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Managerial support, work–family conflict and employee outcomes: an Australian study

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Abstract

Purpose – Derived from leader–member exchange theory, this study hypothesises the relationships between work–family related managerial support and affective commitment and job satisfaction, and advocates that these relationships are mediated by work–family conflict.

Design/methodology/approach – The model was tested in an Australian manufacturing organisation using survey data from employees, using structural equation modelling in Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS).

Findings – The findings suggest that enhanced work–family related managerial support will decrease work–family conflict, eventually enhancing employees' affective commitment and job satisfaction.

Originality/value – This study provides important insights into the impact of managerial support on improvements in employees' work–family conflict, and, in turn, its impact on affective commitment and job satisfaction, in the Australian context.

Keywords Managerial support, Work–family conflict, Affective commitment, Job satisfaction

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The conflict between work and family has been an important research field due to substantial changes in workforce demographics, such as dual-earner couples and increasing women's workforce participation (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Greenhaus *et al.*, 2012; Odriozola and Baraibar-Diez, 2018). "Work–family conflict" (WFC), termed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77), refers to "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect". WFC is related to work–family interference, which refers to the situation in which participation in the family (work) domain is hindered by participation in the work (family) domain (Tummers and Babette, 2014). WFC can impose direct and indirect costs for an organisation. The former includes involvement and belonging (e.g. turnover, strike or slowdown) and industrial accidents, whereas the latter entails lower levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment as well as deteriorating the employer–employee relationship (Quick, 2013).

WFC has been found to be negatively associated with employee outcomes in the work domain, including *job satisfaction* (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2000; Frone *et al.*, 1992; Gözükara and Çolakoğlu, 2016; Kossek *et al.*, 2011), *affective commitment* (e.g. Cloninger and Selvarajan, 2015; Qureshi *et al.*, 2019), and well-being (e.g. Chambel *et al.*, 2017; Galletta *et al.*, 2019; Karatepe and Karadas, 2016; Kinman *et al.*, 2017; McDowell *et al.*, 2019). While job satisfaction refers to an individual's enjoyment or positive emotion arising from an evaluation of his or her job and/or job experiences (Locke, 1976), affective commitment is 'the relative strength of an

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individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation' (Mowday *et al.*, 1979, p. 226). *Managerial support* can elicit satisfaction and affective reactions among employees (Pohl and Galletta, 2017) and has been found to weaken WFC experienced by employees (Karatepe and Kilic, 2007; Frone *et al.*, 1992; Selvarajan *et al.*, 2013). Managerial support is the extent to which managers appreciate employees' contributions, care about their subordinates' well-being and are attentive to employee needs (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002).

Our study extends work–family research in several ways. First, we test the mediating role of WFC between managerial support and both job satisfaction and affective commitment (see Figure 1). Recent studies have found that the effect of managerial support on job satisfaction was mediated by WFC (Drummond *et al.*, 2017; Hwang and Ramadoss, 2017). A meta-analysis also tested the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between general work support (including support from supervisors, colleagues and organisation) and job satisfaction (Ford *et al.*, 2007). However, little is known about whether WFC mediates the relationship between managerial support and *affective commitment* (see the Table A1 for key information on relevant studies).

Past studies have mainly explored separate elements of our model. A number of studies found direct effect of work–family related support from managers on job satisfaction (e.g. Babin and Boles, 1996; Charoensukmongkol *et al.*, 2016; Hwang and Ramadoss, 2017; Lapierre *et al.*, 2008; Qureshi *et al.*, 2018) and affective commitment (e.g. Talukder *et al.*, 2018; Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Wayne *et al.*, 2013). Literature has also established the negative association between WFC and the concerned two outcome variables. For example, Choi and Kim (2012) and Gözükara and Çolakoğlu (2016) show that WFC has a detrimental impact on job satisfaction; whereas Allen *et al.* (2000), Talukder *et al.* (2018) and Qureshi *et al.* (2019) suggest WFC is negatively associated with affective commitment. However, to our knowledge, the model proposed in Figure 1 has not been previously tested.

