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FAMILY SUPPORTIVE ORGANISATIONAL PERCEPTIONS AND OUTCOMES: THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

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Social exchange theory was used to understand employee perceptions of organisational support for work-family issues in this study of 165 random New Zealand employees. These perceptions of family support were found to positively influence job and life satisfaction, and negatively influence turnover intentions. Consequently, there is strong support for firms supporting work-family issues leading employees to reciprocate with superior outcomes. Further, supervisor support was tested as a potential moderator of these effects and was found to intensify the beneficial nature towards job satisfaction only. This indicates that the role of firms in providing a supportive work-family climate is important and can consistently contribute to employee outcomes. Given the sample included a majority of single non-parent employees, this also highlights a supportive culture will enhance attitudes amongst all employees, not just working parents.

Keywords: family supportive organisation perceptions, job attitudes, moderation, supervisor support.

INTRODUCTION

Work-family issues have demanded greater attention from organisations as demographic changes to the workforce, such as dual career families, increased participation of women in the workforce and the growth of single parent families, have sparked much debate into the 'crisis' of work-family conflict (Beauregard, 2006). The rationale surrounding organisational work-family policy adoption, such as flexible work schedules and childcare assistance, have been to moderate the growing commitments of employees with family responsibilities, and hence aim to assist employees to balance work and family demands (Goodstein, 1994; Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994; Osterman, 1995). Support for these policies have resulted in findings of increased retention of qualified staff, increased commitment and reduced turnover intentions (Appleby, 2006; Haar & Spell, 2004; Pasewark & Viator, 2006; Grandey, Cordeiro, & Crouter, 2005).

However, there is a growing body of literature that question whether these policies alone facilitate the balancing of work and family roles (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, 1999; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Eaton 2003). Consequently, critics have suggested that formal work-family policy adoption by organisations is an inadequate condition on which to alleviate work-family conflicts (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). For example, Kossek et al. (2006) and McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley and Shakespeare-Finch (2005), suggested that there is a difference between

the stated policy aim and employee beliefs regarding actual work-family support. Kossek et al. (2006) referred to this as the "underlying message" (p. 350) and suggested this to be an important consideration in employee's perceptions of organisational support. Similarly, Haar and Spell (2004) and Lambert (2000) focused on employee's perceptions of work-family practices and found these to be useful indicators of job attitudes and experiences.

Allen (2001) found that family perceptions of organisational support suggested that benefit availability alone had a small effect on job attitudes, but that the global perceptions employees formed with the regard to the work place environment was strongly related to employee commitment. Therefore, what may be crucial in balancing work and family are employee beliefs as to the perceived organisational climate or 'underlying message', regardless of the stated aim of the work-family practice. This is important, as recently Behson (2005) argued that only organisations that spend time and energy to create cultures and management skills that are truly supportive of formal work-family practices would benefit from positive outcomes.

The present study examines perceptions of organisation support towards family in New Zealand. As the above literature suggests, efforts by an organisation to enable employees to blend their work and family roles more effectively may not have the intended outcome if the perceived organisational climate aimed at supporting balance, creates an inconsistent view of work and family support among employees. Furthermore, we test the role of supervisor support as a potential moderator of this supportive organisational culture as recognition of the role of support in assisting employees to better manage their work and family responsibilities has been established (van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006).

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY & HYPOTHESES

Social exchange theory is used to describe and understand the interactions that employees encounter with their employing organisation (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory is built on mutual exchanges of give and take and as such the norm of reciprocity is the cornerstone in the development of social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960). Unlike economic exchange, for example work for pay, the precise nature (or currency) of social exchanges is not specified in advance, but when enacted serve to develop reciprocation of value between parties (Chen, Aryee, & Lee, 2005). For example, an employee receiving benefits such as work-family practices may feel morally obligated to recompense their employer for this benefit through reduced turnover intentions (Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Wheatley, 2004). Therefore, social exchange theory results in the development and enhancement of relationships within the organisation, as reciprocation of valued resources between interacting parties are exchanged (Chen et al., 2005; Cole, Schaninger, & Harris, 2000). Social exchange theory has been used successfully to understand better the relationship between work-family practices and job attitudes (Brandes et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2005; Kossek et al., 2006; Haar & Spell, 2004; Allen, 2001; Lambert, 2000). For example, Haar and Spell (2004) used social exchange theory to support their assertion that work-family benefits lead to higher employee commitment towards their organisation.

