected that an employee's relationship quality with their skip-level leader, how frequently they interact, and how dependent they are on their skip-level leader, a fellow meeting attendant with high status, would be related to their job embeddedness.

Relationship Quality. In order to measure the quality of the relationship between an employee and their manager's manager, the LMX7 (Graen & Uhl-Blen, 1995) was included.

This scale is the most commonly used scale to measure leader member exchange (Dalla et al., 2022; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kacmar et al., 2007). An example item is, "Regardless of how much formal authority your skip-level leader has built into his or her position, what are the chances that your skip-level leader would use his or her power to help you solve problems in your work?" In addition, the Gerstner and Day (1997) meta-analysis and Schriesheim, Castro, and Cogliser (1999) found the LMX 7 (Graen & Uhl-Blen, 1995) to have the strongest psychometric properties among the existing leader-member exchange measures. More specifically, meta analytic results showed that the LMX7 had the highest average alpha ($\alpha = .89$) and the strongest correlations with other variables (e.g. higher performance ratings, higher objective performance, higher overall satisfaction, greater satisfaction with supervisor, stronger organizational commitment, and more positive role perceptions) among the measures used for leader member exchange. This scale was modified so that each time an item says "leader" ,it was replaced with "skip-level leader," and the scale will only be directed toward the "follower" (employee), rather than the leader.

Skip-Level Leader-Employee Interaction Frequency. To measure how frequently employees interact with their respective skip-level leaders in general, an item was included that asks participants how frequently they interact with their skip-level leaders outside of skip-level meetings. This is modeled after the methods employed by Howell, Neufeld, and Avolio (2005). This item is, "On average, how frequently do you interact with your skip-level leader OUTSIDE of your skip-level meetings?" with response options ranging from "Never" to "Always (Every Day)".

Interdependence with Skip-Level Leader. To measure interdependence between an employee and their skip-level leader, a three-item measure of interdependence was used that was

modeled after the methods performed by Anand and colleagues (2018). While interdependence is a group-level construct (Courtright et al., 2015), the majority of human resources and organizational behavior scholars have examined interdependence at the individual level in order to measure an employee's perceptions (Anand et al., 2018). Considering that the present study aimed to measure an employee's individual perceptions of their interdependence with their skip-level leader, only the employee's perspective was measured (rather than including that of the skip-level leader).

The three-item measure was developed by Pearce and Gregersen (1991) in order to have employees report the extent to which they are dependent on their leader for accomplishing work goals (Anand et al., 2018). Pearce and Gregerson (1991) conducted an exploratory factor analysis to assess the number of factors in their scale of interdependence and concluded that there were two distinct factors. This led to the narrowing down of the scale to three items with an internal consistency of ($\alpha = 0.69$). An example of an item is, "I frequently must coordinate my efforts with others." This scale will be adapted to be centered on interdependence with the skip-level leader such that the item will read, "I frequently must coordinate my efforts with my skip-level leader."

Results

A total of 450 participants were initially recruited for the study through Prolific. Of these, 443 participants successfully began the survey, while three participants did not provide consent and were subsequently excluded from the data set. Additionally, nine participants completed less than 70% of the survey, resulting in their removal from the analysis. In addition, one participant failed the manipulation check, so their responses were deleted from the data set. The final data

set used for analysis consisted of responses from 433 participants which is above the necessary 395 estimated by power analysis to ensure adequate power for this study.

Descriptive statistics were computed for the remaining participants. The distribution of demographic characteristics within the retained sample was examined to ensure representativeness with 75.6 % Caucasian, 1.2% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 5.7% Asian, 6% Black or African American, 5.2% Hispanic or Latinx, and 6.3% a combination of ethnicities. The sample was 61% men, 37.5% women, and 1.5% genderqueer/nonbinary or genderfluid with an average age range of 25-34 years. The data were then subjected to further statistical analyses to address the research question and hypotheses outlined in the study.

Typical Practices in Skip-Level Meetings

RQ 1: What appear to be the typical practices in skip-level meetings with regard to cadence, length, scheduling, topics discussed, purpose, how many attendants are typically present, if and how the manager in the middle is informed or involved, location, and the presence of an agenda?

Tables 2-19 show descriptive statistics addressing the research question regarding the typical practices done in skip-level meetings. Starting with the question of whether participants have ever participated in a skip-level meeting, 41% of participants have participated in skip-level meetings at some point throughout their careers. However, 88% of those participants have participated in at least one skip-level meeting at their current job.

