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Managers' Family-Supportive Supervisory Behaviors: A Multilevel Perspective

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Managers' Family-Supportive Supervisory Behaviors: A Multilevel Perspective

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Using a combination of trait and situational variables we develop a model to explore the antecedents of managers' family-supportive behaviors. Our model hypotheses were tested using data gathered from a sample of 312 subordinates matched to 92 managers. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) of the nested data yielded results that show both an individual manager's trait (i.e., empathy) and situational variables (i.e., subordinate's family-to-work conflict and leader–subordinate exchange quality) significantly predicted managers' supportive behaviors. Additional HLM analyses showed that the manager's gender (trait) and group work-to-family conflict (situation) moderated the relationship between manager's empathy and family-supportive behaviors. Our results suggest that managers' family-supportive behaviors are related to individual characteristics of the manager and to subordinate workgroup contexts, but not to organizational culture. *Organization Management Journal*, 12: 49–62, 2015. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2015.1037043

Empirical studies clearly show that managers' family-supportive behaviors have positive employee and organizational outcomes. Managers' family-supportive behaviors are actions taken by the manager that help employees address and manage their work and family responsibilities. Employees benefit from managers' family-supportive behaviors such as rearranging schedules, encouraging use of work–family programs (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006), and ameliorating subordinates' concerns about using available work–family initiatives (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Managers' family-supportive behaviors can significantly reduce work-to-family conflict (Behson, 2005; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Ilies et al., 2007;

Kossek & Distelberg, 2007; Kossek & Hammer, 2008; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano, 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Warner & Hausdorf, 2009) and increase access to work–family initiatives (Kossek & Distelberg, 2007; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Swody & Powell, 2007; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007). These behaviors also are positively associated with employee job satisfaction and negatively associated with turnover intentions (Foley, Linnehan, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2006).

While research has explored the outcomes of managers' family-supportive behaviors, little is known about factors that predict whether or not managers' will engage in family-supportive behaviors (Foley et al., 2006; McCarthy, Darcy, & Grady, 2010; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Straub, 2012). We integrate the work–family literature on family-supportive supervision with a leadership theoretical perspective to propose a set of individual managerial characteristics and situational contexts that might predict the degree to which managers engage in family-supportive behaviors. We use the term "leader" when referring to the leadership literature and the term "manager" to refer to the literature on family-supportive supervision and to our research hypotheses and sample. We empirically test whether managers' family-supportive behaviors are associated with leader characteristics (e.g., leader empathy and gender), situational factors (e.g., organizational work–family culture) (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; Zaccaro, 2007; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004), or a combination of both. Our hypotheses are tested using data gathered from 312 subordinates matched to 92 managers across several different companies. Subordinates rated their own work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and also their managers' empathy and family-supportive behaviors. Managers described their organizational work–family culture. In addition, managers rated the quality of their relationship with each subordinate. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) was used to analyze within subordinate groups' and between subordinate groups' trait and situational variables and their relationship to managers' family-supportive behaviors.
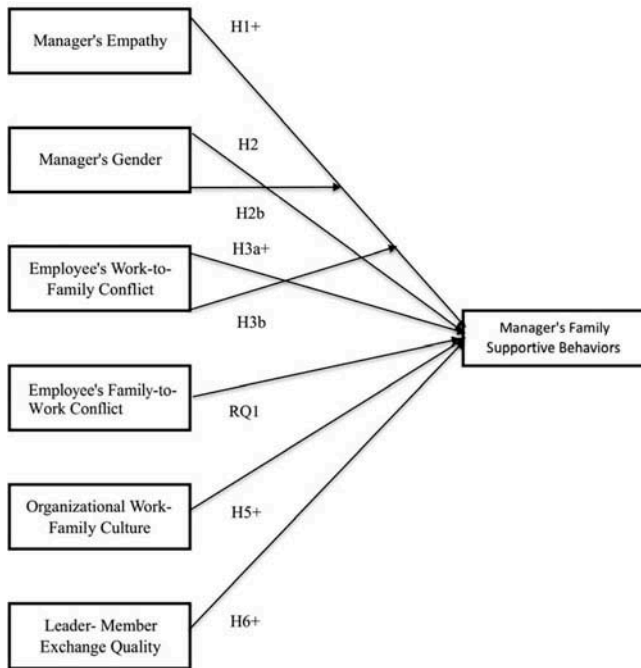
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FIG. 1.   Conceptual model of managers' family-supportive behaviors.

MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

A key discussion in the leadership literature is whether leadership emerges from individual characteristics of the leader, particular situational contexts, or from a combination of both (Yukl, 2006; Zaccaro et al., 2004). Therefore, our conceptual model, depicted in Figure 1, proposes that managers' family-supportive behaviors are a function of individual characteristics, situational context, and a combination of both. In the following we describe our hypothesized relationships and the supporting research literature in more detail.

Managers' Individual Characteristics

Empathy. The trait approach to leadership refers to theories that propose that a variety of personality characteristics, abilities, attitudes and values may distinguish one leader from another (Zaccaro, 2007) and a more effective leader from a less effective leader (Yukl, 2006). Based on reviews of the trait theories of leadership (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011) and the work–family literature (e.g., Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011), a leader trait that consistently emerges as a key trait associated with managers' family-supportive behaviors is empathy. Empathetic managers tend to understand and be sensitive to employees' personal situations, needs and concerns. Work–family research shows managers' empathetic reaction to female subordinates' care-giving responsibilities is positively related to managers' support for women's use of flexible work arrangements (Barham, Gottlieb, & Kelloway, 1998; Powell & Mainiero, 1999). Foley

et al. (2006) proposed that empathy mediated the relationship between gender and racial similarity and family-supportive supervision. Managers who have greater empathy are expected to better understand employees' work–family issues, display their empathy, and respond to employees' work–family issues in more family-supportive ways than managers who lack this trait. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between managers' empathy and managers' display of family-supportive behaviors.

