

Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors: Employee Insights

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Work-life balance is becoming increasingly difficult as technology enables individuals to work anytime and anyplace. Family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSBs) can help address this challenge through instrumental support, emotional support, role modeling, and creative management practices. The outcomes of such behaviors include greater work-life balance, positive work-family spillover, increased organizational citizenship behaviors, improved employee well-being, and better family relationships. Although scales have been developed to measure these dimensions, the results may be influenced by subjective factors on the part of employees. These scales are also limited to numerical results, thus not providing insights into employees' lived experiences. This qualitative study analyzes interview data focused on FSSBs to increase understanding of employees' lived experiences. Findings indicate that fostering work-life balance and enhancing employee well-being depends on managerial practices that create a supportive and empowering workplace culture. In contrast, adaptability to employees' evolving needs is crucial for long-term success.

Keywords: family-supportive supervisor behaviors, work-life balance, instrumental support, emotional support, role modeling, creative management practices

INTRODUCTION

Balancing work and personal life is becoming increasingly difficult with technology enabling employees to work anywhere and anytime. Although this potentially contributes to work flexibility, it may also make separating work and personal life challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted how people feel about their jobs and has called attention to what has been termed the Great Resignation, which reflects a continuing trend of increasing quit rates (Fuller & Kerr, 2022). Five factors have contributed to these increases, all made more pronounced by the pandemic—retirement (retiring at accelerated rates and at younger ages), relocation (moving to new locations but mostly staying local), reconsideration (focusing on work-life balance and caregiving but sometimes not by choice, particularly for women), reshuffling (changing jobs but mostly within the same sector), and reluctance (feeling uncomfortable returning to in-person jobs).

Post-COVID, workers attach greater importance to work-life balance than salary although this trend is higher for women (Aviva, 2022). Family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSBs) describe how managers support their employees' well-being and help them effectively balance work responsibilities with personal

and family priorities (French et al., 2018; French & Shockley, 2020; Hammer et al., 2009; Sargent et al., 2022, 2024). These behaviors can be categorized into four areas: instrumental support, emotional support, role modeling, and creative management practices (French et al., 2018; Hammer et al., 2007; 2009, 2011; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; Kossek et al., 2018). Additionally, quality leader-follower relationships are associated with FSSBs and job satisfaction (Bagger & Li, 2014). The outcomes of these behaviors include decreased work-family conflict, increased employee well-being (Hammer et al., 2007, 2009; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010), positive work-family and family-work spillover (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Hammer et al., 2007, 2009; Yu et al., 2022), better family relationships (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), increased organizational commitment and sense of belonging (Choi et al., 2017), and more organizational citizenship behaviors (Bagger & Li, 2014).

Research on FSSB has typically utilized subordinate ratings of supervisors, which may be conflated by subjective feelings such as liking or not liking a supervisor rather than the supervisors' actual behaviors (Sargent et al., 2022; Sargent et al., 2024; Sutton et al., 2013). Two scales have been developed to measure FSSB, a long form consisting of 14 items related to the four FSSB dimensions (Hammer et al., 2007) and a 4-item short form consisting of one statement reflecting each of the areas to provide a more global and practical measure (Hammer et al., 2013). Although research has identified specific elements and outcomes of FSSB, this research is largely quantitative, providing a somewhat limited understanding of how employees experience their supervisors' behaviors. Additional methodological approaches, such as qualitative studies, have been recommended to provide more nuanced understandings (Guo et al., 2024). The current qualitative study examines the perceptions and experiences of employees related to the four components of the FSSB scale: instrumental support, emotional support, role modeling, and creative work-family arrangements as well as the role of relationships. It seeks to provide a rich, deep understanding of employee experiences in the workplace and identify insights and patterns across these experiences. Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1: *How do managers help employees balance their daily work and personal responsibilities?*

RQ2: *How do managers show emotional support related to non-work issues?*

RQ3: *How do managers model behavior that exemplifies work-life balance?*

RQ4: *How do managers use creative management strategies to facilitate work-life balance?*

RQ5: *How do quality manager-employee relationships or other factors impact work-life balance and related outcomes?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated, four sources of FSSBs have been identified: instrumental support, or actions directed at providing aid and resources, emotional support, or showing empathy and concern regarding work-family issues (French et al., 2018; Hammer et al., 2007; 2009; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; Kossek et al., 2018), role modeling, which occurs when managers portray work-life balance, and creative work-family management, or innovative efforts to restructure work to facilitate work-life balance (Hammer et al., 2007, 2009, 2011).

