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## **Overwhelmed by family, but supported by likeminded, trustworthy coworkers: Effects on role ambiguity and championing behaviors**

**Purpose**—This study addresses how and when the experience of family-induced work strain might steer employees away from efforts to promote innovative ideas. In particular, it proposes a mediating role of role ambiguity and moderating roles of two coworker resources (goal congruence and goodwill trust) in this process.

**Design/methodology/approach**—The research hypotheses are tested with data obtained from a survey administered among employees who work in a professional services organization.

**Findings**—An important explanatory mechanism that links family interference with work to diminished championing efforts is that employees hold beliefs that their job roles are unclear. The extent to which employees share work-related mindsets with coworkers, as well as their belief that coworkers are trustworthy, attenuate this harmful effect.

**Originality/value**—This study adds to HR management research by investigating the role of negative spillovers from family to work in predicting idea championing, as explained by negative beliefs about job-related information deficiencies but buffered by high-quality coworker relationships.

**Practical implications**—For HR managers, the study shows a clear danger that threatens employees who feel drained by significant family demands: The negative situation may escalate into work-related complacency (diminished championing), which then may generate even more hardships. As it also reveals though, employees can leverage high-quality coworker relationships to contain this danger.

**Keywords**—family interference with work; role ambiguity; championing behavior; goal congruence; goodwill trust; conservation of resources theory

**Paper type**—Research paper

## Introduction

As human resource (HR) management research indicates, developing innovative ideas is important for organizations, especially if the ideas address organizational shortcomings or failures (Battistelli *et al.*, 2019; Bos-Nehles and Veenendaal, 2019; Gupta, 2020). But merely generating ideas is no guarantee of success; true success depends on the extent to which other organizational members are aware of and willing to implement the proposed ideas (De Clercq *et al.*, 2011; Howell, 2005). A critical factor in this process is the extent to which employees go out of their way to mobilize support for their innovative ideas, in the form of *championing* behaviors (Coakes and Smith, 2007; Pinto and Patanakul, 2015), which can benefit both their employer and themselves. For the employer, persistent championing efforts by workers can contribute to enhanced competitive strength (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017; Van de Ven, 1986). For workers, championing great ideas can give them a sense of personal fulfillment (Kim *et al.*, 2009), increase their intra-organizational network centrality (Wichmann *et al.*, 2015), and boost their organizational reputation or standing (Kissi *et al.*, 2013).

Previous studies indicate that employees are more likely to engage in idea championing in response to positive inducements, such as career progress (De Clercq and Pereira, 2021), transformational leadership (Islam *et al.*, 2021), job control (De Clercq *et al.*, 2021), or change-related voice from their work group (Faupel, 2020). But we also acknowledge the challenges that stem from championing behaviors, such that employees who already experience difficult situations may actively avoid such behaviors. For example, discretionary championing activities may be so energy-consuming that they compromise employees' ability to execute their regular work tasks (Deery *et al.*, 2017; Howell, 2005). Persistent championing efforts also may be ill-received by other members, to the extent that they seem intrusive or self-promotive (Hon *et al.*, 2014; Walter *et al.*, 2011). Considering these pertinent challenges, recent research describes how employees who suffer resource-

depleting work situations may be reluctant to devote significant energy to promoting their innovative ideas. For example, employees exhibit lower championing propensities when they suffer from workplace incivility (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2021) or appraise organizational change as threatening (Fugate and Soenen, 2018).

We add to this burgeoning research stream by investigating a factor that resides *outside* the organizational setting and over which organizational decision makers accordingly may have little control: employees' experiences of family interference with work, or family-to-work conflict (Nohe *et al.*, 2014). This resource-draining condition refers to the extent to which employees believe that their professional functioning is undermined by pressing family demands (Johnson *et al.*, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2015). Due to negative spillovers from family to work, as well as employees' persistent rumination on family issues, they may find it difficult to do their jobs adequately (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010). Prior research carefully distinguishes family-to-work conflict from work-to-family conflict; the latter implies that employees take work-related stress home (Beham, 2011; Gutek *et al.*, 1991). For this study, our focus is purposefully on the former conflict type, in light of our proposition that the inference of family with work creates significant uncertainty surrounding employees' work functioning (Johnson *et al.*, 2019; Oren and Levin, 2017), with potentially harmful consequences for their work-related beliefs and behaviors.

With this research, our specific goals then are to detail relevant factors that *underpin* or *influence* the translation of family interference with work into tarnished championing behavior. First, we postulate that a critical conduit through which this translation may materialize is that employees experience role ambiguity and come to believe that their employer does not provide sufficient information about their job duties (Fried and Tiegs, 1995; Irving and Coleman, 2003). Consistent with the tenets of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000), a lack of understanding of what is expected can

deplete a key resource, namely, clarity about how to meet organization-set performance targets (Hobfoll, 2001; Lundmark *et al.*, 2022). Second, and also consistent with COR theory, we propose that employees' access to valuable resources, through collegial relationships (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017), might function as protective shields against the experience of role ambiguity in the presence of family-induced work strain. If resources such as goal congruence and goodwill trust diminish their beliefs about role ambiguity, even in the presence of family interference with work, they also might undermine employees' propensity to avoid championing efforts. Goal congruence refers to the extent to which employees share similar work-related mindsets with coworkers (Santos *et al.*, 2012; Watt *et al.*, 2001); goodwill trust speaks to their convictions that coworkers are honest in their intentions and would not betray them, even if they had chances to do so (Arzigul *et al.*, 2021; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998).

