

The role of family supportive leadership in promoting thriving at work.

A perspective based on resources.

Work-family scholars have directed increasing attention to the study of Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors (FSSBs) for their potential to improve people capacity to manage the work-life interface (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009; Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007; Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014; Matthews, Mills, Trout, & English, 2014; Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013). FSSBs include both instrumental and emotional support as well as role model behaviors and creative work-family management decisions directed to help employees to manage their work and home roles (Hammer et al., 2009). FSSBs are critical in contemporary organizations given that employees are often reluctant to use formal work-family policies as they develop growing concerns regarding the negative signal it may send for their level of involvement at work and commitment to the organization (Allen, 2001). In addition, perceiving supportiveness from their supervisors can lead people to better cope with work and no work issues as FSSBs often imply eliminating the negative career repercussions associated with employees' high involvement in no work roles (Straub, 2012).

Although research on FSSBs has proliferated in recent years, we have yet to develop a complete understanding of the process by which and the context in which FSSBs may generate these positive effects on individual outcomes (Bakker & Li, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Straub, 2012). Very little research (Matthews et al., 2014) has focused on individual factors to investigate whether FSSBs are beneficial to the same extent for employees presenting different personal characteristics. From an organizational perspective, we believe it is fundamental to understand who is more sensitive to FSSB and why, so to allow supervisors to allocate more effectively the limited resources at their disposal (Bakker & Li, 2014).

To fill these gaps in the literature, in the present study we examine the relationship between FSSBs and individual thriving at work, a growing concept in positive organizational scholarship that refers to a positive psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). We believe in the relevance of this relationship because, among other reasons, thriving has been found to generate significant positive effects on employees' subjective well-being as well as their organizations (see Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012, for a review). Further, research has shown that supervisors play a critical role in facilitating this

psychological state through the development of a supportive climate and caring relationships with their collaborators (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014).

Drawing on the work-home resource model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), which points out the importance of contextual resources to facilitate people's management of work and family demands, we test the model illustrated in Figure 1. More specifically, we examine the mediated relationship between FSSBs, which can be conceptualized as a contextual social support resource (Voydanoff, 2005), and individual thriving at work via work-family enrichment. In addition, we draw on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to examine one possible moderating mechanism in our model: the level of individual need for caring. We posit that this indirect relationship between FSSBs and employees' thriving through work-family enrichment is likely to be more salient for employees who have a high level of need for caring.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Theory and hypotheses

Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors and Work-Home Enrichment

Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors (FSSBs) are defined as the "behaviors exhibited by supervisors that are supportive of employees' family roles" (Hammer, Kossek, Bodner, & Crain, 2013, p. 2). FSSBs consist of four distinct types of behaviors: emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling, and creative work-family management. In this paper, we link FSSBs to individual thriving at work indirectly, via work-home enrichment. Work-home enrichment refers to the process through which individual experiences in one role generate performance improvements also in other roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Drawing on the work-home resource model (ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012), we posit that FSSBs can be crucial to promote greater work-home enrichment. The work-home resource model, grounded on *Conservation of Resource theory* (Hobfoll, 1989), posits that contextual resources and demands can affect people's work-family conflict and enrichment. When resources exceed demands, people experience positive outcomes likewise work-family enrichment. Instead, when demands exceed resources, people experience negative outcomes likewise work-family conflict (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). A central role in this model is occupied by the concept of contextual resources. They are key resources that an individual can find in his or her social context, likewise social support, and that can generate a *resource gain spiral* (Hobfoll, 1989), i.e. a process of further resource generation and

accumulation that occurs when people have a large set of resources at their disposal that can be invested in further resource-generating activities (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). Therefore, we suggest that FSSBs, which are a contextual resource present in the work environment, can generate resource gain spirals (Matthews et al., 2014), resulting in higher levels of work-family enrichment. In fact, FSSBs favor the development and accumulation of critical resources, such as positive mood, assistance and other material resources (Hammer et al., 2009), that are instrumental to achieve significant performance gains also in other domains of people's lives (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Thus,

Hypothesis 1. FSSBs are positively related to work-family enrichment.

Work-Home Enrichment and Thriving at Work

Thriving is defined as “a psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning” (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, Grant, 2005, p. 538). Vitality refers to the positive experience of feeling energized, enthusiastic and alive derived from the acknowledgement of having energy available (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999). Learning refers to the sense that one is improving and can apply knowledge, skills and/or abilities in doing the job (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). In their socially embedded model of thriving, Spreitzer and colleagues (2005) emphasized the critical role that the work context has in influencing the individual experience of thriving. Spreitzer et al. (2005) argued that individuals can thrive to the extent that they engage in respectful, authentic and supportive relationships with significant others. This because such positive relationships encourage individual's growth and self-development by nurturing the perception to work in a safe organizational environment where individuals are able to grow, develop, experiment, take risks and gradually strengthen their qualities, in the same way that children do within the secure environment created by their mothers (Kahn, 2001). In the present study, we hypothesize that work-home enrichment may foster greater thriving at work. We suggest that work-home enrichment may nurture key socio-psychological resources that contribute to enhancing both the individual's learning capacity and their sense of vitality at work. Thus,

Hypothesis 2. Work-home enrichment is positively related to employees' thriving at work.