Skip-Level Meetings in General. For items concerning skip-level meetings in general, the following indicates the most frequent responses: Among those participants ($n = 152$), 30.9%

of participants have participated in two skip-level meetings within the 12 months. This is less than the intended 50/50 split of participants who had skip-level meetings vs. did not have them, however it was sufficient for analyses. This variable served as the independent variable. At those meetings, 52% of participants reported that the only attendants were themselves and their skip-level leader, 30.2% reported that they were in a group format, and 17.8% reported that it's a combination.

In terms of topics discussed in general, the most frequent topics indicated by participants were, "Your team" (91.4%), "Any roadblocks you may be facing" (90.8%), and "Positive recognition for your performance" (87.5%). As for purposes of skip-level meetings in general, the most commonly reported purposes were, "The skip-level manager "getting a pulse" on the organization/what's happening" (70.4%), "To build a relationship between you and your skip-level leader" (61.2%), and "To present new ideas to your skip-level leader" (57.2%).

Participants reported that those meetings are typically held in person (face to face) (48%), although 29.6% of participants reported that their skip-level meetings are typically virtual, and 22.4% of participants reported that the location (virtually vs. in person) varies. As for the in-person skip-level meetings, nearly all of them are held "In the office" (88%). These skip-level meetings range from 15 minutes or less to greater than one hour, with most occurring for 16-30 minutes (49.3%) or for 15 minutes or less (26.3%).

With regard to agenda creation, the most common responses from participants were that their skip-level meetings have an agenda "Sometimes" (22.5%) or "Rarely" (21.9%). During these instances, the agenda is typically created by the skip-level leader alone (46.4%) or it is determined together (43.7%).

Most Recent Skip-Level Meeting. 58.9% of participants reported that at their most recent skip-level meeting, the only attendants were "*Just* my skip-level leader and I." At these meetings, the most frequent topics discussed indicated by participants were, "Any roadblocks you may be facing" (70.4%), "Your team" (68.4%), "What's happening higher up in the organization- things like strategy, organizational goals" (61.2%), and "Your performance/feedback" (59.2%). A full list of topics and the percent of participants who reported that they are discussed at skip-level meetings in general is provided in Table 5.

In terms of the purposes of participants' most recent skip-level meetings, the most frequently reported were, "The skip-level manager 'getting a pulse' on the organization/what's happening" (72.4%), "To present new ideas to your skip-level leader" (67.8%), and "To build a relationship between you and your skip-level leader" (62.5%) (see Table 6 for a full list of purposes of skip-level meetings).

Regarding the location of participants' most recent skip-level meeting, 61.2% reported that they were held in person (face to face). The most common location for these in-person meetings were in an office (86%). These meetings were mostly 16-30 minutes (50%) or 15 minutes or less (26.3%) consisting mainly of "Just my skip-level leader and I" (58.9%). Lastly, 54.3% of participants reported that their most recent skip-level meeting did *not* have an agenda.

Direct Manager Involvement. Participants were asked two questions regarding their direct manager. Results showed that their direct manager typically knows about the occurrence of skip-level meetings before they are held (36.9%). Conversely, 3.9% of participants indicated that their direct manager "Never" knows about their direct reports' skip-level meetings before they take place. As for a follow up discussion between the direct manager and their direct report, 24.3% of participants never have follow up discussions, indicating that 75.7% of participants

have follow-up meetings with their direct manager at some frequency ranging from "Rarely" to "Always".

Relationship Between Participating in Skip-Level Meetings and Job Embeddedness

Hypothesis 1 was that there will be a positive relationship between participating in skip-level meetings within the last year and self-ratings of job embeddedness. Pearson correlations were computed to examine the relationships between participating in a skip-level meeting within the last 12 months and self-ratings of job embeddedness. The results, displayed in Table 2 indicate the strength and direction of associations among the variables.

Participating in at least one skip-level meeting at one's current job within the last 12 months was positively correlated with self-ratings of job embeddedness, albeit only a weak positive correlation. The correlation was not statistically significant (r (171) = 0.031, $p > .05$), thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis 2 was that the discussion content of the skip-level meetings will moderate the relationship between participating in skip-level meetings and their ratings of job embeddedness such that the relationship will be stronger among those who report that they discuss/have discussed career advancement/ opportunities, life outside of work, feedback, and recognition than those who did not discuss those things. A moderation analysis was conducted to explore the potential moderating effect of discussion content on the relationship between the participating in skip-level meetings and job embeddedness. The interaction term Participating in Skip-Level Meetings*Discussion Content was computed by multiplying the scores of the predictor and moderator variables.