These considerations inform various contributions that we seek to make to HR management scholarship. First, we theorize and empirically reveal how family interference with work, a substantial threat to the quality of work functioning (Johnson *et al.*, 2019; Nohe *et al.*, 2014), decreases the likelihood that employees actively promote innovative ideas, because of their convictions that they suffer from information deficiencies with respect to their job roles (Showail *et al.*, 2013). When they find it difficult to focus on work because of their concerns about family issues, employees may halt their championing activities, because of the role ambiguity they suffer (Eatough *et al.*, 2011). Our focus on this mediating role of role ambiguity aligns with predictions of the significant work-related uncertainty that employees experience in the presence of conflicting demands at the family–work interface (de Janasz and Behson, 2007; Oren and Levin, 2017), which may culminate in confusion about job responsibilities. Moreover, the proposed mediating role is interesting from a theoretical perspective, in that it pinpoints how beliefs about unclear job descriptions may

generate a *downward* spiral, in which employees who suffer from interference of family with work shoot themselves in the foot, perhaps inadvertently. That is, they resort to complacent behavioral responses to such interference, which might then prevent them from finding innovative solutions to family-induced work hardships.

Second, we respond to calls to adopt contingency perspectives on the detrimental consequences of employees' experience of family interference with work (Johnson *et al.*, 2019), by showing how the aforementioned downward spiral can be *disrupted*. In particular, we elucidate how a reduced likelihood of championing behavior, in response to family demands that hinder work activities and convictions about role ambiguity, may be mitigated by employees' access to valuable resources embedded in their coworker relationships (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2020). The harmful outcomes of family-to-work conflict do not occur automatically; as prior research shows, various boundary conditions can help employees cope with the experienced hardships, such as their level of agreeableness (Anand *et al.*, 2015), commitment to organizational well-being (Johnson *et al.*, 2019), or perceptions of organizational support (Singh *et al.*, 2018). We add to this research by considering how two complementary aspects of intra-firm relational capital, goal congruence and goodwill trust (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), might buffer the mediating role of role ambiguity in linking family interference with work with championing behavior. Goal congruence is *cognitive* in nature, conveying whether employees have the same work goals as colleagues (Chen *et al.*, 2005; Memon *et al.*, 2014); goodwill trust captures their positive *emotions* with respect to interpersonal interactions (Arzigul *et al.*, 2021; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). These two resources provide a consistent, comprehensive perspective on why some employees might be better placed than others to shield themselves against the risk that they halt or avoid productive championing behaviors in response to negative spillovers from family to work.

## Theoretical background and hypotheses

### *Conservation of resources theory*

Our arguments about the mediating role of role ambiguity and moderating roles of goal congruence and goodwill trust in the connection between family-to-work conflict and championing behavior are grounded in COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). This theory maintains a broad conceptualization of the term *resources*, as referring to any “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources” (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 339). Two critical and related resources that employees tend to consider especially valuable, according to Hobfoll’s (2001, p. 342) overview of key COR resources, are a sense of control over their (work) lives and the ability to organize their own work tasks. Together, these two resources convey the extent to which employees are certain or *clear* about how they can meet organization-set performance targets (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000).

According to previous studies on family-to-work conflict, employees who suffer from negative interference of family with work experience *low* levels of such clarity, because they feel distracted by their family troubles and are less able to discern important from unimportant job matters (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010; Oren and Levin, 2007). Consistent with COR theory, we conceive of employees’ beliefs about role ambiguity, in the presence of family-to-work conflict, as a pertinent manifestation of experienced resource depletion—that is, a *lack* of clarity about job responsibilities (Lundmark *et al.*, 2022)—which diminishes their propensity to engage in championing behavior. Employees’ sense that their employer is unclear about what their job roles entail can escalate into their reluctance to engage in dedicated idea championing because they seek to *conserve* their precious energy, rather than

expending it on work activities from which their organization otherwise could benefit (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018; Quinn *et al.*, 2012).

Yet COR theory further predicts that negative responses are less likely when employees have access to relational resources that diminish their perceived *necessity* (Choi, 2019; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). In particular, the likelihood that they associate performance-related uncertainties, due to pressing family demands, with beliefs about information shortages about their job responsibilities may be mitigated if they can count on likeminded or trustworthy coworkers (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). As extant research shows, goal congruence and trust can assist employees in dealing with work overload (Chan and Lam, 2011) and task-related quarrels (Simons and Peterson, 2000), respectively. We propose that they similarly might protect employees against performance concerns caused by pressing family demands (Nohe *et al.*, 2014), which then translates into less negative opinions about the clarity of their job roles and a lower risk that they stay away from dedicated championing efforts.

