



# Salesperson coping with work-family conflict: The joint effects of ingratiation and self-promotion

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## ABSTRACT

Impression management tactics have recently been identified as effective strategies for coping with work stressors. However, despite the evidence that using a combination of tactics can provide more favorable outcomes than using a single tactic, previous studies have often examined impression management tactics in isolation. Furthermore, many sales organizations view their employees' proactive behaviors as essential for gaining a competitive advantage, but our knowledge about the antecedents of proactivity at work is still limited. To address this knowledge gap, we introduce a theoretical model that explains the joint moderating effects of combining two forms of impression management tactics on the relationship between work-family conflict and salespeople's proactive behaviors. We study 249 salesperson-supervisor dyads, and the results indicate that work-family conflict is negatively related to salespeople's proactive behaviors through emotional exhaustion. In addition, the combination of ingratiation and self-promotion has a buffering effect on the relationship between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion.

## 1. Introduction

Growing numbers of employees are reporting conflict between work and family responsibilities (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2011). In fact, work-family conflict (WFC) has been identified as one of the five emerging psycho-social risks in today's workforce (European Agency for Safety and Health and Work, 2010). Salespeople are particularly susceptible to this type of role conflict due to the boundary-spanning and stressful nature of sales positions (Boles, Johnston, & Hair, 1997). WFC has significant costs for individuals, their employers, and their families (Matthews, Winkel, & Wayne, 2014), with detrimental effects on important outcomes, such as job and life satisfaction, employee retention, and emotional and psychological well-being (Boles et al., 1997; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; O'Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2004). Therefore, comprehending how to deal with work-family conflict is crucial since the use of effective coping strategies may attenuate the relationship between this type of role conflict and its negative consequences.

Ingratiation is an assertive impression management (IM) tactic used to evoke interpersonal attraction or liking. Prior research has confirmed that ingratiation can aid in coping with stress through social support in

the form of intimate affective relationships between members of the organization (Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007; Wayne, Liden, & Sparrowe, 1994; Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012). However, this line of research has not considered the effects of combining different IM tactics. In this regard, there is evidence that the combined use of various IM tactics may provide more positive outcomes than using a tactic in isolation (Falbe & Yukl, 1992) and that some specific combinations of influence tactics can be particularly effective in achieving the desired results (Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). However, the studies that address the use of blending different IM tactics are very scarce. In fact, the study of the efficacy of combining the most frequently used assertive tactics, specifically ingratiation and self-promotion, has been recently underlined as an unanswered question in the IM literature (Bolino, Long, & Turnley, 2016).

To address this gap, we propose a model that examines the role of IM tactics as strategies for coping with WFC (see Fig. 1). Consistent with previous research (i.e., Brouer, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011), we state that IM is instrumental in the attainment of higher levels of social resources. Specifically, we propose that, under certain conditions, the combined use of self-promotion and ingratiation buffers the negative effect of WFC on salespeople's proactive behaviors via emotional exhaustion

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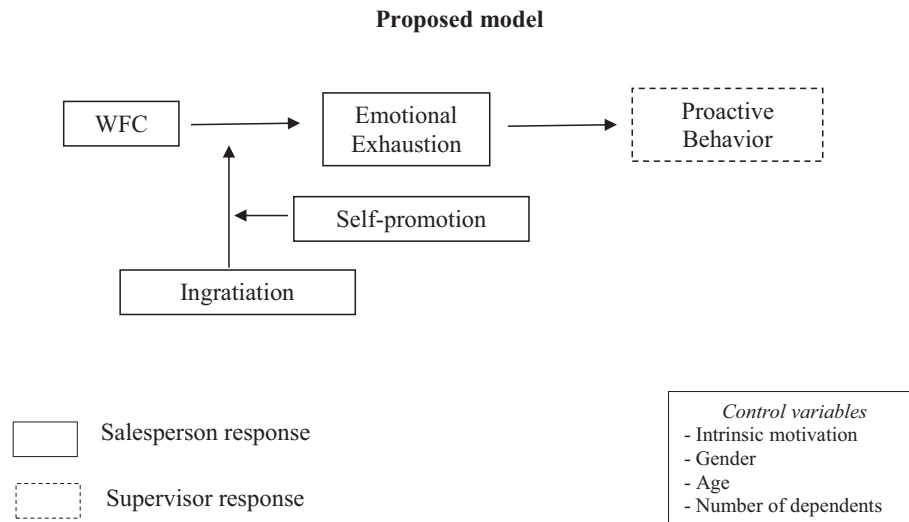


Fig. 1. Proposed model.