Manager's gender. In addition to empathy, the work–family literature also suggests a manager's gender is an important individual trait in work–family decisions. Social role theory asserts that women will be more communal and men more agentic in behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In line with gender role theory, females in enacting communal roles are likely to exhibit nurturing behaviors (Eagly, 1987) and therefore enact family-supportive behaviors more than male managers. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 2a: There will be a relationship between managers' gender and managers' display of family-supportive behavior such that female managers will display greater family-supportive behaviors than male managers.

Gender as a moderator. As described earlier, female managers may be more likely to display family-supportive behaviors. In addition to a direct relationship, gender may serve a moderator role in work–family processes (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Female managers are expected to be empathetic and therefore, based on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012), female managers can maintain their gender role when exhibiting empathy through family-supportive behaviors. Maintaining gender role congruity via the display of role-related behaviors is important to female managers since they can be seen as less effective leaders when they display masculine behaviors (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Male empathetic managers, in keeping with gender stereotypes and role congruity, are less likely to display their empathy through the display of family-supportive behaviors. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 2b: The relationship between a manager's empathy and employee perceptions of their managers' family-supportive behaviors will be moderated by gender such that the relationship between empathy and managers' family-supportive behavior will be stronger for female managers compared to male managers.

Situational Contexts

The situational approach to leadership proposes that characteristics of the leader's situation influence leadership behaviors and may also moderate the effectiveness of those behaviors (Ayman, 2004; Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2006). Relying on the work–family and leadership literatures, we discuss the several situational contexts relevant to managers' family-supportive behaviors.

Work–family conflict. Work–family conflict is defined as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The bidirectional construct consists of work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. In work-to-family conflict, the source of conflict originates in the work domain and then influences the family domain. For example, unexpected workplace demands to work overtime past 5 p.m. can cause conflict with family responsibilities such as picking up children from child care. In family-to-work conflict, the source of conflict originates in the family domain and then influences the work domain. For example, a sick child can cause conflict with work responsibilities such as attending a meeting.

Work-to-family conflict. Previous research has explored employees' work-to-family conflict as a dependent, rather than independent, variable, in its relationship with managers' family-supportive behavior (Behson, 2005; Goff et al., 1990; Ilies et al., 2007; Kossek & Distelberg, 2007; Kossek & Hammer, 2008; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Major et al., 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). In our conceptualizing work-to-family conflict as an independent variable, our research builds on the call to better understand the larger processes involved in work–family interactions (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Poelmans, 2005). Additionally, our conceptualization of work-to-family conflict occurring before managers' family-supportive behaviors acknowledges that the employees' experience of work-to-family conflict is not limited to one point in time (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). Additionally, we draw on the decision process theory of work and family in viewing individuals as both active and reactive agents (Poelmans, 2005) involved in the greater time horizons during which work-to-family conflict occurs.

As the active agent, an employee uses his or her experience of work-to-family conflict as a catalyst for action and solicits family-supportive behaviors from the manager. Once the manager responds to the solicitation for family-supportive behaviors, the employee as the reactive agent will again experience work-to-family conflict. In this expanded view of work-to-family conflict, employees' work-to-family experiences can act as a trigger for subsequent interactions and behaviors (e.g., managers' family-supportive behaviors), which then result in a new set of work-to-family experiences for the employees.

As an illustrative example of work-to-family conflict serving as both a precursor to and result of managers' family-supportive behaviors, consider an employee who has recently had an increase in his or her work responsibilities due to a staffing shortage. This employee begins to experience work-to-family conflict as the employee is no longer able to leave work at the usual time (e.g., and is now late for picking up at the child care center). The employee seeks help from his or her manager. Based on the resulting family-supportive behaviors displayed by the manager, the employee may then experience a new level of work-to-family conflict. If the manager does respond with family-supportive behaviors, the employee's experience of work-to-family conflict may lessen.

Hall (1972) proposes that employees can use conflict as a catalyst for coping behaviors. Employees will see the workplace as a resource for coping behaviors since the conflict originates in the workplace (Frone, 2003). As a resource for workplace assistance, the employee may then solicit family-supportive behaviors from his or her manager (Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner, & Zimmerman, 2011; Hancock & Page, 2013; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). This solicitation provides the opportunity for the manager to respond to the employee's work-to-family conflict. Since the source of the conflict is the work domain, the manager is likely to have an ability to respond. Thus, we hypothesize that when an employee's work-to-family conflict is viewed as a precursor to a manager's family-supportive behaviors, the higher an employee's work–family conflict (i.e., the more work is interfering with family), the more likely it is that a manager will exhibit family-supportive behaviors.

Hypothesis 3a: There will be a positive relationship between an employee's work-to-family conflict and a manager's family-supportive behavior.

Context may affect a manager's empathy for the subordinate's situation differently and therefore elicit varying levels of managers' family-supportive behaviors. For employees with high levels of work-to-family conflict, managers may feel more compelled to respond in an effort to aid employees in difficult work–family situations. Conversely, for employees with low levels of work-to-family conflict, even empathetic managers may be less likely to display family-supportive behaviors. Thus, the situational variable of employees' work-to-family conflict could act as moderator such that the relationship between a manager's empathy and that manager's display of family-supportive behaviors may vary depending on degree of work-to-family conflict. We therefore propose:

Hypothesis 3b: The employee's level of work-to-family conflict moderates the relationship between a manager's empathy and a manager's family-supportive behaviors, such that the relationship is stronger when the employee's work-to-family conflict is higher than when it is lower.

