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**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**  
SYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

**The impact of a supportive work-life culture on affective  
commitment**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the Degree of Master of Commerce in Organisational Psychology**

**Faculty of Commerce**  
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**2008**

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## ABSTRACT

The work-life issues of working parents is a well-researched topic which has received increased attention in the literature in the past two decades. Empirical evidence suggests that the more that working parents believe that the organisation supports their need to balance the demands of work and family, the more committed they will be to their organisation. Empirical research on the work-life issues of employees who choose not to have families or remain single is very limited. Recent research indicates that if employees without children believe that the organisational culture is supportive of their life-choices they are also more inclined to feel a sense of belonging to the organisation and affectively commit. This study explores how the perceived supportiveness of an organisational culture influences employees' sense of belonging and desire to remain with an organisation. A total of 85 participants employed in a local multinational tobacco company responded to an online survey designed to measure their perceptions of the supportive work-life culture in their organisation and its relationship to affective organisational commitment.

## INTRODUCTION

Changes in workforce demographics reflect the different life choices people are making. According to Ransome (2007) the total responsibility burden people have is a reflection of their life choices. Their total responsibility burden consists of necessary labour (paid and unpaid work) and recreational labour and accounts for all the activities in which people are involved and can be applied to all forms of households and not just family households with young children. Individuals make choices about family size, standard of living and marital status. These choices impact on their total responsibility burden and their work-life balance decisions are based on how they intend to manage their commitments to their responsibilities (Ransome, 2007).

Shifts from traditional to dual-earner couples with families where both parents agree to contribute to childcare, household and income responsibilities has placed additional pressure on couples to coordinate, share responsibility and manage the demands between their work and family roles (Casper, Martin, Buffardi & Erdwins, 2004; Allen, 2001; Rousseau, 1997). There are also a growing number of single-parent households where responsibility for childcare and income rests with a working parent who has to manage the demands of work and childcare without the assistance of a partner (Glass & Estes, 1997; Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004).

According to Movius (1976) a growing number of women are making a conscious choice not to have children, or remain voluntarily childfree to have more flexibility to travel and focus on their careers. Thirty years ago Houseknecht (1978) conducted a qualitative study of career issues of 27 female undergraduates and found that the majority desired a childless lifestyle as they believed there were more advantages to remaining childless than disadvantages.

In a more recent study Rousseau (1999) found evidence to support this growing trend and found that more women make a conscious decision not to have children or to postpone having children in order to alleviate the potential conflict of managing commitment to work and family. Castle (2005) studied the career-family perspectives of young professionals and found that the majority made a conscious decision to defer having children for fear of career and lifestyle limitations. Barnett (1999) suggests that the emergence and increase of new family forms at work such as dual-earner, childfree couples and single employees with no children means that employees will be dealing with issues other than dependent children in their lives beyond work.

Family households with dependent infant children have become the ideal-typical object of analysis in the research literature (Ransome, 2007), particularly when exploring the work-life balance issues of employees, but what of the work-life issues of young adult households, work-mates sharing accommodation or family households without dependent children? Increased variations in household forms demands a broader understanding of the work-life issues employees deal with, based on the life choices they make.

Changes in the demographic composition of the workforce together with changes in the psychological contract between the employer and the employee (Capelli, 2000) has resulted in varying levels of employee commitment. Capelli (2000) proposed that in the new world of work, employees will operate in the market as free agents and their most important relationship is with the market, not their employer. The new psychological contract shifts career accountability to the individual who is motivated to source work opportunities that will add value to their basket of skills and abilities and enable them to reinvent and reshape themselves to be more marketable.

This view is consistent with the theory of the protean career (Hall, 1996) where the new career contract is not a pact with an organisation; it is an agreement with one's self and one's work. Capelli (2000) argued that organisations who understand what makes employees feel more committed to an organisation are more likely to retain their employees. According to Rossi (1993) the increasing diversity of the workforce profile demands increased flexibility from employers in order to gain employee commitment. Studies have shown that employee perceptions of a supportive work-life culture have a distinct impact on organisational outcomes such as organisational commitment and intention to quit (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness 1999; Allen, 2001; Casper, Weltman & Kwesiga, 2007).

Two constructs of a supportive work-life culture have been developed in the literature. Thompson et al. (1999) developed a construct and measure of a family-friendly culture and Casper et al. (2007) developed a construct and measure of a singles-friendly culture to explore the work-life issues of single employees without dependent children. The constructs were developed to explore the relationship between a supportive culture and outcomes such as commitment. Organisational commitment is a psychological state that binds the employee to an organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The affective commitment of employees is a desirable outcome of a supportive work-life culture as it predicts intention to remain with the organisation out of a desire to do so and not out of need or a sense of obligation. Eisenberger, Hutchison, Huntington and Sowa (1986) found that employees' commitment to the organisation is strongly influenced by their perception of the organisation's commitment to them reflected in employees' global beliefs about the extent to which an organisation cares about their well-being.