Second, it theorises a process by which the provision of managerial support for employees to manage their work and life roles accounts for an increase in affective commitment and job satisfaction among employees. We use leader–member exchange (LMX) theory (Deluga, 1994), which is underpinned by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). We postulate that supporting a subordinate employee in managing competing work–life demands (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002) helps decrease the level of WFC experienced by the employee (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Kim and Mullins, 2016; Lapierre and Allen, 2006; Mas-Machuca *et al.*, 2016; Pluut *et al.*, 2018; Talukder *et al.*, 2018; Thompson *et al.*, 1999). The employee will reciprocate with affective responses in terms of affective commitment and job satisfaction (Birtch *et al.*, 2015; Major and Lauzun, 2010).

Third, our theoretical model was tested in the Australian context. WFC and related issues such as stress (Smith *et al.*, 2002; Turner *et al.*, 2014) have been considered as common among Australian employees (Skinner and Chapman, 2013). Despite reforms in childcare, parental leave and employment regulations over the past two decades, WFC continues to be a challenge in Australia. Many Australian employees were found to have encountered high

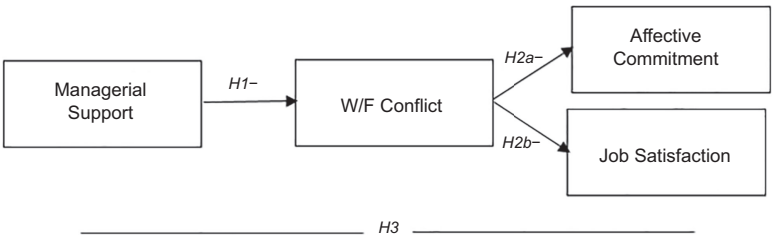

Figure 1.
Theoretical model

levels of WFC (Skinner and Pocock, 2014). WFC has received the attention from scholars, government, employers and employees (De Cieri *et al.*, 2005; Zheng *et al.*, 2016). Capturing the role of support from managers for employees to alleviate the conflict between work and family roles has the potential for organisations to understand the reciprocal exchange and in turn, to arrange necessary support in pursuit of desired employee attitudes and behaviour.

Theoretical foundation and hypotheses development

In building the theoretical model (as displayed in Figure 1), we draw on the LMX theory to investigate the process through which WFC could be alleviated and lead to positive employee outcomes, including affective commitment and job satisfaction. The theory posits that LMX emerges from the social exchange between a manager and employee, wherein the negotiation of the employee's work role occurs through reciprocities between the two parties (Deluga, 1994; Major and Lauzun, 2010). Consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the LMX theory advances the idea that reciprocity arises from the (perceived) fulfilment of needs and expectations by both parties in the relationship (Birtch *et al.*, 2015). The LMX framework incorporates a focus on the quality of the manager–subordinate relationship (Gerstner and Day, 1997).

In addition, LMX and family-supportive managerial behaviour reportedly generate a positive environment in which both components influence and strengthen each other (Tummers and Bronkhorst, 2014). As noted by Graen and Scandura (1987, p. 182), it is crucial to the LMX quality that "each party must offer something the other party sees as valuable and each party must see the exchange as reasonably equitable or fair". Low-quality LMX relationships are characterised by transactional interactions, determined by the employment contract (Litano *et al.*, 2016), in which employees receive standard benefits, including salary, superannuation and sick leave, in exchange for fulfilling formal job duties (Lapierre *et al.*, 2006). By contrast, in high-quality LMX relationships, both instrumental and affective forms of support are increased (Bernas and Major, 2000) due to reciprocal exchanges between the manager and employee (Tummers and Bronkhorst, 2014).

The LMX theory suggests that when employees perceive that the manager is fulfilling his or her part of the LMX process through generating a family-friendly work environment and offering support for a range of work-related and life (personal) matters (Gözükara and ; Odriozola and Baraibar-Diez, 2018), reciprocity should emerge. On the basis of reciprocity, the exchange relationship between employees and managers (and the organisation) is formed (de Juana-Espinosa and Rakowska, 2018). This relationship is manifested in employees' inclination to demonstrate positive behaviours and attitudes towards the organisation (and manager) and job (Talukder *et al.*, 2018), including affective commitment and job satisfaction (Birtch *et al.*, 2015).