Figure 1 summarizes the proposed conceptual framework. Employees' beliefs about role ambiguity are critical channels through which their experience of family-to-work conflict translates into tarnished idea championing. Coworker relationships marked by high levels of goal congruence and goodwill trust function as buffers, such that the escalation of family interference with work into diminished efforts to champion innovative ideas, through role ambiguity beliefs, is less likely among employees who share a common goal set with colleagues or consider their colleagues trustworthy.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

#### *Mediating effect of role ambiguity*

According to COR theory, difficulties that employees experience in one domain, such as the family sphere, can adversely impact their functioning in another domain, such as the



workplace (Oren and Levin, 2017; Turner *et al.*, 2014). Previous applications of this theory to family–work issues indicate that when employees suffer from negative interference of family with work, they tend to experience significant work-related uncertainty, because they find it challenging to stay focused on work and understand how to allocate their energy to various job duties (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010). We similarly predict a positive relationship between employees’ experience of family interference with work and their beliefs about role ambiguity. In line with COR theory, negative spillovers from family to work deplete employees’ ability to see clearly how they can meet organizational performance expectations (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010; Liao *et al.*, 2019). This lack of clarity might prompt beliefs that the employer has failed to provide sufficient job-related information (Eatough *et al.*, 2011). In contrast, if employees do not suffer from family-induced work strain, they should have more clarity about how to perform well at work (Vieira *et al.*, 2018), so it becomes less likely that they develop beliefs that they have received incomplete information about their job duties. We accordingly predict:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a positive relationship between employees’ experience of family interference with work and their beliefs about role ambiguity.

We also hypothesize a negative relationship between employees’ beliefs about role ambiguity and their championing behaviors. If employees sense that their employer does not offer clear explanations of their job responsibilities, they may feel less motivation to allocate their personal energy to productive activities that could benefit the organization (Coelho *et al.*, 2011; De Clercq, 2019). This logic reflects the notion of resource *conservation* from COR theory (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, employees’ sense that they lack sufficient information about their job responsibilities may lead to work complacency in the form of diminished idea championing, in their attempt to avoid “wasting” their valuable energy on an organization that seemingly does not even care enough to explain their job duties clearly (De Clercq, 2019; Quinn *et al.*, 2012). The logic underlying COR theory further suggests that

employees' reluctance to undertake championing behaviors, in response to role ambiguity, may be due to their motivation to produce resource *gains*, in the form of personal fulfillment (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). If employers deprive them of sufficient information about their jobs, employees may derive a sort of secret joy by exhibiting complacency, in the form of diminished championing efforts (Fugate and Soenen, 2018; Ryan and Deci, 2000). We hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a negative relationship between employees' beliefs about role ambiguity and their championing behavior.

The integration of these different arguments points to a pertinent mediating role of role ambiguity. Suffering from negative interferences of family with work increases the chances that employees halt their championing behaviors, because they come to believe that their organization provides unclear information about their job roles (Showail *et al.*, 2013). If they experience uncertainty about the best ways to meet performance targets, due to a negative interference of family with work (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010), employees are less likely to dedicate significant energy to constructive work activities that push novel ideas, reflecting their convictions that they lack job-related information (Eathough *et al.*, 2011). In prior research, employees' sense of role ambiguity has been found to mediate the links of other sources of work-related hardships, such as limited influence over organizational decision making (Jermias and Yigit, 2013) or perceptions of dysfunctional leadership (Koveshnikov and Ehrnrooth, 2018), with negative work outcomes. We complement such research by postulating:

**Hypothesis 3:** Employees' beliefs about role ambiguity mediate the relationship between their experience of family interference with work and championing behavior.

#### *Buffering effect of goal congruence*

The premises of COR theory indicate that resource-draining, pressing work circumstances, whether they originate from within or outside the workplace, seem less

intrusive if employees can offset the resource drainage with access to valuable resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). The predicted escalation of family interference with work into convictions about unclear job roles may be less probable if employees regard their work-related difficulties as mutually shared (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Sharing a common mindset with coworkers reduces employees' sense that they suffer in isolation from resource-depleting family-to-work conflict and increases their perceptions of support for the shared pursuit of organizational goals (Santos *et al.*, 2012). In particular, congruent work goals may help employees see more clearly how they can meet performance expectations, even if family issues interfere with their work functioning (Oren and Levin, 2017), because they receive support from coworkers experiencing similar work-related difficulties (Chen *et al.*, 2005; Watt *et al.*, 2001). Employees who share a common work-related mindset with their coworkers also may be better to relativize negative spillovers from family to work. That is, coworkers with similar mindsets likely encounter similarly precarious situations, so employees may realize there are worse things they could suffer (Memon *et al.*, 2014), which reduces performance concerns stemming from family-induced work strain (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010) and thus the likelihood of developing a sense of role ambiguity.

These arguments, in combination with the theorized mediating effect of role ambiguity, hint at a moderated mediation process (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). As a relational resource, goal congruence functions as a critical contingency of the negative indirect relationship between family interference with work and championing behavior, through beliefs that the organization deprives employees of adequate information. If employees share compatible work goals (Witt, 1998), their beliefs about job-related information deficiencies become subdued. That is, their shared views counter their tarnished ability to comply with organization-set performance goals in the presence of family interference with work (Johnson *et al.*, 2019), which then diminishes the likelihood that employees curtail their dedicated

championing efforts due to negative views about underspecified job responsibilities (Kauppila *et al.*, 2014).

