A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between leader-member exchange and work-family experiences ☆

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ABSTRACT

It is well accepted that leadership-relevant constructs (e.g., leader support, family supportive supervisor behaviors) are advantageous for subordinates' work-family experiences. However, the profundity of this literature has lacked connection to well-established leadership theories, which could inform its progress. This study was designed to demonstrate the value of LMX theory as a lens through which employees' work-family experiences can be understood. An expansive search of the published and unpublished literature yielded 64 correlations ($N = 18.139$) from 40 independent studies. Using random-effects meta-analysis, LMX was demonstrated to be negatively related to work interference with family ($\rho = -0.26$), and family interference with work ($\rho = -0.13$), and positively linked to work-family enrichment ($\rho = 0.38$), and family-work enrichment ($\rho = 0.28$). Analyses suggest both contextual and methodological moderators in the relationship between LMX and work interference with family. This study highlights the value of incorporating established leadership theory into work-family research to better understand how and why leaders assist their employees in effectively managing work and family.

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Working adults invariably devote the majority of their time and energy to two life domains: work and family. The term 'family' broadly refers to one's non-work roles and is inclusive of familial (e.g., parent, partner) *and* personal life roles (e.g., community volunteer; Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011). The scholarly literature and popular press concur that work and family demands often compete and that managing the work-family interface can be a major challenge among employees (e.g., Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011; Sandberg & Grant, 2015). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that perceived support from the work organization, especially the support of one's immediate supervisor, is positively linked to favorable work-family experiences among employees (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) describe what immediate supervisors do to demonstrate their support for employees' work-family needs (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009; Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007) and represent a rapidly growing area of work-family research. While this research stream has advanced our understanding of which behaviors supervisors engage in to facilitate employees' work-family management, from a theoretical perspective, the notion of support offers little to our understanding of *how* or *why* supervisors facilitate work-family management. For example, it is well understood that an employee is more likely to experience optimal work-family experiences when he or she reports receiving emotional support for work-family from the immediate supervisor (e.g., Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). What is less clear, however, is why this immediate supervisor would assist with employees' work-family issues and how this supervisor goes about providing such assistance. Over the past 15 years, work-family

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researchers have increasingly turned to LMX theory to clarify the supervisor's role in work-family management (e.g., Bernas & Major, 2000; Lapierre, Hackett, & Taggar, 2006; Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano, 2008).

The present meta-analytic review of research linking LMX and work-family experiences has the potential to advance the work-family literature in a variety of ways. First, this study is the first to meta-analytically examine the relationships between LMX and work-family experiences. As a result, this meta-analysis demonstrates the viability of LMX theory as a lens through which employees' work-family experiences can be understood. Second, the contextual and methodological moderator analyses answer recent calls in the work-family literature to develop an understanding of situations in which relationships between leadership and work interference with family (WIF) may vary (e.g., Poelmans, Greenhaus, & Maestro, 2013; Shaffer, Joplin, & Hsu, 2011). These findings inform future research examining the role of leadership in facilitating work-family management and provide practical guidance regarding contexts that moderate the effects of leadership. Finally, this meta-analysis serves an agenda-building function; that is, the empirical findings demonstrate the value of integrating leadership theory into the work-family literature and provide scholars direction on the research questions of most critical need surrounding these two bodies of literature.

Although supervisor support and behaviors have received increased attention from work-family scholars over the past two decades, these leadership-relevant concepts are largely void of leadership theory. As a result, this body of literature has progressed with a focus on which resources the leader may offer to assist with work-family management, whereas the understanding of *why* and *how* the leader provides these resources has struggled to mature. Therefore, this study may encourage researchers seeking to understand the supervisor's role in work-family management to embrace leadership theory to better understand these relationships.

In the sections that follow, focal work-family experiences (i.e., work-family conflict and work-family enrichment) are introduced and defined. Next, LMX theory and its utility in understanding employees' work-family experiences are described. Finally, moderators of the relationship between LMX and WIF are considered.

The work-family interface

Research examining the work-family interface has primarily focused on *work-family spillover*, or the intra-individual transfer process of experiences, attitudes, and moods between one's work and family roles (Crouter, 1984). Work-family spillover refers to the extent to which participation in one's work (family) role positively or negatively affects his or her participation or experiences in the family (work) domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Work-family conflict

Consistent with the general tendency across psychological literatures to emphasize and accentuate negative experiences (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), research on the work-family interface similarly suffers from a negativity bias (Morganson, Litano, & O'Neill, 2014). Work-family conflict (WFC) represents negative spillover and is defined as a "form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). WFC is bi-directional, such that the inter-role conflict can originate in either the work or family domain. WIF occurs when work role demands hinder participation in the family role, whereas family interference with work (FIW) transpires when familial or personal responsibilities impede meeting work role expectations (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). Both WIF and FIW are negatively associated with a host of advantageous work, family, and health-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, family satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Shockley & Singla, 2011).

Work-family enrichment

Positive work-family spillover has been represented by a number of constructs, including work-family facilitation (Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004), enhancement (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), positive affective and instrumental spillover (Hanson & Hammer, 2006), and enrichment (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Work-family enrichment, considered to represent the most comprehensive description of positive spillover, refers to "the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in another role" (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p. 73). Work-family enrichment transpires when resources generated in one's work (family) role facilitate enhanced affect or performance in his or her family (work) role (Carlson et al., 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Also bi-directional, work-to-family enrichment (WFE) occurs when positive work experiences facilitate improved functioning in one's family role, and family-to-work enrichment (FWE) transpires when positive family experiences facilitate enhanced performance at work. A recent meta-analysis demonstrated both WFE and FWE to be positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, family satisfaction, and physical and mental health (McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010). Although conceptually and empirically distinct, assessments of work-family conflict and enrichment exhibit a strong negative link (Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013).

Leader-member exchange applied to the work-family interface

LMX describes the quality of the social exchange relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX theory suggests that the supervisor forms unique relationships with each of his or her