Perceived organisational support is the extent to which employees believe the organisation values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing. Employee perceptions are influenced by their treatment and experiences in the organisation and they form inferences about organisational motives based on their treatment (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

The aim of this study is to explore the work-life issues of all employees in order to fully understand the impact that a uniformly supportive work-life culture will have on their affective commitment to the organisation.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Workforce demographics and trends have changed dramatically and the employee composition of organisations has become increasingly diverse with emerging trends such as increased participation of females at work particularly among married women with young children and single mothers rearing children on their own (Rossi, 1993; Greenhaus, 2006); new family forms, the increase of dual-earner couples and single people with no children or dependants (Flynn, 1996). According to Bran and Nilsen (2005) the choice biography where individuals take responsibility for the direction of their lives is a sociological theme which has replaced the standard biography where they follow a life course that is laid out for them. In a longitudinal study of young career professionals Castle (2005) found that individuals were committed to a career and life course of their own making and were reluctant to commit to a single organisation or location. The changing demographic composition of organisations has mobilized considerable research and studies of the relationship between work and family (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux & Brinley, 2005).

Organisations have become increasingly aware of the work-life issues of employees with families and responded with family-friendly policies and programmes to help attract and retain their employees (Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O'Neill & Payne, 1989; Osterman, 1995). In contrast, very little research has been conducted on the work-life issues of childless singles and the impact on their relationship with the organisation (Casper et al. 2007). According to Flynn (1996) the provision of family-friendly benefits has prompted a backlash amongst employees without children which could have an adverse effect on their sense of attachment to the organisation. The following review examines the literature on the work-life issues of working parents and childless employees and the impact on their affective attachment to the organisation.

### **Employer responsiveness in the past decade**

Employees are faced with multiple commitments to work and life roles based on their life situations. Employee work roles consist of the activities associated with formal paid employment. Employee life roles are the activities and responsibilities outside of work and consist of unpaid activities such as household management, direct and indirect care and emotional work. Recreational labour is an additional activity that occupies employee time outside of work and consists of leisure activities, personal time, community service, sports or part-time study (Ransome, 2007). Each role places unique demands on employees' time and attention and they find themselves striving to create balance between their work and life roles and responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Organisations have recognized the reality that their employees have multiple roles in their lives which are not mutually exclusive and create conflicting demands which could result in undesirable outcomes such as employee turnover, absenteeism and decreased productivity (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Family-friendly policies and programmes have been developed by organisations in response to an effort to help facilitate work-life balance and retain dedicated employees and mitigate the potentially adverse effects of work/family conflict (Greenberger et al., 1989; Grover & Crooker, 1995). Research has shown that working parents or employees with families are more likely to feel attached to an organisation that recognizes their need to balance the demands between their work and life roles (Eby et. al., 2005; Osterman, 1995, Thompson et al., 1999). According to Glass and Estes (1997), there are three types of organisational interventions designed to address family needs of employees; reduction of work hours, greater flexibility and social support for parents.

Greenberger et al. (1989) conducted a study of the impact of formal family-responsive policies and informal social support on the wellbeing and attitudes of single working mothers, married men and married women. The results indicated that informal support accounted for 48% of organisational commitment of married women and formal family-responsive policies helped predict role strain for women. In their attempt to explain the rationale for providing organisational policies and practices that support employees with families, Thomas and Ganster (1995) explored the consequences associated with the stress of trying to achieve balance between work and life roles.

The study found that the potential for conflict and stress increases as employees find themselves having to cope with work and family responsibilities and identified four reasons to promote employer understanding. Firstly the cost of stress-related illnesses to the economy, secondly, employee litigation against companies for stress originating in the workplace, thirdly, negative health outcomes of occupational stress and finally the cost of loss of productivity, loss of time and higher accident rates.

The case for organisational benefits and policies that help employees balance the demands between work and life roles may not only be driven by cost avoidance motives. According to Wise and Bond (2003) the benefits of being more responsive to the changing needs of the workforce include improved morale and motivation, improved retention by being more responsive and improved recruitment. According to Casper and Buffardi (2004) information about work-life benefits provided to potential candidates wishing to join a company influence their intentions to pursue employment with that company.

Grover and Crooker (1995) conducted a study of 745 randomly selected employees and found that employees who enjoyed the benefit of family responsive policies such as flexible workforce scheduling, family leave policies and childcare assistance showed greater organisational commitment and a lower intention to quit. Glass and Fujimoto (as cited in Parker and Allen, 2001) define work-family benefits as “any benefit, working condition or personnel policy that has been shown to empirically decrease job-family conflicts among employed parents” Grandey (2001) makes the distinction between two types of family friendly policies. Segmentative policies help employees to focus on their work demands by providing services to help them cope with family demands such as a child care center. Integrative policies are designed to help employees restructure their time at work to help them cope with family demands such as telecommuting, parental leave, flexitime and job sharing.