The reciprocal nature of the relationship between employer and employee are crucial to test because failure to receive reciprocity may lead an employer to reduce or remove the giving of benefits (specifically work-family practices). Further, trust in terms of reciprocity is paramount in these exchanges as the precise exchange for services gained by employees are not specified in advance (Gambetta, 1998). Consequently, employers might provide work-family practices but would not be assured of any re-compensation or reciprocity from their employees. Consequently, testing the reciprocity nature of a supportive work-family organisational culture is important for New Zealand employers.

Direct Effects of Family Supportive Organisation Perceptions

The perceived organisation support (POS) literature is grounded in social exchange theory (Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Cotterell, & Marvel, 1987; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa 1986). POS suggests that employees develop beliefs regarding how much they are cared for and valued by their organisation. Eisenberger et al. (1986) found that where an employee feels they are highly regarded by their organisation they will be more likely to perceive their organisation as valuing them, and thus, view it more favourably. In return, employees reciprocate this favourable treatment through enhanced outcomes, such as increased organisational commitment, reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover intentions and feelings of obligation towards that organisation (Brandes et al., 2004; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Coyle-Shapiro and Conway 2005). A meta-analysis of POS revealed that it is a major predictor of job attitudes and behaviours (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

A minor criticism of POS is its generic and generalised approach towards between employer and employee exchange relationships. For example, Flynn (2005) argued that how employees act in social exchange situations might depend on greater "contextual factors" (pg 747). In response to these calls to improving the generalised nature of POS, Allen (2001) developed a measure of the family supportive organisation perceptions (FSOP), which relates to employee perceptions of the work-family supportive nature of a workplace environment. Her study produced strong support for this measure, with findings indicated FSOP significantly contributed to predicting job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intentions. Allen also found that understanding the work-family culture of an organisation was a better predictor of job and life outcomes, than simply testing work-family practice provision. This approach makes sense because a firm might not provide specific policies and benefits (e.g. flexible scheduling), but instead have a culture where the norm is to balance start and finish times to aid family and ultimately, work. Hence, testing for the influence of work-family practices would likely produce limited effects. The FSOP measure taps into how employee's perceptions of how supportive their work environment is to family roles and allows us to predict the influence on attitudes accordingly. This approach is vital because firms are likely to adopt a wide range of policies and provide varying levels of overall support to certain benefits and practices. Consequently, the FSOP approach taps into the underlying message (Kossek et al., 2006) regarding how supportive a firm is towards its employee's work and family responsibilities, and as such, may provide a clearer indicator for examining social exchange relationships.

Allen's (2001) study confirmed the importance and significance of the role that work-family supportive perceptions have on attitudes, over and above the offering of work-family benefits. The present study aims to confirm Allen's (2001) findings with respect to FSOP predicting job satisfaction and turnover intentions, but we also widen its context and applicability to another outcome: life satisfaction. As such, the present study will test the direct effects of FSOP to a number of outcomes. We retest the effects on job satisfaction and turnover intentions because these outcomes are important given they're detrimentally influenced by employees being unable to balance their work and family responsibilities (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Haar, 2004; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2001). Allen (2001) found higher FSOP, through allowing employees better work-family balance, was linked to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions. This supports other studies, which have found positive associations between work-family practices and turnover intentions (Lawlor, 1996) and job satisfaction (Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

We expand the outcomes explored by Allen to include life satisfaction, as a meta-analysis has found life satisfaction to be strongly correlated with job satisfaction (Tait, Padgett & Baldwin, 1989). The work-family literature has also found job and life satisfaction to be detrimentally influenced by work-family conflict (Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994). Clearly, someone enjoying their job is more likely to also be enjoying their life. Given that work-family practices specifically target improving the 'whole' life of an employee (e.g. through flexibility in working times which moves into the family domain too), we would therefore, expect a supportive work-family environment to be positively linked to life satisfaction. Finally, it is important to test non-work attitudes as these are sometimes missing from work-family studies. This leads to our first set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Higher family supportive organisation perceptions will be positively related to job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Higher family supportive organisation perceptions will be positively related to life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Higher family supportive organisation perceptions will be negatively related to turnover intentions.

Moderating Effects of Supervisor Support

The concept of support, including supervisor, manager, and co-worker, has been well studied in the work-family literature (van Daalen et al., 2006; Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Frone & Yardley, 1996; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002; Fu & Shaffer, 2000). Indeed, supervisor support has been found to be among the most studied types of support (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). While support has been found to have buffering effects (Cohen & Willis, 1985), there has been no examination of potential enhancement (moderating) effects of supervisor support towards the outcomes of FSOP. We suggest a supportive supervisor might aid and enhance the direct positive effects of a supportive family organisational culture towards employee outcomes. In this regard, an employee who feels their supervisor supports them and provides assistance when work and family issues grow burdensome might enhance the positive family supportive culture that already exists in the organisation. Consequently, we suggest that a supportive supervisor will enhance the direct effects of a family supportive organisational culture such that employee will report even stronger positive effects on outcomes. This leads to the next set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4. The positive relationship between FSOP and job satisfaction will be enhanced by greater perceptions of supervisor support.