**Hypothesis 4:** The indirect negative relationship between employees' experience of family interference with work and championing behavior, through their beliefs about role ambiguity, is moderated by their goal congruence with coworkers, such that this indirect relationship is mitigated by goal congruence.

#### *Buffering effect of goodwill trust*

According to COR theory, the likelihood that employees develop beliefs about job-related information shortages, as a response to the experience of negative spillovers from family to work, should be lower when they can rely on trustworthy relationships with coworkers (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015). As an important corollary, goodwill trust makes employees more willing to be vulnerable and forthcoming about hardships they endure at work (Hasel, 2013; Hussain *et al.*, 2018; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Because they can frankly express how difficult it is to complete their job duties, due to persistent concerns with family issues, they likely receive more feedback and solutions (Arzigul *et al.*, 2021; Ding *et al.*, 2012). Employees who are confident their coworkers are trustworthy also likely heed their advice for dealing with resource-draining inferences of family with work, without worrying the coworkers have nefarious motives (Kaur and Arora, 2020; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Perceptions of colleagues' goodwill might prompt more sympathetic opinions about the employing organization as a whole too, because their professional functioning is not threatened by the members of the organization (Curado and Vieira, 2019; Jiang *et al.*, 2017). These favorable beliefs should diminish performance-related concerns due to pressing family obligations, with beneficial outcomes for how employees assess their organization and the information it provides about their job roles (Kauppila, 2014).

As we noted for goal congruence, these arguments point to a moderated mediation dynamic (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). Goodwill trust is a relevant boundary condition of the mediated relationship of family interference with work and championing behavior. If employees can

rely on the honesty of their peers (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998), convictions about unclear job roles should play a less prominent role in connecting negative spillovers from family to work to a refusal to mobilize support for innovative ideas. This relational resource mitigates performance-related uncertainties that arise with family-induced work strain (Johnson *et al.*, 2019) and thus decreases the likelihood that employees stay away from dedicated promotion efforts in response to their convictions about role ambiguity (Coelho *et al.*, 2011). But for employees who cannot count on the goodwill of coworkers, beliefs about the presence of significant ambiguity in their job roles represent more important mechanisms through which family interference with work escalates into tarnished championing behavior.

**Hypothesis 5:** The indirect negative relationship between employees' experience of family interference with work and championing behavior, through their beliefs about role ambiguity, is moderated by their goodwill trust in coworkers, such that this indirect relationship is mitigated by goodwill trust.

## **Research method**

### *Data collection and sample*

Survey data were collected in fall 2020 from employees of an Israeli-based professional services organization, which employs more than 200 people and offers accountancy, salary processing, and tax return services. With our focus on one specific organization, we avoided any interference by unobserved industry factors that also might predict employees' idea championing (Howell, 2005; Van de Ven, 1986). The data collection period, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, was marked by substantial turmoil at the industry level, as well as diminished productivity, so most organizations were hard pressed to get employees to contribute to their survival and success (Gould and Gallagher, 2020). The daily stresses of the pandemic also increased the chances that employees experienced family-related worries that could interfere with their work (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). From this perspective, our study is timely in addressing how employees may react to family

interference with work by reducing their championing behavior and how high-quality peer relationships can counter such reactions.

We relied on the well-established translation–back-translation approach to develop the survey (van Dick *et al.*, 2018). The original version, written in English, was translated into Hebrew by a bilingual translator, then back-translated into English by a different translator. After fixing minor discrepancies, the final version was administered in Hebrew; an English version was available to respondents whose native language was not Hebrew. The sample frame encompassed the entire list of organizational employees, obtained from senior management. We used a random digit generator to select 150 employees randomly from this list, then invited them to participate by explaining that they could count on completely confidential treatment of their responses and that their individual answers would never be part of any research output. That is, we clarified our research focus on the detection of *general* patterns across aggregate data. We also made it clear that the organization would not know who took part in the research and that they could withdraw at any time. These clarifications diminish the likelihood of social desirability bias (Jordan and Troth, 2020). From the 150 contacted employees, we received 118 completed surveys, for a response rate of 79%. Among the respondents, 47% were women, and 26% had worked for their organization for more than five years.

### *Measures*

The five focal constructs were measured with previously validated scales, which used seven-point Likert anchors that ranged between 1 (“strongly disagree”) and 7 (“strongly agree”).

*Family interference with work.* To assess the extent to which employees suffer from family-induced work strain, we adopted a five-item scale of family-to-work conflict (Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996). For example, participants assessed whether “Family-related strain

interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties” and “My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime” (Cronbach’s alpha = .81).

*Role ambiguity.* We evaluated the extent to which employees believed that their organization provided them with insufficient information about their job duties with a well-established, reverse-coded, six-item scale of role clarity (Rizzo *et al.*, 1970), which has been used widely in extant research (e.g., De Clercq, 2019; Fried and Tiegs, 1995; Netemeyer *et al.*, 1990; Skogstad *et al.*, 2014). Two example items were, “I know what my job responsibilities are” and “I know exactly what is expected of me in my job” (Cronbach’s alpha = .80).