Managerial support and WFC

Research shows that high LMX is associated with lessened WFC. Using a sample of Dutch healthcare professionals, Tummers and Bronkhorst (2014) found that high LMX was negatively correlated with work–family interference, a construct that is closely related to WFC. Similar negative relationships have also been reported when examining the relationship between LMX and two types of WFC (Gutek *et al.*, 1991), namely family interference with work and work interference with family. Lapierre *et al.* (2006), for instance, reported a negative relationship between LMX and family interference with work in their study of a Canadian non-profit organisation. Studies conducted by Bernas and Major (2000) and Major *et al.* (2008) have found a negative relationship between LMX and work interference with family.

A general consensus in the literature is that managerial support has beneficial effects on work–family experiences among employees (Litano *et al.*, 2016). Scholars have contended that

managerial support exerts a stronger influence on work-to-family conflict, as opposed to family-to-work conflict, since the source of support is work-related (Frone *et al.*, 1992; Selvarajan *et al.*, 2013). Karatepe and Kilic (2007) have lent empirical support to the relationship between managerial support and work-to-family conflict. This finding is consistent with that of Thomas and Ganster (1995). Similarly, results in a longitudinal study pertain to the relationship between work-to-family conflict and turnover intentions, which is most effectively buffered by support stemming from the work domain (Nohe and Sonntag, 2014).

Managers who display accommodating behaviours and compassion for employees' work and family responsibilities can have a significant impact on employees' endeavour to achieve work–life balance (Talukder *et al.*, 2018; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). These managers serve as a source of instrumental and emotional assistance to buffer work-related demands (Choi, 2020). Support for work–life initiatives from managers propagates employees' perceptions of balance between their work and personal (life) commitments (Mas-Machuca *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, managerial support is considered as a crucial workplace resource conducive to employees' achievement of better work–life balance (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2012), including perceived decreased role conflict, specifically, decreased WFC (Talukder *et al.*, 2018).

For instance, flexible working hours may optimise employees' ability to fulfil both work and non-work responsibilities (Russo *et al.*, 2016). From a work–family perspective, Major and Lauzun (2010) suggest that not only does a manager appreciate an employee's contributions, the manager is also interested in ensuring that the employee feels appreciated and maintains productivity at work, including providing employees with assistance to handle work–family issues. Likewise, the employee could be inclined to contribute to the manager's goals and be confident in the manager's propensity for appropriate help and acknowledgement, namely aiding in the employee's ability to manage work–family demands. A meta-analysis suggests that support of immediate managers and positive work–family experience among employees are strongly related (Kossek *et al.*, 2011). Empirical literature has also established that a supportive manager plays a pivotal role in reducing WFC (e.g. Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Thompson *et al.*, 1999). Allen (2001) explains that managerial support exerts influence over employees' perceptions of their organisation's family-supportiveness, which could lead to reduced WFC. O'Driscoll *et al.* (2003) found that employees supervised by managers who provide more support for work–family balance reported less psychological strain than those with lower levels of managerial support. Managerial support is of great importance in work–family balance (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2012; Gözükara and Çolakoğlu, 2015), due to its alleviating effects on work–family tension (Beehr *et al.*, 2000).

The work-to-family type of conflict reflects the extent to which participation in the family role is complicated as a result of participation in the work role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). From this perspective, antecedents of WFC arise from the work domain, and the levels of work resources and work demands are associated with WFC (Byron, 2005; Michel *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the provision of managerial support for employees to participate in the family domain is likely to ameliorate the role demands at work interfering in family responsibilities (i.e. WFC). The present study therefore proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. Managerial support will be negatively associated with WFC.

WFC and affective commitment, job satisfaction

Affective commitment, as a component of organisational commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991), is related to the role or roles of an individual within the social organisation, which could evoke satisfaction or stress experienced by the individual (Benligiray and Sönmez, 2012). Affective commitment is a form of psychological attachment originated from sense of pride and loyalty to an organisation or the manager as the organisation's representative (Allen and

Meyer, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2015), and is likely to be influenced by job- or role-related characteristics (i.e. job demands and resources) (Mowday *et al.*, 1982).