Osterman (1995) found that organisations seeking to pursue high-commitment work systems and win the emotional engagement of their employees are more likely to adopt work/family programmes to help build employee commitment and incorporate this into a broader employer strategy. Organisations have recognized the reality that their employees have multiple roles in their lives which are not mutually exclusive and create conflicting demands on their employees and responded with family-friendly policies and benefits designed to help employees manage the reality of trying to create balance between the two.

### **Current research in employer responsiveness**

Thomas and Ganster (1995) conducted initial research into the role of employee perceptions and proposed that family supportive work environments consist of two components; family-supportive policies and family-supportive supervisors.

Family-supportive policies are defined as “services that make the everyday management of family responsibilities easier”. A family-supportive supervisor is defined as one who “empathizes with an employee’s desire to achieve balance between work and family responsibilities”.

The results of their study revealed that supportive policies and practices, in particular flexible scheduling and supportive supervisors had a positive effect on employees' perceptions of control over the conflicting demands of work and family responsibilities. These benefits and policies may not be available or useful to all employees

In addition provision of family-friendly benefits may prompt backlash from single employees without families who do not benefit from family-friendly policies (Casper et al., 2007). Grover (1991) studied employee perceptions of parental leave policies and found that employees who stood to benefit from the policies or were similar to the employees who stood to benefit, perceived the policy as more fair and had a more positive attitude toward the policies than those who would not benefit or were not similar to those who would benefit. The provision of supportive benefits such as flextime, telecommuting, parental leave, on-site childcare and job sharing does not necessarily result in benefit utilization. Most family-supportive benefits are exclusively for employees with families such as on-site day care and maternity leave but some benefits might have universal appeal.

The provision of benefits alone might not be instrumental in assisting employees alleviate the conflict (Allen 2001) and could also result in adverse reactions from employees who do not need the benefits (Casper et al., 2007) or feel compelled not to use them for fear of negative career consequences (Allen 2001, Perlow, 1995, Behson, 2002, Swody and Powell, 2007). Swody and Powell (2007) found that employees may be reluctant to participate in family-friendly programs unless they believe that their supervisor will support their participation.

In addition to the provision of formal family-friendly benefits, Behson (2005) found that informal support in the form of a supportive work culture predicted a greater variance in desirable outcomes such as job satisfaction, stress and turnover intentions than formal mechanisms.

This study highlighted the significance of a supportive culture where formal policies that may be supportive may be undermined if the organisational culture is perceived to be unsupportive. Although the study provides empirical evidence for the importance of informal support, the impact on affective commitment of employees was not tested.

Organisational commitment has been the focus of considerable research in recent decades (Mowday, 1998) in order to promote understanding of why employees leave organisations and more importantly to promote understanding of the factors that contribute to why they stay.

### **Organisational commitment**

In the development and validation of a measure of organisational commitment, Mowday, Porter and Steers (1979), defined organisational commitment in terms of the strength of an employee's identification with and involvement in an organisation. Organisational commitment reflects an active involvement with the organisation where the employee feels willing to exert effort to make a contribution, believes in the goals of the organisation and has a strong desire to maintain membership (Mowday et al., 1979). This initial construct of commitment was unidimensional (Mowday, 1998) in that it explained one form of commitment, also known as attitudinal commitment which is reflective of a psychological state where the employee feels bound to the organisation.

Allen and Meyer (1990) developed a three-component model of organisational commitment that provides further insight into the psychological state. Affective commitment is defined as emotional attachment to the organisation where the employee identifies with the values and culture of the organisation and volunteers to remain as a result of an emotional bond. Employees who feel an emotional tie to the organisation and personally identify with the values and goals typically remain with the organisation because they want to.

This type of commitment is closely related to the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire developed by Mowday et al. (1979) to measure organisational commitment and is also described as affective attachment or commitment. Continuance commitment is a form of commitment where employees choose to remain with an organisation because the perceived costs of leaving would be too high (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The third form of commitment is normative commitment, where employees choose to remain with an organisation out of a sense of duty and obligation (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Tsui, Pearce, Porter and Tripoli (1997) found that employees reported a higher level of affective commitment to employers with which they believed they had a mutual investment or overinvestment relationship. Mutual investment describes a situation where the employee and employer agree to a balanced exchange and overinvestment describes a situation where the employee is engaged to perform a defined task but the employer agrees to a series of open-ended rewards such as training and development and career opportunities.

### **Perceived organisational support**

The model of perceived organisational support is based on early research on the dynamics of reciprocation. Gouldner (1960) identified the norm of reciprocity as a universal dimension found in all moral codes where people should help those who have helped them and should not harm those who have helped them. In a similar view of reciprocation Blau (1964) proposed the theory of social exchange where both parties to a social relationship are prone to supply more of their own services and favours to each other if both parties value the nature of the favours or benefits and wish to continue the mutual exchange.

Social exchange is a voluntary action motivated by the returns they are expected to generate. Levinson (1965) proposed the concept of reciprocation between the organisation and the employee where the organisation is a source of psychological meaning to the employee.