*Championing behavior.* We measured the extent to which employees actively promoted innovative ideas with a three-item scale of championing behavior (Janssen, 2000). Two sample items were “I often mobilize support for innovative ideas” and “I often make organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas” (Cronbach’s alpha = .84). Using self-assessments is consistent with prior championing research (Faupel, 2020; Wichmann *et al.*, 2015) and with the argument that employees are best positioned to offer accurate, comprehensive evaluations of their own championing efforts, compared with other raters (e.g., superiors, peers) who tend to have incomplete views of how much time employees spend promoting ideas in interactions with various organizational members (Howell, 2005; Kissi *et al.*, 2013).

*Goal congruence.* The extent to which employees share work-related mindsets with coworkers was assessed with a four-item scale of goal congruence (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017). Participants indicated their agreement with statements such as “Most of my work objectives are fully aligned with those of my coworkers” and “My

coworkers and I think alike on most issues with respect to the organization” (Cronbach’s alpha = .83).

*Goodwill trust.* To assess the degree to which employees believe in the sincerity of their coworkers, we applied a five-item scale of goodwill trust (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017). The respondents rated, for example, whether “My coworkers are perfectly honest and truthful with me” and “My colleagues would not take advantage of me, even if the opportunity arose” (Cronbach’s alpha = .86).

*Control variables.* We controlled for two demographic characteristics: *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female) and *organizational experience* (1 = less than 6 years, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = 16–20 years, 5 = more than 20 years). Male employees are more likely to push their ideas than their female counterparts (Detert and Burris, 2007), and employees who have worked for their organization for a more extensive period may feel more confident about their ability to succeed with discretionary work behaviors (Ng and Feldman, 2010).

#### *Assessment of construct validity*

The estimate of a five-factor measurement model indicated adequate fit:  $\chi^2(230) = 427.41$ , comparative fit index = .85, incremental fit index = .85, and root mean squared error of approximation = .02. The five constructs exhibited convergent validity; each item had strongly significant factor loadings ( $p < .001$ ) on its corresponding construct (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Further, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were higher than the cut-off value of .50 for each construct, except role ambiguity, for which it was .43. We could affirm the presence of discriminant validity too, in that the AVE values exceeded the squared correlations of the associated construct pairs, and the fit of 10 models with restricted construct pairs, in which correlations between constructs were fixed to 1, was significantly worse than the fit of unrestricted counterparts, with freed correlations between constructs (Lattin *et al.*, 2013).



### *Statistical testing*

We applied the Process macro procedure to test the research hypotheses, due to its advantages over a piecemeal regression approach. In particular, it enables *simultaneous* estimations of individual paths (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4) and mediation and moderated mediation effects (Hypotheses 3 and 5). Further, the estimation applies bootstrapping, so problems associated with nonnormal distributions of indirect and conditional indirect effects can be avoided (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2004). To assess mediation, we estimated the indirect relationship between family interference with work and championing behavior through role ambiguity, together with the corresponding confidence interval (CI), based on the Process macro's Model 4 (Hayes, 2018). In this first stage, we also assessed the nature and significance of the direct paths between family interference with work and role ambiguity and between role ambiguity and championing behavior. To evaluate moderated mediation, we calculated the conditional indirect effects of family interference with work, and the corresponding CIs, at different values of goal congruence and goodwill trust. To reflect our proposed theoretical framework, we relied on Model 7 in the Process macro (Hayes, 2018), which included the moderating effects of the two relational resources on the link between family interference with work and role ambiguity, but not between role ambiguity and championing behavior. A post hoc check affirmed that the second link was not significantly influenced by the two resources.

### **Results**

The bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics are in Table 1. The mediating effect findings, estimated with the Process macro, are in Table 2. Family interference with work was positively related to role ambiguity ( $\beta = .140, p < .05$ , Hypothesis 1), which in turn was negatively related to championing behavior ( $\beta = -.550, p < .001$ , Hypothesis 2). The assessment of mediation revealed an effect size of  $-.077$  for the indirect relationship between

family interference with work and championing behavior through role ambiguity; the CI did not span 0 [-.174, -.006], in support of the presence of mediation that we predicted in Hypothesis 3.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The Process macro results for moderation by goal congruence (Table 3, Panel A) showed a negative, significant effect of the family interference with work  $\times$  goal congruence interaction term ( $\beta = -.158, p < .001$ ) when we predict role ambiguity. Specifically, the positive relationship between family interference with work and role ambiguity became subdued at higher levels of goal congruence (.308 at one SD below its mean, .151 at its mean, and -.046 at one SD above its mean). The CI did not include 0 at the two lower values of the moderator ([.161; .455] and [.043; .260], respectively) but did at its highest level ([-.201; .109]), indicating a non-significant effect in the latter case. For an explicit assessment of moderated mediation, we compared the strength of the conditional indirect relationship between family interference with work and championing behavior through role ambiguity at distinct levels of goal congruence. Table 3 reveals lower effect sizes at higher moderator levels: from -.169 at one SD below, to -.083 at its mean, to .025 at one SD above the mean. The CI again did not span 0 at the two lower values of goal congruence ([-.309; -.037] and [-.171; -.011], respectively) but did at the high level ([-.042; .122]). In addition, the index of moderated mediation was .087, and critically, its CI did *not* include 0 [.018, .164]. We thus find support for Hypothesis 4 (Hayes, 2015).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Table 3, Panel B, confirms a similar buffering effect of goodwill trust. It indicates the negative significant effect of the family interference with work  $\times$  goodwill trust interaction term ( $\beta = -.170, p < .01$ ) for predicting role ambiguity. The positive relationship between family interference with work and role ambiguity was mitigated at elevated levels of

