The Effect of Supportive Workplace Supervisors on Work-Family Conflict

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Abstract

The problem under investigation is how work-family conflict is a growing concern, especially

where supervisors are stringent regarding workers' family duties and responsibilities. This

conflict occurs when family and work demands create excessive pressure on the individual to the

detriment of their work and family. All University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) employees

with families will be invited via email to participate. The experiment will be conducted through

a 5-item Likert scale survey, two on a daily basis, one at home and one while at work, for one

month. An additional survey, a Likert-type scale survey, will be conducted and evaluated at the

end of the study to gather data from the overall perception of the participants' view on their

supervisors' work-family support. Interventions in the employee work-family well-being show

that supportive supervisors have elicited higher job satisfaction among employees through the

use of methods such as adequate workloads, supportive actions towards employees who are

parents as well as implementing family-friendly policies. This paper considers whether such

interventions have an impact on work-family conflicts, thereby applying its effects both in the

management and organizational level. In this longitudinal study, I propose the major conclusion,

based on the data, employees who report lower levels of work-family conflict will also report

supportive supervisors in their workplace.

Keywords: employee, work, family, conflict, supportive supervisors

The Effect of Supportive Workplace Supervisors on Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict occurs when a conflict exists due to the double role the family member plays at home and work. Research describes that people have a specific amount of energy and time that they expend daily. Both work and family require a certain degree of time and energy. If they are not balanced, a person will become distressed mentally and psychologically (Camgoz, 2014). As the number of working mothers and fathers increase over the years, the rate of work-family conflict also increases because employees cannot balance between work and family (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). One factor will demand more attention than the other. Businesses and families are looking for solutions to reduce the conflict or stop it with all means. The dependent variable in our study is work-family conflict, and our independent variable is workplace supervisors. This study is a correlational study, we will measure supervisor's supportive behaviors and see if they correlate with work-family conflict. Therefore, the study should show employees who report lower levels of work-family conflict will also report supportive supervisors in the workplace.

One of the plausible solutions that have been highlighted, which has the potential to eradicate this social problem, is enacting favorable company policies that support families. Moreover, supportive supervisors at the workplace could also reduce work-family conflicts. Supportive supervisors understand the value of family and grasp the role parents or caretakers have for their families in relation to their work. In a positive work environment, the family supportive supervisor cares for the well-being of the employees. When this environment is created, a worker feels cared for by the employer and is in a better position to balance between the work and family (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). This research proposal lays the foundation for a study to determine the effect of supportive workplace supervisors in

reducing work-family conflicts. This research paper will seek to identify the relationship that exists between reduction of work-family conflicts and a positive work-family supportive supervisor.

Current studies in this field are geared towards examining how work affects workers' well-being from the perspective of the private life of the employee, specifically work-family issues (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Research indicates the establishment of supportive family policies alone is not sufficient to address the issues of work-family conflict since the rules depend on the discretion of workers' supervisors (Geurts, Kompier, Roxburgh, & Houtman, 2003). Managerial or supervisory support has been acknowledged as an important factor in lessening work-family conflicts.

According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory, persons aim at gaining resources and strive to protect and maintain them like objects (such as food), conditions (e.g. promotions or a valued job role), and personal characteristic (e.g. mastery, and self-esteem) (Hobfoll, 1989). When these resources are lost or begin to disappear, workers experience stress. Based on this framework, the paper will argue that excessive workload and unsupportive supervisors are job stressors that result in work-family conflict. An upsurge in such strains calls for more resources being consumed in the work environment, thereby leaving less energy for the family.

Considering resources are limited, increased workloads and unsupportive supervisors leave scarcer resources to fulfill the demand of family needs. Resource drain on a daily basis due to increased workloads and unsupportive family environment at work can depressingly influence family duties, translating in work-family conflict. As a result, a number of other results could occur, including the lack of employee satisfaction (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002), and the lack

of social support systems for the employee (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999), among other multi-dimensional problems (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000).

