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A closer look at how and when family-supportive supervision influence work interference with family: the roles of family-role overload and task crafting

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ABSTRACT

Although family–supportive supervision (FSS) has been identified as one of the most useful social resources for reducing the occurrence of work interference with family (WIF), relatively little is known about the boundary conditions and the underlying mechanisms through which this relationship occurs. Drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory, we examined *how* and *when* FSS relates to WIF in two field studies, focusing on family–role overload as a moderator and employee task crafting as a mediator. Results from Study 1, using multi-wave data from a high-technology firm, showed that family role–overload moderated the relationship between FSS and WIF such that the relationship was stronger for employees with more family role–overload than for those with less family role–overload. Results from Study 2, using multi-wave data from employees working in different industries, revealed that employee task crafting mediated the interactive effect of FSS and family–role overload on WIF. Implications of these findings for research and practice are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Family–supportive supervision;
work interference with family;
family–role overload

In today's rapidly changing and highly demanding work environment, employees find it challenging to effectively balance competing work and family responsibilities (Allen et al., 2000; Ganster et al., 2018). Work interference with family (WIF), a 'form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible' (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77), has been shown to have

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serious negative consequences on employee health and other important work-related outcomes. For instance, WIF has been associated with higher psychological distress, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover intentions, and decreased engagement, health, job success, and job and life satisfaction (Allen et al., 2000; Amstad et al., 2011; Anderson et al., 2002; Eby et al., 2005; Major et al., 2002; Wayne et al., 2017).

In an attempt to reduce WIF, there have been considerable research efforts to understand the roles of work, family, and social support as determinants of WIF (Byron, 2005; Kossek et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011). Among work and family support determinants, family–supportive supervision (FSS)—the degree to which employees perceive that their supervisor consistently demonstrates, promotes, and facilitates effective management of work and home life (Allen, 2001; Hammer et al., 2009)—has been identified as one of the most important, effective, and viable social resources capable of reducing or preventing WIF (Byron, 2005; Hammer et al., 2009; Michel et al., 2010; Wayne et al., 2013). For example, a meta-analysis showed that work–family specific support related more strongly to reduced work interference than other more general types of supervisor and organization support (Kossek et al., 2011). The researchers concluded '…that work–family-specific support plays a central role in individuals' work–family…experiences' (Kossek et al., 2011, p. 290). Despite research showing the importance of FSS in reducing or preventing WIF, scholars have paid less attention investigating *how* and *when* FSS relates to WIF. To date, researchers have predominately suggested that FSS can reduce WIF by increasing employees' control over their work time (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). However, what employees actually do with this work time to manage their tasks so as to reduce WIF and the boundary conditions accounting for this relationship remain unclear. Such research consideration is needed to advance the FSS literature because it is likely to provide management scholars with a more nuanced understanding of when FSS is more likely to be effective and the underlying mechanism through which such family-supportive behavior influences WIF.

Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to explore the boundary condition and mechanism underlying the relationship between FSS and WIF. To do so, we draw on conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001) to explain *family–role overload* (i.e. the feeling of being overwhelmed by family, home, and personal responsibilities; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Thiagarajan et al., 2006) as a moderator, and *task crafting*—a primary form of job crafting that focuses on altering task boundaries, such as the number, scope, and sequencing of work tasks (Leana et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) as a mediator in this relationship. According to COR theory, resources such as FSS

have more instrumental value in reducing the experience of stressful events (e.g. WIF) when individuals' current situations are taxing (Hobfoll, 1989). Drawing from the COR perspective, we suggest that when employees have high family–role overload, FSS is likely to have more instrumental value in helping to reduce WIF.

With this research, we make several important contributions to the literature. First, we extend research by identifying family–role overload as an important boundary condition in the FSS–WIF relationship. Meta-analyses have found varying effects regarding the relationship between FSS and WIF (e.g. Kossek et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011). By introducing family-role overload as a boundary condition, we not only help to resolve the mixed effects in the literature, but also contribute to theory building by explicating when FSS may be more effective. Second, although researchers have speculated that FSS may offer employees the platform to redesign and restructure their jobs to enable the effective management of work and family roles, the potential impact of FSS on employee job redesign such as task crafting and its subsequent association with WIF has received limited research attention (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). In this regard, our research provides new insights on the relationship between FSS and WIF by highlight task crafting as an important, yet overlooked mechanism and in so doing, provide a more nuanced and precise view of the effects of FSS on WIF.

Third, although past studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of task crafting (Berg et al., 2010; Leana et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2017; Tims et al., 2012; Vogel et al., 2016), relatively less attention has been paid to the role of leadership. To address this omission, scholars have begun to uncover the potential role of leaders or immediate supervisors in facilitating task crafting (Bavik et al., 2017; Harju et al., 2018; Hetland et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017a; Wang et al., 2017b). Our research adds to this growing evidence and in so doing, provides new insights into previously unexamined antecedents of task crafting as well as its benefit for reducing WIF. In sum, by identifying family–role overload and task crafting as moderating and mediating mechanisms accounting for the FSS–WIF relationship, our research answer calls for researchers to explore *how* and *when* FSS may be useful in alleviating WIF in organizations (Kossek et al., 2011), and in doing so, we provide a more complete account of the influence of FSS on WIF.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Family–supportive supervision as a valuable resource and COR theory

In building conceptual support for our model, we draw on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001, 2011). COR theory suggests that individuals

strive to obtain, maintain, foster and protect valuable *resources* (i.e. anything perceived to be beneficial for individuals to achieve their work and personal goals; Halbesleben et al., 2014). With the complex nature of work in today's modern society, these resources are particularly linked to individuals' personal experiences at work that prompt the initiation of proactive changes (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2011). Along this line, research in the work-family domain has identified FSS as one such valuable resource (Hammer et al., 2009; Matthews et al., 2014) due to the significant influence immediate supervisors have on employees' day-to-day experiences at work. FSS is a set of proactive behaviors that supervisors demonstrate in support of employees' work–family roles and responsibilities (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Family–supportive supervisors offer emotional support by listening to employees discuss their work and non-work life problems and showing interest in their work and family roles. Such supervisors also offer instrumental support by responding to employees' needs and providing them with flexibility to accommodate those needs and are role models for creative work–family management (Hammer et al., 2009). Specifically, they make creative attempts to support employee family life while keeping in mind the broader organization (Hammer et al., 2013). When supervisors engage in these behaviors, they create a context in which employees are better able to actively manage their work and family responsibilities, thereby reducing the extent to which their work interferes with their family and home lives (Breaugh & Frye, 2008; Greenhaus et al., 2012; Hammer et al., 2009, 2013; Kossek et al., 2011; Matthews et al., 2014; Wayne et al., 2013).