The Mediating Role of Work-Home Enrichment

In this paper, we specify work-home enrichment as a mediating mechanism that link FSSBs to individual thriving at work. We suggest that FSSBs are an important contextual resource (Voydanoff, 2005) that can promote greater work-family enrichment as it can be carried over to the family domain and generate significant improvements in the family system functioning. For example, FSSBs can provide employees with greater flexibility, useful advices and role model examples that employees can observe and imitate to integrate successfully their work-family roles. This enriching experience, in turn, may increase their sense of thriving as they both develop the perceptions to have sufficient energies available to devote to multiple life roles (i.e. vitality) and learn new ways to accommodate constructively multiple role demands effectively (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Thus,

Hypothesis 3. Work-family enrichment mediates the relationship FSSBs and employees' thriving at work.

The Moderating Role of Need for Caring

Finally, we examine whether the positive effects of FSSBs on work-home enrichment are contingent with the presence of particular individual characteristics. Matthews et al. (2014) have demonstrated that the positive effects of FSSBs on work engagement are stronger in presence of relevant dependent care responsibilities, i.e. for people having children under the age of 18 to care. In the present study we focus on respondents' subjective perception to be in a dependent caring situation, regardless of their actual family situation. In particular, we suggest that the positive effects of FSSBs on work-home enrichment are stronger for individuals who feel the highest need for caring. We refer to need for caring as an individual's global desire to feel valued, cared and appreciated by significant others in his/her social environment. Need for caring represents an innate desire of an individual – who has a natural propensity to seek caring from other people – but it may also depend on a particular stage of the life; for instance when a person is navigating life events that require specific care, support and empathy from others such as the birth of a child or a career transition. Prior research on caregiving in organizations points out the crucial role of supervisors in satisfying employees' needs for caring (Likert, 1961; Kahn, 1993). We draw on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to build our rationale and suggest that the individual's need for caring moderates the relationship between FSSBs and work-home enrichment. Self-determination theory posits that people have a set of basic psychological needs that, once fulfilled, generate better individual functioning, psychological health, self-development, and well-being (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Warner & Hausdorf, 2009). We believe that

individuals in strong need for caring are more likely to experience work-family enrichment because FSSBs fulfill a fundamental individual psychological need that, once fulfilled, enables a better system functioning, resulting in an enhanced ability to accomplish the potential synergies between work and family roles. It is also plausible that employees with a strong need for caring will be more likely to transfer and use in the family domain the social support resources gained in the workplace as they perceive them to be particularly helpful in relation to their actual life needs. Thus,

Hypothesis 4. Need for caring moderates the positive relationship between FSSBs and work-family enrichment, such that this relationship will be stronger among employees with a high level of need for caring compared to individuals who are low on need for caring.

Method

The study was carried out in Italy. We adopted a two-wave longitudinal design to test our hypotheses. A six-month time lag was specified between the first (T1, July 2013) and second (T2, January 2014) waves. We chose a six-month time lag as this is considered an appropriate time frame in longitudinal studies in work-life research (Siu et al., 2010; Matthews, Wayne, & Ford, 2014). The prerequisite for inclusion in the sample was to be employed in a full-time job. A total of 333 employees responded at T1 to the survey, which contained demographics and the scale to measure FSSB. Six months later, respondents were invited to complete a second survey containing the other study's variables. A total of 191 people completed the survey, for a T2 response rate of 57.3%. In line with longitudinal research (Matthews et al., 2014), we conducted a series of *t* tests on demographic variables and FSSBs to control for attrition sample bias. To test the study's hypotheses, we ran a series of regression analyses using the PROCESS bootstrap procedure for testing moderated mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). This procedure, illustrated by Preacher and Hayes (2008), uses ordinary least square regression to estimate coefficients and 5,000 bootstrap samples to construct a 95% confidence level for confidence intervals for the indirect relationships. A macro developed by Preacher and Hayes for SPSS was used to run the analyses. Individual thriving was entered as dependent variable, FSSBs as predictor, and work-family enrichment and need for caring as mediator and moderator, respectively.

Findings and contributions

Results lend support, albeit with some important nuances, to our hypothesized model, in which employees' need for caring moderated the relationship between supervisors' family

supportive behaviors and work-family enrichment, which, in turn, was associated with greater individual thriving at work. All employees who felt a higher need for caring were likely to perceive supervisor family support to be more salient and conducive to greater work-family enrichment.

Our study has several important implications. First, by linking FSSBs to individual thriving via work-home enrichment we address recent claims for both conducting more studies on the process conducive of the favorable effects of FSSBs and for expanding the number of outcomes associated with FSSBs (Straub, 2012). We believe that it is critical for organizations to discover how supervisors can help people thrive at work favoring an effective management of their work-life interface; this will result in employees being more effective and profitable at work (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014) and living a more sustainable career (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Moreover, despite research on FSSBs is rapidly exploding, there are very few studies that consider individual characteristics as possible boundary conditions in this process. We contribute to this debate by elucidating the role of the individual need for caring as an important condition that can amplify the perceived benefits of FSSBs on work-home enrichment. This allows us to empirically validate one of the main corollaries of the Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) work-home enrichment model, that indicates that positive interdependences between work and non-work domains tend to be more intense and beneficial when the resources gained at work are compatible with the actual needs of an individual.

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Figure 1

The hypothesized research model