The organisation is personified through various inherent characteristics and actions of an individual are perceived as indicators of the organisation's intent rather than actions of a particular individual. Actions of organisational agents such as managers, supervisors and are presumed to be actions of the organisation itself (Levinson, 1965). According to the norm of reciprocity perceived favourable actions by the organisation are reciprocated by favourable actions of its employees. From this basis, Eisenberger et al. (1986) developed the model of perceived organisational support where employees form global beliefs and perceptions about the organisation based on their treatment and experiences in the organisation. Their initial study found empirical evidence to support the idea that employees form global beliefs about the degree to which an organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being.

Eisenberger, Fasolo and Davis-La-Mastro (1990) studied the relationship between employee perceived organisational support and desirable employee outcomes such as employee diligence, commitment and innovation in the absence of immediate direct rewards and personal recognition. Employees who reported high perceived organisational support reciprocated this support with stronger feelings of loyalty and affiliation which is manifest in desirable behaviours such as employee innovation and lower absenteeism.

Behson (2002) found evidence to support the argument that outcomes such as organisational commitment are better predicted by perceived organisational support than by the dimensions of an organisational culture. However, supportive organisational actions such as work-family benefits can signal to an employee that he or she is valued and can facilitate perceived organisational support (Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Lambert, 2000).



### **A supportive work-life culture**

Starrels (1992) proposed that organisational culture plays a significant role in determining the extent to which programmes and benefits effectively help employees manage the demands between their work and life roles. According to Schein (1990) organisational culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1990, p. 111). Schein’s model of the cultural analysis of an organisation creates context for the construct and analysis of a supportive work-life culture.

A uniformly supportive work-life culture is based on research of the components of organisational culture that influence employee attitudes and beliefs about the extent to which the organisation is sensitive to their work-life roles and is supportive of their endeavour to balance their commitment to their work and life responsibilities. Thompson et al. (1999) empirically measured the effects of work-family culture on employee attitudes and found that the culture of the organisation plays a significant role and determines whether employees use work-family benefits and influences their attitude towards the organisation.

A work-family or family-friendly culture consisted of three dimensions: (1) managerial support for work-family balance, (2) career consequences associated with utilising work-family benefits and (3) organisational time demands. A family-friendly culture was defined as “the shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organisation supports and values the integration and employees’ work and family lives” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 394). The study provided preliminary evidence of the dimensions of a family-friendly organisational culture and found that affective commitment was positively related to the dimensions of a family-friendly culture.

Research on support for work-family support in organisations focused purely on the extent to which employees with families experienced the supportiveness of their organisational culture. Articles in the popular press suggested that single employees without children experience backlash in reaction to family-friendly policies. Flynn (1996) reported concerns and frustrations amongst single employees, Young (1999) questioned the fairness of family-friendly policies in relation to single employees without children and Hammers (2003) explored approaches for creating benefits programmes that address the work-life needs of all employees. Eby et al. (2004) examined perceptions of single men and women with and without children and explored differences in actions taken towards them. Single parents were perceived as more mature than childless singles, were more likely to be offered a job that did not require relocation and more likely to receive a more favourable increase than childless singles.

Young (1999) challenged two common assumptions made in the research. Firstly that families (one or more parents living with one or more child) are the most common unit of the workforce profile and secondly that dependant care is the most prominent work-life issue challenging employees.

In order to investigate employee perceptions of the organisation's support for the work-life issues of single employees without dependants and the extent to which their perceptions contributed to affective commitment, Casper et al. (2007) developed the first construct and measure of a singles-friendly culture. Their study of the dimensions of a supportive culture went beyond supportive policies and benefits and explored organisational norms. A singles-friendly culture was defined as "the shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organisation supports integration of work and non-work that is unrelated to family" (Casper et al., 2007, p. 480). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the existence of five dimensions of a singles-friendly culture: (1) social inclusion, (2) equal work opportunities, (3) equal access to benefits, (4) equal respect for non-work roles and (5) equal work expectations.

Casper et al. (2007) explored the relationship between the dimensions of singles-friendly culture and family-friendly culture to investigate the possibility that organisational culture may be uniformly supportive of employee efforts to balance the demands between their work and life roles, regardless of their life choice. Managerial support for work-family, and career consequences were significantly positively related to all five dimensions and organisational time demands was significantly negatively related to all five dimensions.

The study revealed that the dimensions of a singles-friendly culture operate via perceived organisational support to predict affective commitment. The linear combination of the five dimensions predicted 16.5% of the variance in affective commitment and 37% of the variance in perceived organisational support. Social inclusion was the only dimension of singles-friendly culture that uniquely predicted affective commitment and perceived organisational support and the test for mediation revealed that social inclusion operated via perceived organisational support to influence affective commitment.