Hypothesis 5. The positive relationship between FSOP and life satisfaction will be enhanced by greater perceptions of supervisor support.

Hypothesis 6. The negative relationship between FSOP and turnover intentions will be buffered by greater perceptions of supervisor support.

The hypothesized relationships are shown in Figure 1. - The Hypothesized relationship of FSOP, Supervisor Support, and Job Satisfaction towards Employee Outcomes.

[Click here to view the graphs](#)

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Two hundred surveys were randomly distributed to a large number of firms (approximately 100) in a New Zealand region amongst both cities and towns. A total of 165 employee surveys were returned (response rate 82.5%). Respondents ranged in age from 17 to 60 years (average age of 28.3 years), 53% were female, 33% were married, and 30% parents. Education was well spread with 47% with high school education, 16% polytechnic/technical education, 34% with a bachelor's degree and 3% with a graduate qualification. Overall, respondents worked 30.9 hours per week, with 78% full-time employees, with an average tenure of 3.6 years. By industry sector, 49% of respondents were from the private sector, 46% the public sector, and 5% from the not-for-profit sector.

Measures

All scales achieved acceptable coefficient alphas of at least 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Specific details are provided after each measure.

Predictor Variable

Family Supportive Organisation Perceptions was measured with 10-items from Allen (2001), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Respondents were asked to reflect on the extent each item represented the beliefs or assumptions held by their organisation. Most of the items are worded negatively (e.g. "It is considered taboo to talk about life outside of work"); these negative items were reverse-scored so that a higher score indicated a perception of the organisation as being more family-supportive. This measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .67.

Criterion Variables

Job Satisfaction was measured using 5-items by Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke (2005), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied or unsatisfied they were with different features of their present job. A sample item is "Most days I am enthusiastic about my work". This measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .80.

Life Satisfaction was measured using the 5-item measure by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. A sample question is "In most ways my life is close to ideal". This measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .84.

Turnover Intentions was measured using a 4-item measure by Kelloway, Gottlieb, and Barham (1999), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. A sample question is "I am thinking about leaving my organisation". This measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

Moderation Variable

Supervisor Support was measured with 6-items by Lambert (2000), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Questions followed the stem "My supervisor..." and a sample item is "Is helpful when I have a family or personal emergency". This measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

Control Variables

Similar to other work-family studies (e.g. Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002) a number of demographic variables were controlled for. These were Gender (1=female, 0=male), Marital Status (1=married/cohabitating, 0=single), Parental Status (1=parent, 0=non-parent), Education (1=college qualification, 2=polytechnic qualification, 3=university qualification, 4=postgraduate qualification), Hours Worked (in hours), and Tenure (in years).

Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to analyze the data. Control variables (gender, marital status, parental status, education, hours worked, and tenure) were entered in Step 1, and FSOP was entered in Step 2 as the predictor variable. To test for moderation, supervisor support was entered in Step 3 and Step 4 held the interaction between FSOP and supervisor support. To address issues of multi-collinearity, mean centring of the interaction terms was done (Aiken & West, 1991).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for all the study variables in study one are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	7
1. Hours Worked	30.9	15.4	--					
2. Job Satisfaction	3.5	.71	.17*	--				
3. Life Satisfaction	3.3	.77	.06	.30**	--			
4. Turnover Intentions	2.7	1.1	-.31**	-.56**	-.22**	--		
5. Supervisor Support	3.6	.81	.09	.39**	.27**	-.40**	--	
6. FSOP	3.5	.50	.01	.25**	.34**	-.26**	.30**	--

N=181, *p< .05, **p< .01

Table 1 shows FSOP is significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($r = .25, p < .01$), life satisfaction ($r = .34, p < .01$), and turnover intentions ($r = -.26, p < .01$), which supports taking analysis to the regression stage. Job satisfaction is significantly correlated with life satisfaction ($r = .30, p < .01$), turnover intentions ($r = -.56, p < .01$), and supervisor support ($r = .39, p < .01$). Life satisfaction is significantly correlated with turnover intentions ($r = -.22, p < .01$), and supervisor support ($r = .27, p < .01$), while turnover intentions is significantly correlated with supervisor support ($r = -.40, p < .01$). Finally, hours worked is significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($r = .17, p < .05$), and turnover intentions ($r = -.31, p < .01$).