Although FSS serves as a valuable resource to reduce WIF, there is theoretical reason to believe that this relationship is more complex than depicted in the extant literature. COR theory posits that resources such as FSS have more instrumental value in reducing the experience of stressful events (e.g. WIF, which occurs when employees' job responsibilities prevent them from having the time and energy to tend to their family and home lives; Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Carlson et al., 2000; Major et al., 2002), especially when individuals' current situations are taxing (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). Drawing from this perspective, extant research shows that resources are more likely to become salient and have more enriching effects when demands are high (e.g. Bakker et al., 2007; Hobfoll, 2011). Demands that are physical and that have psychosocial aspects on an individual's life that are perceived to be taxing—such as role overload—make certain domain-specific resources more relevant and instrumental (Bakker et al., 2007). Here, we propose that a particularly taxing home situation in the form of family–role overload will enhance the effectiveness of a family-specific resource such as FSS on

WIF because employees with higher family–role overload are more likely to view FSS as being more instrumental.

COR theory further suggests that in taxing situations, individuals are more motivated to protect, maintain, and expand their current resources by initiating actions that may help shape or construct the conditions that meaningfully support their needs and goals, and in doing so, this helps to reduce stressful events (Hobfoll, 2011). As such, we suggest that the reason why FSS is more likely to reduce WIF among employees with higher family–role overload is that these employees are in the greatest need of change in their work routine because of their particularly taxing situation. Employees in a family–role overload situation have more motivation and are in greater psychological need to expend the resources offered by family–supportive supervisors by initiating actions to restructure their tasks *via* task crafting—a process by which employees proactively shape their tasks in order to align it with their own needs and preferences (Leana et al., 2009).

Although job crafting may occur in various forms, by making changes to either the task (task crafting) or social environment (relational and cognitive job crafting) at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), we focus on task crafting in particular because it explicitly captures employees' ability to reduce the amount of resources expended on the job and allows them to reduce hindrances (e.g. Leana et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2017; Vogel et al., 2016). This tends to be highly relevant for work–family management (Lapierre & Allen, 2012) because it reflects employees' efforts to make the job a better fit with their current needs and preferences (Leana et al., 2009). As family–supportive supervisors initiate actions to restructure work and support employees' work and non-work lives (Hammer et al., 2009), we suggest that employees in high family–role overload situations will be motivated to expend the resources offered by such supervisors by initiating actions to restructure their tasks to align it with their own needs and preferences *via* task crafting, which subsequently reduces WIF.

The moderating role of family–role overload in the relationship between family–supportive supervision and work interference with family

Role overload describes situations in which individuals feel that there are too many responsibilities expected of them in light of the time available, their abilities, and other constraints (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Rizzo et al., 1970; Thiagarajan et al., 2006). Drawing from Rizzo and colleagues' definition, Fisher et al. (2016) describe family–role overload as a situation whereby employees perceive they do not have the necessary resources to meet the role expectations in their personal life.

Compared to those with lower role overload, individuals with higher overload in a specific domain tend to require additional domain-relevant resources to enable them to meet or fulfill their responsibilities (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Fisher et al., 2016; Grandey et al., 2007). As such, employees who perceive higher family–role overload are more likely to use FSS as a valuable resource to enable them to meet their overwhelming responsibilities at home by reducing WIF. In other words, COR suggests that as people lose personal resources, they are more likely to draw upon other salient resources to help them protect and defend their remaining resources. This suggests that FSS will be even more instrumental when employees have high family–role overload.

Having a supervisor who recognizes the importance of effectively fulfilling other equally important non-work responsibilities is likely to be more relevant for employees who struggle with role overload in their personal lives because supervisors have considerable influence in controlling and assigning work roles and responsibilities due to their positional power (Aryee et al., 2013). Even though employees' family roles are out of a supervisor's control, employees struggling with higher family–role overload are more likely to benefit from a family–supportive supervisor as a useful social resource to adjust their current work activities in a way that such activities do not encroach on their family responsibilities. Family–supportive supervisors are more likely to take the time to learn about employees' personal needs and empathize with their overwhelming responsibilities outside work in an effort to provide avenues for employees to better manage their work activities, thus helping to reduce WIF.

Additionally, family–supportive supervisors' enactment of work-based flexibility and the concern that such supervisors show in regard to employees' family responsibilities are more likely to be helpful under conditions of high family–role overload because it gives employees the opportunity to initiate actions to reshape their work, thus reducing WIF. As such, employees with higher family–role overload are expected to better utilize the valuable resources and support that FSS offers, in a way that they are better able to effectively fulfill their responsibilities at work. In partial support of these arguments, Grandey et al. (2007) found that among male blue-collar hourly workers, perceiving a work–family supportive organization—'the belief that the organization values work–family balance and that non-work roles are supported' (p. 462)—was more effective in reducing work–family conflict and increasing job satisfaction when family demands were high rather than low. Thus, consistent with theory and previous research, we suggest that FSS will have a stronger negative relationship with employee WIF when family–role overload is higher.