Job satisfaction emanates from employees' favourable evaluations of the job (Locke, 1976). Detrimental job characteristics that cause incompatible requirements arising from one's work and family roles that potentially have restraining influences on role fulfilment (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) could be minimised by manager support or "psychologically and functionally useful resources" for employees to achieve work–life balance (Kossek *et al.*, 2011, p. 294). Research has established that a common way in which employees reciprocate to their manager (and organisation) entails developing strong affective and socio-emotional attachment, including affective commitment and job satisfaction (Birtch *et al.*, 2015; Gözükara and Çolakoğlu, 2015; Mukanzi and Senaji, 2017).

According to Thompson *et al.* (1999), family-supportive management with goodwill and intention to assist employees in balancing work–family responsibilities could evoke feelings of attachment from employees, including affective commitment and intention to leave. Similarly, a recent study conducted in the Australian financial sector revealed the significant role of managerial support in promoting work–life balance (i.e. decreased WFC), which subsequently affected employee attitudes, including job satisfaction, organisational commitment and life satisfaction (Talukder *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, substantial evidence suggests that affective commitment and job satisfaction are improved when an individual experiences fewer conflicts at the work–life interface. Meta-analytic evidence shows that WFC negatively impacts affective commitment and job satisfaction (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). Results from a number of studies (e.g. Boles *et al.*, 1997; Cannon, 1998; Good *et al.*, 1988; Weale *et al.*, 2019) reveal that WFC is related to a lower degree of job satisfaction and affective commitment. Drawing upon the LMX concepts and presented research evidence, it is proposed that:

H2a. WFC will be negatively associated with affective commitment.

H2b. WFC will be negatively associated with job satisfaction.

The mediating role of WFC

The above hypotheses combine to form a mediation model. In the present study, we applied the LMX framework, which is rooted in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Deluga, 1994), to theorise the process in which WFC will mediate the relationship between managerial support and employees' affective and socio-emotional outcomes, including affective commitment and job satisfaction. We predict that it is likely that managerial support will lessen the level of conflicts between employees' work and life roles (Hypothesis1), which in turn will promote affective commitment (Hypothesis 2a) and job satisfaction (Hypothesis 2b). Therefore:

H3a. WFC will mediate the relationship between managerial support and affective commitment.

H3b. WFC will mediate the relationship between managerial support and job satisfaction.

Methods

The study used a cross-sectional design, and data were collected through a survey of employees from an Australian manufacturing organisation.

Sample and data collection

The sampling frame comprised all employees of an Australian manufacturing organisation. Initially multiple organisations were approached, however only one organisation agreed to

participate and provided access to its employees. An e-survey link was sent to each employee via the HR manager. The responses were directly received by the researchers, with no involvement of the HR manager. Employees' self-reported data were collected as opposed to peer or supervisor ratings, objective observations or archival data. The data were collected between July 2013 to September 2013. A total of 250 employees were sent a survey. After deleting incomplete responses, 134 surveys with all questions answered led to a response rate of 53.6%. Final sample size was within the acceptable range of 30–500 responses, defined by scholarly standards (Roscoe, 1975). It also fulfils the various rules of thumb, such as $50 + k$ (Harris, 1975), $5k$ (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1989), $50 + 8k$ (Green, 1991) and 100 (Combs, 2010). The value of k for the current study is 4. The respondents comprised 75% male and 25% female, with a mean age of 45 years. Of participating employees, 62.5% were below the age of 45, and 47.8% had the European/Anglo-American background.