The main effect of the predictor, participating in skip-level meetings, did not yield a significant coefficient (β = -0.025, *SE* = 0.432, *p* = 0.954), indicating that it did not have a statistically significant relationship with job embeddedness. However, the main effect of the moderator, discussion content, demonstrated statistical significance (β = 0.044, *SE* = 0.008, *p* < 0.001), indicating there is a significant relationship between discussion content and job embeddedness

Additionally, the interaction effect, represented by the term Participating in Skip-Level Meetings*Discussion Content, was not found to be statistically significant (β = -0.170, *SE* = 0.116, *p* = 0.142). This suggests that the moderating effect of discussion content on the relationship between participating in skip-level meetings and job embeddedness was not supported by the data.

In summary, moderation analysis was found to be non-significant, however the main effect of discussion content was found to be significant. These findings suggest that the variables did not demonstrate a significant relationship or moderation effect in relation to the outcome variable, thus, hypothesis 3 was unsupported.

Open Ended Analyses

In an effort to gain a holistic understanding of skip-level meetings, open-ended responses were analyzed. Participants were asked to write one to two sentences describing skip-level meetings based on their experience. A thematic analysis was conducted in NVivo, yielding 11 primary themes. This process began by grouping skip-level meetings as either "positive experiences", "negative experiences", or "mixed experiences". Following this, I performed a constant comparative analysis to narrow down the themes to 11 distinct categories. A full list along with their descriptions and exemplary responses can be seen in Table 21.

Discussion

This study sought to advance the meetings literature by exploring a particular leadership practice that aligns with theorizing around job embeddedness and had seldom been studied prior to now: skip-level meetings. My first goal was to provide descriptive information about skip-level meetings by identifying what topics are discussed in practice as well as meetings literature and measuring them in the present study. I proposed that skip-level meetings would be positively related to perceived job embeddedness as they serve to activate the three job embeddedness tenants of links, fit, and sacrifice. For links, they provide opportunities to build connections and personalized relationships that would otherwise be inaccessible without skip-level meetings. In terms of fit, they have the potential to allow employees to assess their level of organizational fit by interacting with their skip-level leaders. Lastly, they may provide a unique ability to help employees better understand the costs and benefits associated with staying at the organization given that career advancement is often part of these conversations (sacrifice).

Theoretical Implications

First, as demonstrated in the descriptive findings, skip-level meetings did indeed serve as a platform for all three components of job embeddedness as outlined above. Perhaps the most strongly represented in the results was the tenet of links. More specifically, 76.3% of participants reported that they discuss life outside of work/ their personal lives during skip-level meetings, and 61.2% reported that relationship building was a purpose of their skip-level meetings. Particularly in the qualitative results, relationship building was a clear purpose or advantage of skip-level meetings. While this may apply to 1:1 or small group meetings in general, relationship building may be of greater significance given that the relationship is between an employee and a senior leader. This not only benefits the employee through increased visibility, learning from that

leader's experiences, and increased feelings of connection to the organization, but it also benefits the skip-level leader by enhancing their visibility and by humanizing them to lower levels of the organization.

Second, while it may not have been as clearly laid out as the tenet of links in the findings, the tenet of fit was also represented. Namely, 69.7% of participants reported that gathering information about the organization that helps them determine their fit with the company was a purpose of their skip-level meetings in general. Given the dearth of research on skip-level meetings and the assumed lack of structure or uniformity of these meetings, the fact that 69.7% of participants already reported determining fit as a purpose of their meetings is considerable. It is possible that as more findings are published on skip-level meetings, particularly findings of this nature suggesting that they are positively experienced by employees, that more skip-level meetings will be held in the future with job embeddedness as a guiding framework of the intent.

Third, sacrifice was represented through several findings. In the present study, the tenet of sacrifice was mainly defined by the awareness that employees have of what they may be giving up if they were going to leave their organization. One way that this was conceptualized was through having conversations about career advancement, development, or opportunities. Surprisingly, 82.2% of participants reported this as a discussion topic during their skip-level meetings in general. In addition, 30.3% of participants reported that a purpose of their skip-level meetings appeared to be to retain talent and prevent turnover. These findings communicate that skip-level meetings allow a platform for employees—as well as skip-level leaders—to both retain talent as well as nurture those relationships to enhance employee awareness of the sacrifices they may be making if they were to leave that organization.

Fourth, while the main effect corresponding to Hypothesis 1 (the correlation between participating in skip-level meetings within the last 12 months and job embeddedness) was a weak relationship, it demonstrated the existence of the relationship that had yet to be examined in the literature, and the findings discussed above present a clear picture of job embeddedness being highly relevant to skip-level meetings. In addition, the present study includes extensive descriptive data beyond what was discussed above on the practices involved in skip-level meetings (i.e., the presence of agendas, the typical length of these meetings, etc.), providing a necessary foundation for future research regarding these types of meetings.