Hypothesis 1: *Family–role overload moderates the negative relationship between FSS and WIF such that this relationship is stronger when family–role overload is higher rather than lower.*

The mediating role of employee task crafting

As earlier noted, task crafting is a primary form of job crafting that focuses on altering task boundaries, such as the number, scope, and sequencing of work tasks (Leana et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). COR theory contends that individuals are motivated to protect, maintain, and expand their resources by proactively initiating behavioral actions or strategies that may help shape or construct the necessary conditions that support their needs (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), which can then reduce the experience of stressful events such as WIF (Bakker et al., 2007; Hobfoll, 2011). Employees are likely to find a social resource such as FSS useful in reducing WIF not only because of the flexibility and support a family–supportive supervisor offers, but also because employees are likely to view family–supportive supervisor's behaviors as an opportunity to expand their own resources by proactively shaping and restructuring their task to enhance their effectiveness. Thus, we suggest that FSS will reduce WIF by enhancing employees' task crafting as a way of expanding their resources.

Task crafting is a primary way in which employees initiate the shaping and restructuring of their own tasks (Leana et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2017). Although job crafting may take other forms including making changes to one's social environment at work, increasing structural or social job resources, and increasing or decreasing job demands (Tims et al., 2012, 2013), we focus on task crafting because it is often regarded as the primary form of job crafting (cf. Lin et al., 2017). Moreover, it involves self-driven actions that individuals engage in to modify and redefine their current tasks in an attempt to improve work effectiveness or to make the work easier so that fewer resources are expended and in doing so, make the job a better fit with their current needs (Leana et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Interestingly, the work-family literature has implicitly suggested that one of the reasons employees experience WIF is their inability to effectively craft their tasks at work (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Importantly, although it is generally believed that employees craft their tasks themselves rather than being directed by others (Berg et al., 2010), scholars have also acknowledged that leaders can stimulate task crafting by providing employees with flexibility and latitude at work and by building a supportive, problem-solving work environment (Bavik et al., 2017; Hetland et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017b). As such, leaders' role in task crafting, and consequently reducing WIF,

is particularly important because they provide resources for successful task crafting efforts.

In relation to our theoretical model, we argue that FSS enhances employee task crafting, which then leads to a reduction in WIF. FSS is a 'proactive behavior which is geared toward taking the initiative to improve current circumstances and challenge the status quo' (Straub, 2012, p. 16). For instance, family–supportive supervisors creatively reallocate job duties to help employees become better, think about how work tasks can be redesigned to benefit employees and the organization, and challenge assumptions about the use of time and how work gets done (Hammer et al., 2009, 2013; Straub, 2012). In this regard, employees of family–supportive supervisors are likely to orient themselves toward proactively changing their work tasks to enhance their effectiveness. These employees are likely to be motivated to maintain the resources offered by family–supportive supervisors by improving their own work, minimizing unenjoyable tasks, or changing standard procedures of the job to make them more effective (Leana et al., 2009). In effect, FSS gives employees a 'license' to streamline work tasks on their own without necessarily consulting others first and also provides employees with valuable suggestions and resources in which to engage in task crafting. Consistent with this reasoning, past research has suggested that FSS can stimulate higher levels of work engagement behaviors (Aryee et al., 2016; Matthews et al., 2014), behaviors akin to albeit different from task crafting (Leana et al., 2009).

In turn, task crafting should reduce the likelihood of WIF. Although task crafting is not intentionally directed to enhance one's personal or non-work life, research has suggested that resource expansion at work can be useful in improving employees' personal functioning and overall quality of non-work life (Lapierre & Allen, 2012; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). As employees build upon their supervisor's family–supportive behaviors to craft their tasks, they are likely to improve their effectiveness in ways that reduce WIF—which is said to occur when activities at work (e.g. working overtime) limit employees' abilities to enjoy activities in their personal life (e.g. having the energy to attend events with family and friends; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Carlson et al., 2000). When employees engage in task crafting, they reshape their task boundaries, alter the amount of tasks they work on, and redesign their work procedures (Leana et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2017; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Because preventing WIF requires the effective allocation of employees' finite resources in deciding how tasks should be accomplished (Lapierre & Allen, 2012), task crafting is likely to be useful for reducing WIF because individuals who engage in task crafting tend to introduce important modifications to accomplish their tasks more

effectively and with less effort (Lin et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has revealed that the inability to take personal initiative at work is related to higher levels of work–family conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Accordingly, we suggest that as a result of experiencing FSS at work, employees expand their resources in ways that create the conditions that improve their work processes by engaging in task crafting, which then reduces WIF, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Task crafting mediates the relationship between FSS and WIF.*

We further expand our investigation of the interactive effects of FSS and family–role overload on employee WIF by examining employee task crafting as a mediator. Specifically, we suggest that the reason why FSS is more likely to reduce WIF, particularly for employees with high family–role overload, is that these employees are able to restructure their tasks at work.

This is in line with COR theory, which suggests that people are more motivated to maintain and expand their resources in taxing personal circumstances (Bakker et al., 2007; Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). As such, employees with higher family–role overload are more likely to view FSS as an opportunity and a license to create the necessary conditions that support their needs by changing aspects of their tasks that may potentially interfere with their family responsibilities.

When individuals are faced with family–role overload situations, they are more motivated to make use of other relevant resources in the environment (e.g. FSS) in order to ease their distress (Halbesleben et al., 2014). For example, with higher family–role overload, employees of a family–supportive supervisor should be more inclined to introduce new approaches to improve their work and minimize tasks that may potentially make their personal circumstances even more unpleasant. These employees will engage in task crafting as a way of maintaining and expanding resources offered by FSS, which in turn reduces WIF as explained above. In other words, when employees with high family–role overload experience FSS, the extent to which they craft their jobs will be greater, which would subsequently reduce WIF. Taking our arguments above together, we suggest the following:

Hypothesis 3: *Task crafting mediates the moderating effect of family–role overload on the relationship between FSS and WIF.*

Overview of research

We test our hypothesized model shown in Figure 1 in two time-lagged field studies. In Study 1, we examine whether family role–overload

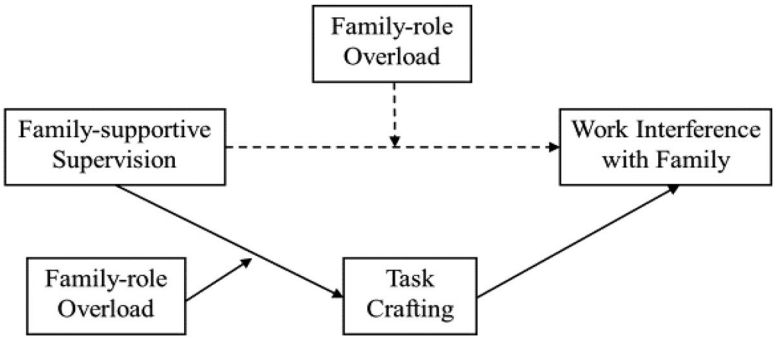

Figure 1. Theoretical Model.*Note*. Dashed lines represent paths tested in Study 1 and solid lines represent paths tested in Study 2.

moderates the relationship between FSS and WIF. In Study 2, we examine the extent to which task crafting mediates the interactive effect of FSS and family–role overload on WIF. Taken together, these two studies provide a solid platform for testing our model and strengthening our contributions.