Measures

This study uses four latent variables measured through multiple indicators which represent the underlying constructs (Byrne, 1998). These indicators are repeatedly used in the literature for the measurement of these latent constructs that cannot be directly measured (e.g. Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Boyar *et al.*, 2005). This is referred as parcelling in literature that involves "averaging or summing several raw items to form a single score, which can then be used as an indicator of a latent variable" (Sterba, 2011, p. 554). Hence, the main four variables (see Figure 1) are based on reflective scales where the measured items "jointly influence the latent construct, and meaning emanates from the measures to the construct in the sense that the full meaning of the composite latent construct is derived from its measures" (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2005, p. 713). The responses to the items were averaged to create the final score for the construct (e.g. Armstrong *et al.*, 2010; Liao *et al.*, 2009), as these indicators reflect the heterogeneous causes of latent construct (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Empirical justifications for averaging items include attaining normality, enhancing reliability and achieving a better model fit (Bandalos and Finney, 2001). Summing items can lead to misleading values in the presence of missing responses to some items.

Predictors. Work–family related *managerial support* was measured by an eleven-item scale developed by Thompson *et al.* (1999), with a reported reliability of 0.91. The exploratory factor analysis was run to check the validity of the scale with the current data. Three items were dropped from the scale due to factor loadings below 0.4. A sample item is "In general, managers are quite accommodating of family-related needs". The Cronbach's alpha value for the current study is 0.875. Scales were reported on a five-point Likert scale from "1" representing "strongly disagree" to "5" representing "strongly agree".

Outcomes. A seven-item scale was used to measure *job satisfaction,* developed by King *et al.* (2012), asking the degree of employee satisfaction with respect to different aspects of the job, for example "support from immediate manager" and "value of work". The reported reliability of the scale was 0.86. The Cronbach's alpha value for the current study is 0.89. *Affective commitment* was measured using a four-item scale originally developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). The sample item is "Working at this organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me". The scale measures the emotional attachment, identification and involvement of employees with the organisation. The Cronbach's alpha value for the current study is 0.84. For both scales, employees reported on a five-point Likert scale from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied".

Mediator. The mediating variable of *WFC* was measured with a scale used by Netemeyer *et al.* (1996), with a reported reliability of 0.88. The scale comprised five items, for example, "The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life". Employees reported on five response choices ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The Cronbach's alpha for the current study is 0.94.

Controls. The analysis controlled for the effects of gender and age. Participant gender was coded as a dummy variable, where "0" = male and "1" = female. Age was an open-ended question in the survey. To convert it into a categorical variable, we calculated the median value of age and created two categories above and below the median value. Lower values were represented by "0", while the upper values were represented by "1". A total of 51.5% of the values lay below the median value.

Results

Means, correlations and standard deviations for all variables in the theoretical model are presented in Table 1. The data were checked for multivariate assumptions through Cook's distance, skewness, kurtosis and collinearity diagnostics. All the values were below 0.1 for Cook's distance hence showing no outliers (Cook, 1977). Similar was the case for skewness, kurtosis and variation inflation factor (VIF) values. The Mardia's standardised coefficient value is a multivariate measure of normality. Its value equal to or less than 1.96 indicates multivariate normality of the data (e.g. Vargas-Halabí *et al.*, 2017). For the proposed model, the value is 1.711 indicating the normality of data. Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion has been used to establish the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. According to the criterion, the convergent validity can be assessed through average variance extracted (AVE), with the values above 0.5 acceptable. For the current model the AVE values for all the construct are above 0.5, indicating the presence of convergent validity of the constructs (see Table 2). On the other hand, the criterion proposes the presence of discriminant validity if the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than the correlations involving the constructs. The results fulfil the criterion for the presence of discriminant validity in the current data. At the same time the correlation coefficient values for all variables were below 0.5, indicating convergent and discriminant validity of the data. Convergent and discriminant validity of variables were also established through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, where all factor loadings were above 0.5 (see Table 2: Cunningham *et al.*, 2001;

VARIABLE	MEAN	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Predictors							
1. Managerial support	*3.60*	*0.575*					
Mediator							
2. Work–family conflict	2.69	0.969	−0.177*				
Outcome							
3. Affective commitment	3.43	0.710	0.477**	−0.206*			
4. Job satisfaction	3.81	0.640	0.110	−0.345**	0.254**		
Controls							
5. Gender	0.27	0.445	0.069	−0.026	0.201*	−0.076	
6. Age	1.49	0.502	−0.179*	0.017	0.039	−0.016	−0.182*

Note(s): *$p < 0.05$ (2-tailed). **$p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations

Variable	Reliability	Convergent validity
Managerial support	0.87	0.50
Work–family conflict	0.94	0.74
Affective commitment	0.84	0.51
Job satisfaction	0.89	0.56

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity

Tharenou *et al.*, 2007). The cross-sectional nature of data may also pose threats of common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Consistent with past literature, the statistical procedures were used to reduce the bias (e.g. Bitrian *et al.*, 2020; Erkutlu and Chafra, 2019). Therefore, Harmon's single factor test was conducted to exclude superfluous items. The results indicate that 35.15% of total variance was explained by single factor, demonstrating no risk of common method bias.

