



How context matters: The relationship between family supportive supervisor behaviours and motivation to work moderated by gender inequality



Maria José Bosch^{a,*}, Mireia Las Heras^b, Marcello Russo^c, Yasin Rofcanin^d, Marc Grau i Grau^{e,f}

^a ESE Business School, Universidad de los Andes, Av. Plaza 1905, Las Condes, Santiago de Chile, Chile

^b IESE Business School, Universidad de Navarra, Pearson Avenue 21, Barcelona 08034, Spain

^c Università degli Studi di Bologna, Via Capo di Lucca 34, 40126 Bologna, Italy

^d Essex Business School, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ, UK

^e Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard Kennedy School, 79 John F. Kennedy St, Cambridge, MA 02138, United States

^f Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Immaculada 22, 08017 Barcelona, Spain

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ABSTRACT

This study examines relationships between family-supportive supervisor behaviour (FSSB) and individuals' prosocial and extrinsic motivation at work in four countries: Brazil, Kenya, the Netherlands and the Philippines. With a sample of 2046 employees from these four countries, we use national levels of gender inequality, measured by the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII), to examine whether differences in men's and women's achievements in society moderate the relationship between FSSB and individuals' motivation at work. The study reveals that FSSB is positively associated with prosocial motivation and extrinsic motivation, and that the level of gender inequality in a country is relevant, given that GII moderates the effects of FSSB on prosocial motivation. Our results show that when GII is low, the positive effects of FSSB on prosocial motivation are stronger. We discuss the implications for theory and practice.

1. Introduction

We often hear that the world is flat, and that because of globalisation and migration geographical differences are becoming irrelevant (Adame, Capliure, & Miquel, 2016). However, employees' personal motivation (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007), organisational work-family policies (Javidan, Dorfman, Sully de Luque, & House, 2006) and societal norms in regard to the gender division of labour (Eagly & Wood, 1999) are heterogeneous and differ across societies. Despite these differences, work-family scholars have only touched upon the study of how national contexts influence the relationships between workplace factors designed to help employees achieve a better work-family balance, as well as social support, and individual work- and family-related outcomes (for some exceptions, see Den Dulk, Peper, Kanjuo Mrčela, & Ignjatović, 2016; Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014; Las Heras, Trefalt, & Escribano, 2015; Russo, Buonocore, Carmeli, & Guo, 2015).

In this article, we contribute to filling this research gap by examining the relationship between family-supportive supervisor behaviour (FSSB) and individual prosocial and extrinsic motivation at work through a cross-national examination. FSSB is an important workplace resource (Voydanoff, 2005) that has been shown to help employees fulfil their

work-family responsibilities (Hammer, Kossek, Bodner, & Crain, 2013; Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007). We use the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII), which captures countries' levels of gender inequality, to examine the moderating effects of cross-country differences on the relationship between FSSB and prosocial and extrinsic motivation (see Fig. 1). We test our hypotheses in four countries that vary substantially in terms of their levels of gender inequality: Brazil, Kenya, the Netherlands and the Philippines.

Our study advances the research on FSSB in at least two ways. First, we examine the effects of FSSB on individual motivation at work. We test this relationship in previously unexplored cultural contexts, including African and Latin American countries. This has both theoretical and practical relevance. Research shows that FSSB is associated with higher levels of work-family enrichment, job satisfaction and thriving at work among employees (Bagger & Li, 2014; Russo et al., 2015), as well as lower levels of anxiety and depression (Snow, Swan, Raghavan, Connell, & Klein, 2003), work-family conflict (Breaugh & Frye, 2008) and turnover intention (Li & Bagger, 2011). No previous studies appear to have investigated the relationship between FSSB and individuals' motivation at work. This link is important because motivation is a powerful personal resource that enables employees to perform better,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mjbosch.esa@uandes.cl (M.J. Bosch), mlasheras@iese.edu (M.L. Heras), marcello.russo2@unibo.it (M. Russo), yasin.rofcanin@essex.ac.uk (Y. Rofcanin), Marc_Grau-Grau@hks.harvard.edu, mgraug@uic.edu (M. Grau i Grau).

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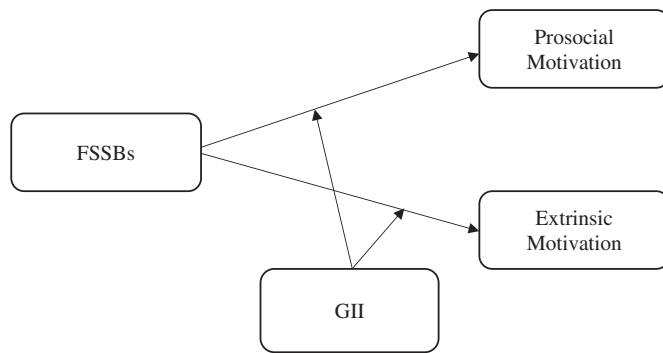


Fig. 1. Hypothesised research model.

and consequently represents a source of competitive advantage for companies (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