This finding suggests that work-life support perceptions influence affective commitment through general support perceptions. This finding also provides preliminary evidence to suggest that organisational culture can be universally supportive or unsupportive of employee efforts to balance their work and life roles and influence their affective commitment through general support perceptions. If an organisation is sensitive to all employee commitments to their roles outside of work, regardless of their parental or marital status it is likely that the culture may be perceived as uniformly supportive and the nature of a supportive work-life culture can be examined.

## **The eight dimensions of a supportive work-life culture**

### Managerial support for work-family balance

Thompson et al. (1999) suggested that supervisor support can influence the extent to which employee's feel free to utilize work-family benefits. Swody and Powell (2007) found that employees feel reluctant to participate in supportive programs or use supportive benefits if they do not believe that their supervisor or their organisation encourages and supports their participation. According to Glass and Estes (1997), employees who feel that their prospects for promotion or reward will be jeopardized by taking advantage of work-family benefits will avoid using them. Allen (2001) explored the extent to which the components of a work-family culture influence behaviours and found that supervisors play a meaningful role in shaping the experience and perceptions employees have of their environment.

### Career consequences associated with utilizing work-family benefits

If employees take advantage of work-family benefits such as extended leave or flexible working hours, perceived organisational norms may imply that their careers will be adversely affected, particularly if employees believe that the organisational environment is not supportive of benefit usage (Allen, 2001).

Perlow (1995) conducted a qualitative study of 30 engineers over six months and identified the assumption that physical presence is related to contribution and commitment to the organisation and could explain employee reluctance to take advantage of work-family benefits. Three barriers to the effective implementation of work-family policies and programmes were identified. Firstly, the assumption that to be seen to be working one must be seen at work. Secondly, commitment to the organisation is demonstrated by working longer hours, also known as face time and finally, in order to be successful work has to be the primary priority in one's life.

A recent article in the popular press reported that maternity leave is sabotaging women's careers and that employers are reluctant to select candidates of childbearing age and women interviewed for the article felt anxious about taking maternity leave for fear of being penalised for taking paid time off (Brewer, 2008). This article reflects that organisational norms for using supportive work-life policies or benefits can influence employee behaviour. If employees believe that taking time off to attend to issues outside of work is generally accepted they may be more likely to do so.

#### Organisational time demands

Organisational time demands or the extent to which organisations expect employees to prioritise work above family is the third dimension of a work-family culture identified by Thompson et al. (1999). Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk and Beutell (1996) found empirical evidence to suggest that if employees are expected to work long hours, it is likely to interfere with their family commitments. This dimension is also applicable to employees who may not have family commitments but perhaps other commitments such as extra-curricular study.

#### Social Inclusion

Social inclusion describes the extent to which formal and informal events in the organisation are equally appropriate for both employees with families and for single employees. A company who is socially inclusive would be sensitive to the different social needs of its employees. For example a Saturday team-building activity branded a "Family Fun Day" might implicitly exclude single employees without children. Casper et al. (2007) define social inclusion as "the degree to which there are similar social expectations and opportunities for single employees and those with families" (Casper et al. 2007, p.480).

The remaining four dimensions of a supportive work-life culture are driven by a demand for equitable distributive justice. Organisational justice is defined as the study of fairness perceptions at work and distributive justice is a type of organisational justice that describes the fairness of outcomes received (Byrne and Cropanzano, 2001). There are three rules applied to distributive justice; equity, equality and need (Grandey 2001). Equity theory proposes that individuals perceive fairness if the ratio of their work efforts to work outcomes is equal to the ratio of a comparable other. Individual perceptions of under reward or over reward will be associated with distress and followed by efforts to restore equity, Adams (as cited in Huseman, Hatfield & Miles, 1987). This theory is based on the premise that individuals are equally sensitive to inequity.

Huseman et al. (1987) developed a construct of equity sensitivity to explore individual preferences and attitudes towards equity and developed three types of equity preferences; Benevolents, Equity sensitives and Entitleds. Benevolents will prefer an input to outcome ratio less than that of comparison others, Equity sensitives prefer balanced input to outcome ratios and Entitleds prefer an input to outcome ratio that exceeds comparison others and experience distress if they do not believe they are getting a better deal.

The authors proposed that equity preference will moderate the relationship between an individual's perception of equity and organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover. Moorman (1991) investigated the relationship between perceptions of fairness and organisation citizenship behaviours and found that interactional justice or the interpersonal behaviours of a supervisor influenced perceptions of procedural justice (formal procedures and interactional justice) influenced citizenship behaviours. Equitable outcomes are distributed on the basis of merit and contribution and according to Grandey (2001) family-friendly benefits contradict equity rules and for this reason may be perceived as unfair.

According to the equality rule, Family-friendly policies and benefits can be considered fair, if they apply to everyone such as flexi-time. Family-friendly policies are typically need-based allocations offered in response to employee needs such as telecommuting, parental leave and childcare support.