Lastly, the present study did not differentiate between on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness. It is possible that the relationships measured in this study would have been stronger if there were only a focus on on-the-job embeddedness. However, there was still a positive relationship between skip-level meetings and job embeddedness, although it was a smaller effect size than anticipated. In future studies of this relationship, the findings in the present study suggest that it may have been more relevant to focus solely on on-the-job embeddedness. However, this raises potential criticism of job embeddedness as a concept. More specifically, there is some deliberation about whether job embeddedness is different enough from other job attitudes such as employee satisfaction or affective commitment. While there have been meta-analyses performed that demonstrate that job embeddedness is not redundant and is in fact a unique enough construct, the present study does not necessarily support this. Further exploration of this topic should be considered.

Practical Implications

First, connecting this to the current labor market, scholars have recently taken profound interest in the current phenomenon that economists refer to as "the Great Resignation" (Klotz,

2021), making talent retention a central focus in both the academic and industrial sectors. This refers to the mass exodus of the United States labor force resulting from a variety of factors, with more than 4.3 million people voluntarily quitting their jobs in December 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Consequently, employers are wondering why employees are leaving, and how they can make them stay. Due to the associated turnover costs, this poses a significant threat to the welfare of organizations (Allen et al., 2010). With this considered, the results from the present study outline the nuances of skip-level meetings for many reasons that are relevant to employee retention and satisfaction.

Second, relationship building between employees and senior management was highlighted as a key aspect of skip-level meetings. Without these touch points, it may be difficult for employees to gain access to senior management/leadership in their organizations, especially in a remote work environment. Employees can expedite their development, nurture their feelings of connectivity to their organization, and learn how to make themselves of value to their organizations by enhancing their relationships with leadership. This can be especially critical for those who are earlier in their career and have mainly worked in remote work arrangements.

Third, the desire for employees to learn about the broader organization was frequently reported as a purpose of skip-level meetings. When employees feel distanced from the overall strategy and meaningfulness of their work, their jobs can feel primarily task-driven and disconnected from the purpose of the organization. By connecting with leadership through skip-level meetings, employees can reconnect with their organization's vision, mission, and values. This not only benefits employees, but it can help leaders to motivate and retain their talent. Ultimately, the results of this study underscored the practical importance of participating in and

conducting skip-level meetings. However, the quantitative findings were limited, indicating that the extent to which skip-level meetings are related to job attitudes are still relatively unknown.

Limitations

This study had various limitations. First, its cross-sectional design (as opposed to longitudinal), there was no construct developed to measure skip-level meetings prior to this study, and that job embeddedness is only one potential job. Future research should focus on measuring different job attitudes in relation to skip-level meetings, as well as examining longitudinal data of participating in skip-level meetings. Measuring additional job attitudes may provide a more holistic understanding of how skip-level meetings resonate with employees.

Second, in addition, future studies on skip-level meetings should focus on reducing endogeneity bias more so than the present study. Furthermore, additional research should measure additional moderator variables. For example, skip-level meeting satisfaction may have an impact on employee's ratings of job embeddedness.

Third, it is important to consider that even having a designated skip-level leader assumes a hierarchical organizational design or structure with clear reporting lines. While this certainly describes many organizations, it may fall short in terms of its application to more "flat" organizations, more "top-heavy" organizations, "bottom-heavy" organizations, or start-ups without a clear organizational design.

Fourth, while the survey asked respondents to report on their most recent skip-level meeting as well as their skip-level meetings in general, their responses at large may have been influenced by their most recent experiences, leading to a recency bias. Similarly, there could have been selection bias effects. It is possible that participants who opted to answer a survey

regarding practices at work either enjoy their work or strongly dislike their work. However, it was not possible to prevent these biases with the current study design.

Fifth, given the remote nature of work and the associated geographical ranges (e.g., an employee may work for a North Carolina-based organization while living in California), the measure of job embeddedness may be less relevant. One could argue that job embeddedness would still be relevant given that their remote job allows the individual to live where they choose rather than being geographically bound.

Sixth, the robustness—or lack thereof—of the independent variable may have contributed to the hypotheses being unsupported. The independent variable was having participated at a skip-level meeting within the last 12 months at one's current job. There is likely a large difference in those who participated in a skip-level meeting 11 months ago versus the following week. Refining this independent variable should be done in the future.