Family-to-work conflict. The extant research has primarily focused on workplace support for employees' work-to-family conflict (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011), with less attention paid to the reverse situation in which family interferes with work roles. However, while the source of conflict in family-to-work conflict is in the employee's personal life, the work domain is the focal point of impact and therefore warrants attention by work–family researchers (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Including family-to-work conflict in our model builds on a call for more research to address the bidirectional nature of work–family conflict (Odle-Dusseau, Britt, & Greene-Shortridge, 2012).

Managers may not feel compelled to respond to employees' life-to-work conflict since the originating source of conflict is not the workplace (Frone, 2003). Supporting a negative relationship between family-to-work conflict and workplace outcomes, Hoobler, Wayne, and Lemon (2009) found that managers' perceptions of female subordinates' family-to-work conflict negatively impact managers' perceptions of employees' fit with the organization and job, as well as employees' performance and, ultimately, promotability.

Alternatively, managers may feel compelled to respond to employees' family-to-work conflict with family-supportive behaviors in their efforts to maximize positive work-related outcomes. Since little research exists on the relationship between family-to-work conflict and managers' behaviors, and since both positive and neutral relationships can be predicted, we propose a research question regarding the nature of the relationship between the employee's situation and the manager's level of supportive behavior:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between employees' family-to-work conflict and managers' family-supportive behaviors?

Organizational work–family-supportive culture. Organizational culture, defined as the shared beliefs, norms, and values of the members of an organization (Pinder, 2008), sends messages to managers about organizational values (Schein, 1992). Thus, beyond specific work–family benefits, organizations may also have a family-friendly culture that communicates to employees that employees' work and family responsibilities are valued (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). A family-friendly organizational culture also sends a message to managers that efforts to support employees' attempts to achieve more satisfactory work–family balance are valued (Major et al., 2008). In organizations with a strong work–family-supportive culture, managers are most likely to enact these organizational values and therefore demonstrate behaviors consistent with these cultural values (Allen, 2001; Foley et al., 2006; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Thompson et al., 1999). Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive relationship between an organization's work–family-supportive culture and a manager's family-supportive behaviors.

Leader–member exchange quality. In addition to work–family-supportive cultures, managers' supportive behaviors may also be affected by the quality of their working relationship with their subordinate. According to leader–member exchange theory (LMX), leaders develop relationships with their subordinates and allocate resources under their control depending on the quality of the exchange relationship (Yukl, 2006). A leader's selection of subordinates with whom that leader will form a close working relationship is based on the leader's perception of the subordinates' "(a) competence and skill, (b) extent to which they can be trusted, (c) motivation to assume greater responsibility within the unit" (Liden & Graen, 1980, pp. 451–452). Subordinates viewed by managers as having high exchange qualities (i.e., competent, trustworthy and able to assume greater responsibility) are therefore likely to be the recipients of managers' family-supportive behaviors (e.g., flexibility in work schedule). The subordinate contributes greater levels of trust, commitment, loyalty, and assistance to the leader in exchange for greater resources (Yukl, 2006). Thus, researchers have suggested that a high-quality manager–subordinate relationship may increase access to and usage of work–family programs by favored subordinates (Friede, Kissek, Lee, & MacDermid, 2008; Major & Lauzon, 2010; Major & Morganson, 2011; Poelmans & Beham, 2008; Straub, 2012), and empirical research has shown that LMX is associated with managers' implementation of idiosyncratic work-family-supportive arrangements (Major & Lauzon, 2010). Golden (2006) found evidence that higher quality LMX relationships are associated with greater use of telecommuting by subordinates. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 6: There will be a positive relationship between the degree to which a manager perceives a subordinate as competent, trustworthy, and able to assume responsibility (i.e., the higher the manager–subordinate exchange quality) and a manager's family-supportive behaviors.

The hypothesized relationships are summarized in Figure 1.

METHODS

Survey data were gathered from managers and subordinates from a convenience sample of 13 diverse organizations in the northeastern United States, including an education company, marketing/consulting companies, a long-term care nursing facility, not-for-profit organizations, banking/finance, government, and manufacturing organizations. Organizations participating in the research ranged in size from 27 to

2,400 employees. Data were gathered from five organizations in spring 2009 and an additional eight organizations in spring 2012.

Procedure

Data were gathered in collaboration with employed, part-time master's in business administration (MBA) students at a northeastern United States university. Using students in recruitment and data-gathering efforts can help in obtaining a broader variety of organizations and respondents (Demerouti & Rispens, 2013). This breadth was particularly desirable in our study since we are exploring managers and subordinates, in general, and not a particular organizational or demographic group.

Formal approval for data gathering was obtained from a responsible senior manager at each organization. Respondents were told the data were being collected as a part of an academic research project. All participation was voluntary. Managers and subordinates could complete the survey during work hours. Subordinates received a pencil-and-paper or online survey; the practicalities of the workplace determined the survey option. All managers received paper-and-pencil surveys. In total, 117 managers and 643 subordinates received surveys, and of these, 108 managers (92%) and 466 subordinates (72%) completed their surveys. The final analytic sample of matched dyads with data on all variables of interest for this research consisted of 92 managers (79%) and 312 subordinates (49%). Prior to distributing the survey, managers and subordinates were assigned codes so that manager–subordinate dyads could be matched when surveys were completed.