The supportive supervisor supports the desire of an employee to balance between their work and family. In so doing, he or she can put together a schedule that is flexible so that the worker can be with the family at the time they need. Also, the supervisor can tolerate the behavior of the employee, for example, if he or she wants to make phone calls to their children when they get home after school. The supervisor is also able to give the employee some time for him or her to visit the childcare center, elder care center, or even to give permission to the worker to bring their children to work. A supportive supervisor is in a position of offering time off to the employee if their caretaker leaves or quits. With these different forms of support, a worker will feel cared for, and his or her family roles valued. These practices will help an employee meet both the family and work responsibilities that they have (Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

Supervisors that support employees are significant in helping the worker balance between the work and family roles. The balance helps reduce the stress that the employee might encounter (Winfield & Rushing, 2005). Supervisors have the mandate and the authority to make decisions that govern how an organization should operate. Therefore, family supportive supervisors will put measures in place, just like those highlighted by Thomas & Ganster (1995) to help workers balance between family roles and work responsibilities. Family-supportive supervisors are significant within an organization, hence the need for each company and organization to put in place measures that favor working parents, especially mothers. If a balance is met, then businesses will realize significant profits and tremendous growth because the workers will be comfortable since they know how their families are doing.

Family supportive supervisors help in putting up measures and policies that favor working parents. Winfield and Rushing (2005) say that directors and managers of organizations have the ability to implement family-friendly policies or choose to leave them out. They add, these supervisors have been given a greater responsibility to make decisions as compared to the owners or management. In organizations, programs that support families are by choice, and a supervisor has the option of allowing them or not. In addition, the supervisor has the mandate to choose who will enjoy the advantages. On the other hand, the supervisors can allow some of the policies to be breached, especially when they are family supportive. In allowing family-friendly policies to be practiced, the stress and conflict in families or workplaces are reduced. Kossek et al. (2011) also echo the same ideas by saying that it is mostly the responsibility of the supervisor to decide on what happens with the employees put under him or her. Therefore, a family supportive supervisor will ensure the workers are comfortable at work and that their families are safe and healthy too.

Reduction in work-family conflicts improves the health of the worker and family members. A family supportive supervisor helps reduce the stress that an employee might have especially when it comes to meeting the needs of the family and the work. Increased stress levels make some people aggressive and unable to meet the responsibilities they have. On the other hand, the results that workers offer might be substandard thus affecting their work and family relationships. Supervisors who create a flexible and worker friendly schedule might reduce the stress of the employee thus help in maintaining proper health status because stress affects human health greatly (Wadhwa, 2016). Work-family conflict creates unfavorable environments for the worker, both at home and at the workplace. Therefore, proper measures need to be set to ensure their health and well-being is taken care of.

The supervisor is also able to put in place a policy that allows workers to bring their family members, for example, children to work to complete their job in the organization on the premises and not take the work home. With this, they can have more quality time with their family members (Crain, et al., 2014). Also, the stress that is brought about by having pending tasks is reduced and the time at home is spent taking care of the needs of the family. Therefore, supportive family supervisors make a significant contribution to both employees and the company.

There are several support systems in workplaces or organizations. There is general supervisor support that entails the general expressions of being concerned about the employee, for example, emotional support and other instrumental support. This support is intended to provide a favorable working environment for the workers. On the other hand, supervisor work-family support presents an environment for the employee to be able to handle family matters and work issues without straining or experiencing any challenges. Per Wadhwa (2016), supervisors are always the agents of the organization. When a supervisor supports the work and family issues of an employee, the organization is in full support of the same. The other form of support is the organizational support where people can relate to an organization and hence develop a positive attitude towards the organization while organizational work-family support is the ability of an organization to support both work and family roles of the employees, for example, favorable working hours. At the same time, the employees can feel that the organization is concerned about their welfare (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011).

Several studies have been carried out to identify the importance of organizational and supervisory support to employees. What most of the researchers did not tackle is how the support can reduce or prevent work-family conflicts. Different theories and models on employee support

have also been discussed and little on work and family disagreements. On the other hand, what the previous studies have also focused on is the how the support motivates employees leading an organization or a company towards achieving its set objectives (Odle-Dusseau, Britt, & Greene-Shortridge, 2012). Most researchers did not realize that the support is critical to the employee's families rather than the organizations. The society is profit-oriented. As a result, it will look for different ways of impressing their employees so that they are motivated to work towards achieving the goals of an organization. There is more than just making profits. These employees are family members, and these members are under their care. They need them just as much the companies, and other businesses need them. A balance must be there between their work and the people they care about. The supervisors in the workplace are responsible for ensuring the employees are comfortable, and their families are also excellent.