The structural equation modelling (SEM) technique in Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) was used to test the hypothesised model shown in Figure 1. Hypotheses 1, 2a and 2b state the direct relationships in the model. Hypothesis 1 proposes that work–family related managerial support is negatively associated with WFC ($\beta = -0.40$, $\alpha < 0.05$). Hypotheses 2a and 2b anticipate that WFC is negatively related to affective commitment ($\beta = -0.51$, $\alpha < 0.001$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.42$, $\alpha < 0.001$), respectively. Table 3 presents the estimates and significance of the direct effects in the model. The 95% confidence interval using 5000 bias corrected samples does not include zero, reporting the relationships to be significant.

Hypothesis 3a states that WFC will mediate the relationship between managerial support and affective commitment ($\beta = 0.32$, LLCI = 0.007, ULCI = 0.140, $\alpha < 0.05$), whereas hypothesis 3b predicts the mediating influence of WFC on the relationship of managerial support and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.30$, LLCI = 0.010, ULCI = 0.167, $\alpha < 0.05$). The results (presented in Table 4) indicate that managerial support had a positively significant effect on affective commitment and job satisfaction via WFC. The 95% confidence interval using 5000 bias corrected samples does not include zero, reporting the relationships to be significant.

The chi-square to the degrees of freedom ratio for the complete model is 1.627, suggesting that the model is fit for the data. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is the most used index to check model fitness (McDonald and Ho, 2002). For the proposed model, the RMSEA value is 0.05, indicating a model fit (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004; Steiger, 2007). Other absolute fit value measures are the goodness of fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI). For the proposed model, the GFI and AGFI values are 0.977 and 0.919, respectively, showing acceptable variance for the study (Hooper *et al.*, 2008). The incremental fit indices mostly reported for SEM are the comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI) and Tucker Lewis index (TLI). The CFI, NFI and TLI values for the proposed model are 0.954,

Table 3.
Direct effects

Predictor	Outcome	Estimate	LLCI – ULCI
Managerial support	Work–family conflict	−0.40**	−0.622 – −0.036
Work–family conflict	Affective commitment	−0.51***	−0.267 – −0.092
Work–family conflict	Job satisfaction	−0.42***	−0.330 – −0.116

Note(s): ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.05$
Bootstrap sample size = 5000 bias corrected, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit, CI= Confidence Interval, Level of confidence = 95%

Table 4.
Mediating effects

Predictor	Mediator	Outcome	Estimate	LLCI – ULCI
Managerial support	Work–family conflict	Affective commitment	0.32**	0.007–0.140
Managerial support	Work–family conflict	Job satisfaction	0.30**	0.010–0.167

Note(s): **$p < 0.05$
Bootstrap sample size = 5000 bias corrected, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit, CI= Confidence Interval, Level of confidence = 95%

0.90 and 0.886, respectively. According to Schumacker and Lomax (2004), values approaching one are treated as good and acceptable. All the parsimonious, absolute and incremental fit indices show the proposed model fit for the study.

Discussion

The basic purpose of this paper was to explore whether: (1) managerial support decreases WFC, (2) WFC is negatively associated with affective commitment and job satisfaction, and (3) WFC mediates the relationship between managerial support and outcomes (affective commitment and job satisfaction). The results reveal all the proposed relationships are significant.