Sample of subordinates. Subordinates were professional (39%), managerial (10%), clerical (13%), sales (16%), technical (11%), and manual workers (2%). The analytic sample included 40% male and 60% female respondents with a median age of 36 years. The sample included 11% of respondents having some high school or a high school diploma, 19% some college education, 13% a 2-year college degree, 40% a 4-year undergraduate degree, 16% a master's degree, and 1% a doctoral degree. Also, 60% of subordinates were married or in a committed long-term relationship, and 49% had direct responsibility as a primary caregiver for dependent children or adults. Subordinates averaged 2–4 years of working with their current employer.

Sample of managers. The analytic sample of managers included 46% male and 54% female respondents with a median age of 38 years. The sample included 5% of respondents having some high school or a high school diploma, 11% some college education, 7% a 2 year college degree, 46% a 4-year undergraduate degree, 28% a master's degree, and 4% a doctoral degree. Manager participants included supervisors/office managers (26%), middle managers (41%), upper-middle managers (14%), and senior executives (18%). Also, 83% of managers were married or in a committed long-term relationship, and 60% had direct responsibility as a primary caregiver for dependent

children or adults. Managers averaged 4–8 years of working with their current employer. In the analytical sample managers had 1 to 15 matched subordinates, with an average of 4 matched subordinates per manager.

A summary of all data points that are common to both the subordinate and manager samples is given in Table 1.

Subordinate-Obtained Measures

Manager's family-supportive behaviors. Subordinates' perceptions of their managers' family-supportive behaviors were measured using the Shinn, Simko, Wong, and Ortiz-Torres (1989) nine-item scale of managers' family-supportive behaviors (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). A review of this scale with subject-matter experts led to the addition of one item ("Serves as a role model for balancing work and personal responsibilities"), for a final scale with 10 Likert-style items. Subordinates used a 5-point scale with response options ranging from 1 = *very inaccurate*, to 5 = *very accurate* to rate their managers' behaviors. Cronbach's alpha for our research was .83. Development and validation of additional scales of managers' family-supportive behaviors were published after we fielded our survey (Hammer, Kossek, Bodner, & Crain, 2013; Hammer et al., 2009). Our measure closely approximates these scales, with items for the validated dimensions of emotional support, instrumental support, and role modeling. Sample items from our scale include "Is understanding about your competing work and personal responsibilities," "Juggles your tasks and

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics of samples[a]

Variable	Subordinates[a]	Managers[a]
Gender (male/female)	40/60	46/54
Median age (years)	36	38
Highest level of education completed (%)		
Some high school or high school diploma	11	5
Some college	19	11
2-year college degree	13	7
4-year undergraduate degree	40	46
Master's degree	16	28
Doctoral degree	1	4
Marital status (married or committed relationship/single)	60/40	83/17
Primary caregiver responsibility (yes/no)	49/51	60/40
Median years with current employer	2–4	4–8

[a]$n = 91$ managers and 321 subordinates.

duties to accommodate your personal responsibilities," and "Serves as a role model for balancing work and personal responsibilities."

Manager's empathy. Subordinates' perceptions of their manager's empathy were calculated using four items from the "Other's Emotional Appraisal" subscale of the Wong–Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002). Items were reworded for subordinates' ratings rather than manager's self-rating. A 5-point scale with response options ranging from $1 = $ *very inaccurate* to $5 = $ *very accurate* was used. Sample items included "Is a good observer of emotions in other people" and "Is very sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others." Cronbach's alpha was .94.

We measured empathy from the subordinates' perspectives to minimize the likelihood of supervisors enacting social desirability bias in responding to the empathy scale items. Since we theorized empathy as a trait variable, and thus stable within individual managers, we used an average rating of a manager's empathy. To confirm the validity of using a group average, r_{wg} and intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) were calculated (Bliese, 2000; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). In our analytic sample, 20 managers had only one subordinate with reported data. These managers and their subordinates' ratings were not included in these calculations. We used LeBreton and Senter's (2008) approach for calculating r_{wg} as a measure of within-group agreement. Since our empathy data were slightly negatively skewed we calculated r_{wg} using both a uniform and slight skew distribution. The mean r_{wg} value under a uniform distribution was .87 and ranged from –1.0 to 1.0. The mean r_{wg} under a slightly skewed distribution was .80 and ranged from –.24 to 1.0. In the data set of managers with more than one direct report, 88% have mean r_{wg} values over .7 using a uniform distribution; 76% have r_{wg} values over .7 using a slightly skewed distribution. These results provide evidence of a high rate of agreement between subordinates' ratings of a manager's empathy, thus supporting our use of an average rating and our conceptualization of empathy as a trait variable. ICC(1) and ICC(2) also were calculated (Bliese, 2000; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The ICC(1) estimate for managers with more than one direct report was .24 and ICC(2) was .57. This suggests that 24% of the variance in the ratings of manager's empathy is explained by group membership. Our ICC(2) value indicates the reliability of our average rating of manager's empathy. While the ICC(1) and ICC(2) values are low, group size can impact ICC (Bliese, 2000; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Our small group sizes (e.g., 2-15 subordinates per manager) likely negatively impacted the ICC values. Our r_{wg} and ICC results, with consideration of sample sizes within each group, support our use of an average value of manager's empathy and for empathy as a stable managerial trait.

Employee's work-to-family conflict. A six-item work-to-family scale (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999) with items such as "My job or career keeps me from spending the amount of time I would like to spend with my family or friends" and "My job or

career interferes with my responsibilities at home, such as yard work, cooking, cleaning, repairs, shopping, paying the bills, or child care" was used. Subordinates rated each item using a 7-point scale with response options ranging from $1 = $ *disagree strongly* to $7 = $ *agree strongly*. Cronbach's alpha was .92.