(EE). Guided by the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we argue that WFC leads to strain (e.g., EE) because individuals lose resources (e.g., time away from work, energy) while trying to adequately perform both family and work roles. During this process, individuals are inclined to protect their actual resources (conservation) and acquire new ones (acquisition); they can do so by using coping behaviors (e.g., IM) which are defined as “the person’s constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person’s resources” (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986, p. 993).

Individuals can employ a variety of IM tactics to make positive impressions on others. Ingratiation and self-promotion are the most frequently used assertive tactics, which are behaviors initiated by an actor to boost their image (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Ingratiation is a type of “other-focused” tactic, as ingratiators are motivated to highlight the targets’ positive aspects in an effort to appear likable and warm (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). In contrast, self-promotion is a “self-focused” tactic that is used to accentuate favorable aspects of oneself or one’s job in an effort to appear competent (Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Regarding the joint effect of both tactics as coping strategies, recent studies (i.e., Holioen & Fiske, 2013) extend the compensation effect (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005) to IM. They suggest that individuals appear less competent (self-promotion) with intent to seem friendly and affable (ingratiation) and appear less warm (ingratiation) with the intent to seem competent (self-promotion).

Furthermore, we analyze the joint moderating effects of IM tactics on the relationship between WFC and salespeople’s proactive behaviors. Proactive behavior refers to self-starting and an orientation toward change or toward the future (Crant, 2000). Contemporary organizations face the challenge to change and adapt to increasingly dynamic and turbulent environments. In this context, many organizations view their employees’ proactive behaviors as essential for gaining an advantage over their competitors (Ashford, Blatt, & Valle, 2003; Crant, 2000). This is particularly important for salespeople because they face progressively more complex external (with customers) and internal (with different departments) work environments within an organization (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). Studies involving boundary-spanning employees have unambiguously demonstrated that proactive behaviors result in increased performance levels and have recently focused on understanding proactive behavior drivers. As reported in Table 1, studies consistently report a positive association between proactive behaviors and performance. They have also shown that both organizational and individual-

level factors can motivate proactive behaviors.

Research shows that there is an individual disposition toward proactive behavior (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Proactive behaviors are affected by individual-level factors like goal orientations, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy (e.g., Mallin et al., 2014; Porath & Bateman, 2006). Proactive behaviors can also be the consequence of workplace elements and organizational variables (Sonnentag, 2003). For example, Jong and Ruyter (2004) report that both inter-team and intra-team support increases proactive service recovery behaviors. Varela et al. (2018) recently showed that salespeople are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors when their manager is viewed as a servant leader. However, starting and maintaining proactive behavior requires extra effort (Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997) and employees are less likely to engage in proactive actions when they feel “burned out” (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007).

One of the factors that can influence proactive behavior is the presence of workplace stressors, as they can limit the available resources to be spent on proactive behavior. Although research that empirically addresses this issue is limited, some studies report a positive effect of work stressors, such as time pressure on proactive behavior (e.g., Fay & Sonnentag, 2002; Ohly, Sonnentag, & Pluntke, 2006; Sonnentag, 2003). A recent meta-analysis elucidates this unexpected and surprising result by confirming that time pressure is related not only to strain but also to higher work motivation (Lepine, Podsakoff, & Lepine, 2005). According to these findings and under certain conditions, work stressors could actually increase proactive behaviors through higher work motivation.

According to spillover theory, there are no boundaries between ‘work’ and ‘home’, and the pressures experienced in one domain can also affect the other domain (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). An excessive number of working hours drains employees’ personal resources and results in the belief that achieving ‘work’ and ‘family’ objectives are not possible, thus leading to WFC and high levels of strain (Briggs, Jaramillo, & Noboa, 2015). Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran’s (2005) meta-analysis also demonstrates that WFC results in withdrawal behaviors like tardiness, absenteeism, turnover, and low job involvement. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that employees facing a high level of WFC may not have the necessary level of energy or the desire to engage in proactive behaviors. However, as shown in Table 1, research examining the impact of WFC and strain on proactive behavior has rendered inconclusive results. For example, Chang et al.’s (2007) meta-analysis shows that emotional strain reduces the occurrence of proactive organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). Yet this negative association becomes non-significant in various conditions including effect

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