Direct Effects of FSOP

Results of the hierarchical regressions for Hypotheses 1 to 3 are shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2. Regression Coefficients for Job Satisfaction

Variables	Job Satisfaction			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
	Controls	Predictor	Moderator	Interaction
Gender	.13	.13	.11	.12
Marital Status	.25*	.24*	.24*	.23*
Parental Status	-.13	-.16	-.16	-.12
Education	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.07
Hours Worked	.13	.15	.15	.12
Tenure	.22*	.19	.19	.17
FSOP		.22**	.13†	.13†
Supervisor Support			.35***	.33***
FSOP x Supervisor Support				.16*
R ² change	.14**	.05**	.11**	.02*
Total R ²	.14	.18	.29	.32
Adjusted R ²	.10	.14	.25	.27
F Statistic	3.409**	4.131***	6.582***	6.508***
†p< .1, *p<.05, **p<.01, p< .001. Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.				

Table 3. Regression Coefficients for Life Satisfaction

Variables	Life Satisfaction			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
	Controls	Predictor	Moderator	Interaction
Gender	.06	.05	.04	.04
Marital Status	.15	.13	.12	.11
Parental Status	-.06	-.10	-.07	-.07
Education	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02
Hours Worked	-.01	.02	.00	-.00
Tenure	.22*	.17	.16	.16
FSOP		.31***	.27**	.27**
Supervisor Support			.14	.15
FSOP x Supervisor Support				-.05
R ² change	.07	.09***	.02	.00
Total R ²	.07	.16	.18	.18
Adjusted R ²	.03	.11	.12	.12
F Statistic	1.591	3.468**	3.417**	3.072**
†p< .1, *p<.05, **p<.01, p< .001. Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.				

Table 4. Regression Coefficients for Turnover Intentions

Variables	Turnover Intentions			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
	Controls	Predictor	Moderator	Interaction
Gender	-.07	-.07	-.06	-.06
Marital Status	-.19	-.18	-.14	-.14
Parental Status	.21	.24*	.18	.18

Education	.04	.04	.05	.05
Hours Worked	-.27**	-.29**	-.26**	-.26**
Tenure	-.31**	-.29**	-.26**	-.26**
FSOP		-.23**	-.15*	-.15*
Supervisor Support			-.30***	-.31***
FSOP x Supervisor Support				.06
R ² change	.20***	.05**	.08***	.00
Total R ²	.20	.25	.33	.34
Adjusted R ²	.17	.21	.29	.29
F Statistic	5.533***	6.317***	8.097***	7.259***
†p< .1, *p<.05, **p<.01, p< .001. Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.				

The Tables shows that FSOP is significantly associated with job satisfaction ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$), life satisfaction ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), and turnover intentions ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .01$).

Consequently, there is support for Hypotheses 1 to 3. From the R² Change figures in Step 2, we see FSOP accounts for 5% of the total variance for job satisfaction ($p < .01$), 9% for life satisfaction ($p < .001$), and 5% for turnover intentions ($p < .01$).

Interaction Effects of Supervisor Support

The Tables also shows that supervisor support affects the relationship between FSOP and job satisfaction only: ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), accounting for an additional 2% ($p < .05$) of the variance. However, supervisor support held no other significant interaction effect, providing no support for Hypotheses 5 and 6. To facilitate interpretation of the significant moderator effect (Hypothesis 4), interactions are presented in Figure 1. On Figure 1, FSOP low and high represent points below and above the mean ($M=3.5$), while supervisor support low and high represent points below and above the mean ($M=3.6$).

Figure 2. Interaction Plot of FSOP and Supervisor Support with Job Satisfaction as Dependent Variable- [Click here to view the graphs](#)

Plotting the interaction terms (Figure 2) illustrates that when FSOP is low, there is a significant difference between respondents registering high or low levels of supervisor support towards job satisfaction. When supervisor support is low, those with high FSOP report higher job satisfaction than those with low supervisor support. When FSOP increases to high, all respondents report higher job satisfaction. However, those with high supervisor support report significantly higher job satisfaction than those with low supervisor support. This supports Hypothesis 3.

The overall strength of the moderation models is significant and substantial: job satisfaction ($R^2 = .32$, $F = 6.508$, $p < .001$), life satisfaction ($R^2 = .18$, $F = 3.072$, $p < .01$), and turnover intentions ($R^2 = .34$, $F = 7.259$, $p < .001$).