Examples of instrumental support are flexible work hours, remote work, and workload management to accommodate family needs; emotional support entails listening to employee concerns about their personal or family situations and offering encouragement during times of stress; role modeling might be exhibited by managers taking time off for a family event to demonstrate ways in which they balance work and personal life; creative management strategies entail finding individualized work arrangements that benefit both the employee and the organization. This perception of FSSB has been called the resource-based view

in that it conceptualizes FSSB as resources provided by supervisors; employees use the resources to address work-life balance issues (Guo et al., 2024).

A second view of FSSB is based on social support theory, which posits that supportive relationships with coworkers, supervisors, family, and friends improve one's ability to manage stress and enhance health and well-being (Bagger & Li, 2014; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Hammer et al., 2013; Yin et al., 2023). This view is associated with leader-member exchange leadership theory (LMX), or the view that quality relationships between leaders and followers positively impact employee attitudes and behaviors and organizational effectiveness (Dansereau et al., 1975). Positive correlations have been found between LMX and FSSBs regarding job satisfaction and turnover intention (Bagger & Li, 2014). When managers meet their employees' expectations, mutually beneficial relationships are developed, contributing to leaders helping employees manage work and family-life conflict through FSSBs (Guo et al., 2024). An organizational culture characterized by FSSBs is one in which managers not only feel compassion for employees' non-work issues, but act to find solutions (Cox, 2023; Hougaard & Carter, 2022; Tramuto, 2022).

Research-based on both perspectives—the resource perspective and the social exchange view—have identified positive outcomes of FSSB in terms of improved work-family balance and job performance. However, the resource-based view has been more widely researched. A meta-analysis of the two perspectives examining research focused on the outcomes of in-role performance, job satisfaction, and burnout determined that each has different explanatory power with the resource view accounting for the relationship between burnout and FSSBs and social exchange showing greater impact on job performance and job satisfaction (Guo et al., 2024). In other words, these lenses illustrate how FSSBs impact employee outcomes differently.

Gender and FSSB

How supervisors demonstrate FSSBs may be aligned with gender roles (Sargent et al., 2024). Those with a masculine gender role orientation may use instrumental support behaviors, such as allowing time off for personal matters or delegating tasks to offset workload, rather than demonstrating emotional support behaviors. Gender also influences managers' awareness of opportunities and options for using FSSB (Sargent et al., 2024). When managers have discretion over how to enact FSSB policies, support may reflect unconscious biases and differ by gender. Thus, structural changes, training, and accountability for work-family policy implementation is needed to achieve consistency. Greater awareness on the part of supervisors may be needed to identify FSSB opportunities and learn how to demonstrate their willingness to enact such behaviors. Employees should learn how to frame their requests in specific ways, while supervisors should refrain from requiring too many personal details.

FSSB is more prevalent when supervisors share the same race and gender as their employees (Linnehan et al., 2006). Women value a workplace characterized by positive supervisor relations, enjoyable work, flexible work arrangements, and safe physical conditions (Zou, 2015). Male and female employees with female supervisors experienced more social support and less work-to-family conflict than male supervisors; female managers with female supervisors reported greater autonomy and fewer work absences than male supervisors (Moore et al., 2005). Female managers in Japanese firms had more instances of employees taking parental leave. They approved more family-related support requests from men than their male counterparts, suggesting that female supervisors are more aware of how to encourage the integration of work and family responsibilities across genders (Fuwa, 2021).

FSSBs support employees promising voice or sharing problems with supervisors and making suggestions for improvement (Li et al., 2022). This is related to the emotional support aspect of FSSB. For women, employee voice is enhanced by work-family integration such as flexible work arrangements whereas for men, it is motivated by supervisor actions to decrease work-family conflict. Once again, this illustrates the need to understand gender differences when applying FSSBs.