#### Equal work opportunities

Equal access to work opportunities entails allocating work opportunities to employees on the basis of equity or equality but not need. This dimension of a singles-friendly culture reflects that a single-friendly culture promotes allocation of work opportunities on the basis of merit or equity and not need. Eby et al. (2004) found evidence to suggest that single parents were more likely to be offered jobs that did not require relocation, presumably as a reflection of a stereotype that single parents have more difficulty adjusting to a move than childless singles.

#### Equal access to employee benefits

Equal access to employee benefits is defined as “the degree to which similar ability exists for single employees and those with families to use benefits” (Casper et al. 2007, p. 481). It is important to note that perceptions of fairness are influenced by self-serving bias. According to Mowday (as cited in Casper et al. 2007) people are more sensitive to inequity when they feel under-rewarded but respond less consistently when over-rewarded.

Grover (1991) studied employee perceptions of parental leave policies and found that employees who stood to benefit from the policies or were similar to the employees who stood to benefit perceived the policy as more fair and had a more positive attitude toward the policies than those who would not benefit or were not similar to those who would benefit. Parker and Allen (2001) found evidence to support the view that individuals who stand to gain the most from work/family benefits will have more favourable fairness perceptions.

Most family-supportive benefits are exclusively for employees with families such as on-site day care and maternity leave but some benefits might have universal appeal such as flexitime, telecommuting, study leave and an onsite gym (Grandey, 2001). Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Drescher-Burke (2005) found that employees who were less privileged reported limited access to flexible work schedules and taking time off for personal or family related needs while more educated workers, managers and professionals had more access to work-family policies and flexible work schedules. This finding was also supported by Casper et al. (2007). Grandey (2001) proposed that individuals who do not have access to supportive benefits and policies or do not need them may be inclined to perceive them as unfair. Glass and Estes (1997) reported that women in professional positions are more likely to receive family-friendly benefits than women in less skilled positions.

#### Equal respect for non-work roles

Equal respect for non-work roles is defined as “the degree to which similar value is placed on non-work roles of all employees” (Casper et al., 2007, p. 482.). Young (1999) found that employees’ most important life concerns are child and elder care, fitness, pursuit of education, a second job, and commuting.

#### Equal work expectations

Equal work expectations are defined as “the degree to which there are similar work expectations for single employees and those with families” (Casper et al., 2007, p. 482). Young (1999) wrote that single employees feel that their status as a single prompts their managers to demand more from them. This is a significant feature as it reflects the role of a supervisor in administering assignments on the basis of merit as opposed to need (Grandey, 2001).



The dimensions of a singles-friendly culture and family-friendly culture may be universally relevant to employees regardless of their life choices. Research to date has examined the impact of two constructs of culture on perceived organisational support and affective commitment but the two constructs of culture have not yet been measured as a single construct. This study will combine the dimensions of a singles-friendly culture and a family-friendly culture to measure the effects of a uniformly supportive work-life culture on perceived organisational support and affective commitment. In their study of the work-life issues of single employees, Casper et al. (2007) found that the three dimensions of a family-friendly culture were strongly related to the five dimensions of a singles-friendly culture. This finding suggests that organisations who support work-life balance for employees with families may also support the work-life needs of childless singles.

Casper et al. (2007) also found that affective commitment is influenced by employee perceptions of the supportiveness of the culture. Thus perceived organisational support mediates the relationship between organisational culture and affective commitment. For the purpose of this study, affective commitment will be examined as the dependent variable, to the exclusion of normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is the ideal form of commitment as it reflects an emotional bond to the organisation, where employees identify with the norms and values and are willing to increase their efforts to pursue organisational goals (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

It is proposed that employees who experience a uniformly supportive work-life culture will be more likely to report perceived organisational support which will influence their affective commitment to the organisation..

## Research propositions

### Proposition 1.

*The three dimensions of a family-friendly culture will have a positive relationship with the five dimensions of a singles-friendly culture.*

### Proposition 2.

*A supportive work-life culture will not explain a significant portion of the variance in the affective commitment of employees to their organisation.*

### Proposition 3.

*General perceived organisational support will mediate the effects of supportive work-life culture on the affective commitment of employees to their organisation.*

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## METHOD

### Research design

A descriptive research design approach was used and a self-report survey instrument was developed to measure the perceptions and attitudes of employees. This cross-sectional design enables the collection of primary data from a sample of employees.

### Procedure

The site of the research was a multinational tobacco company based in Stellenbosch. An 8-page anonymous, self-administered questionnaire, including a half page cover letter with endorsement from the ethics committee at UCT was posted on an electronic bulletin board. The company communication fully endorsed the questionnaire and mentioned that it was for a master's thesis. The bulletin board is available to 1500 employees and the survey was posted for 3 weeks. A further communication was sent out after 1 week to generate more responses as only 40 employees had responded. The communication generated a further response of 46 respondents before the deadline and obtained a total of 86 respondents resulting in a 5.6% response rate. The cover letter described the purpose of the study and reassured participants of the anonymity of their response. It was company policy at the participating organisation for all surveys to be completed and submitted electronically using a web-based survey tool.