Second, we test these relationships in four very distinct cultural contexts: Brazil, Kenya, the Netherlands and the Philippines. This is theoretically important because most of the previous studies on FSSB have been conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries (for some exceptions, see Las Heras, Bosch, & Raes, 2015; Russo et al., 2015). For this reason, numerous researchers (e.g. Matthews, Mills, Trout, & English, 2014; Shor, Greenhaus, & Graham, 2013) have called for a finer-grained analysis of the effects of family-supportive supervisors in different contexts. Third, we consider GII as a potential moderator of the effects of FSSB on individual motivation at work. We believe that studying the role of gender inequality may help us understand the influence of national context and gender dynamics (Karkouloulian, Srour, & Sinan, 2016) on the relationship between work–family resources and employee outcomes, an area that is receiving increasing scholarly attention (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). A country's level of gender (in)equality may influence individuals' affective reactions to the presence of a family-supportive supervisor, and consequently their desire to reciprocate the positive treatment received. Thus, we contribute to elucidating the boundary conditions through which FSSB is likely to generate more positive outcomes in the workforce, an aspect that has been overlooked in previous research (Straub, 2012).

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Theory of reciprocity in social exchange

From childhood and through myriad social experiences we are socialised to “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12) and to “do in Rome as the Romans do” (Bertram, 1993). These two behavioural prescriptions reflect humans' conscious and unconscious desires to reciprocate and emulate others in positive and/or negative ways. Social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) is the theoretical framework that best captures the socio-emotional dynamics underlying reciprocal relationships at work, and it has been defined as one of “the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviors” (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 874). It posits that employees regulate their efforts, dedication and intentions to reciprocate towards other actors at work, not only in exchange for tangible assets such as salary and perks (economic principle), but also in exchange for socio-emotional assets such as caring and esteem (social principle; Blau, 1964; Eisenberg, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Economic exchange refers mainly to *tangible* as well as specific transactions, whereas social exchange refers mainly to *unspecific* and often intangible transactions.

Molm, Collett, and Schaefer (2007) offer a finer-grained examination of the mechanism of reciprocity through their *theory of reciprocity in social exchanges*. They identify two main types of reciprocity in social exchanges: direct (or restricted) and indirect (or generalised). Direct

reciprocity refers to the extent to which two parties in a relationship exchange resources to benefit each other. There are two types of direct reciprocity: negotiated exchange and reciprocal exchange. *Direct negotiated exchange* refers to situations in which “actors jointly negotiate the terms of an agreement that benefits both parties, either equally or unequally” (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007, p. 209). *Direct reciprocal exchange* refers to situations in which actors “perform individual acts that benefit another, such as giving assistance or advice, without negotiating and without knowing whether or when or to what extent the other will reciprocate” (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007, p. 209).

Indirect reciprocity refers to the extent to which a receiver of positive treatment decides to reciprocate to other parties in the social network with no specific intent. Molm et al. (2007) identify two types of indirect reciprocity: chain-generalised reciprocity and fairness-based selective reciprocity. *Chain-generalised reciprocity* describes situations in which those who have received positive treatment decide to reciprocate it to other people not involved in the initial exchange, building a chain of reciprocity. For example, employees who have received social support from their boss may decide to help other colleagues who are in need, activating a virtuous cycle of solidarity. *Fairness-based selective reciprocity* refers instead to situations in which people select those to whom they will reciprocate positive treatment received on the basis of their perceptions of how fair these people have been with them in the past.

In this study, we contend that direct and indirect reciprocity are two important mechanisms that may help to explain employees' responses to family-supportive supervisors. FSSB refers to a set of discretionary behaviours undertaken by a supervisor with the goal of aiding employees to fulfil their work and family commitments (Hammer et al., 2007, 2015). When enacting such supportive behaviours, supervisors may be unsure whether these behaviours will be reciprocated, which is the essence of direct reciprocal exchange. Moreover, as previous research demonstrates, recipients of FSSB do not reciprocate only to their direct supervisors, but also to the entire organisation through better task performance (Bagger & Li, 2014) and loyalty (Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001), illustrating chain-generalised reciprocity.

Although previous studies show that FSSB may enhance positive individual attitudes and behaviours at work, none has examined the link between FSSB and individual motivation. Previous research indicates the existence of three main types of work motivation: extrinsic, intrinsic and prosocial (Deci & Ryan, 1985). People who are motivated by extrinsic factors seek external rewards for their job, such as salary increases, promotions, and recognition. Those motivated by intrinsic factors are moved by the work itself and feel rewarded by performing the activity even “in the absence of operationally separable consequences” (Deci, 1976, p. 12). Finally, prosocially-motivated people perform actions that make a difference to other people's lives (Grant, 2007). In this article, we focus only on extrinsic and prosocial motivation because we are interested in examining the effects of FSSB on employees' desire to receive rewards at work for what they do (extrinsic motivation) and to contribute to the welfare of others (prosocial motivation). We contend that people might be motivated for extrinsic or prosocial reasons as a response to what they perceive form a third party, in this case their bosses' family-supportive behaviours. In contrast, intrinsically-motivated individuals believe that their jobs are interesting and will satisfy their fundamental psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000), so they are unlikely to be influenced by the reciprocal process determined by SET.

2.2. FSSB and prosocial motivation

FSSB is defined as a set of “behaviors exhibited by supervisors that are supportive of families” (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009, p. 838). Such behaviours include emotional and instrumental support provided by supervisors to their subordinates, role-modelling behaviours, and creative work-family management solutions that may benefit

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