Lastly, a limitation of this study was the challenge of grounding skip-level meetings in a theory. While job-embeddedness theory provided some structure for the overall study and framework, it was a less established theory than some others. However, I learned from this study that one of the hardest challenges in this type of research is embedding concepts at work in theory given that individuals and work itself is so dynamic and idiosyncratic.

Future Directions

First, this study provided a substantial foundation for future research on skip-level meetings. While the hypotheses were unsupported, the descriptive data as well as the qualitative data provided rich data on this type of meeting. Further exploring the qualitative data is perhaps the biggest opportunity for this topic. More specifically, one of the discussion topics highlighted

by participants was discussing their team. While there were some indications of what this could be (e.g., day to day operations, any roadblocks they may be facing), the data is limited in terms of what this could mean. One possibility is that participants were complaining about their team members to the skip-level leader. While this may be possible, it is unlikely given that the skip-level leader most often set the agenda themselves. It would be interesting to study what exactly discussing one's team means in the context of skip-level meetings. In general, diving deeper into the nuances of the qualitative findings would be valuable. Also for example, a study comparing the differences in perceptions of skip-level meetings among remote and in-person employees should be considered. Further exploration of this topic should also be conducted in the context of different organizational structures and industry sectors. For example, more hierarchical structures such as in the finance sector may conduct skip-level meetings for different purposes than more collaboratively-driven fields such as social work.

Second, future studies should delve deeper into the dynamics of skip-level meetings and their effects on various job attitudes–including employee satisfaction and affective commitment– to better understand their unique contributions in comparison to existing constructs. From this process, I learned that job-embeddedness may be less relevant given the era of remote work. While individuals may feel stuck at their remote jobs because it allows them to live where they choose, being embedded at one's job because of this is likely less relevant than it once was before the pandemic. Affective commitment is likely less affected by this factor and thus could have strengthened the relationships measured in this study. In addition, affective commitment is perhaps more theoretically relevant, as well, and thus would have likely had more theoretical contributions than job-embeddedness. With this study serving as a foundation, future studies can examine statistical relationships beyond correlations.

Third, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term impact of skip-level meetings on employee engagement and retention. For example, an organization could institute skip-level meetings among certain teams and delay the start of them for other teams to create a more experimental study design and measure the impact that participating in skip-level meetings may have on associated job attitudes.

Fourth, skip-level meetings are a great candidate for multi-level research. Given that there are multiple parties involved (e.g., the employee, the direct manager, and the skip-level leader), it would likely provide much richer data than the current study to measure the perspectives of all three levels. By only measuring one perspective (the employee), this research is inherently limited.

Conclusion

In sum, the present study advanced the meetings and job embeddedness literature by gathering a substantial body of descriptive data and examining the relationship between skip-level meetings and perceptions of job embeddedness. As demonstrated, skip-level meetings may serve as a platform for job embeddedness, specifically in terms of relationship-building, fit assessment, and sacrifice awareness. From a practical standpoint, this research offers valuable insights into typical practices around skip-level meetings and the importance of them for employees, especially in the remote-work environment where employees may feel a diminishing sense of connection and engagement.

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Figure 1

Visual representation of a skip-level meeting to participants
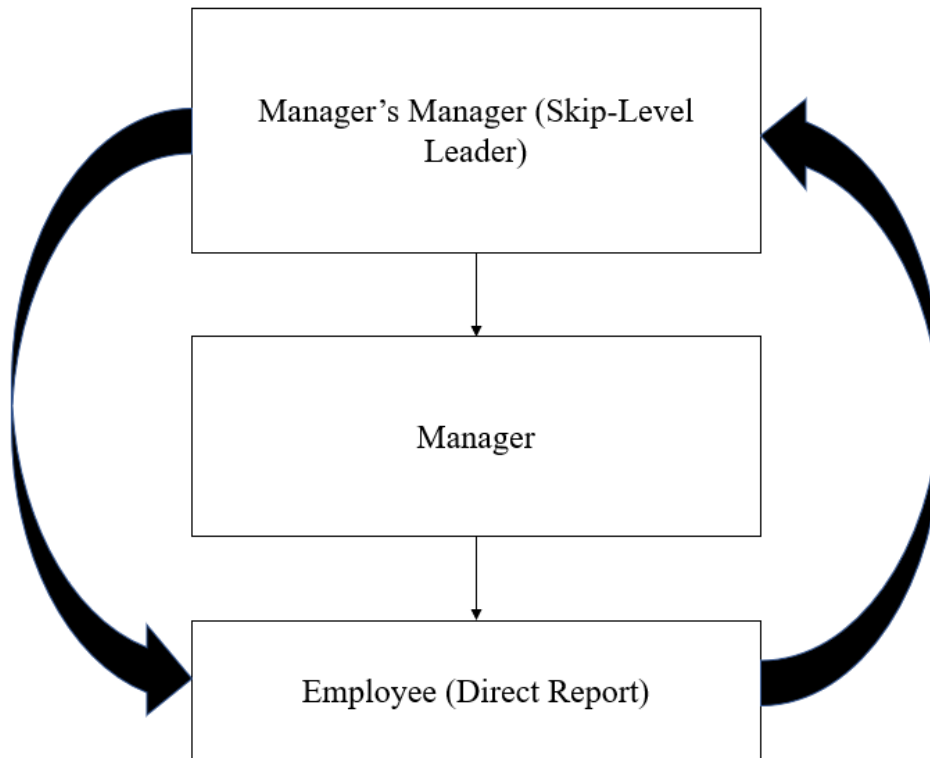
Table 1