The results indicate a negative relationship between work–family related managerial support and WFC. Our findings support and strengthen the literature suggesting decrease in WFC because of managerial support (e.g. Allen, 2001; Drummond *et al.*, 2017; Frone *et al.*, 1992; Karatepe and Kilic, 2007; Pluut *et al.*, 2018; Selvarajan *et al.*, 2013; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). For example, Pluut *et al.* (2018) stated that supervisor's support mitigates the within-individual workload effects on emotional exhaustion which reduces WFC. Kossek *et al.* (2011) reported a strong relationship between immediate manager support and work–family experience. Managerial support is also found to exert influence on employees' perceptions of an organisation's family supportiveness, which can lead to lower WFC (Allen, 2001). Similarly, Drummond *et al.* (2017) and Lapierre *et al.* (2008) found negative association between supervisory support and WFC.

Furthermore, the negative association between WFC and affective commitment/job satisfaction found in this study is widely supported in the literature (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2000; Boles *et al.*, 1997; Cannon, 1998; Good *et al.*, 1988; Gözükara and Çolakoğlu, 2016; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; McDowell *et al.*, 2019; Qureshi *et al.*, 2019). For example, Weale *et al.* (2019) found a significant association between WFC and job satisfaction among residential aged care employees. Choi and Kim (2012) and Grandey *et al.* (2005) reported an increase in job satisfaction with the decrease in WFC. Regarding commitment, Qureshi *et al.* (2019) reported a significant negative relationship between WFC and affective commitment. Lyness and Thompson (1997) also found negative association between WFC and affective commitment. Meta-analytic evidence has also attributed WFC to a broad range of employee outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction, low organisational commitment and high turnover intention (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Eby *et al.*, 2005; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005). Therefore, the findings of the current study strengthen the evidence for negative effects of WFC on job satisfaction and effective commitment.

Our findings indicate that the mediating relationships of managerial support–WFC–outcomes are also significant. This study provides pioneering evidence of the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between managerial support and affective commitment. However, the mediating relationship of managerial support–WFC–job satisfaction has been previously studied by Anderson *et al.* (2002) and Hwang and Ramadoss (2017). They reported significant mediation of WFC in the relationship of managerial support and job satisfaction. There is adequate theoretical support for the results via LMX theory. The LMX theory suggests that managers' fulfilment of needs and expectations lead employees to reciprocate the same behaviour towards their managers and the organisation (Birtch *et al.*, 2015; Gözükara and Çolakoğlu, 2015; Odriozola and Baraibar-Diez, 2018). The quality of this exchange relationship holds much importance (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Solís, 2017).

Theoretical and research contributions

This study makes various theoretical and research contributions. *First,* the findings provide support for LMX theory (Deluga, 1994), that is based on social exchange theory and its norm

of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). The fulfilment of needs and expectations of managers and employees through positive social exchange (de Juana-Espinosa and Rakowska, 2018) underpins the philosophy of LMX theory (Birtch *et al.*, 2015; Deluga, 1994; Major and Lauzun, 2010). Therefore, the decrease in the level of WFC experienced by employees, due to managers caring for employee well-being and family-supportive behaviour, led employee to reciprocate positively in the form of enhance affective commitment and job satisfaction (Birtch *et al.*, 2015; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002). *Second*, the findings provide empirical evidence for the negative linear relationship between managerial support and WFC, and WFC and affective commitment/job satisfaction**.** This strengthens the argument that demonstration of family-supportive behaviours from managers helps employees to manage work–life demands effectively, reducing WFC (Drummond *et al.*, 2017; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002; Pluut *et al.*, 2018) and leading to affective responses from employees in terms of commitment and job satisfaction (Birtch *et al.*, 2015; Qureshi *et al.*, 2019). This study focuses on managerial support as it has been considered as most useful and valuable for employees (Ng and Sorensen, 2008).

Third, this study addresses a gap in the literature by reporting the direct and mediating relationships in the Australian context that have not previously been explored. Researchers can also further explore the proposed framework in different cultural settings with larger data sets and longitudinal analyses. The influence and type of managerial support and facets of WFC might differ in developed, developing and under-developing cultures. Our research used the limited number of variables to undertake the focused study rather than the comprehensive study; however, WFC also has a number of other predictors that need to be further investigated, like work–family culture, work-role ambiguity, co-worker support, task autonomy, schedule flexibility and so on (Michel *et al.*, 2011; Thompson *et al.*, 1999). Similarly, managerial support and WFC can influence employee behaviours and outcomes at a larger level. Analysing larger sets of predictors and outcomes of WFC can help understand the reasons for the increase/decrease in WFC.

