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## Sequential mediation among family friendly culture and outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of perceived organizational support and family supportive supervisor behaviors as mechanisms for relationships of family friendly organizational culture with employees' turnover intentions and satisfaction with work family balance. Using data from 13 companies our results indicate that perceived organizational support serves as a mechanism explaining why employees in family-friendly environments, those with family friendly organizational culture and/or family supportive supervisor behaviors, respond positively to those by increasing their commitment to the organization even when they do not directly benefit from a family-friendly environment. Our study contributes to the literature of work-family balance by (1) empirically validating the sequential mechanisms by which perceived organizational support promotes positive outcomes for the organization and the employees, and (2) exploring these effects on five different national contexts that had not been included in previous research.

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## 1. Introduction

Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them (Matthew 7:12). The norm of reciprocity, also known as The Golden Rule, is one of the common pillars of all ethical codes and religions. People's desire to reciprocate, both positively and negatively, has been discussed in various fields, including sociology (Gouldner, 1960), economy (Fehr & Gächter, 2000), and political science (Keohane, 1986). In organizational science, researchers have extensively studied the reciprocity principle based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). According to social exchange theory, employees form perceptions about their organizations, and react on those perceptions by using positive and negative reciprocity considerations. This is bound to happen because organizations and their members depend on one another to obtain valued outcomes (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007).

Despite an abundance of work on social exchange and reciprocity, little is known on how various reciprocity principles operate in employees' reactions to a family friendly organizational culture. This is of major importance in a highly competitive environments in which companies heavily depend on their employees' ongoing commitment. Our study helps to understand which mechanisms impel employees to go the extra-mile.

Family friendly organizational culture (FFOC) describes the extent to which an organization's enacted values support the integration of the

employees' work and family roles (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). FFOC is of interest for men and women worldwide, and can only be expected to increase: as more women enter the labor force, resulting in an escalation of double income couples and employed single mothers; and, as worldwide employees with and without family commitments, demand their organizations to embrace more social and humanistic values, including more attention to a balance between work and non-work (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). Although prior work confirms that in such environment FFOC relates to positive employee outcomes, little is known on the mechanisms underlying the relationships to employee outcomes (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Feldt, 2012). Obtaining insight into these mechanisms could advance further theoretical and empirical work on FFOC, and provide important practical insights for organizations interested in strengthening the positive effects of their FFOC on employees.

This study focuses on two key employee outcomes: satisfaction with work–family balance (SWFB) and turnover intentions (TI). Satisfaction with work–family balance describes employees' "overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one's degree of success at meeting work and family role demands" (Valcour, 2007, p. 1512). Turnover intentions describe employees' inclination to leave the organization (Johnston, Futrell, Parasuraman, & Sager, 1988). Researchers have found various determinants of SWFB and TI, yet little is currently known on the role of FFOC in shaping them, nor on the underlying mechanisms explaining those relationships.

Based on social exchange theory, we propose: a) that family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSBs) – those behaviors that supervisors display to help employees in juggling work and family demands that consist of offering emotional support; being a role-model for effective balancing; and coming up with creative solutions to work–family

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**Table 1**  
Sample size and mean score on the main variables per country.

Country	Dyads employee–supervisor	Tenure employees	Average age	Tenure managers	Average age managers	Percentage of women
Chile	1,228	7.1	39.6	10.1	43.2	46%
El Salvador	1,430	6.0	30.2	11.1	37.3	59%
Spain	27	2.7	38.6	7.0	51.0	52%
Mexico	47	4.6	32.0	5.7	42.4	52%
Peru	425	6.8	39.5	10.3	46.7	53%
Total	3157	6.5	35.2	10.5	41.1	53%

challenges (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hansen, 2009); b) that perceived organizational support (POS), which is employees' general belief that their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger, Singlhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002) mediates the relationship between FSSB and outcomes.

We intend contribute to the literature on work–family, POS, and employee outcomes. First, by exploring how FSSB and POS sequentially mediate relationships between FFOC and employee outcomes. This is of major importance since most research has focused only on the direct effects of FFOC, leaving unanswered the question of which mechanisms explain such connection (Mauno, Kiuru, & Kinnunen, 2011; Mauno et al., 2012); and also because little research studies the antecedents of SWFB (McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphe, Matz-Costa, Brown, & Valcour, 2013). Second, by drawing practical implications for those who seek to increase employees' satisfaction with work–family balance. Finally, by testing our model using organizational data from a set of countries that has been under-represented in the prior research in this field (i.e., Mexico, El Salvador, Chile, Peru, and Spain).