Have you ever participated in a skip-level meeting?

Y/N	Total Participants (N=418)	Percentage
Yes, participated	173	41%
No, have never participated	245	59%

Table 2

Have you ever participated in any skip-level meetings (either 1:1 or in a group setting) at your current job?

Y/N	Total Participants (N=173)	Percentage
Yes	152	88%
No	21	12%

Table 3

How many skip-level meetings have you participated in during the last 12 months?

Meeting Amount	Total Participants (N=152)	Percentage
1	42	27.6%
2	47	30.9%
3	17	11.2%
4	15	9.9%
5	13	8.6%
6	3	2.0%
7	0	0%
8	1	0.7%
9	1	0.7%
10	3	2.0%
11	0	0%
12	0	0%
More than 12	10	6.6%

Table 4

How many attendants were present at your most recent skip-level meeting?

Attendants	*Amount*	*Percentage*
1= *Just* my skip-level leader and I (2 total)	89	58.9%
2= Group format (skip-level leader, myself, and at least one other)	62	41.1%

Table 5

Did you discuss any of these discussion topics during your most recent skip-level meeting?

◆ Maps to JE

Topic	Yes	No	Cannot Recall	
Career development/ advancement/ opportunities	66	82	4	◆
Life outside of work/Personal life	59	88	5	◆
How things are going with your direct manager	75	74	3	
Your performance/feedback	**90**	**60**	**2**	
Giving feedback to your skip-level manager	84	65	3	
New ideas you have	84	62	5	
New ideas your skip-level manager has	74	74	4	
Your team	**103**	**48**	**0**	
Any roadblocks you may be facing	**107**	**44**	**0**	
Information about the organization that helps you determine your fit with the company	54	93	5	◆
What's happening higher up in the organization- things like strategy, organizational goals	**93**	**56**	**3**	◆

Table 6

What was the purpose of your most recent skip-level meeting?

◆ Maps to JE

Purpose	NOT the Purpose	A Minor Purpose	The MAIN Purpose	% Yes	
The skip-level manager "getting a pulse" on the organization/what's happening	42	65	45	72.4%	
To retain talent/prevent turnover	93	39	20	**38.8%**	◆
To evaluate your fit within the organization	106	24	21	**29.6%**	◆
To build a relationship between you and your skip-level leader	57	64	31	62.5%	◆
To present new ideas to your skip-level leader	49	63	40	67.8%	
To talk about your manager	96	28	28	**36.8%**	

Table 7

Where was your most recent skip-level meeting held?

Location	Virtually (Zoom, Teams, etc.)	In Person (face to to face)
Number of Participants	59	93
Percentage	38.8%	61.2%

Table 8

Where was your most recent in-person skip-level meeting held?

Location	Walking/Outside	In an office	Other
Number of Participants	4	129	17
Percentage	2.7%	86%	11.3%

Table 9

Did your most recent skip-level meeting have an agenda?

Yes	69	45.7%
No	82	54.3%

Table 10

How long was your most recent skip-level meeting?

Length	15 Minutes or Less	16-30 Minutes	31-60 Minutes	More than 1 Hour
Number of Participants	40	76	32	4
Percentage	26.3%	50.0%	21.1%	2.6%

Table 11

How many attendants are typically present at your skip-level meeting(s)?

Attendants	Just my skip-level leader and I	Group Format	A Combination
Number of Participants	79	46	27
Percentage	52.0%	30.2%	17.8%

Table 12

How often did/does your direct manager know about the meetings taking place before the meetings were held?