### Sample

Of the respondents, 43% were single and of the single employees 66% had no children. The majority of the respondents were married (57%) and 86% of them had children. The education levels of all the respondents were indicative of a predominantly white collar workforce as 67% had a tertiary qualification and 42% occupied a middle management or associate professional level.

Only 31% were clerical staff (78% were female) and 27% were at senior management or professional levels. All respondents were employed on a permanent, full-time contract of employment. The majority of respondents were white (57%) or coloured (19%) and 11% chose not to answer. The average age was 38 and average tenure was 11 years.

### **Measures**

Four constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale developed in the previous studies. Response categories ranged from 1 = (strongly disagree) to 5 = (strongly agree). Scales for the integrative construct of a supportive work-life culture were drawn from the dimensions of two established constructs.

*Family-friendly culture.* Twenty items from Thompson et al. (1999) were used to measure the three dimensions of the construct of a family-friendly culture; (1) managerial support for work-family balance (e.g. "In general, managers in this organisation are quite accommodating of family related needs"), (2) career consequences associated with utilizing work-family benefits (e.g. "This organisation is supportive of employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs for family reasons") and (3) organisational time demands (e.g. "Many employees are resentful when women in this organisation take extended leave to care for newborn or adopted children").

The items were designed to measure employee perceptions of the general extent to which the organisation helps facilitate their endeavor to balance work and family responsibilities as well as the three dimensions of a work-family culture.

*Singles-friendly culture.* Forty one items from Casper et al.'s (2007) study were used to measure the five dimensions of a singles-friendly culture. For social inclusion 17 items were used (e.g. "My supervisor believes that work-related social gatherings should be appealing to both single and married employees"), 7 items for equal work opportunities (e.g. "My organisation provides equal work opportunities for single and married employees"), 7 items for equal access to benefits (e.g. "My organisation provides benefits that are relevant for single and non-single employees"), 3 items for equal respect for non work roles (e.g. "My supervisor treats all employees' requests for time off the same, regardless of why the employee wants the time off") and 7 items for equal work expectations (e.g. "In my organisation, work assignments are made without considering family status").

*Affective commitment.* Allen and Meyer (1990) developed a three component model of organisational commitment. For the purpose of this study only affective commitment was measured. Allen and Meyer's (1990) 8 items affective organisational commitment scales were used (e.g. "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation").

*Perceived organisational support.* Eisenberger et al. (1986) developed a 36 item scale to measure perceived organisational support and Casper et al. (2007) used 6 of these items in the study of singles-friendly culture but did not report which items were used. Correspondence with the author revealed the 6 items for perceived organisational support that were included in Casper et al.'s (2007) questionnaire (e.g. "My organisation cares about my opinions" and "My organisation really cares about my well-being").

## RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the following analyses reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis.

### Reliability analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted on all 10 scales using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). When necessary items were discarded to increase the alpha for a scale. All the final co-efficient alphas equaled or exceeded .70 and were therefore acceptable (Hair, Babin, Money, & Samouel, 2003). The reliability for *affective commitment* was .85, after one item was deleted to increase the alpha (i.e. "I think I could easily become as attached to another organisation as I am to this one"). For *career consequences for using work-family benefits* one item was deleted to increase the alpha (i.e. "Many employees are resentful when women in this organisation take extended leave to care for newborn or adopted children"). The reliability coefficients are reflected on the diagonal of Table 1.

### Correlation analysis

Proposition 1 explored the relationship between the dimensions of a *supportive work-life culture* to provide preliminary evidence to suggest that the dimensions may have universal relevance and contribute to overall perceptions of a supportive work-life culture. Pearson correlation was used for the correlation analysis. An analysis of the correlations revealed highly significant relationships between the dimensions. Refer to Table 1.

*Social Inclusion* correlated with all the dimensions of *family-friendly culture* but had the most significant correlations with *managerial support for work-family balance* ( $r= 0.4, p < 0.0001$ ) and *career consequences associated with using work-family benefits* ( $r=-0.4, p < 0.0001$ ). *Organisational time demands* correlated significantly negatively with *social inclusion* ( $r= -0.31, p < 0.05$ ).

There was a strong positive correlation between *equal access to benefits* and *managerial support for work-family balance* ( $r= 0.21, p< 0.01$ ) and a strong negative correlation with *equal access to benefits* and *organisational time demands* ( $r= -0.30, p< 0.01$ ).

*Equal work expectations* correlated significantly with *managerial support for work-family balance* ( $r= 0.35, p< 0.001$ ) and correlated negatively with *career consequences* ( $r= -0.28, p< 0.05$ ).

*Career consequences* had a highly significant negative correlation with *managerial support for work-family balance* ( $r= -0.45, p< 0.0001$ ) and *organisational time demands* had a highly significant negative correlation with *managerial support for work-family balance* ( $r= -0.52, p< 0.0001$ ). *Career consequences* had a highly significant positive relationship with *organisational time demands* ( $r= 0.52, p< 0.0001$ ).