goodwill trust (.340 at one SD below, .102 at the mean, and .001 at one SD above). At the lowest level of the moderator, the CI did not include 0 ([.157; .523]), but the CIs at the two higher levels included 0 ([-.011; .215] and [-.150; .151], respectively). The formal evaluation also indicated diminished effect sizes of the indirect influence of family interference with work at higher levels of goodwill trust: from -.187 at one SD below the mean, to -.056 at the mean, to .001 at one SD above it. The CI did not span 0 at the lowest value of this relational resource ([-.377; -.042]) but did at the two higher levels ([-.135; .004] and [-.083; .087], respectively). The index of moderated mediation equaled .093, and its associated CI did not include 0 [.011, .208], in support of Hypothesis 5.

## **Discussion**

This study adds to extant research on innovative work behavior by unpacking the connection between employees' experience of family interference with work and the likelihood that they mobilize support for innovative ideas, with a particular focus on critical factors that underpin or buffer this connection. In particular, it contributes to previous studies of how adversity that originates *inside* the workplace steers employees away from championing efforts (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2021; Fugate and Soenen, 2018), by explicitly considering how and why *family*-induced work strain might curtail employees' propensities to function as idea champions, as well as the relational conditions that can mitigate this detrimental effect. Leveraging the logic of COR theory (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000), we have predicted that (1) the likelihood of diminished championing behavior, in response to resource-depleting family interference with work, might be higher due to employees' convictions that their employer is vague about their job roles, and (2) the relational resources of goal congruence and goodwill trust might subdue this dynamic. The statistical findings confirm these theoretical arguments.

In turn, we derive several theoretical implications. In particular, employees' suffering at work, because they cannot keep family preoccupations out of their minds, leaves them complacent, rather than evoking idea championing, because they develop beliefs that their organization has deprived them of complete information about their job duties (Eatough *et al.*, 2011; Kauppila, 2014). In line with COR theory, these beliefs arise because they suffer depletion of the clarity resources they need to comply with organization-set performance standards and thus uncertainty about their work functioning (Lundmark *et al.*, 2022; Oren and Levin, 2017). These role ambiguity beliefs in turn leave employees reluctant to engage in dedicated championing efforts. This negative link is theoretically intriguing, considering that employees arguably could benefit from mobilizing innovative ideas to clarify their job roles. But this mechanism seemingly is superseded by a desire not to waste energy on an organization that does not provide role clarity, such that it does not appear deserving of productive work activities, including idea championing (De Clercq, 2019). Critically, this finding points to a dangerous dynamic, in which one adverse situation (family demands hinder work activities) sows the seeds for another (diminished championing efforts). To the extent that such reactions undermine organizational standing among peers or managers (Walter *et al.*, 2011) or prevent innovative solutions (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017), employees may cause themselves even more hardships at work.

Another theoretical take-away from this study is that this counterproductive process is *less* likely to materialize when employees have access to valuable resources, gained through relationships with colleagues (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2020). As we hypothesized, convictions about role ambiguity serve as less effective conduits for resource-depleting family interference with work to induce a reduced probability to promote innovative ideas when (1) employees' work goals are aligned with those of their coworkers (Watt *et al.*, 2001) or (2) they regard coworkers as sincere and trustworthy (Kaur and Aurora,

2020). In COR terminology, the likelihood that employees develop negative thoughts about insufficient role clarity, due to resource-draining family concerns, becomes subdued if employees can rely on relational resources that enable them to deal with these concerns (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018; Oren and Levin, 2017). Employees who suffer from family-induced work strain become less likely to complain about unclear about job responsibilities, and then decide to avoid constructive promotion efforts, when they find support from the similar mindsets and trustworthiness of their coworkers (Arzigul *et al.*, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2005). A sense of being in the same boat and not being vulnerable means that employees, even if they are disheartened by resource-draining family-to-work conflict, experience less need to express their dismay about job-related information deficiencies, because they gain meaningful support from their high-quality peer relationships (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000).

In summary, we expand prior research on idea championing by explicating the beneficial role of supportive coworker relationships in protecting employees against the risk that they react to severe family demands with tarnished efforts to mobilize support for innovative ideas. Notable in this regard is that the study findings complement prior investigations of the *direct* beneficial effects of value congruence (Afsar *et al.*, 2018) and intra-organizational trust (Jaiswal and Dhar, 2017) on the likelihood that employees engage in innovative work behaviors. We provide the novel insight that the harmful effect of employees' beliefs about role ambiguity on their championing behaviors, in reaction to experienced family interference with work, can be *contained* by coworker relationships marked by shared mindsets and goodwill. These two relational contingencies diminish the risk that family-induced work problems escalate into work-related complacency.