Frequency	Number of Participants	Percentage
Never	6	3.9%
Rarely	16	10.5%
Sometimes	14	9.2%
Occasionally	18	11.8%
Frequently	23	15.1%
Very Frequently	19	12.5%
Always	56	36.9%

Table 13

How often do/did you have "follow-up" meetings with your direct manager after your skip level meetings to discuss what happened/how it went?

Frequency	Number of Participants	Percentage
Never	37	24.3%
Rarely	38	25.0%
Sometimes	31	20.4%
Occasionally	21	13.8%
Frequently	10	6.6%
Very Frequently	5	3.3%
Always	10	6.6%

Table 14

How often do you discuss each of these discussion topics during your skip-level meetings?

Topic	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	% Yes
Career development/ advancement/ opportunities	25	42	44	32	9	**82.2%**
Life outside of work/ Personal life	35	40	46	22	8	**76.3%**
How things are going with your direct manager	31	45	45	19	12	**79.6%**
Receiving feedback	12	21	51	53	15	**85.5%**
Positive recognition for your performance	18	24	59	44	6	**87.5%**
Giving feedback to your skip-level manager	20	29	48	42	13	**86.8%**
New ideas you have	20	21	57	38	15	**86.2%**
New ideas your skip-level manager has	20	23	52	44	13	**86.8%**
Your team	12	21	40	55	23	**91.4%**
Any roadblocks you may be facing	14	15	52	51	20	**90.8%**
Information about the organization that helps you determine your fit with the company	45	36	38	23	9	**69.7%**
What's happening higher up in the organization- things like strategy, organizational goals	22	24	46	44	16	**85.5%**

Table 15

What is/has been the purpose(s) of your skip-level meetings? ◆ Maps to JE

Purpose	Yes	No	I Cannot Recall	% Yes	
The skip-level manager "getting a pulse" on the organization/what's happening	107	44	1	70.4%	
To retain talent/prevent turnover	46	101	5	30.3%	◆
To evaluate your fit within the organization	38	111	1	25.0%	◆
To build a relationship between you and your skip-level leader	93	58	1	61.2%	◆
To present new ideas to your skip-level leader	87	61	4	57.2%	
To talk about your manager	51	100	1	33.6%	

Table 16

Where are these skip-level meetings typically held?

Location	Virtually (Zoom, Teams, etc.)	In Person (face to to face)	It Varies
Number of Participants	45	73	34
Percentage	29.6%	48.0%	22.4%

Table 17

Where are your in-person skip-level meetings typically held?

Location	In the office	Walking/ Outside	Coffee Shop/ Restaurant	Other
Number of Participants	132	2	2	14
Percentage	88.0%	1.3%	1.3%	9.3%

Table 18

How long are your skip-level meetings typically?

Length	15 Minutes or Less	16-30 Minutes	31-60 Minutes	More than 1 Hour
Number of Participants	40	75	34	3
Percentage	26.3%	49.3%	22.4%	2.0%

Table 19

Do your skip-level meetings have an agenda?

Frequency	Number of Participants	Percentage
Never	28	18.5%
Rarely	33	21.9%
Sometimes	34	22.5%
Occasionally	10	6.6%
Frequently	19	12.6%
Very Frequently	9	6.0%
Always	18	11.9%

Table 20

Who typically determines the agenda for your 1:1 meetings with your manager?

Party Responsible	Number of Participants	Percentage
Just me	6	4.0%
Just my skip-level leader (without my input)	70	46.4%
We determine it together	66	43.7%
Unsure	9	6.0%

Table 21

Descriptions of Experiences of Skip-Level Meetings

◆ Maps to JE

	Theme	Illustrative Quote
	Positive and Productive	"My skip-level meetings tend to be relatively casual. It's usually a check-in to make sure I'm happy, and find out where I'm at and how I want to move forward."
◆	**Casual and Informal Atmosphere**	"My skip-level meetings are very much relaxed. My skip-level manager is amazing and always gives constructive feedback."
	Check-Ins	"The skip-level meetings are helpful but they make my immediate supervisor nervous. She doesn't like to be left out. I have to be sure I keep the meetings short and brief her on everything."
◆	**Focus on Organization and Vision**	"A chance for the skip-level leader to check in with folks to get impressions on our shared manager and to collect feedback. Also an opportunity to directly share his vision."
	Mixed Experiences	"They are usually not very productive. I don't have a close relationship with this person so our communication is not as seamless as it could be."
	Task-oriented and Project-focused	"Usually our skip-level meetings act more as a staging ground for more generalized tasks and projects that extend beyond our direct teams."
◆	**Relationship Building and Feedback**	"I typically try to catch up with my skip-level manager on things that have occurred in my personal and professional life. I also try to ask a question about larger organizational goals since he has more insight into those topics."
	Variability and Informality	"My skip-level meetings are very open and free-flowing. I have a great relationship with my skip-manager and we communicate often via teams."
◆	**Career Development and Support**	"They always seem to be productive and helpful to my development as a leader."
	Assessments of their Direct Manager	"In my experience, they're a group setting, a few of my co workers together, going over all of the daily nitty gritty. We are telling an unbiased side of what goes on in our department."
◆	**Retention and Morale**	"It is a way to get the truth out about management and issues we are having."