Employee's family-to-work conflict. A six-item family-to-work scale (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999) with items including "My personal life interferes with my responsibilities at work, such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, or working overtime" and "My superior and peers dislike how often I am preoccupied with my personal life at work" was used. Subordinates rated each item using a 7-point scale with response options ranging from $1 = $ *disagree strongly* to $7 = $ *agree strongly*. Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Manager-Obtained Measures

Organizational work–family culture. Managers' actions are most likely influenced by managers' perspectives on the work–family friendliness of the organization. Thus, organizational work–family culture was measured from the manager's perspective. Organizational work–family culture was measured by adapting Allen's (2001) 14-item family-supportive organizational culture scale, which had a coefficient alpha of .91. The 14-item scale was reduced to seven items. Managers used a 7-point rating scale ranging from $1 = $ *disagree strongly* to $7 = $ *agree*. Items included "It is best to keep personal matters separate from work" and "It is assumed that the most productive employees are those who put their work before their personal time." Low scores indicate an organizational culture reflecting a traditional philosophy (i.e., work and family as separate spheres); high scores reflect integrated work–family cultural values (i.e., work should be balanced with nonwork family). Cronbach's alpha was .76 for the seven-item scale.

Leader-member exchange quality. Since we hypothesized that the quality of leader–subordinate exchange relationship will serve as an antecedent of managers' family-supportive behaviors, we measured the quality of the exchange relationship from the *manager's* perspective. This aligns with Gerstner and Day's (1997) position that the manager's perspective on the quality of the leader–member relationship is more relevant when evaluating supervisory actions. While LMX-7 is frequently used to operationalize leader–member exchange quality (Gerstner & Day, 1997), Paglis and Green (2002) note that LMX-7 is often used when a subordinate's perspective is desired, and even when LMX-7 is measured by supervisors' ratings, it assesses the supervisor's contribution and not the subordinate's contribution to the exchange relationship. Since we conceptualize managers' family-supportive behaviors as an exchange for the manager's perception of the subordinate's contribution, measurement from the manager's perspective is appropriate.

To assess the manager's perception of the subordinate's contribution to the leader–member exchange relationship, a three-item rating scale developed by Wu and Taber (2009) was

used. The scale is based on the fundamental premise of LMX theory that specific subordinates are chosen for a close, trusting relationship with the leader because of their "(a) competence and skill, (b) extent to which they can be trusted . . . (c) motivation to assume greater responsibility within the unit" (Liden & Graen, 1980, pp. 451–452). Research on LMX conceptualizations and reliability supports the use of a multi-item LMX scale (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). Managers rated the overall effectiveness of each subordinate in carrying out his or her job responsibilities on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 = *the least effective employee I have known* to 9 = *the most effective employee I have known*. A 5-point scale, where 1 = *very little* and 5 = *very much*, was used to rate the amount of trust the manager had in each employee, as well as the amount of responsibility and authority the manager delegated to each employee. The three ratings were converted to a common metric and averaged to form an index of leader–member exchange quality. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .85.

Gender. Manager's gender was measured as a binary variable (1 = male, 2 = female).

Control Variables

A manager's position and subordinate's gender were included as control variables. A manager's position may correspond with levels of autonomy and control and may influence the manager's ability to display family-supportive behaviors. Manager's position was measured using a 4-point scale (1 = supervisor, 2 = middle manager, 3 = upper-middle manager, 4 = senior executive). Subordinate's gender was measured as a binary variable (1 = male, 2 = female). Given gender stereotypes, managers may be more sympathetic to work–family needs of female subordinates and less likely to engage in family-supportive behaviors toward male subordinates.

ANALYSIS

We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) rather than ordinary least squares regression (OLS) due to the nested nature of our data. For example, subordinates (level 1) who perceive managers' family-supportive behaviors and managers' empathy and experience work–family conflict are nested under the same manager (level 2). When data are hierarchical and nested, the assumptions of independent random errors and constant variance that underlie OLS regression are violated (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In addition, HLM allows us to partition the variance in managers' family-supportive behaviors into within-group (level 1) and between-group (level 2) components and provides a statistical test of the between-group variance component (τ_{00}). To establish support for hypotheses that predict a hierarchical effect (hypotheses 2a and 5) and a cross-level effect (hypotheses 2b and 3a) of a level-2 variable on level-1 variables, we must first establish that there is significant between-group variance

in the level-1 intercept (β_{0j}) and level-1 slopes (β_{ij}) (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Culpepper, 2013).

Given that HLM models use the level-1 parameters as outcome variables in the level-2 analysis, the meaning and interpretation of these variables become critical (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). To achieve meaningful level-2 parameters estimates, researchers often center their level-1 variables around either their grand mean or a group mean. Group mean centering is preferred when the researcher is interested in examining the between-group (level-2) variance of the dependent variable and to test cross-level effects (Aguinis, Gottfredson & Culpepper, 2013; Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Group mean centering also yields more consistent parameter estimates when examining cross-level effects of group-level variables on level-1 relationships (e.g., slope parameters, β_{ij}). Since we are interested in differences across managers (i.e., level-2 between-group variance) and in testing relationships between level 1 and level 2 (i.e., cross level), we used group mean centering.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency estimates of the study variables are provided in Table 2. Data sources are also listed in this table.