FSSB Outcomes

FSSBs result in a range of desirable outcomes benefiting both employer and employee. Such behaviors reduce work-family conflict, address incompatibilities of work-family roles, and improve well-being (Hammer et al., 2007, 2009, 2011; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010). FSSBs are associated with organizational commitment (Choi et al., 2017), organizational citizenship behaviors (Bagger and Li, 2014), perceived organizational support (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006), job satisfaction (Wnuk, 2016), and reduced stress and exhaustion (Eredi et al., 2023). FSSB mediates work-family conflict and facilitates home-work management (Armstrong et al., 2015; Beham & Drobic, 2010; Hsu, 2011; Narayanan & Savarimuthu, 2013).

Positive outcomes apply to a variety of contexts as indicated in the following studies:

- Women faculty in computer science during COVID-19 experienced higher levels of work-life conflict than men, causing turnover for both genders; however, FSSBs ameliorated this conflict for women, leading to better retention (Lawson et al., 2023).
- FSSBs decreased emotional exhaustion and turnover in the food industry, particularly for women (Jolly et al., 2021).
- FSSBs led to higher levels of work engagement leading to improved performance for financial credit employees in Mexico (Rofcanin et al., 2017)
- Prosocial motivation, or the desire to benefit others through one's work, and extrinsic motivation increased for public and private sector workers in Brazil, Kenya, the Netherlands and the Philippines due to FSSBs (Bosch et al., 2018).
- FSSBs create favorable impressions of supervisors, specifically in perceptions of warmth and competence, which mediates work-family conflict (Yu et al., 2022).

METHODS

Data for this study consists of recorded and transcribed interviews with employees in organizations in the researchers' local region. Students in the researchers' undergraduate leadership theory course assisted with the data collection. After completing a rigorous human subject certification course and qualitative research and interview technique training, students conducted the interviews using an interview guide. As trained, they probed to elicit richer insights from participants. The study met all Institutional Research Board requirements at the researchers' university, and all participants gave informed consent.

The study sample included 323 employees, 12 randomly selected participants providing insights into the four research questions representing the Hammer (2009) framework, for a total sample of 48 participants. These same samples were also analyzed for evidence of quality relationships between leaders and followers, keeping with LMX theory. The sampling process was one of convenience, specifically, individuals available to the researchers' students. Convenience sampling is appropriate for exploratory qualitative studies, which seek to understand a particular phenomenon from participants' lived experiences and viewpoints (Creswell & Frost, 2017; Frost, 2000; Stratton, 2021). Although a disadvantage of this approach may be limited sample representation, the participants represented different demographic variables and work sectors. A summary of the characteristics of the selected sample is provided in Table 1. Note that not all participants answered all questions; therefore, the number of responses varied.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender (other)	1% (n=3)
Male	53.54% (n=136)
Female	46.06% (n=117)
Children	56% yes (n=142)
Managerial/ Leadership Level - Top	25% (n=63)
Managerial/ Leadership Level - Middle	21% (n=52)
Managerial/ Leadership Level - Lower	23% (n=57)
Not in a leadership position	31% (n=78)
Avg. position tenure (years)	2.87 yrs
Avg. organizational tenure (years)	3.21 yrs
Company sector	Financial: 16% (n=38) Utilities: 2% (n=5) Consumer discretionary: 3% (n=7) Consumer staples: 3% (n=6) Consumer services: 30% (n=70) Energy: 2% (n=4) Healthcare: 22% (n=51) Industrial: 6% (n=13) Information technology: 11% (n=26) Real estate: 3% (n=6) Raw materials: 3% (n=6)

Participants were asked open-ended questions with probing to elicit details and enhance understanding of the phenomena. See the appendix for the questions related to the four FSSB dimensions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was informed by prior research, specifically the four dimensions of FSSB (French et al., 2018; Hammer et al., 2007; 2009, 2013; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; Kossek et al., 2018; Sargent et al., 2022; Sargent et al., 2024) as well as by social exchange theory and LMX theory (Bagger & Li, 2014; Guo et al., 2024). The Hammer (2009) framework was used to organize the data into broad categories, which were then further analyzed and refined to determine aspects of the responses that fit with current knowledge of FSSBs and what aspects of participants' lived experiences brought new insights. The data was coded to identify initial themes about the research questions followed by a more in-depth analysis to identify patterns, relationships across themes, characteristics of the themes, and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013).