#### *Limitations and future research*

This study has some shortcomings, which suggest avenues for continued examinations. First, the theoretical arguments are grounded in COR theory—which predicts

that resource-draining work situations lead employees to undertake behaviors that allow them to conserve their existing resource reservoirs (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000)—but the possibility of reverse causality cannot be completely ignored. Employees who successfully promote innovative ideas may form positive opinions about their work functioning in general (Kim *et al.*, 2009), so they may feel happy with their organization and the information it provides, which then might diminish challenges at the family–work interface. In this reverse dynamic, role ambiguity, as a source of *work*-related hardship, seems more likely to escalate into work-to-family conflict, instead of family-to-work conflict, but longitudinal research still would be beneficial, in that it could measure each construct within the proposed mediation (i.e., family-to-work conflict, role ambiguity, and championing behavior) at *multiple* time points, allowing for an explicit evaluation of causality and estimation of cross-lagged effects. Similarly, we have drawn from the robust COR framework to theorize about pertinent mechanisms that underpin the mediation link—that is, family-to-work conflict increases role ambiguity due to depleted clarity for employees regarding how to meet organization-set performance targets (Hoobler *et al.*, 2010), and role ambiguity diminishes championing behaviors due to these employees’ motivation to conserve valuable energy (De Clercq, 2019). Continued studies could formally assess these mechanisms in sequential mediation models.

Second, we focus on goal congruence and goodwill trust as two valuable relationship-based contingencies, reflecting extant evidence of their instrumentality in helping employees deal with challenging work situations (Kaur and Sangeeta, 2020; Witt, 1998). It would be interesting to investigate other “protective shields” at the organizational level, such as perceptions of organizational fairness (Colquitt, 2001) or trust in organizational leadership (Bouckenooghe and Menguç, 2018). Resources at the *personal* level might protect employees against the risk that family interference with work translates into convictions of role ambiguity and tarnished championing behavior too, such as their resilience (Happy *et al.*,

2020) or optimistic personalities (Li *et al.*, 2019). A valuable research effort could assess the relative influence of each contingency in buffering the work hardships that come with pressing family demands, as well as whether the effects of goal congruence and goodwill trust prevail, after accounting for other factors.

### *Practical implications*

This research has useful implications for HR management practice. In particular, HR managers should be cognizant of the work hardships that arise when employees become preoccupied with family issues (Nohe *et al.*, 2014). These family-induced, sometimes unavoidable challenges can be harmful for employees but also for the organization, to the extent that employees deal with their performance-related concerns by forming beliefs about job-related information shortages, with the eventual consequence that they refuse to promote innovative, potentially valuable ideas (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). But some employees might be hesitant to admit that their family-related worries disrupt their work, whether because they believe the employer will not care or to avoid appearing vulnerable or incapable (Anand *et al.*, 2015). Thus, HR managers should encourage a caring internal organizational climate, in which employees feel safe venting their worries about pressing family demands and the effects on their ability to perform work tasks, whether to supportive supervisors, dedicated contact persons in the HR unit, or an ombudsman or ombudswoman formally appointed to deal with organizational challenges that make it difficult to combine work and family demands (Harrison *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to facilitating an organizational climate that encourages employees to talk about family-evoked work stresses, this study shows HR managers that they should prioritize supportive relationships among employees. If incompatibilities between family and work responsibilities are likely, they should take the initiative to halt any potential counterproductive spirals, in which the family concerns leave employees unable to see clearly

how they might meet performance targets (Johnson *et al.*, 2019), so they develop convictions about unclear job roles that mount into a refusal to engage in constructive championing efforts that could contribute to organizational success (Walter *et al.*, 2011). As we show, this counterproductive dynamic can be contained by organizational measures to encourage goal sharing and trust building. By developing relationship-based resources, such as increasing employees' enthusiasm about their shared organizational membership (Bolino *et al.*, 2002), senior management might establish more positive energy among employees to push innovative ideas, even if their private-life preoccupations remain. In the long run, employees who can rely on likeminded, trustworthy coworkers likely experience interference of family with work as less upsetting, with beneficial outcomes for how they assess their jobs, as well as their motivation to contribute with devoted championing activities (Fugate and Soenen, 2018).

### *Conclusion*

This research extends prior studies by explicating the influences of role ambiguity and pertinent relational resources in the connection between family interference with work and a refusal to champion innovative ideas. Beliefs about unclear job role descriptions explain how work-related difficulties caused by family demands might render employees reluctant to undertake constructive championing efforts. We also detail how this harmful process is subdued among employees who benefit from supportive coworker relationships. These findings provide an impetus for continued investigations of how the detrimental consequences of family-invoked work strain can be managed by nurturing high-quality coworker exchanges among an organization's ranks.



