The influence of leadership behavior on employee work-family outcomes: A review and research agenda

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly inquiries into the prominent role that leaders play in influencing their followers' work-family experiences have flourished in recent decades. Despite this encouraging progress, researchers have criticized the current state of the literature, lamenting that the study of leader behaviors in the work-family literature is either incomplete or oversimplified. To move the field forward, we conducted a systematic review of the literature to take stock of what we know, identify what is still unknown, and chart a path forward for future research. We organize the literature linking leadership to employees' work-family experience based on a four-category framework of leader behavior (task, relationship, change, and ethical/unethical). We summarize what effects leader behaviors may have on their followers, how such effects occur, and the boundary conditions of these effects. We conclude our review by identifying both theoretical and methodological gaps that can inform future leadership research in the work-family domain.

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1. Introduction

The past several decades have seen significant demographic shifts in the workplace. More working mothers, employees in the "sandwich generation" with both childcare and eldercare responsibilities, and those who live in non-traditional family arrangements are entering the workforce (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). These changes, in combination with technological advances that allow (or possibly compel) employees to work outside of the traditional workplace and schedule, have made it increasingly challenging for employees to manage their work and family responsibilities simultaneously. Complicating matters, the boundaries between work and family are permeable, such that experiences from one domain can affect experiences in the other domain (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). In some cases, employees may experience work-family conflict, defined as the perception that a given life domain is made more difficult as a result of participation in another life domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). At the same time, participating in both work and family domains may also allow employees to experience work-family enrichment, which occurs when experiences from one domain increase the quality of experiences in another domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Research suggests that both conflict and enrichment have an impact on important employee and organizational outcomes such as their physical and mental health, family functioning, and work attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Byron, 2005; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010). These findings have led to calls for organizations to assume a more proactive role in assisting their employees in finding a balance between work and family needs (Kelly, Kossek, Hammer, Durham, Bray,

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Chermack, et al., 2008). In response, some organizations have introduced a variety of family-friendly programs such as flexible work schedules, on-site daycare centers, and parental leave to accommodate employees' needs to coordinate different life roles (Butts, Casper, & Yang, 2013; Gajendran & Harison, 2007). However, empirical research has called into question the efficacy of these programs, instead suggesting that the behaviors of workplace leaders are more predictive of how employees manage the work-family interface (Allen, 2001; Bagger & Li, 2014; Kelly et al., 2008).

Historically, the link between leadership and employee work-family outcomes is one that has been often overlooked. This may be because leadership research tends to focus on the role of leader behavior in influencing outcomes such as organizational and individual effectiveness, performance, and success. This view of leadership has been informative, but does not fully consider the notion that leader behaviors may have secondary effects that go beyond the traditional boundaries of work. While it may not be the intention of the leader to impact how followers manage the work-family interface, such effects do occur. Research has shown that some leader behaviors may increase followers' abilities to overcome work–family conflict and increase work-family enrichment (e.g., Beauregard, 2011), but other leader behaviors may have the opposite effect by making it more difficult for followers to manage work-family needs at the same time (e.g., Tepper, 2000).

In recent years researchers have started to link leader behavior to follower work-family outcomes (Tang, Kwan, Zhang, & Zhu, 2016). Although previous work on the relationship between leadership and the work-family interface is informative, as research in this area has grown, the literature has also become fragmented. Leader behavior has been conceptualized in different ways across studies (e.g., Greenhaus, Ziegert, & Allen, 2012; Md-Sidin, Sambasivan, & Ismail, 2010; Tepper, 2000), and inconsistent results on whether and how leader behaviors impact employee work–family conflict and enrichment have led to the suggestion that the role of leadership in this domain may be overstated (Minnotte, 2012). Such fragmentation may frustrate practitioners searching for research-based, organizational prescriptions for improving the work-family balance of their employees and may create difficulties for researchers that look to extend previous research. Because leaders "play a particularly important role in helping individuals balance their work and family demands" (Kailasapathy, Kraimer, & Metz, 2014, p. 2682), we believe that the effects of leader behaviors in work-family research will continue to receive increasing attention in the years to come.

Two recent meta-analyses found that leader support was negatively related to work–family conflict (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011) and that these effects were mediated by perceived organizational support (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Although these findings are informative, they are incomplete in that they (a) offer limited insight into when and how these effects are realized; (b) do not examine the effects of leader behavior on work-family enrichment; (c) do not examine the downstream effects of leader behavior through conflict and enrichment; and (d) do not include other types of leader behavior beyond support. Consequently, a systematic review of this literature is necessary to consolidate existing findings and to provide a path forward for future research in this area.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. The work-family interface

Three paradigms have been used to describe the work-family interface. Influenced by the scarcity hypothesis (Goode, 1960), the conflict paradigm is based on the notion that a given individual possesses a limited pool of resources (such as time, effort, or physical and emotional energy) that can be allocated to different domains of life. When demands for resources in one domain (such as work) are high, fewer resources are available for meeting demands in another domain (such as family). When this happens, fulfilling the responsibilities associated with one role may prohibit the fulfillment of responsibilities in a different role. Past research has distinguished two directions of conflict: *work-to-family conflict* (WFC) and *family-to-work conflict* (FWC). The enrichment paradigm, in contrast, assumes that work and family can be allies such that the engagement in one domain may generate resources that can be used to improve performance in the other domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Marks, 1977). According to this perspective, individuals can grow or acquire valuable resources in one domain (such as work) that can then be transferred to another domain (such as family), thereby enhancing the quality of the enriched domain (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007). Just like conflict, enrichment can also occur in both directions: *work-to-family enrichment* (WFE) and *family-to-work enrichment* (FWE). Recent research has identified a third paradigm called work-family balance that is referred to as "an overall appraisal of the extent to which individuals' effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are consistent with their life values at a given point in time" (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011, p. 174). According to this perspective, an individual may experience work-family balance to the extent that they experience effectiveness in a role that is highly valued (such as the work role) irrespective of their experience in other roles (such as the family role) that are not prioritized. Unlike conflict and enrichment, work-family balance does not distinguish the directions in which work and family impact each other.

2.2. Leadership and follower work-family outcomes

Despite increasing interest in the interface between leadership and follower work-family outcomes, the literature currently lacks a conceptual framework that proposes clear links between the two. We thus draw on research from the leadership literature to present a review of how leader behavior impacts employees' work-family outcomes. Past research has suggested that leadership is transmitted through four mechanisms: traits, behaviors, affect, and cognition (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011). Our review focuses on leader behaviors for two reasons. First, leader behaviors tend to have more proximal effects on outcomes that mediate the effects of the other three mechanisms (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Second, of the four