With the increase in the number of couples participating in full-time jobs, family roles are now tasks of both spouses. Together with increased workloads and the twenty-four working systems in most firms, employees are currently facing mounting demands from both domains: family and work. As a result, work-family conflicts (WFC) have now gathered the attention of researcher's due to the increased recognition that the relationship between work and family has a fundamental influence on the well-being of an employee. Consequently, current studies in this field are geared towards examining how work impacts workers' well-being from the perspective of the private life of the employee, specifically work-family issues (Baker & Demerouti 2007). Work-family conflict occur when duty stressors from family and work are jointly incompatible where involvement in one domain is made difficult by virtue of involvement in the other domain.

Research indicates the establishment of supportive family policies alone is not sufficient to address the issues of work-family conflict since the rules depend on the discretion of workers'

supervisors (Geurts, Kompier, Roxburgh, & Houtman, 2003). Informal managerial or supervisor support has been acknowledged as an important factor in lessening work-family conflicts. Thus, firms must consider how managers and supervisors influence an employees' WFC, workload, and well-being (Baker & Demerouti 2007).

Although informative and encouraging, the existing studies have largely concentrated on between-individual relationships and variations. For instance, increased job duties have been identified as work stressors, hence, researched largely as a between-individual variation employing longitudinal and cross-sectional research strategies (Edwards, & Lambert, 2007). However, both designs fail to address or examine real-time, dynamic features influencing the individuals' experiences. The over-focus on between-individual relationships has neglected the within-individual variability in the employees' daily job strains, well-being, and conflicts (Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015). Likewise, although it is widely accepted, supervisory or managerial support has a positive influence on workers' WFC, a considerable amount of information is unknown about how such support influences a persons' daily well-being and work-family conflict. Using the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the paper will address the within-individual relations of workers' well-being and workload as mediated by the WFC and cross-level controlling duty of supervisor work-family support.

The overall purpose of this study will be to examine if family-supportive supervisors in workplaces lessen work-family conflicts. To address this, the study will examine two broad questions: 1) Do initiatives at the workplace centered on work-family support reduce the worker's work-family conflict? 2) How does reduced work-family conflict influence the overall employees' output, specifically business aftermaths at the organization's level?

The study will employ the conservation of resources theory (COR) to help in the theorizing process. COR posits that stress is a result of the loss of resources, the risk of losing resources or the failure to gain resources after investing resources. According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), persons aim at gaining resources and strive to protect and maintain them like objects (such as food), conditions (e.g. promotions or a valued job role), and personal characteristic (e.g. mastery, and self-esteem). When these resources are lost or disappearing, the people experience stress. Based on this framework, the paper will argue that workload and unsupportive supervisors are job stressors that result in mental, time, and energy depletion. An upsurge in such strains calls for more resources being consumed in the work atmosphere. Considering the resources are limited, increased workloads and unsupportive supervisors leave scarcer resources to fulfill the demand of family needs. For instance, unsupportive supervisors might establish policies that do not support family, hence increased workload and time spent at work. The more hours an individual spends at work, the fewer hours they spend with family resulting in a conflict between the two spheres due to insufficient resources to meet the demands of the two sides: family and work. Resource drain can be on a daily basis due to increased workloads and unsupported family environments at work which influences work-family conflict. This may be due to a time shortage to undertake an individuals' family duties or the absence of enough time to be involved in the family dynamics. Therefore, I hypothesize the following: Employees who report lower levels of work-family conflict will also report supportive supervisors in their workplace.

Method

Ethical considerations

Researchers have ensured approval by relevant institutional review boards and will obtain informed consent from all participants. All participants will receive a certificate of informed consent to read, and if agreed to, they will fill out certificate, sign, and return. The certificate of informed consent will be administered through paper two weeks before the study begins and must be mailed back via work mail to the researchers one week before the first morning the study begins. A debriefing will be mailed inside each participant check at the end of the study.

Sample, procedure, material and research design

The study targets all University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) employees with families, they will be invited via email to participate. The experiment will be conducted through a 5-item Likert scale online survey, two on a daily basis, one at home and one while at work for a period of one month. An additional survey, a Likert-type scale survey, will be conducted at the end of the study to address the overall perception of the participants' view on their supervisors' work-family support. The dependent variable in our study is work-family conflict, and our independent variable is workplace supervisors. This study is a correlational study, we will measure supervisor's supportive behaviors and see if they correlate with work-family conflict. Therefore, the study should show employees who report lower levels of work-family conflict will also report supportive supervisors in the workplace.