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

Organizational culture can be described as the group of norms, values, and ideas of action that are shared by the members of an organization (Schein 1984, 1985, 1996). FFOC, more specifically, denotes the extent to which the organization supports and values the integration of the employees' work and family roles (Thompson et al., 1999), and consists of two dimensions. First, the dimension of *time demands* describes the extent to which an organization expects the employee to put work before family responsibilities, and focuses on the amount of time employees perceive they are expected to work. Second, the dimension of *career consequences* describes the extent to which employees perceive negative career consequences (such as fewer opportunities for promotion) of using work–family benefits.

To understand the relationships between FFOC and employee outcomes, researchers have built on the logic of social exchange theory (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). Social exchange theory argues that employees trade their work and dedication to their employer not only for tangible assets (economic principle) as salary and perks, but also for socio-emotional assets (social principle) as caring or esteem (Blau, 1964; Eisenberg, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). According to Blau (1964), the most crucial distinction between social exchange and economic exchange is that the latter entails specific obligations (price and quantities), while the former entails *unspecific* obligations: that is, the type and the amount of what is given in return are not determined.

The key reason for social exchange to work is rooted in people's innate impulse to reciprocate (Gouldner, 1960). Molm et al. (2007) show that there are two types of reciprocity that can each take two forms: *direct reciprocity*, divided into (1) negotiated exchange and (2) reciprocal exchange, and *indirect reciprocity*, divided into (3) chain-generalized reciprocity and (4) fairness-based selective reciprocity. In *direct negotiated exchange* “actors jointly negotiate the terms of an agreement that benefits both parties, either equally or unequally” (Molm et al., 2007, p. 209). In *direct reciprocal exchange*, however, actors “perform individual acts that benefit another (...) without knowing whether or when or to what extent the other will

reciprocate” (Molm et al., 2007, p. 209). *Chain-generalized reciprocity* binds those who have received support in the past to provide similar support to other (third) party individuals in the future; and *fairness-based selective reciprocity* refers to the desire of people to provide support for those whom they believe have given similar support to others in the past.

Both direct and indirect forms of reciprocity, we argue, underpin the mechanisms between FFOC and employee outcomes. Direct reciprocal exchange may explain direct effects for those receiving the benefits of work–family formal and informal support; for example, why Robert, who got emotional support to deal with his child's surgery, will work harder to get new clients and contribute to the organization in the future. Chain-generalized reciprocity could explain lagged effects of work–family support, e.g., why John, who received instrumental support in the past, is willing to support an organizational member, Betty, who was not involved at the time John received the support. Finally, fairness-based reciprocity would account for why Peter and Mary, who have not directly experienced family support, do still respond in a positive manner to the organization that has supported Robert and John. This reasoning implies that reciprocity can be at work for employees who perceive direct work–family benefits, but also for those who may not directly receive such benefits (e.g., because they do not have family responsibilities), yet are in direct contact with those who receive such benefits.

Empirical findings have illustrated these types of reciprocity and the principles of social exchange theory so far mostly in Asian and Anglo-Saxon countries. In a New Zealand sample, Haar and Roche (2010) show that support for work–family balance positively influences job and life satisfaction, and negatively influences turnover intentions and job burnout. In a Taiwanese sample, Liao (2011) revealed that perceived organizational support and leader–member exchange fully mediated the influence of work–family conflict on intentions to quit and affective organizational commitment, and partially mediated work–family conflict's influence on job satisfaction. Similarly, a British sample (Wood & De Menezes, 2010) shows that family friendly management strengthened the relationship between commitment and key economic outcomes. A U.S. sample (Grover & Crooker, 1995) shows that family-responsive policies have a positive effect on the individual-level work commitment of both people who directly benefit from the policies and those who don't.

### 2.1. Relationships between FFOC, FSSB, and POS

In any organizational setting, individuals' thoughts and actions influence the organization's cultural norms and practices, and in turn cultural norms and practices influence the thoughts and actions of individuals (Lehman, Chi-yue, & Schaller, 2004). According to Schneider's (1987) ASA framework, people are attracted to situations where they think they will fit, and when this fit does not happen people are likely to leave the organization, or to be socialized resulting in lasting value changes (van Maanen, 1975). In our setting, this reasoning implies that FFOC can be expected to relate to the behaviors of a key group of organizational members: supervisors.

Based on social exchange theory and the preceding discussion on reciprocity, we expect that supervisors who perceive that the company as a whole provides support to balance work and family (i.e., the higher

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