RESULTS

Across the research questions posed, the primary themes were flexibility, attentiveness, approachability, genuine friendships, safe space, open communication, time management, boundaries, priorities, and autonomy. Example responses follow:

Research Question 1

The first research question examines how managers help employees balance work and personal responsibilities. Participants discussed various approaches their managers used to promote work-life balance while maintaining productivity. One participant mentioned, “Whenever I needed to go home to see my daughter and had more work to do, he helped me finish it up so I could hurry and get out of there to see her.”

Additionally, participants highlighted that managers commonly employed flexible scheduling to accommodate their needs. One participant shared, “Whenever I need time off, whether it’s for personal reasons or emergencies, my manager is understanding and accommodating.” Similarly, another emphasized, “We had a medical emergency at home recently, and my manager immediately adjusted my workload without hesitation.”

The overarching theme of flexibility was supported by sub-themes of understanding, empathy, and awareness. Employees noted that flexibility extended beyond schedule adjustments to include remote work opportunities and task redistribution. For example, one participant shared, “My manager is always very flexible with our ability to work from home or take time off, or whatever we need to accommodate our family situation and needs.” These practices helped employees manage their personal responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed by professional obligations.

Research Question 2

The second research question explores how managers emotionally support employees regarding non-work issues. In the interviews, participants shared experiences of how their managers offered emotional support during personal challenges. One participant described their manager’s approach: “He’s very approachable, and we have weekly team meetings to talk about work, life, and any concerns we might have. It’s a safe space to express ourselves without judgment.”

Many participants also highlighted the role of managers as emotional pillars during difficult times. One participant noted, “She follows up on personal things if you tell her something. I know she cares and remembers our needs.” Another shared, “You could tell he cares about you while also caring about the job. I was dealing with a lot of stress outside of work, and it was affecting both my mental and physical health. My manager pulled me aside for a one-on-one meeting, and we discussed my feelings. He also provided me with resources to get help.”

These responses highlight that managers offer emotional support through actions that demonstrate genuine care and concern. They create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing both personal and professional struggles. Managers build trust by showing attentiveness to employees’ needs, offering follow-up support, and ensuring that boundaries are respected. Their openness to listening and willingness to provide resources also fosters a sense of understanding and empathy, while their flexibility allows for tailored approaches to emotional well-being.

Therefore, the participants’ responses reveal that the primary themes of how managers provide emotional support include being genuine, fostering strong friendships, creating a safe space, and maintaining open communication. These themes were further supported by sub-themes such as awareness, attentiveness, vulnerability, understanding, listening, boundary-setting, sincerity, and flexibility.

Research Question 3

The third research question explores how managers model work-life balance through their behavior and practices. Participants discussed how their managers set an example by prioritizing their well-being and encouraging employees to do the same. One participant shared, “My manager leaves the office no later

than four every day, while I usually stay until around 8:00. We have different hours, but seeing that makes me think, ‘Maybe I should adjust my schedule to go home earlier.’ She’s great at modeling work-life balance, which rubs off on me. More than anything else, a manager is a role model, and they need to demonstrate healthy behaviors and set boundaries around work-life balance.” This demonstration of balanced work habits fosters a culture that values personal time and emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries alongside professional commitments.

