

The Role of Supervisor Relationship Quality in Managing Work-Family Outcomes

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Presentation Summary

Interest in how the leader influences an individual's experience of work-family conflict is evident in the extant literature (e.g., Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Work-family research has demonstrated that the leader can impact subordinates' work-family experience by engaging in family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) and by developing a high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship with his/her subordinates (e.g., Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009; Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano, 2008). The primary goal of the current study was to better position employees' work-family outcomes in the leadership literature.

Major and colleagues have argued that industrial-organizational psychology's long history with and understanding of leadership can and should be better applied to understand the leader's role in the employee's work-family experience (e.g., Major & Cleveland, 2007; Major & Morganson, 2011). In answering this call, the current study integrated LMX theory and the literature on FSSB to model the supervisor's role in facilitating optimal work-family outcomes. Our model (see Figure 1) proposes that FSSB are the mechanism through which LMX impacts employees' work-family outcomes, including work interference with family (WIF) and work-family balance satisfaction (WFBS).

This model is in line with LMX theory and research. A high-quality LMX relationship is one in which the expectation of mutual benefit and the exchange of resources is established (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Fueled by mutual respect and loyalty, the subordinate is productive and instrumentally supportive of the leader; in turn the leader engages in behaviors that are supportive of the subordinate's work-family needs. Indeed, research has demonstrated that in a high-quality LMX relationship, the supervisor provides more support, resources, autonomy, and communication than in a low LMX relationship (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kacmar et al., 2003; Wayne et al., 1997). Thus FSSB, which include creative work-family management, role modeling positive work-family management, and instrumental and emotional work-family support, represent ways in which leaders may enact their role in a high-quality exchange relationship, resulting in positive work-family outcomes for the employee.

Method

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is a crowdsourcing site used for the recruitment and compensation of research participants. A qualification survey consisting of demographic questions was used to identify an appropriate sample. Three surveys administered one month apart were used to assess the constructs in the proposed model. The final sample of 221 working adults was predominantly male (60.6 percent), Caucasian (82.1 percent), and married or cohabitating (66.1 percent). Participants were an average of 33.85 years old ($SD = 10.1$), and worked an average of 42.35 hours per week ($SD = 6.1$). LMX, FSSB, work interference with family, and work-family balance satisfaction were assessed with well-established measures (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996; Valcour, 2007).

Results and Discussion

The proposed model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation, and bootstrapping at 5,000 iterations in MPlus7.

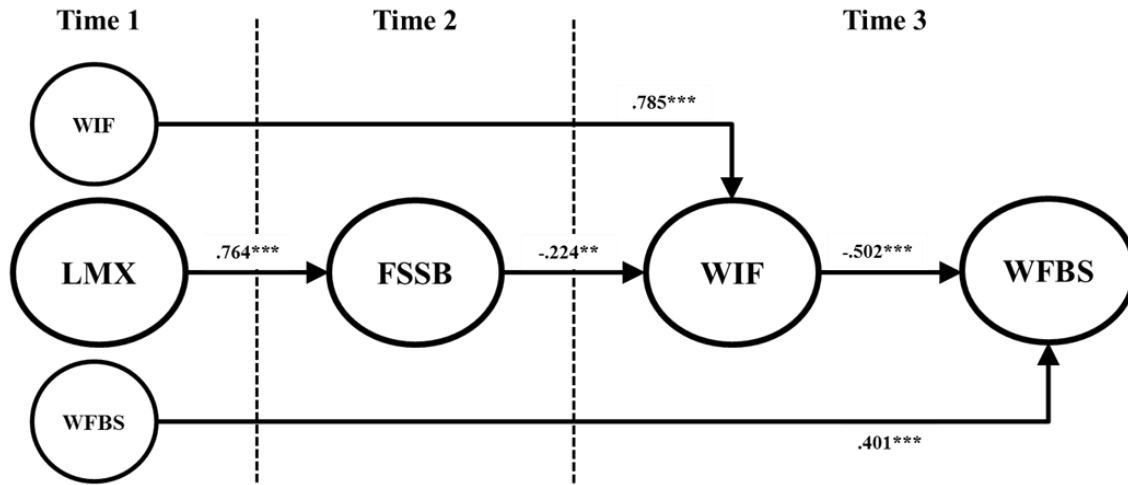


Figure 1. Hypothesized model with standardized path estimates. Model fit statistics: $\chi^2(211) = 371.524, p < .001$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06 (95%CI [.05, .07]), SRMR = .13.

Note: LMX = Leader-member exchange, FSSB = Family supportive supervisor behaviors, WIF = Work interference with family, WFBS = Work-family balance satisfaction.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Predictors explained large portions of variance in FSSB (.58), work interference with family (.66), and work-family balance satisfaction (.66). As expected, results suggested that LMX and FSSB are positively related, $\beta = .764, p < .001$. Furthermore, when controlling for LMX and work interference with family at Time 1, FSSB significantly predicted work interference with family at Time 3, $\beta = -.224, p = .006$. Notably, results further demonstrated that FSSB fully mediated the relationship between LMX and WIF, even after controlling for the effect of WIF measured at Time 1, $\beta = -.081$ (95% CI [-0.16, -0.01]). Additionally, the indirect effect of LMX on work-family balance satisfaction via FSSB and work interference with family was positive and significant, $\beta = .041$, (95% CI [0.01, 0.08]). These findings suggest that a major way in which supervisors enact their role in a high LMX relationship is through the provision of FSSB, which support subordinates in managing WIF and ultimately contribute to their satisfaction with the balance between work and family life. Of course findings also suggest that in the absence of LMX, FSSB is less likely to occur, at least without intervention (see Hammer et al., in this proposal).

From a practice perspective, our findings imply that organizational work-family interventions should be mindful of the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and subordinates. Although work-family interventions aimed at increasing FSSB may compensate for poor relationship quality (cf. Hammer et al., this proposal), results from the current study suggest that high LMX may reduce the need for certain types of work-family interventions (i.e., when high LMX is present, supervisors may be more likely to engage in FSSB without the aid of

an intervention). Moreover, organizational family-friendly interventions of all types may be more effective when high LMX is present. In the context of a high LMX relationship:

- Supervisors may be more likely to inform employees of available family-friendly benefits, and subordinates may feel more comfortable inquiring about them.
- Employees may be more likely to request family accommodations, and supervisors may be more likely to grant them.
- Attributions the supervisor makes about the employee's use of family-friendly benefits and accommodations may be more positive, and negative career consequences for the employee may be less likely.

Thus, future research should continue to explore the dynamic relationship between LMX and FSSB and the resulting work-family outcomes.

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