Study 1: method and results

Sample and procedure

We recruited participants in an information and communication technology (ICT) firm from China. With the assistance of the human resource department, employees were invited to participant in a multi-wave study on workplace practices and employee well-being. Participants were assured that their individual results would be confidential and would not be linked to their organization's evaluations. At Time 1, we distributed 216 numerically coded questionnaires where participants were asked to complete measures on-site of family–supportive supervision and family–role overload. We received 197 surveys. At Time 2 (six weeks later), participants who completed Time 1 surveys were asked to complete a measure of WIF. After eliminating incomplete data (i.e. participants with missing data points), we ended up with 147 fully completed surveys, representing an effective response rate of 68%. We checked for the representativeness of our sample by comparing the age, gender, and organizational tenure of those who responded at Time 1 but did not respond at Time 2 with the final sample. We found no significant differences.

Among the 147 respondents, 77.6% were male, 70.7% were married, and their ages ranged from 21 to 41 years ($M = 30.05$, $SD = 4.63$). All respondents worked full time and a majority (89.8%) held a bachelor's degree or higher. The average tenure of employees was 3.21 years ($SD = 1.23$). 36.1% had zero children, 61.2% had one child, and 2.7%

had two children. We followed the standard back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980) to translate the study's scale from English to Chinese.

Measures

Except where noted, all measures were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Family–supportive supervision (FSS)

We measured FSS using the 14-item scale developed by Hammer et al. (2009). Sample items included, 'My supervisor asks for suggestions to make it easier for employees to balance work and non-work demands' and 'My supervisor works effectively with workers to creatively solve conflicts between work and non-work'. Following previous research (e.g. Matthews et al., 2014; Russo et al., 2018), we operationalize FSS as an overarching construct. The Cronbach's alpha (α) was .93.

Family–role overload

We used a 5-item scale developed by Thiagarajan and colleagues (2006) as used by Matthews et al. (2010) to measure family–role overload (α = .90). Consistent with Matthews et al. (2010), participants were asked to respond to items by reflecting upon the *family/home-life* domain. Sample items included, 'In my family/at home, I have to do things I do not really have the time and energy for' and 'In my family/at home, I cannot ever seem to catch up'.

Work interference with family (WIF)

We used a 9-item scale developed by Carlson and colleagues Carlson et al., Carlson et al., (2000) to measure work interference with family (α = .92). Sample items included, 'My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like' and 'Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy'.

Controls

We controlled for age, number of children (using dummy variables to allow for the possibility of non-linearity with those having more children enduring higher costs), gender, and organizational tenure because previous research suggests that these may potentially influence both task crafting and WIF (Leana et al., 2009; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). We tested our model with and without control variables and obtained comparable results.

Data analysis

We analyzed the data using partially latent structural equation models (SEM) with Mplus version 8.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998–2017). SEM models provide a balance of Type I error rates and statistical power when testing latent variables with multiple indicators (Cheung & Lau, 2008). We created parcels for measures that had more than one theoretical dimension (i.e. FSS and WIF). This helped to maintain favorable indicator to sample size ratios and minimize potential estimation issues (Landis et al., 2000). Based on the number of theoretical dimensions, we created four parcels for FSS and three parcels for WIF. For family–role overload, we used items as indicators. We tested moderation using a latent variable interaction using the xwith option in Mplus. This approach produces interactions that are unattenuated by measurement error and reduces the likelihood of biased estimates (Little et al., 2006). We first examined a model without the interaction term to determine overall fit of the model and then added the interaction term. We examined models with and without control variables; the hypothesized relationships remained the same.

Before proceeding with hypothesis testing, we examined the discriminant validity of our focal constructs by conducting confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) on the items measuring FSS, family–role overload, and WIF. The CFA results show that the three-factor model fit the data better (χ^2 = 52.25, df = 51, Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = 1.00, standardized root mean squared residual [SRMR] = .04, root mean squared error of approximation [RMSEA] = .01) than a two-factor model combining FSS and family–role overload (χ^2 = 563.47, df = 53, CFI = .59, SRMR = .22, RMSEA = .26) and a model combining FSS and WIF (χ^2 = 536.61, df = 53, CFI = .61, SRMR = .19, RMSEA = .25). The hypothesized three-factor model fit the data best by meeting cutoff criteria with CFI close to .95, SRMR close to .08, and RMSEA close to .06 (values suggested by Hu & Bentler, 1999), providing support for the discriminant validity of our measures.

Results

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables.