Fourth, the study provides pioneering evidence for the significant mediating effect of WFC on the relationship of managerial support and outcomes (affective commitment and job satisfaction). Studies can also be undertaken to compare the level of managerial support and family support in enhancing or reducing WFC (Madhavi, 2015; Michel *et al.*, 2011). At the same time, employee personality traits can also play a vital role in defining WFC (Michel *et al.*, 2011).

Practical implications

Managerial support has been considered as the most important and valuable resource for employees to reduce WFC (Kossek *et al.*, 2011; Ng and Sorensen, 2008). According to a survey by the Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic and Social Research, employees facing WFC can face problems in their work performance, their children's functioning and their family life (Wilkins *et al.*, 2019). WFC and stress in lives have been considered as common among Australian workers (Skinner and Chapman, 2013). The supportive and accommodating work–family climate among managers and employees can help employees achieve a balance (Talukder *et al.*, 2018; Thomas and Ganster, 1995) as they find instrumental and emotional assistance to fulfil work-related demands (Choi, 2020). Increasing attention of organisations' impact on the manager–employee relationship requires firms to focus on the quality of this exchange relationship. Therefore, evaluating the pros and cons of this relationship holds significant practical implications. The proposed theoretical framework helps organisations to understand this reciprocal relationship and its consequences. The more positive managerial support employees receive, the more positive their behaviours will be towards the organisation due to decreased conflict in their work and family lives. The improved

relationships among managers and employees will ultimately result in better outcomes for both employees and the organisation.

The HILDA Survey (Wilkins *et al.*, 2019) states that 12% of employees facing high WFC for around five years will certainly leave employment. This shows that if organisations understand the reasons for WFC and successfully create a family-supportive environment, they can develop a positive exchange relationship between managers and employees, leading to more positive outcomes. This study draws attention to the importance of managerial support in reducing WFC as managerial support plays a critical role in mitigating WFC (Goh *et al.*, 2015). Managers' family-supportive behaviour towards employees will eventually force employees to reciprocate positive behaviours and attitudes towards the organisation (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997; Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000; Mor Barak and Levin, 2002). Organisations can invest in training their managers to maximise their family-supportive behaviours (Hammer *et al.*, 2011; Mukanzi and Senaji, 2017); this will help managers to use resources to enhance employee well-being and alleviate the negative effects of a high workload.

According to a media release in 2019 by Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS, 2019) vis Australian Government, the incompatible work and family demands are a source of threat to the mental health of mothers as well as fathers. Fathers experiencing high WFC have reported to be psychologically distressed, and thus reduction in WFC can significantly improve their mental health (Cooklin, 2018). Therefore, it is important for organisations to boost managers' training to support employee health and well-being to reap benefits of the most critical resource of the organisation and to make it their competitive edge. Such training will aid them to communicate effectively with their workers and develop compatible working roles to enhance positive employee outcomes like affective commitment and job satisfaction (Deluga, 1994; Major and Lauzun, 2010). These positive outcomes will ultimately enhance organisational productivity.

Limitations

This study holds certain limitations. First, only managerial support is considered as the predictor of WFC, whereas many other organisational and family factors can influence WFC. Future research can account for additional predictors of WFC, such as work/family behaviour support, family non-supportive culture and work/family culture (Glaveli *et al.*, 2013; Thompson *et al.*, 1999). Second, this study was conducted in the Australian context—the influence and support of managers may differ in other cultural settings. Third, the limited sample size and inclusion of only one manufacturing organisation may limit the generalisability of the findings. Fourth, the study uses a cross-sectional, single-source, self-reported data design. This can constitute a risk of common method variance and does not allow for causal inferences. Future research can expand the scope of the study by using a longitudinal design to assess the relationships.

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Appendix

Appendix is avaialble at https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJMBE-03-2020-0056/full/html

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