To test the hypotheses, we conducted a sequence of hierarchical linear regression models using the HLM 6 statistical package (Kidwell, Mossholder, & Bennett, 1997; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). We first computed a null model, testing whether there was significant between group variance in managers' family-supportive behaviors. Multilevel models are useful only if there is sufficient between-group variation at each level. Our results showed significant between-manager differences in family-supportive behaviors ($\tau_{00} = .08$, $p < .001$) reported in Model 1 of Table 3. The data also indicate that HLM ICC, which quantifies the proportion of the total variation in managers' family-supportive behaviors across managers, is .17 (i.e., 17% of the total variance), which is considered significant (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Culpepper, 2013). Finally, reported in Table 3, Model 3, our data also confirmed that the variance of the slope estimate for empathy, β_{1j}, was significantly different across managers ($\tau_{11} = .03$, $\chi^2 = 84.6$, $p < .05$). Thus, our data supported using a random intercept and slope model. For our random intercept and slope regression model, we centered level-1 variables at their group mean and then included group means of the level-1 independent variables in our level-2 random intercept regression, following Hofmann and Gavin (1998) and Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Culpepper (2013).

Having seen that there is significant variance in managers' family-supportive behaviors both within and between groups, we next test whether the variables proposed in our various hypotheses are capable of explaining the within- and between-group variance. The results, reported in Table 3, show that the random intercept model explains 40% of the within-group

TABLE 2

Means, standard deviations, zero-order correlations, and internal consistency[a]

Variable	Data	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Subordinate's gender	S	40%										
2. Manager's position	M	2.21	1.03	.09								
3. Empathy	S	3.52	1.08	.00	-.11	.94						
4. Manager's gender	M	46%		.30***	.04	.13*						
5. Organizational work–family culture	M	5.03	1.05	.08	.15**	-.13	-.14*	.76				
6. Leader–member exchange quality	M	6.35	1.81	.04	.25***	.10	.02	.13*	.85			
7. Work-to-family conflict	S	3.33	1.66	-.01	.09	-.13*	-.11	.00	.14*	.92		
8. Family-to-work conflict	S	1.98	0.97	-.14*	-.09	-.05	-.23***	.01	-.08	.36***	.86	
9. Family-supportive behaviors	S	3.79	0.69	.06	.04	.62***	.10	.04	.18**	-.23***	-.19***	.83

Note. Letters after the name of each variable indicate the data source: M = manager; S = subordinate.

[a]$n = 92$ managers and 312 subordinates. For multiple-item measures, Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency) values are reported in italics on the diagonal.

[b]For the dichotomous gender variables, the value shown is the percentage male.

$* p < .05.$ $** p < .01.$ $*** p < .001.$

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TABLE 3
Random intercept and slope model of managers' family-supportive behaviors

Level and variable	Null, Model 1		Random intercept and fixed slope, Model 2[1]		Random intercept and random slope, Model 3[1]		Cross-level interaction, Model 4[1]	
	Robust std. error		Robust std. error		Robust std. error		Robust std. error	
Level 1								
Intercept-γ_{00}	3.82	0.05***	3.84	0.05***	3.85	0.03***	3.86	0.03***
Manager's empathy (β_1)			0.36	0.05***				
Work-to-family conflict (β_2)			−0.04	0.04	−0.03	0.03	0.06	0.13
Family-to-work conflict (β_3)			−0.06	0.04+	−0.07	0.04*	−0.06	0.04*
Manager's LMX (β_4)			0.04	0.02*	0.04	0.02+	0.03	0.02+
Subordinate's gender (β_{06})			0.07	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.11	0.06+
Empathy × Work-to-family conflict (β_{07})							−0.02	0.03
Level 2—Random intercept (β_0)^2								
Manager's position					0.06	0.03*	0.06	0.03*
Manager's gender γ_{01}					−0.04	0.08	−0.05	0.08
Manager's perception of org w-l culture γ_{02}					0.00	0.03	0.00	0.03
Group mean empathy γ_{03}					0.39	0.05***	0.41	0.05***
Group mean work-to-family conflict γ_{04}					−0.09	0.04*	−0.11	0.04**
Group mean family-to-work conflict γ_{05}					−0.09	0.07	−0.09	0.07
Group mean LMX γ_{06}					0.07	0.03***	−0.07	0.03*
Group mean subordinate gender γ_{07}					0.05	0.11	0.04	0.11
Cross-level interactions								
Level 2—Random slope—Empathy (β_1)^2								
Intercept γ_{10}					0.35	0.04***	0.43	0.11***
Manager's gender γ_{11}							0.23	0.08**
Group work-to-family conflict γ_{12}							0.15	0.06*
Variance components								
Within-manager variance component δ^2	0.40		0.27		0.24		0.24	
Between-manager variance component (τ_{00})	0.08***		0.13		0.02**		0.02*	
Slope variance (τ_{11})					0.03*		0.02	
Deviance (restricted ML)			583		523		530	
Number of parameters			2			4		4
ICC	0.17							
Percent within variance explained			33%		40%			
Percent between variance explained—intercept							77%	

Note. n = 92 managers and 312 subordinates. Level 1 n = 312 and Level 2 n = 91.
[1]Level 1 variables are group-mean centered.
+p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

(level-1) variance in managers' family-supportive behaviors and 77% of the between-group (level-2) variance in managers' family-supportive behaviors.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between manager's empathy and perception of managers' family-supportive behaviors. As shown in Table 3, Model 2, hypothesis 1 was supported with evidence of a significantly positive regression slope between empathy and family-supportive behaviors of managers ($\beta_1 = .36$, $p < .001$).