Other participants also showed how managers openly communicated their boundaries between work and family responsibilities. One participant explained, “He’s available most of the time through various means, but there are times when he clearly tells everyone he won’t be available. He encourages us to text or email and will respond when he can—whether he’s on vacation or otherwise. He sets clear boundaries around his time, but for the most part, he’s very accessible.” This openness and communication helped normalize the practice of prioritizing personal well-being, reducing the stigma around boundary-setting. These behaviors created an environment that promoted inclusivity and work-life balance. The key themes that emerged from participants’ experiences included open communication, effective time management, autonomy, prioritization, and boundary-setting—essential elements in how managers successfully model work-life balance.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question explores how managers employ creative management strategies to support work-life balance for their employees. Participants shared various innovative approaches their managers used to enhance work-life balance while maintaining productivity. Notable strategies included task delegation and team-based scheduling. One participant discussed a significant challenge during Black Friday: “The biggest challenge we faced was Black Friday last year with all the unexpected changes. It was very stressful for everyone. But now, we’ve streamlined the process to ensure everything is delegated properly. Nothing gets overlooked, and people can prioritize their time off and their families, along with better work-life balance.” By streamlining processes and delegating tasks effectively, this approach reduced stress, fostered teamwork, and improved overall efficiency.

Another example came from a participant who described how his manager creatively supported his work-life balance during a period of weekly health treatments. Instead of requiring him to commute to the office, his manager allowed him to work from home, offering the flexibility to manage both his work hours and treatment schedule. The manager maintained open communication, provided options to adjust work schedules as needed, and demonstrated attentiveness and support, reinforcing a commitment to employee well-being.

These participants identified key strategies that emphasize the importance of providing employees with flexibility and autonomy, ensuring they can balance work responsibilities with personal needs. The managers built trust by maintaining open communication channels and understanding individual situations. The ability to accommodate varying schedules and listen actively to employees’ concerns reinforced a supportive environment where employees felt empowered to manage their personal and professional lives effectively.

As a result, the participants’ responses indicate that managers use key strategies—such as flexibility and attentiveness—to facilitate work-life balance. These strategies are further demonstrated through open communication, trust, autonomy, understanding, accommodation, supportiveness, knowing employees, and active listening.

Research Question 5

Interview questions did not focus specifically on research question 5, or quality manager-employee relationships; however, themes emerged that emphasized the role of friendship and approachability. One participant described how having a positive and approachable relationship with her manager significantly influenced her attitude and performance at work: “The manager that I’m working for now is approachable and because I feel comfortable to tell her the things that are going on in my personal life and she’s able to

help me with my job and knowing that I want to work harder. . . . So I'm very glad that my manager is approachable."

Another participant recounted a comparable experience, emphasizing the value of a supportive approach: "We had a situation where we had a teacher that was struggling and when we met with this last Friday, the very first question the principal asked was 'how are things going? How are you doing?' And that context was so incredibly important as we went forward to deal with the job performance issue because it was impacting things. And to show an openness and the employees know that it's a safe place. It's not gonna be talked about. It's not gonna be, you know, it's all about relationships. And I think if you treat people as a whole person and consider those things, you establish the kind of relationship that builds the trust to be able to share personal things."

From these examples, the participants' experiences clearly underscore the importance of genuine connections, autonomy, a safe space for open communication, and creating trusting relationships in fostering strong manager-employee relationships that positively impact performance and well-being.

These narratives highlight how managers' genuine efforts to build meaningful connections with their employees—through empathetic actions, a deep commitment to understanding, and fostering trust—serve as a foundation for creating safe spaces for open dialogue. This combination of authenticity and support not only strengthens workplace relationships but also enhances employee morale, engagement, and overall performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the crucial role of managerial practices in promoting work-life balance, with flexibility, emotional support, and innovative strategies central to employees' overall well-being. These practices align with existing research, emphasizing that supportive leadership is a key factor in improving employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement (Hammer et al., 2007, 2009; Kossek et al., 2010). Specifically, FSSB has been shown to foster organizational commitment, enhance organizational support, strengthen employees' sense of belonging, and mitigate work-family conflict (Choi et al., 2017; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). This study contributes to the growing body of literature highlighting the essential role of FSSB in cultivating healthier, more productive work environments.