Hypothesis 1 suggested that family–role overload would moderate the relationship between FSS and WIF. As already discussed above, we first tested a model without the interaction term and the model fit the data well (χ^2 = 176.61, df = 121, CFI = .96, SRMR = .07, RMSEA = .06) according to cutoff criteria by Hu and Bentler (1999; see above). We then added the interaction term to the model as shown in Table 2. This

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study Variables.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	30.05	4.63								
2. Gender	.22	.42	−.06							
3. Number of children*n* = 0	.36	.48	.51**	.00						
4. Number of children = 1	.61	.49	.46**	−.01	−.94**					
5. Number of children = 2	.03	.16	.12	.01	−.13	−.21*				
6. Tenure	3.21	1.23	.14	.11	−.20*	.23**	−.10			
7. FSS	3.68	.91	−.07	.02	−.03	−.02	−.03	.04		
8. Family–role overload	2.69	1.12	.01	.06	−.07	.06	.05	.13	.03	
9. Work interference with family	2.71	1.01	.04	.08	−.12	.15	−.08	−.11	−.20*	.01

Note: $N = 147$. FSS = Family–supportive supervision. Gender is coded as male = 0 and female = 1. Tenure represents average number of years spent in the organization.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

model revealed a negative association between FSS and WIF ($b = -.25$, $p < .05$) and a significant interaction between FSS and family–role overload on WIF ($b = -.24$, $p < .01$). Consistent with our predictions, simple slopes analyses showed that FSS was more strongly related to WIF when family–role overload was at higher levels (one standard deviation above the mean; $b = -.57$, $SE = .15$, $p < .01$) than at lower levels (one standard deviation below the mean; $b = .07$, $SE = .15$, $p > .05$). The difference between the slopes was significant ($b = -.64$, $p < .01$). This interaction is depicted in Figure 2.

Study 1 discussion

The hypothesis that we tested in Study 1 was that family–role overload would moderate the negative relationship between FSS and WIF such that the relationship would be stronger when overload is higher as opposed to lower. In support of this, we found a negative relationship between FSS and WIF and further found that the effect was stronger for employees experiencing high overload; that is, for employees experiencing high family–role overload, the presence of FSS greatly reduced WIF. In contrast, employees who had high family–role overload and low FSS experienced the highest levels of WIF. We found that the relationship was not significant for employees with little or no

Table 2. Study 1: Structural Equation Modeling Results.

Dependent Variable = Work Interference with Family		
Predictor	*b*	*SE*
Age	−.01	.02
Gender	.21	.19
Tenure	−.15*	.07
Number of children*n* = 1	.41*	.20
Number of children = 2	−.36	.52
Family–supportive supervision behavior	−.25*	.10
Family–role overload	.05	.08
FSS x Family–role overload	−.24**	.09

Note: $N = 147$. FSS = Family–supportive supervision. Gender is coded as male = 0 and female = 1.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

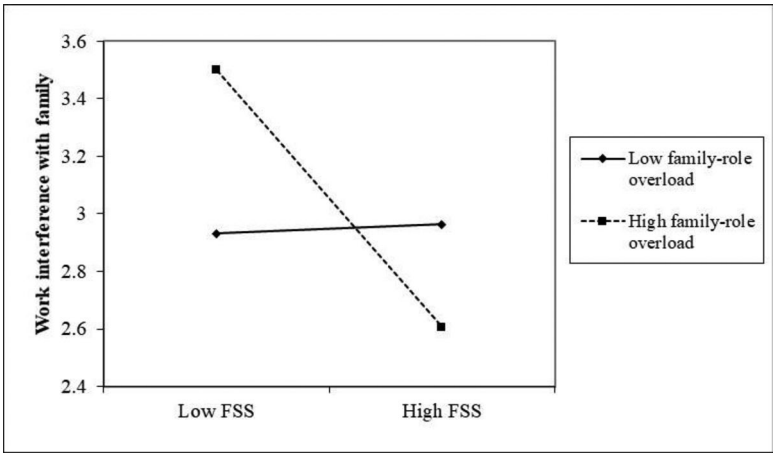

Figure 2. Interaction of Family–Supportive Supervision and Family–Role Overload on Work Interference with Family (Study 1).

family–role overload. Two of the limitations for this study is that the sample used for this study was primarily male and we were unable to reveal mediating mechanisms through which FSS related to WIF. Thus, Study 2 draws from a more gender-diverse sample and examines the process through which FSS relates to WIF.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to test the mediating mechanism—task crafting—through which the effect of FSS on WIF was hypothesized to occur (Hypothesis 2) and to test the moderating effect of family–role overload on the mediated relationship between FSS and WIF *via* task crafting (Hypothesis 3). We also added another control variable—control over work time (Thomas & Ganster, 1995)— to address potential concerns in which people with little discretion and time on their hands would be less likely to respond to the survey and additionally to have less opportunity for task crafting. Finally, in Study 1, we used a sample of workers from the ICT industry, which is a male-dominated industry. To provide robustness to our results and further account for potential selection bias issues, we drew from a broader sample of individuals from different jobs and organizations in Study 2.

Study 2 method and results

Sample and procedure

The data collection for this study was conducted by a consulting firm in China. The firm used cluster sampling techniques by first dividing the business areas in China into two major megacities consisting of 21

clusters and randomly selecting nine of them. From these clusters, the firm randomly selected 50 individuals per cluster (450 in total) who currently had a full-time job. Participants received a cover letter explaining the purpose and implications of this study and were promised strict confidentiality. They were also informed that data would be collected in three waves with each separated by a two-week interval. Three hundred eighty-six individuals followed the instructions in the cover letter to complete an online questionnaire. At Time 1, participants completed demographic details, measures of their immediate supervisors' FSS, and their own family–role overload. At Time 2, participants completed measures of task crafting and control over work time. Finally, at Time 3, participants completed a short survey on WIF.

Two hundred forty-one participants fully completed all three surveys, yielding a response rate of 62.4%. Consistent with Study 1, we checked for the representativeness of our sample by comparing the age, gender, and organizational tenure of those who responded at Time 1 but did not respond at Time 2 and Time 3 with the final sample. We found no significant differences. An e-voucher of 50 RMB ($7.26 USD at the time of data collection) was given to respondents who completed all waves. Among the final sample, 53% were female, 80.5% were married, 24.1% had zero children, 73.4% had one child, 2.5% had two children, and their ages ranged from 21 to 59 ($M = 32.77$, $SD = 6.95$); Most of the respondents had at least a secondary school education (93.4%). Of the participants, 23.24% worked in the public sector, and the rest worked in the private sector in various industries, including manufacturing (27.80%), ICT (7.47%), agriculture and fishing (6.64%), finance and banking (31.95%), and other services (2.90%).

Measures

Except where noted, all measures were assessed on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Family–supportive supervision (FSS)

We measured FSS using the same 14-item scale used in Study 1 (α = .95).

Family–role overload

We measured family–role overload using the same 5-item scale used in Study 1 (α = .93).