Adapting a research design (Goh et al., 2015), participation will be requested via email solicitations sent to all UHD employees with families. Also, for a better comparison, the study will target both full-time and part-time employees. The participants will be expected to complete two 5-item Likert scale surveys on a daily basis, one at home and one while at work for one month assuming they undergo the same routine all year long and to accommodate work-shift changes if any. The first 5-item Likert scale survey will be administered at the workplace via

online. To consider the unpredictable work schedules, participants will be expected to complete the survey around the time they leave UHD daily. The 5-item Likert scale home survey will be administered through paper questionnaires after work and be answered before the participants retire to bed; home surveys will be mailed back via work mail to the researchers the next morning before the participants begin their daily schedule. An additional survey, a Likert-type survey, will be conducted at the end of the study to gather data about the overall perception of the participants' view on their supervisors' support on work-family. This will be administered through paper questionnaires after work and be answered before the participants retire to bed; the additional Likert-type survey will be mailed back via work mail to the researchers the next morning before the participants begin their daily schedule. All UHD participants will be paid $100 at the end of the study after receipt of completion of the one-month study and additional Likert-type survey on the view of their supervisors' support on work-family.

Measure and variables.

Daily workload: On a daily basis, at work, a five-item measure will be employed to evaluate worker's daily job-load. Four will be work demand measure (Goh et al., 2015) revised to mirror sensitivities of daily workloads (for instance, I had to handle my work backlog today; I had to do a lot of work today; and today, I had issues with the high pace of work) and the last item will involve an evaluation of the workload (for instance, today, I had a low workload). Responses will be rated on a 5-point scale (5=strongly agree and 1=strongly disagree).

Daily work–family conflict: After work, at home, participants will report on their daily work-family conflicts employing a borrowed six-item measure (Edwards, & Rothbard, 2000) scored on a 5-point scale, (5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree). The items will include, "the

rigors of my work today made it hard to feel relaxed after work," and "I reached home exhausted to touch anything."

Supervisor work–family support: The overall perception of the participants' view on their supervisors' work-family support will be evaluated at the end of the study from a Likert-type survey. And scored on a scale of 5, 5=strongly agree, and 1=strongly disagree. A four-item measure will be employed, borrowed from Benson (2005). Items will include, for instance, "my supervisor is understanding," and "he allows workers to attend to family issues when necessary."

Controls

The number of children, age, and gender of the participants will be utilized as second level control variables. Gender will be considered because women and men involved in family-friendly issues, like work schedule flexibility, differ which influences work-family experiences. We control for age as a proxy for work and job tenure (Byron, 2005). The number of children influences work-family conflict by placing more demands at home.

Daily life satisfaction: While at home, participants will be encouraged to report on their daily satisfaction utilizing a five-item valuation adapted from (Goh et al., 2015) scored on a scale of 5 points, (5=strongly agree, and 1=strongly disagree). For instance, "Today, I feel am in control of my surrounding: work and family."

Preliminary Analyses

Univariate normality. Data will be accessed before testing the hypothesis to check for non-normality of the chosen scales.

Exploratory factor analysis. Factor evaluation employing the principal axis factoring method will be conducted to inspect the nature of the item-factor loading and the factor structure of the measure.

Discussion

The larger part of the literature review has shown previous research linked with the phenomenon of worker sensitivity with possible effects on the employee. In parts where the employee had a receptive boss, there were higher chances of employee satisfaction with the work. However, effects of supervisor behavior on work-family conflict are yet to be discovered. While supportive supervisors may have positive effects, studies have not effectively explored the issue of work-family conflicts in the context of supportive supervisors.

As a result, this research will look into this issue in-depth to determine the reality of effects for supportive and non-supportive supervisors on work-family conflict. With positive relationships linked to worker satisfaction and supportive supervisors, this study looks to establish the relationship between resulting overall job satisfaction with work-family conflicts. Although possible outcomes include the reduction of work-family conflicts with increasing support from workplace supervisors, the relationship needs to be established, and its significance determined through the tests run in this study.

Conclusively, a certain outcome shall be produced at the end of this research to give the relationship between the two variables and the effect of such findings to the business field. Furthermore, this could be an addition to transformational leadership in the light of work-family conflicts.

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