Flexible Scheduling

Balancing daily work and personal responsibilities remains a significant challenge for employees, particularly in today's fast-paced, always-connected work environment. This research examined managers' strategies to help employees navigate and manage these demands. Managerial practices are pivotal in enabling employees to effectively meet the dual demands of work and personal life. Understanding these practices is essential for fostering a supportive workplace, where effective management helps employees fulfill their professional and personal obligations and enhances their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Interviews with employees highlighted the importance of managerial behaviors such as flexibility, empathy, and proactive problem-solving. This study identified specific ways in which managers assist their team members in addressing daily challenges, emphasizing the value of tailored approaches that consider individual circumstances. The findings offer valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between managerial practices and employee well-being, reinforcing the critical role of personalized support in creating a healthier and more productive work environment.

Flexibility fosters trust and signals that managers value employees' personal lives. Understanding and empathetic responses further strengthen this relationship, making employees feel supported and appreciated. The emphasis on flexible scheduling reflects a broader organizational commitment to addressing individual employee needs, ultimately contributing to a culture of inclusivity and respect.

Emotional Support

Providing emotional support is crucial in fostering a positive workplace culture where employees feel secure and valued. Managers' active listening, genuine care, and empathetic actions significantly enhance

employee engagement and morale. The emotional safety cultivated by these practices encourages open communication about personal and professional challenges, enabling more effective problem-solving and fostering trust within the organization.

The findings from participants' experiences underscore the importance of emotional support as a key managerial practice. Managers who demonstrated awareness and attentiveness to employees' needs were perceived as deeply invested in their teams' well-being. Participants highlighted examples where managers provided meaningful support during personal crises, such as offering referrals to counseling services, temporarily adjusting workloads, or simply taking time to listen. These actions alleviated stress and strengthened the bond between employees and their managers, reinforcing a sense of belonging and psychological safety.

The themes of genuineness, openness, and empathy were central to how managers supported their employees emotionally. For instance, fostering a safe space for dialogue—such as through regular team check-ins or one-on-one meetings—allowed employees to express concerns without fear of judgment. Participants noted that these practices cultivated an environment where they felt understood and respected, even when navigating non-work challenges. Moreover, the ability of managers to follow up on personal matters showed attentiveness and a commitment to addressing individual needs over time.

In addition to direct emotional support, managers also employed boundary-setting and flexibility to further support employees. For example, some managers proactively adjusted expectations or encouraged employees to take necessary time off, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the interplay between personal and professional responsibilities. By showing vulnerability and willingness to share their experiences, managers normalized discussions about well-being, reducing stigma and encouraging employees to seek help when needed.

These findings emphasize that emotional support is not limited to grand gestures but is often reflected in small, consistent actions. Genuine care, attentiveness, and active listening create a ripple effect, fostering a workplace culture where employees feel empowered to bring their whole selves to work. This, in turn, enhances overall job satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity.

Modeling Work-Life Balance

Managers' behavior significantly influences team culture, particularly in the context of work-life balance. By modeling healthy practices and setting clear boundaries, managers empower employees to prioritize personal well-being and maintain a better equilibrium between professional and personal responsibilities. This behavior benefits individual employees and establishes long-term organizational norms that promote a healthier and more sustainable work environment.

The findings from participants' experiences reveal that managers who model work-life balance send a powerful message about the value of personal time. For example, managers who adhered to consistent working hours or openly communicated their boundaries inspired employees to reflect on and adjust their own practices. These actions demonstrated that prioritizing well-being is both acceptable and encouraged. Participants noted that seeing their managers set these examples reduced feelings of guilt or hesitation when they, too, needed to prioritize personal matters, fostering a culture of mutual respect and balance.

Open communication emerged as a key theme in how managers effectively modeled work-life balance. Managers who clearly articulated their availability and communicated boundaries—such as designated “off-hours” or times dedicated to family—helped normalize these practices for employees. This approach reduced the stigma often associated with taking personal time and underscored the importance of setting limits to protect mental and emotional health. Employees described feeling reassured by managers' transparency, as it created a shared understanding of expectations and encouraged them to adopt similar practices.

