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CURRENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Facilitating Work-Life Balance: Understanding the Factors That Predict Managers' Support

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In the United States, about two-thirds of families with children have two working parents (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). More than 65 million Americans are unpaid caregivers, individuals who assist others with activities or daily living (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2015). Family responsibilities are part of the everyday lives of nearly every worker, and the importance of these tasks cannot be underestimated. However, family demands impact the workplace as workers try to juggle competing demands of work and family. Workers are pressured to find ways to accommodate both their work and their family responsibilities, and they need support within the workplace to accomplish this goal. Research has found that manager's supportive behaviors have positive outcomes for the organization and the individual employee. Without consideration and flexibility, effectively balancing work and family becomes frustrating and overwhelming for employees.

In their article, "Managers' Family-Supportive Supervisory Behaviors: A Multilevel Perspective," Sue A. Epstein, Janet H. Marler, and Thomas D. Taber examine the characteristics and situational variables that predict whether managers will engage in family supportive behaviors. They find that individual level characteristics of managers, including empathy

and gender, predict supportive behaviors. They also find that managers show greater empathy when the work demands are high, and when there is a trusting relationship between worker and manager. The authors discuss these and other findings, helping us to have a better understanding of these complicated factors.

The tension between workplace demands and family care needs is not likely to diminish in the future, particularly with the demands for care placed by aging baby boomers on their children. Organizations must plan for the reality that these pressures will mount, and they need to know what factors will improve their ability to create a supportive and productive work environment. The findings revealed by the authors of the article are important to keep in mind as we select and train managers and plan for the future.

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