Table 22

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between participating in skip-level meetings within the last year and self-ratings of job embeddedness.

Correlation between Job Embeddedness and Skip-Level Meetings

Column Label		Job Embed.	Skip Y/N Curr.
Job Embed.	Pearson's r	___	
Skip Y/N Curr.	Pearson's r	0.031	x
	df	171	x
	p-value	0.682	

Note. The score for job embeddedness is a calculated average per participant. The skip-level meeting measure is whether participants have participated in a skip-level meeting at their current job within the last 12 months.

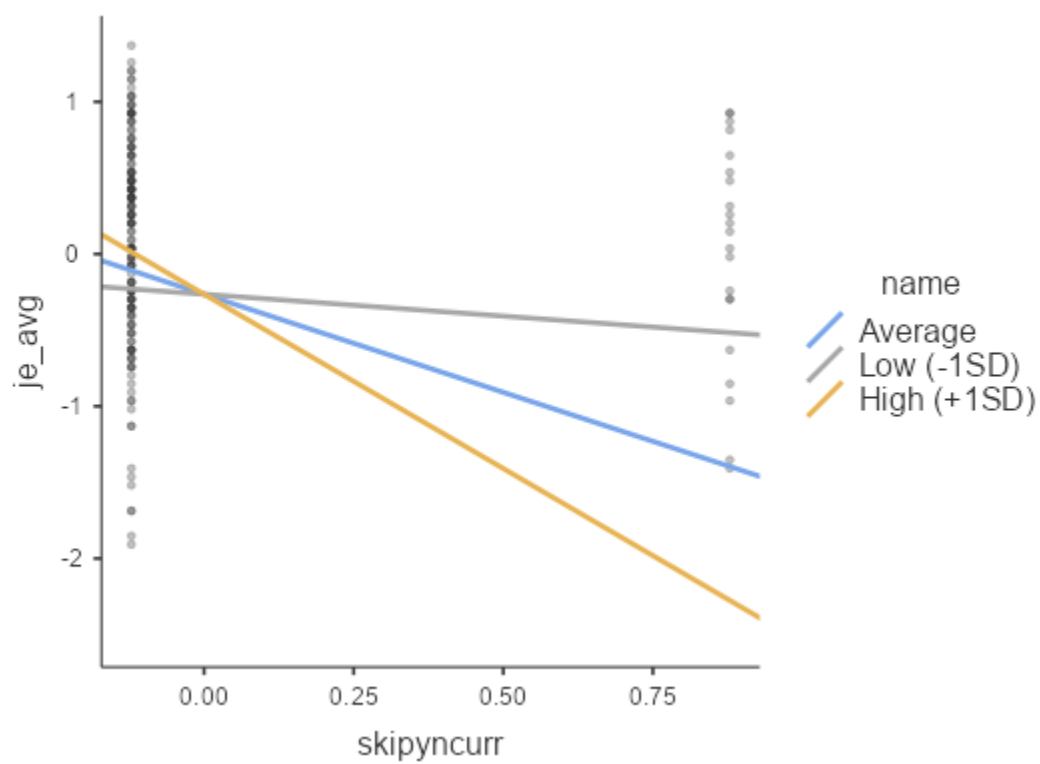**Table 23**

Paired samples t-test

Paired Samples T-Test

			statistic	df	p
JE AVG	skipvnever	Student's t	45.1	417	< .001

Note. H_a μ Measure 1 - Measure 2 $\neq 0$

Table 24

Hypothesis 3: Moderation Analysis

Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Skip y/n	-0.0249	0.4324 5	- 0.0576	0.954
topic_h3	0.0441	0.0084 3	5.2262	< .00 1
skipyncurr ✳ topic_h3	-0.1700	0.1158 3	- 1.4680	0.142

Table 25

Simple Slope Plot

Note: je_avg is the average score of job embeddedness among participants and skipyncurr is whether participants participated in skip-level meetings.