Additionally, autonomy and prioritization were critical components of this dynamic. Managers who emphasized results over rigid schedules allowed employees greater flexibility in managing their workloads, promoting a sense of trust and independence. By focusing on outcomes rather than hours spent in the office, these managers demonstrated that work-life balance is achievable without compromising productivity.

Participants highlighted how this approach enhanced their efficiency and contributed to a greater sense of job satisfaction and loyalty to the organization.

The influence of managers as role models extends beyond individual employees to shape organizational culture. By modeling behaviors such as leaving the office on time, taking regular breaks, and encouraging employees to disconnect outside of work hours, managers help establish norms that prioritize health and well-being. These actions foster an inclusive and supportive workplace where employees feel empowered to make choices that align with their needs.

Creative Strategies

Innovation in management practices is crucial for addressing employees' unique challenges in achieving work-life balance. The findings from this study underscore the value of creative solutions such as team-based scheduling and rotating remote days. These strategies demonstrate managerial adaptability and forward-thinking, fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment. By leveraging modern technological tools and encouraging team collaboration, managers enhance productivity and create opportunities for employees to balance their professional and personal responsibilities effectively.

The diverse workforce highlighted in Table 1: Participant Demographics underscores the importance of tailoring these strategies to meet varying employee needs. For instance, employees with children (56%) might prioritize flexible scheduling to accommodate school pick-ups or family obligations. Conversely, younger employees without dependents might find value in opportunities for remote work, enabling them to balance personal growth activities such as further education or travel. Recognizing and addressing these variations ensures work-life balance strategies remain inclusive and effective across different employee demographics.

Flexibility and attentiveness emerged as key themes in participants' experiences, with managers actively listening to employee concerns and finding personalized solutions. For example, one manager allowed an employee undergoing weekly health treatments to work from home, demonstrating not only accommodation but also a deep understanding of individual needs. Such practices reflect a commitment to employee well-being, fostering trust and loyalty within the workplace. This approach highlights the importance of managers' willingness to adapt to unique circumstances, ultimately strengthening team cohesion and morale.

Another significant strategy is task delegation, as illustrated by the participant's experience during Black Friday. By streamlining processes and distributing responsibilities equitably, managers can alleviate stress during peak periods while maintaining operational efficiency. These practices ensure that work is completed effectively and allow employees to focus on personal priorities, promoting a healthier balance.

The role of open communication and trust is critical in these creative approaches. Managers who encourage employees to voice their concerns and preferences empower them to take ownership of their work-life balance. This transparency fosters a culture of mutual respect and understanding, enabling more effective collaboration. Moreover, offering autonomy in task management and scheduling builds employee confidence while reinforcing the organization's commitment to flexibility.

Fostering Quality Manager-Employee Relationships

Strong manager-employee relationships are critical for creating a supportive and productive work environment. Although the interview questions did not explicitly focus on this aspect, the emergent themes of approachability, trust, and empathy highlight the value of cultivating genuine connections between managers and their teams. The results indicate that managers building meaningful relationships with their employees foster a sense of security and motivation, positively impacting individual performance and organizational outcomes.

The participants' experiences emphasize that approachability is a cornerstone of effective leadership. Managers who make themselves available and approachable create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing personal challenges. This openness strengthens relationships and provides managers with the insight needed to offer personalized support. For example, one participant's ability to confide in

their manager enhanced their motivation and commitment, illustrating the reciprocal benefits of trust-based relationships.

Another key theme is the importance of empathetic communication. Managers who actively listen and demonstrate genuine concern for their employees' well-being establish a foundation of trust. As one participant recounted, a principal's thoughtful inquiry about a teacher's personal well-being set the stage for addressing professional concerns compassionately and constructively. This example underscores how empathy can transform potentially challenging conversations into opportunities for growth and understanding.

The findings also highlight the value of treating employees as whole individuals. Managers who acknowledge and accommodate employees' circumstances—whether through flexibility, understanding, or tailored support—reinforce the importance of human-centered leadership. By creating safe spaces for open dialogue, managers foster trust and encourage employees to share their concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal.