Task crafting

We measured task crafting using a 4-item scale from Leana and colleagues' Leana et al., Leana et al., (2009) task crafting measure (α =

.73). This scale has been used in previous research and has demonstrated strong reliability (e.g. Vogel et al., 2016). Participants were asked to rate how often they engaged in each of the listed behaviors on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Almost never* to 5 = *Very often*. Sample items included, 'Introduce new approaches to improve my work' and 'Change minor work procedures that I think are not productive'.

Work interference with family

We used the same 9-item scale used in Study 1 (α = .90).

Controls

We controlled for age, number of children (using dummy variables to allow for nonlinearity such that having more than one child could be a larger burden than having zero or one), gender, and organizational tenure, because previous research suggests that these factors may potentially influence task crafting and WIF (Leana et al., 2009; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). In addition, we controlled for control over work time considering previous research showing that FSS may influence WIF by positively influencing how employees use their time at work (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Therefore, by including control over work time as a control variable, we account for the unique influence of task crafting and provide evidence of the robustness of our predictions. We measured control over work time using a 10-item scale (α = .88) from Thomas and Ganster (1995). Sample item: 'How much control do you have over when you can take a few hours off?' (1 = *Very little* to 5 = *Very much*). Participants reported a wide range of control over work time (the averaged scale had a minimum score of 1.10 and a maximum score of 4.70) with a mean of 3.64 (*SD* = .63), suggesting that our sampling technique captured a broad scope of people who varied in terms of how much discretion they had over how they used their time at work. This helped alleviate concerns over potential selection bias and accounted for an alternative explanation for task crafting and WIF. We tested our model with and without control variables and obtained comparable results.

Data analysis

We analyzed the data as described in Study 1 using partially latent structural equation modeling with Mplus version 8.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998–2017) using theoretical dimensions as parcels for FSS and WIF. We used items as indicators for family–role overload (5 items) and task crafting (4 items). Control over work time had 10 items so we created three random parcels (one parcel with four items and the other two parcels with three items) to aid in model estimation by maintaining a

favorable indicator to sample size ratio (Landis et al., 2000). We began by examining our measurement model to establish discriminant validity of the constructs by conducting CFAs on FSS, family–role overload, task crafting, control over work time, and WIF using the strategy described above. The CFA results showed that the five-factor model fit the data well (χ^2 = 213.26, df = 142, CFI = .98, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .05). This model had a better fit as compared to a four-factor model combining task crafting and control over work time (χ^2 = 489.81, df = 146, CFI = .88, SRMR = .12, RMSEA = .10), a three-factor model combining FSS and family–role overload (χ^2 = 1368.79, df = 149, CFI = .59, SRMR = .16, RMSEA = .18), and a one-factor model in which all measures were set to load on a single factor (χ^2 = 2019.70, df = 152, CFI = .37, SRMR = .19, RMSEA = .23). The hypothesized five-factor model fit best according to cutoff criteria by Hu and Bentler (CFI close to .95, SRMR close to .08, and RMSA close to .06; 1999), providing support for the study variables' discriminant validity.

Next, we moved to hypothesis testing by first examining the overall fit for a model with direct effects only (no moderation) and used this model to compare models of full versus partial mediation. After determining the model with the best fit, we proceeded to fit the model with the latent variable interaction, and we thus report the results of this final model for our tests of Hypotheses 2 and 3 below. We compared a model with full mediation (FSS to task crafting to WIF with control variables predicting the main dependent variable, WIF; χ^2 = 324.02, df = 236, CFI = .97, SRMR = .08, RMSEA = .04) to a model with partial mediation (adding a path from FSS to WIF; χ^2 = 318.94, df = 235, CFI = .97, SRMR = .07, RMSEA = .04). The models did not differ significantly ($\Delta\ \chi^2$ [1] = 5.08, $p > .05$), but the added path from FSS to WIF was significant ($b = -.16$, $p < .05$). Because of the significant path, we concluded that mediation was partial and we used this model for hypothesis testing. We examined models with and without control variables; the hypothesized relationships were the same.

Results

Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables.

Table 4 show the results for Hypotheses 2 and 3. In support of Hypothesis 2, which predicted that task crafting would mediate the relationship between FSS and WIF, our results revealed that FSS was positively related to employee task crafting ($b = .20$, $p < .01$) and task crafting was negatively related to WIF ($b = -.21$, $p < .05$). We tested mediation by examining the Monte Carlo bootstrapped confidence

intervals (CIs) of the indirect effects with 20,000 resamples (Preacher & Selig, 2012). Results showed that FSS was related to WIF *via* task crafting (indirect effect = −.04; 95% CI = [-.09; −.003]). The confidence interval for the indirect effect did not cross zero providing support that the indirect relationship was significant.

Next, Hypothesis 3 suggested that task crafting would mediate the moderating effect of family role overload on the relationship between FSS and WIF. As initial evidence, we found a significant moderating effect of family–role overload on the relationship between FSS and task crafting (b = .17, p < .01). Simple slopes analyses showed that the relationship between FSS and task crafting was significant under conditions of high family–role overload (one standard deviation above the mean; b = .85, SE = .24, p < .01) and significant under conditions of low family–role overload (one standard deviation below the mean; b = −.45, SE = .23, $p \leq .05$). The difference between slopes was significant (b = 1.30, p < .01). The interaction is shown in Figure 3. Next, to test whether the interactive effect of FSS and family–role overload related to WIF *via* task crafting, we tested the Monte Carlo bootstrapped confidence intervals of the indirect effects of the paths of the interaction to the mediator (FSS with family–role overload predicting task crafting) and the mediator (task crafting) to WIF. Results showed that the conditional indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = −.04, 95% CI = [-.08; −.002]; CI did not cross zero). Thus, Hypothesis 3 received support.