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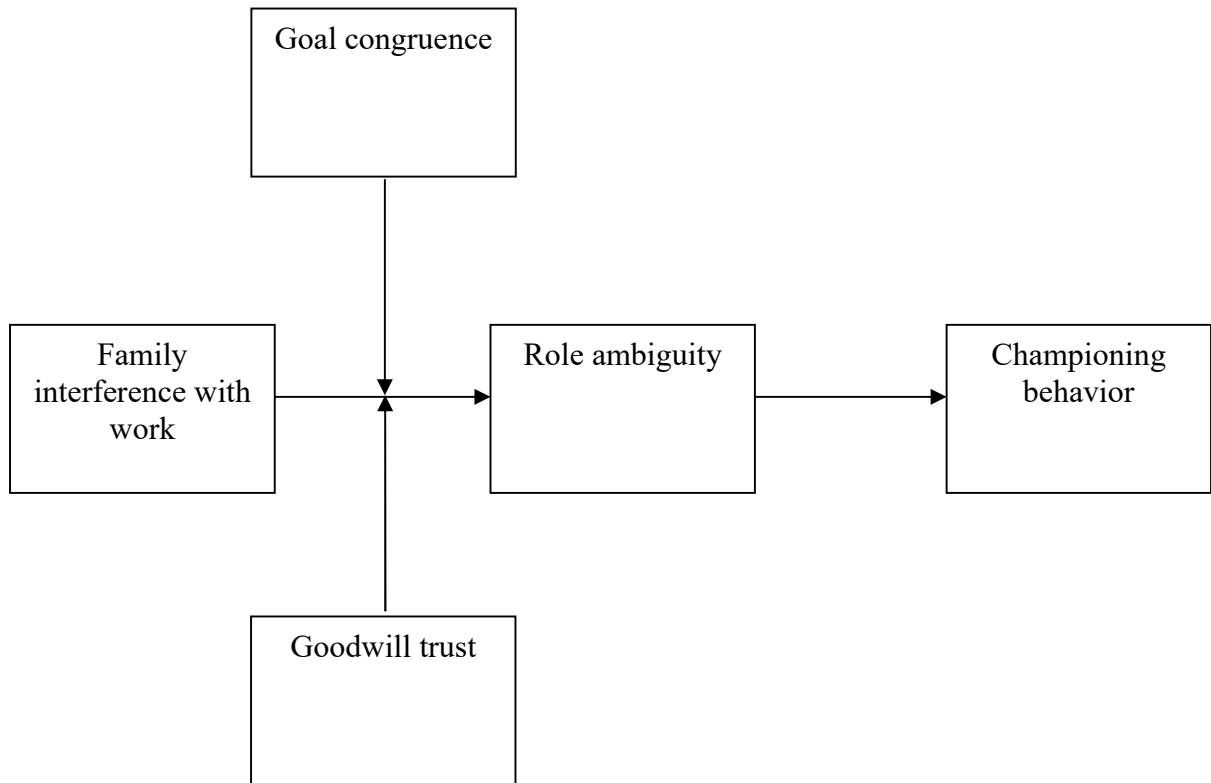
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**Figure 1:** Conceptual model



**Table 1:** Correlation matrix with descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Family interference with work							
2. Role ambiguity	.308**						
3. Championing behavior	-.154	-.427**					
4. Goal congruence	-.152	-.445**	.350**				
5. Goodwill trust	-.234*	-.408**	.257**	.459**			
6. Gender (1 = female)	-.052	-.018	-.178	.004	-.100		
7. Organizational experience	.101	.047	.056	.051	-.046	.078	
Mean	2.419	2.138	4.582	4.782	5.520	.466	1.441
Standard deviation	1.051	.724	1.186	1.084	.955	.501	.822

Notes: n = 118.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .





**Table 2.** Mediation results (Process macro)

	Role ambiguity	Championing behavior		
Gender (1 = female)	-.045			-.454*
Organizational experience	.031			.118
Family interference with work	.140*			-.043
Goal congruence	-.212***			.204 <sup>+</sup>
Goodwill trust	-.164*			.012
Role ambiguity				-.550***
	R <sup>2</sup>			.256
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect	-.077	.044	-.174	-.006

Notes: n = 118; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .05$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Moderated mediation results (Process macro)

<b>Panel A: Moderation by goal congruence</b>				
	Role ambiguity		Championing behavior	
Gender (1 = female)		-.101		-.454*
Organizational experience		.022		.118
Family interference with work		.147**		-.043
Goal congruence		-.231***		.204 <sup>+</sup>
Goodwill trust		-.165*		.012
Family interference with work × Goal congruence		-.158***		
Role ambiguity				-.550***
	R <sup>2</sup>	.358		.256
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of family interference with work on role ambiguity				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	.308	.074	.161	.455
Mean	.151	.055	.043	.260
+1SD	-.046	.078	-.201	.109
Conditional <i>indirect</i> effect of family interference with work on championing behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	-.169	.070	-.309	-.037
Mean	-.083	.041	-.171	-.011
+1SD	.025	.041	-.042	.122
Index of moderation	.087	.038	.018	.164
<b>Panel B: Moderation by goodwill trust</b>				
	Role ambiguity		Championing behavior	
Gender (1=female)		-.061		-.454*
Education		.013		.118
Family interference with work		.150**		-.043
Goal congruence		-.210***		.204 <sup>+</sup>
Goodwill trust		-.183**		.012
Family interference with work × Goodwill trust		-.170**		
Role ambiguity				-.550***
	R <sup>2</sup>	.337		.256
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of family interference with work on role ambiguity				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE		
-1 SD	.340	.092	.157	.523
Mean	.102	.057	-.011	.215
+1SD	.001	.076	-.150	.151
Conditional <i>indirect</i> effect of family interference with work on championing behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE		
-1 SD	-.187	.087	-.377	-.042
Mean	-.056	.036	-.135	.004
+1SD	.001	.042	-.083	.087
Index of moderation	.093	.051	.011	.208

Notes:  $n = 118$ ; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; UCLI = upper limit confidence interval  
<sup>+</sup>  $p < .05$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$