These results suggest that fostering quality relationships requires a deliberate commitment to authenticity, empathy, and open communication. Managers prioritizing these practices are better equipped to build cohesive teams and support employees' personal and professional growth. Furthermore, the ripple effects of such relationships extend beyond individual employees, contributing to a workplace culture that values connection, trust, and collaboration.

Limitations

Qualitative research represents the participants' experiences and cannot be generalized although patterns emerge that can inform decision- and policymakers in an organization. In this study, participants shared their perceptions of FSSBs, which may or may not reflect supervisor actions or supervisors' perspectives. Understanding employee perceptions, however, can be informative for organizations and may uncover unconscious bias in applications of FSSB policies. Participant views of FSSBs are also likely to vary based on their need for and experience with such behaviors. In some cases, this may be limited. The context in which FSSB requests are made, such as for employees working from home and those in the office, should also be examined (Sargent et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights managers' critical role in fostering work-life balance through flexibility, emotional support, modeling healthy behaviors, and employing creative strategies. These practices not only enhance employee satisfaction but also improve organizational productivity. The findings emphasize that managers who actively engage in these practices contribute to a supportive workplace culture, where employees feel valued and empowered.

Beyond individual employee satisfaction, fostering work-life balance practices plays a pivotal role in shaping a positive organizational culture. Organizations that prioritize employee well-being through flexible policies and supportive leadership retain talent and cultivate a more engaged, motivated workforce. In the long term, this commitment to balance can help reduce burnout, lower turnover rates, and improve overall morale, contributing to a more resilient organization.

Moreover, the importance of adaptability in managerial approaches cannot be overstated. As workplaces continue to evolve, managers must remain proactive in understanding and addressing the changing needs of their teams. Incorporating employee feedback and staying informed about best practices in work-life balance will be crucial.

The findings of this study also have significant implications for organizational policy. Organizations can create structures that support work-life balance more effectively by integrating flexible work arrangements, emotional support systems, and clear work-life boundaries into formal policies. Training programs for managers to develop these skills and an organizational commitment to sustaining these practices can drive systemic change, creating environments where both employees and the organization thrive.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Daily Job and Personal Problem Solving

- Can you share an example of a time when your manager helped you effectively manage a work assignment while considering your personal or family-related responsibilities? How did they assist you?
- Do you feel that your manager understands the challenges faced by employees in balancing work and family obligations? Explain.
- Do you think your manager is effective in assisting employees with practical work-life issues and family emergencies?
 - If yes: In your opinion, what qualities or behaviors make your manager effective in this area?
 - If no: In your opinion, what qualities or behaviors would make them more effective in this area?
- What advice would you offer to managers or leaders who are looking to enhance their skills in helping employees manage practical work-life challenges and family-related emergencies?

Emotional Support

- Does your manager convey that they are approachable and open to discussing personal or family matters if needed?
 - If Yes: How do they do that? Could you provide an example of a time when you felt comfortable bringing up such topics?
 - If No: What makes you feel that they are unapproachable? Can you provide an example?
- Can you think of any instances when your manager helped create (or hindered) a culture of psychological safety, allowing team members to freely express their feelings or discuss non-work issues without fear of negative consequences?

Role Model Behavior

- What practices, if any, does your manager employ to communicate their boundaries and availability outside of work hours, while still remaining accessible to the team when needed?
- Do you feel that your manager's ability to model effective (or ineffective) work-life balance influences your own approach to managing family and personal priorities? Can you describe a specific instance when this influence was evident?
- In what ways does your manager communicate or demonstrate that they prioritize their own well-being and personal commitments? Can you provide an example of how this approach has positively influenced the team's work culture?

Creative Management

- What strategies does your manager use to allocate tasks or projects based on employees' strengths and availability, in a way that optimizes team performance and individual work-life integration?
- Have you encountered situations where your manager supported the use of alternative work arrangements (such as compressed workweeks or job sharing) to accommodate personal or family commitments?
 - How did using (or not using) such arrangements impact the team's effectiveness?
- Has your manager ever encouraged employees to think outside the box when it comes to finding solutions that benefit both their work and personal lives?
 - If yes: Tell me about that. How did they do that?