Study 2 discussion

The results of Study 2 not only replicate the findings of Study 1, but they also reveal the process through which FSS relates to WIF. The

Table 3. Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study Variables.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	32.77	6.95										
2. Gender	.53	.50	−.15*									
3. Number of children = 0	.24	.43	−.37**	.02								
4. Number of children = 1	.73	.44	.34**	−.04	−.94**							
5. Number of children = 2	.02	.16	.04	.04	−.09	−.27**						
6. Tenure	8.35	6.19	.82**	−.09	−.29**	.29**	−.02					
7. FSS	3.62	.68	−.06	.03	−.08	.05	.09	−.05				
8. Family–role overload	3.79	.78	.00	.02	.01	−.05	.10	−.06	.28**			
9. Control over work	3.64	.63	−.02	−.04	.02	−.03	.03	−.06	.29**	.07		
10. Task crafting	3.98	.47	.04	−.09	.01	−.04	.08	.01	.47**	37**	.22**	
11. WIF	2.43	.72	−.02	.07	−.02	.01	.00	−.02	−.23**	−.13*	−.15*	−.27**

Note: N = 241. FSS = Family–supportive supervision. WIF = Work interference with family. Gender is coded as male = 0 and female = 1. Tenure represents average number of years spent in the organization.
*p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 4. Study 2: Structural Equation Modeling Results.

Path	*b*	S.E.
FSS → Task crafting	.20**	.05
Family–role overload → Task crafting	.23**	.05
FSS * Family–role overload → Task crafting	.17**	.06
Task crafting → WIF	−.21*	.10
FSS → WIF	−.15*	.07
Control variables (predicting WIF)		
Control over work time	−.08	.07
Age	−.01	.01
Gender	.08	.08
Number of children = 1	.06	.10
Number of children = 2	.15	.27
Tenure	−.01	.01

Note. $N = 241$. FSS = Family–supportive supervision. WIF = Work interference with family. Gender is coded as male = 0 and female = 1.
$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$ (two-tailed).

findings demonstrate that employees with FSS are more likely to engage in task crafting and that task crafting reduces WIF. Further, the results show that employees with high family–role overload who also experience FSS are more likely to engage in task crafting. Study 2 is the first that we are aware of linking FSS to task crafting. This is important because we highlight a unique explanatory path for the relationship between FSS and WIF. The results of both studies have several theoretical and practical implications that we discuss below.

General discussion

Although FSS has been recognized as one of the most crucial, effective, and viable social resources capable of reducing or preventing WIF in the workplace (Byron, 2005; Hammer et al., 2009; Kossek et al., 2011;

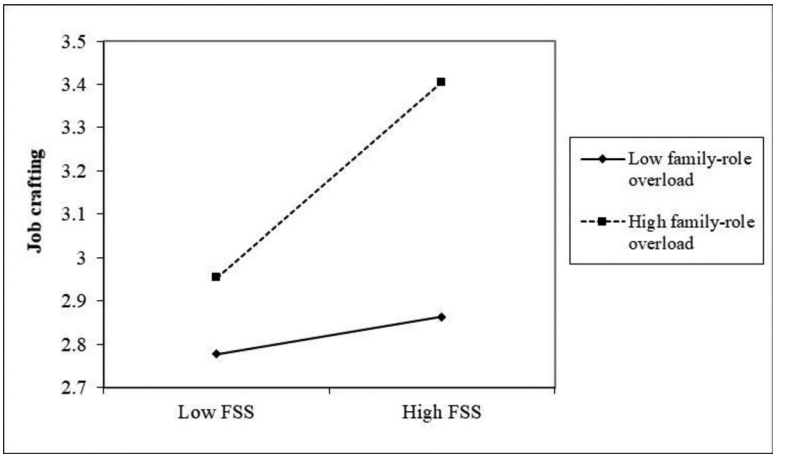

Figure 3. Interaction of Family–Supportive Supervision and Family–Role Overload on Task Crafting (Study 2).

Michel et al., 2010; Wayne et al., 2013), organizational scholars have yet to offer a coherent theoretical explanation of the boundary conditions (when) and the process (how) through which FSS influences WIF. Drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), our objective in this paper was to increase understanding of *how* and *when* FSS relates to WIF by focusing on family–role overload as a moderator and employee task crafting as a mediator. Our results from Study 1 showed that family–role overload strengthened the relationship between FSS and WIF, such that the relationship was stronger for employees with higher family–role overload and not those with lower family–role overload. In Study 2, we found that employee task crafting mediated the relationship between FSS and WIF, controlling for control over work time. We also found that employee task crafting mediated the moderating effect of family role overload on the relationship between FSS and WIF. Implications are discussed below.

Theoretical implications

Our main contribution lies in enhancing current understanding of the relationship between FSS and employee WIF, which has played an important role in the FSS literature (Crain & Stevens, 2018; Hammer et al., 2009). Most prior work has argued that FSS should reduce employee WIF because supervisors who demonstrate FSS provide employees with resources needed to effectively manage their work and family responsibilities (Crain & Stevens, 2018). Yet meta-analytical studies have uncovered varying effects regarding the relationship between FSS and WIF (Kossek et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011). We suggest that this may be because prior research has not considered the important role of employee family role responsibility. This is an important oversight, as COR theory suggests that resources are particularly more important when individuals are faced with high role demands (Hobfoll, 2001). Consistent with COR theory tenets, our findings revealed that employees with high family demands (family–role overload) are more likely to benefit from informal family-based support from their supervisors (i.e. FSS) to handle work and family responsibilities. In contrast, FSS did not effectively reduce WIF among individuals with little or no family–role overload. Therefore, our study shed light on 'for whom' FSS may be more effective in reducing or eliminating WIF in the workplace.