There was no support for hypotheses 2a. As reported in Table 3, Model 3, there was no evidence for a significant relationship between the manager's family-supportive behaviors and a manager's gender, a level-2 variable ($\gamma_{01} = -.04$, ns). However, hypothesis 2b was supported. Hypothesis 2b predicted that a manager's gender would moderate the relationship between manager's empathy and family-supportive behaviors. As shown in Model 4, a manager's gender moderated ($\gamma_{11} = .23$, $p < .01$) the strength of the relationship between a manager's empathy and a manager's family-supportive behavior. The moderating effect of manager's gender on the empathy and family-supportive behavior regression slope is illustrated in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows that there is a significantly stronger relationship between empathy and perceived family-supportive behaviors for female managers compared to male managers.

We expected to find a significant relationship between work-to-family conflict and manager's family-supportive behavior. The results of our data analyses shown in Table 3, Model 2, show no support for hypothesis 3a. However, hypothesis 3b, which predicted that work-to-family conflict would moderate the relationship between managers' empathy and managers' family-supportive behaviors, was supported. As a cross-level moderator relationship, this was explored by looking at between
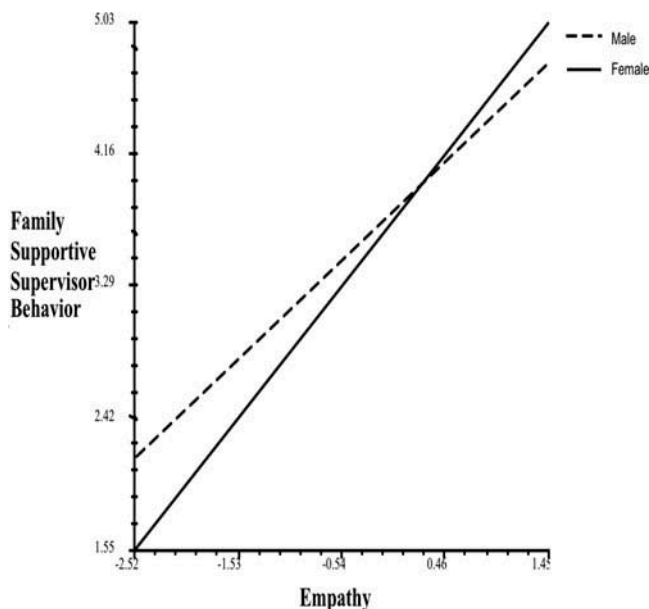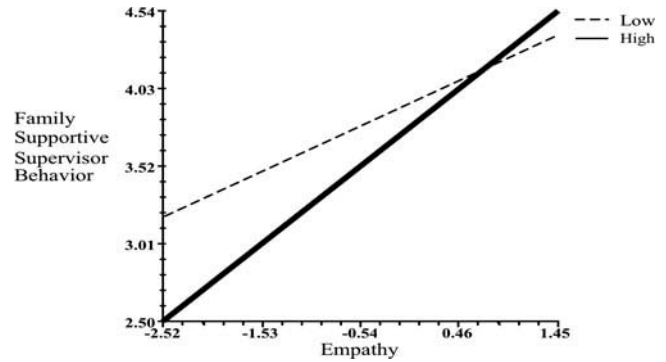

FIG. 3.   Work-to-family conflict as a moderator. Thick line represents group-level work-to-family conflict of the highest quartile and the dotted line is for the lowest quartile.

group differences. Shown in Model 4, the moderated cross-level relationship is a significant ($\gamma_{12} = .15$, $p < .05$), showing that managers of the groups with higher work-to-family conflict showed a stronger relationship between empathy and supportive behaviors. This is illustrated in Figure 3. Managers of employees with high work-to-family conflict showed greater empathy in attempting to help employees manage this conflict compared to managers of employee groups where work-to-family conflict was low and thus such empathy was unneeded.

We also find support for hypothesis 4. There was a significantly negative within-subordinate relationship between an employee's family-to-work conflict and their managers' family-supportive behaviors ($\beta_3 = -.07$, $p < .05$), shown in Table 3, Model 3.

We found no support, however, for hypothesis 5. There was no significant positive relationship between an organization's work-family-supportive culture and a manager's family-supportive behavior.

Finally, hypothesis 6 was supported. There was a significant positive relationship ($\beta_4 = .04$, $p < .05$) between a manager's perceptions of the quality of his or her exchange with a subordinate (i.e., the degree to which a manager perceives a subordinate as competent, trustworthy, and able to assume responsibility) and the subordinate's perception of the manager's family-supportive behaviors.

DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that both a manager's individual-level leader characteristics (i.e., empathy and gender) and a manager's situational characteristics (leader–subordinate exchange quality, within-group family to work conflict, and group-level work-to-family conflict) significantly predict managers' family-supportive behaviors. In particular, our multilevel analyses revealed the importance of context in influencing individual manager's behavior. Our results showed that context (i.e., subordinate's family-to-work conflict and group work-to-family

FIG. 2.   Gender as a moderator.

conflict) had a significant effect on individual manager's family-supportive behaviors. We also showed that the manager's gender, an individual characteristic, moderated the relationship between a manager's empathy and family-supportive behavior. Consistent with gender stereotyping, the relationship between a manager's empathy and family-supportive behavior was stronger for female managers than for males. Finally, our results suggest that the significant antecedents of managers' family-supportive behaviors are more specific to the individual manager and his or her workgroup and less associated with organizational-level variables such as organizational culture.

Consistent with the leadership trait approach and work–family theoretical conceptualizations of the relationship between managers' empathy and family-supportive behaviors (Barham et al., 1998, 2006), our results indicate that a manager's empathy significantly predicts a manager's family-supportive behaviors. As such, our study provides the first empirical evidence of a relationship between managers' empathy and subordinates' perceptions of the managers' family-supportive behaviors.