Finally, the variance inflation factors (VIF) were examined for evidence of multicollinearity. Experts suggest multicollinearity can be detected when the VIF values equal 10 or higher (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1996; Ryan, 1997). However, all the scores for the regressions were below 1.3, indicating no evidence of multicollinearity unduly influencing the regression estimates.

DISCUSSION

The focus of the present study was to test the direct effects of a family supportive organisational culture on employee outcomes, and this was universally and strongly supported. FSOP were positively related to job and life satisfaction, and negatively related to turnover intentions. The supported direct effects of FSOP towards job satisfaction and turnover intentions reconfirm the influence of a supportive family culture on job outcomes (Allen, 2001). Hence, the present study provides support for this effect amongst New Zealand employees. Further, the present study expands the outcomes associated with FSOP by finding it also links positively to outcomes outside the workplace - in this respect, life satisfaction. This has been previously untested, highlighting a useful contribution of the present study. This supports calls from experts (Ford et al., 2007) who argued for further testing of work-family practices effects on outcomes outside the organisation. Consequently, we find that how an organisation supports the work and family roles of its employees may also influence how employees consider their own lives outside of work.

It also worth noting that the strength of FSOP in predicting outcomes was strongest for life satisfaction (9%), and more modest for job satisfaction and turnover intentions (both 5%). This is an important finding because the power to influence work related outcomes is surpassed by the influence on non-work related outcomes, highlighting a previously unknown aspect of family supportive environments. We encourage further research to clarify the effects of FSOP on non-work outcomes, in particular life satisfaction.

The other major focus of this study was the potential moderating effects of supervisor support on the relationships between FSOP and outcomes. While the effects of support has been well explored (Anderson et al., 2002), especially supervisor support (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), there has been scant attention paid to the role of supervisor

support towards family supportive organisational cultures. While significant moderating effects of support have been empirically found (Cohen & Willis, 1985), we find limited effects towards outcomes. In the present study, only job satisfaction was enhanced further by a supportive supervisor, providing some support for the additional beneficial nature of a supportive organisational culture being enhanced by management within. The diagram of the interaction effects clearly shows that the beneficial nature of FSOP is heightened by strong supervisor support, with employees registering low supervisor support reporting much lower levels of job satisfaction than employees registering high supervisor support. Hence, the notion of reciprocity (through social exchange theory) of a family supportive culture becomes intensified when employees report their supervisor supports them and provides (additional) assistance towards work-family issues. The response from employees is heightened job satisfaction, although, this intensification effect was not found towards turnover intentions or life satisfaction. We encourage further study of supervisor support as a moderator to determine the overall generalisability of our findings.

As with similar cross sectional studies, there are limitations that encourage caution towards the findings, with data collected at a single point in time, which raises concerns regarding common method variance. As such, we conducted Harman's One Factor Test for common method variance as this approach is seen as a useful rudimentary check (e.g. Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002). The resulting factor analysis (unrotated) resulted in 10 factors, the largest accounting for 20.8% of the variance. Given that a single dominant factor did not emerge, this test indicated little evidence of common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). One advantage of this study's methodology is that data collection had a wide variation in employees and organisations that were collected. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) have previously criticized work-family research as having homogenous samples (e.g. female employees, managers only etc.). Further, there has been little attention to non-parents and single employees in work-family research, as if these employees could not similarly benefit from work-family practices and supportive environments (e.g. through caring for elderly parents). The present study had a fairly even match by gender (53% female), and has a much lower rate of married respondents (33%) and parents (30%). Taken in context of the present study, this means that employees, even without partner's and children, do appreciate the benefits of a supportive organisational culture, which further aids our understanding of FSOP. Similarly, respondents were from a good mix of industries, including private sector (49%), public sector (46%), and the not-for-profit sector (6%), which is a particularly under-represented segment in work-family studies. Further, collecting data from employees in 100 organisations further enhances the generalisability of these findings.

Despite these limitations, the present study indicates that a supportive organisational culture towards work-family issues does influence employee attitudes regarding job and life satisfaction, and turnover intentions. This provides support to the literature that a supportive work-family environment will encourage employees to reciprocate with enhanced outcomes. Further, the present study benefits New Zealand employers by testing and supporting the effects of a study based on American employees. Further, our test of supervisor support as a potential moderator further enhances our understanding of a supportive work-family organisational culture, indicating that supervisors has the potential to enhance the overall work-family culture of an organisation, at least towards job satisfaction.

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