We also contribute to the literature by utilizing COR theory to identify task crafting as an explanation for why FSS can help build resources needed to reduce WIF. Although prior research has demonstrated the utility of FSS for improving both work and family outcomes (see Crain

& Stevens, 2018), relatively less has uncovered the underlying mechanism linking FSS to WIF (see Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson & Prottas, 2006 for expectations). These few studies have primarily focused on perceived control over work time, without explicitly capturing what employees do to reduce WIF. By suggesting task crafting as an important mechanism, our findings not only highlight that FSS creates a context that allows employees to shape their job tasks in order to align them with their own preferences (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), but also expands the nomological network of FSS (Hammer et al., 2009). Interestingly, our findings suggest that task crafting provides a unique explanatory account for the FSS – WIF relationship above and beyond control over work time. Moreover, it highlights the centrality of task crafting in explaining how employees of family–supportive supervisors with high family–role overload experience reduced levels of WIF. In so doing, we enrich the FSS literature by providing a more nuanced account of the complex relationship between FSS and WIF

Our research not only contributes to the FSS literature but also the research on task crafting. Although past research has largely focused on the consequences of task crafting (Bakker et al., 2020; Leana et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2017; Vogel et al., 2016), evidence about the role of leader behaviors in cultivating successful job crafters is only starting to emerge (Bavik et al., 2017; Harju et al., 2018; Hetland et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017b). Yet these studies have tended to focus on more general forms of leadership such as transformational and servant leader behaviors. Responding to recent calls for leadership researchers to focus on more specific (rather than broad) behaviors that leaders engage in (Rudolph et al., 2020), we advance current understanding of the role of leaders in task crafting by suggesting that FSS can enhance the extent to which employees craft their tasks at work by providing them with valuable suggestions and resources. In this regard, we provide perhaps one of the first pieces of evidence for the role of FSS as an important but overlooked form of leadership behavior in task crafting behavior.

Practical implications

Beyond the contributions that our study makes to theory, our study also offers some important practical implications. For instance, our findings suggest the need for organizations to understand individual employees' situations with respect to their family role and responsibilities. As our results reveal, FSS can significantly reduce WIF, especially for employees with higher family–role overload. Although it may be difficult for supervisors to become aware of the nature of their employees' family situations, such information can be obtained by building quality

relationships with employees where they are better able to speak up about their family situations (Van Dyne et al., 2008). In doing so, it is important for organizations to encourage supervisors to offer employees with higher family–role overload support by engaging in FSS to help reduce their WIF. Fortunately, a study by Hammer et al. (2016) provides evidence that FSS can be trained and developed. As such, it is advisable for organizations to create strong awareness about FSS and to help supervisors develop FSS skills that can help employees, particularly those with high family–role overload.

Additionally, our findings suggest that organizations can help employees reduce WIF by leveraging FSS to facilitate task crafting. To do so, organizations should encourage managers to create and improve the context of employees' tasks to ensure efficiency and to ensure that employees have sufficient resources to craft their tasks. By doing so, employees are likely to become more efficient and effective at their jobs by using their limited resources (e.g. time and energy) more wisely. Relatedly, our findings suggest that organizations can benefit from developing workshops that encourage employees to engage in task crafting. For instance, organizations could design workshops that provide ideas to employees about how they can craft their tasks at work and raise awareness about the benefits of task crafting. By illuminating on the benefits of task crafting and encouraging employees to find ways to strategically craft their tasks, organizations are likely to benefit immensely by reducing operational costs associated with high WIF (see Eby et al., 2005).

Limitations, future research directions, and conclusions

Despite our theoretical and practical contributions, our study is not without limitations. First, because all variables in our study were assessed using self-reported measures, common method or source bias may be a concern. However, given our research question and the fact that all of our measures pertain to individuals' experiences and perceptions, it is reasonable to collect data about FSS, family–role overload, task crafting, and WIF from employees. Nevertheless, to address common method bias, we randomized the ordering of survey questions and separated variables in the causal chain by time, which helped to reduce potential bias (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Specifically, Podsakoff and colleagues (2003) noted that the use of temporal separation 'diminishes the respondent's ability and motivation to use his or her prior answers to answer subsequent questions' (p. 888). Moreover, the moderating effect involved in our two field studies makes it less likely that our findings are tainted by common method variance (Evans,

1985). Regardless, we encourage future research to utilize longitudinal design to help draw strong causal inferences. It is also important to note that the Study 1 sample was male dominated. To address this potential selection bias, in Study 2, we drew from a broader sample of individuals from different jobs and organizations where gender was evenly distributed. Regardless, we encourage future studies to engage more diverse groups in terms of demographics for generalizability purposes.

In our study, we examined the moderating role of family-role overload in our model but did not consider the possible role of work-role overload. We did so because extant research suggests that domain-specific resources tend to be more beneficial when individuals' current situation are taxing in that domain (Kirmeyer & Dougherty, 1988; Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003). In this regard, we believe that family-role overload is a more relevant moderator in the context of our research. That is, FSS is likely to be more effective in reducing WIF when employees experience high family-role overload. Nevertheless, we encourage future research to incorporate work-role overload as a potential moderator in their theoretical model.

Furthermore, the present study focused only on the mediating role of task crafting, as this form of job crafting has been regarded as the primary form of job crafting (cf. Lin et al., 2017). While we believe that how employees craft their tasks at work is more relevant for work-family management than how they craft, for example, their relationships (Lapierre & Allen, 2012), future research should explore the relative strength of different forms of job crafting, such as cognitive and relational crafting in the relationship between FSS and WIF. Additionally, based on one of the tenets of COR theory that human resources are finite (Hobfoll, 2001), an interesting question remains: Can task crafting also lead to WIF? We suspect that there may be a curvilinear relationship between the task crafting and WIF, whereby individuals expend their limited resources as a result of 'too much' task crafting leading to increased resource depletion, and subsequent increase in WIF. Although our data did not support this possibility when tested in a supplementary analysis, such research investigation would be worthwhile in future studies. Such studies would benefit from using other research designs such as experience sampling methodology (e.g. Fullagar & Kelloway, 2009; Tims et al., 2014).

In conclusion, working adults around the world are increasingly finding it difficult to effectively manage their competing work and family demands (Ganster et al., 2018). Although our study reaffirms the importance of FSS in encouraging reduced WIF, it also suggests that the relationship between FSS and WIF is more complex than generally

assumed. Specifically, our study explicates family–role overload as an important contextual factor in this relationship, such that individuals with high family–role overload are more likely to reap the benefits family supportive supervisors offer compared to those with low family–role overload. In addition, we also provide strong empirical evidence for the mediating role of task crafting in the FSS–WIF relationship, beyond previously examined control over work time. We hope our findings encourage researchers to continue exploring additional underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of FSS as well as potential antecedents of task crafting.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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