Our results also show how a manager's gender is related to perceptions of managers' family-supportive behaviors. As illustrated in Figure 2, although there is no direct difference between male and female managers in displaying family-supportive behaviors, women are expected to show greater empathy. When men and women both show low levels of empathy, subordinates perceive female managers as displaying lower family-supportive behaviors. Thus there appears to be a penalty to female managers when their behavior is inconsistent with gender expectations. This finding is supportive of research on gender incongruence in workplace settings (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010). At higher levels of empathy, the differences between male and female managers begin to diminish, but at lower levels of perceived empathy female managers are seen as having lower family-supportive behaviors than men, all else equal.

A manager's personal traits are not the only factor associated with supportive behavior. Our hierarchical analysis also revealed significant contextual effects on managers' family-supportive behavior. In particular, within subordinate groups, we found a subordinate's degree of family-to-work conflict and the manager's perception of exchange quality with their subordinate significantly predict managers' supportive behaviors. Where managers have developed a trusting relationship with their subordinates, the subordinates report more supportive behavior. On the other hand, when a subordinate reports a higher level family-to-work conflict compared to their peers, that subordinate's manager is less supportive.

When the conflict is high and in the opposite direction (e.g., work-to-family conflict) for their subordinates, as a group, managers appear to show a positive response directly and also, indirectly, through greater empathy. The group-level (i.e., level-2) variance in group-level work-to-family conflict was significantly and negatively ($\gamma_{04} = -.09$, $p < .05$) related to

managers' family-supportive behaviors. In addition, our results indicated aggregate work-to-family conflict moderated the relationship between empathy and managers' family-supportive behaviors. As illustrated in Figure 3, the relationship between perceived manager's empathy and managers' family-supportive behaviors was stronger for managers of subordinates who, as a group, experienced high work-to-family conflict compared to managers of subordinates that experienced much lower work-to-family conflict. These results suggest that group-level factors also play an important role in explaining individual managers' behavior. Thus, in situations where there the demands of the workplace are great for the work group, managers may respond by showing greater empathy to their subordinates as a group even if they may not be able to be more supportive by changing things in the workplace. This might be the case, for example, in client-focused, rapid-turnaround, creative-oriented workgroups found in an advertising agency.

Interestingly, our research found no significant relationship between the organization's work–family culture, a broader organizational variable, and managers' family-supportive behaviors. These results combined with the support for leader–member exchange quality significantly predicting managers' family-supportive behaviors suggest that employees' success in balancing work and family demands may derive more from idiosyncratic relationships with managers than from organizational-level policies. These results are consistent with prior research suggesting that informal support (e.g., managers' family-supportive behaviors) is more important than formal support (e.g., organizational policies) (Behson, 2005). Our results provide further empirical evidence for this.

Employees' interest in finding solutions to managing their professional lives while still maintaining involvement and growth in personal responsibilities has expanded beyond female employees responsibilities as caregivers to include male and female employees, older and younger employees, caregiving, and non-caregiving personal interests and responsibilities. As the employee population interested in combining personal and professional growth increases, managers' responsiveness to these interests can help influence employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity. Thus, an understanding of the factors that might encourage or inhibit family-supportive behaviors is relevant to managers and organizations.

Corporate social responsibility can serve as another lens through which managers' family-supportive behaviors are of increased interest within organizations. Organizations with practices and policies that encourage managers to display family-supportive behaviors can use these data in their reporting and may find their employees who benefit from these behaviors spread this information within their social networks and local communities. This action can help in building a positive image of the organization as caring for families and is of interest to multiple audiences beyond the benefiting employee. Consumers are increasingly interested in evaluating organizations based on their demonstration of corporate social

responsibility (Oberseder, Schlegelmilch, Murphy, & Gruber, 2014). Potential employees may evaluate an employer based on corporate social responsibility (Greening & Turban, 2000). Thus, when human resource professionals train and encourage managers to display family-supportive behaviors, the positive impact for the organization may extend beyond the direct recipient.

Limitations

Although we undertook several steps to mitigate the problem of monomethod inflation and single-source method bias, our use of self-reported survey data may contribute to inflation of relationships between variables. We used three study design remedies suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012) to minimize potential limitation. First, the data were obtained from different sources (i.e., managers and subordinates). Second, the work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict variables obtained from subordinates used anchor labels of *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*, whereas the subordinate-obtained dependent variable of managers' family-supportive behaviors used anchors of *very inaccurate* to *very accurate*. Third, confidentiality should reduce social desirability concerns.

This research is cross-sectional and, as such, limits our ability to make causal inferences. Our data were collected from 13 diverse types of organizations. Even though the organizations were from a diversity of industries, the lack of a finding of organizational-related variables as statistically significant predictors of managers' family-supportive behaviors may be due to range restriction on work–family culture variables. However, these findings may also reflect that much of the variance in managers' family-supportive behaviors was related to subordinate-level variance and not between organizations. This suggests that individual, rather than organizational, variables may more crucial in managers' family-supportive behaviors. Future research might explore these relationships across even more diverse samples of organizations.

Future Research

Our results suggest that work-group differences between managers offer an interesting area for future research (e.g., nature of the group's work, degree to which other work-group members use work–family arrangements). Additionally, LMX relationships appear to play an important role in how work–family policies are enacted and represent an interesting avenue for continued research. Our finding concerning manager–subordinate exchange quality suggests there may be equity issues among employees regarding the availability and usage of work–family programs by a few favored work-group members.

In conclusion, our study suggests that the factors that influence managers' family-supportive behaviors are more specific to the manager's individual characteristics and work-group context and appear less associated with the organizational culture. Organizations, therefore, may need to pay more attention to human resource practices regarding the selection, training, and evaluation of managers, rather than simply relying on developing organizational work–family policies.

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