*Affective commitment* correlated significantly positively with *perceived organisational support* ( $r= 0.59, p< 0.0001$ ), *social inclusion* ( $r= 0.30, p< 0.001$ ), *equal work opportunities* ( $r= 0.29, p< 0.05$ ), and *managerial support for work-family balance* ( $r= 0.30, p< 0.01$ ). *Affective commitment* correlated significantly negatively with *organisational time demands* ( $r= -0.27, p< 0.05$ ) and *career consequences* ( $r= -0.30, p< 0.01$ ).

It is important to note that none of the intercorrelations between the work-life scales exceeded .70 indicating that there was little likelihood that multicollinearity would be a problem in regression analyses and that the scales were distinct from one another (Hair et al., 2003). The sample size was too small for factor analysis to be conducted (Hair et al., 2003).

**Table 1.***Correlation analysis for summary scales*

VARIABLE	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Outcome and mediator</i>												
<b>1 Affective Commitment</b>	3.76	0.63	(0.85)									
<b>2 Perceived Organisational Support</b>	3.6	0.71	<b>0.59****</b>	(0.90)								
<i>Supportive work-life culture</i>												
<b>3 Social Inclusion</b>	3.39	0.52	<b>0.30**</b>	<b>0.32**</b>	(0.80)							
<b>4 Equal Work Opportunities</b>	4.04	0.54	<b>0.29*</b>	<b>0.45****</b>	0.21	(0.93)						
<b>5 Equal Access to Benefits</b>	3.87	0.6	0.2	<b>0.31**</b>	0.2	<b>0.48****</b>	(0.91)					
<b>6 Equal Respect for Non-work Roles</b>	3.61	0.79	0.14	<b>0.24*</b>	<b>0.23*</b>	<b>0.42****</b>	<b>0.50****</b>	(0.79)				
<b>7 Equal Work Expectations</b>	3.49	0.64	0.02	-0.05	-0.12	<b>0.29*</b>	0.21	<b>0.25*</b>	(0.85)			
<b>8 Managerial Support</b>	3.61	0.59	<b>0.30**</b>	<b>0.57****</b>	<b>0.44****</b>	0.21	<b>0.30**</b>	<b>0.35****</b>	-0.2	(0.84)		
<b>9 Career Consequences</b>	2.82	0.71	<b>-0.30**</b>	<b>-0.27*</b>	<b>-0.40****</b>	<b>-0.29*</b>	-0.21	<b>-0.28*</b>	0.12	<b>-0.44****</b>	(0.70)	
<b>10 Organisational Time Demands</b>	3	1.02	<b>-0.27*</b>	<b>-0.42****</b>	<b>-0.31*</b>	-0.22	<b>-0.30**</b>	-0.21	0.07	<b>-0.52****</b>	<b>0.52****</b>	(0.91)

Notes. N = 85 after casewise deletion of missing data; \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; \*\*\*\*p<.0001; ( $\alpha$ ) Cronbach's alpha reflected on the diagonal.



## Regression analysis

Regression analysis was performed to examine the variance explained by the dimensions of *supportive work-life culture* in *affective commitment* and *perceived organisational support* to find evidence to support proposition 2 and proposition 3.

Proposition 2 stated that a *supportive work-life culture* will not predict *affective commitment*. This proposition was based on previous findings where only one dimension of culture, *social inclusion*, helped to uniquely predict *affective commitment* (Casper et al. 2007). The linear combination of the eight dimensions of a supportive culture predicted 18% of the variance of *affective commitment* but the overall model was not significant. Refer to Table 2. This proposition was supported but the regression analysis revealed that *equal work opportunities* and *managerial support for work-life balance* uniquely predicted *perceived organisational support* not *affective commitment*. Refer to Table 3.

**Table 2.**

*Regression of affective commitment on supportive work-life culture*

	Affective Commitment				
	Beta	Std. error of Beta	B	Std. error of B	p-level
<i>Supportive work-life culture</i>					
1 Social Inclusion	0.1353	0.1240	0.1649	0.1511	0.2788
2 Equal Work Opportunities	0.1944	0.1329	0.2273	0.1554	0.1481
3 Equal Access to Benefits	0.0170	0.1360	0.0181	0.1442	0.9003
4 Equal Respect for Non-work Roles	-0.1021	0.1361	-0.0812	0.1083	0.4554
5 Equal Work Expectations	0.0485	0.1230	0.0482	0.1224	0.6944
6 Managerial Support for work-family	0.1461	0.1446	0.1554	0.1538	0.3157
7 Career Consequences	-0.1136	0.1378	-0.1013	0.1228	0.4122
8 Organisational Time Demands	-0.8760	0.1388	-0.0537	0.0851	0.5299

Note.  $n = 79$  after casewise deletion of missing data  $R^2 = 0.187$   $p < 0.5680$

Proposition 3 explored the relationship between *supportive work-life culture*, the proposed mediator, *perceived organisational support* and the dependent variable, *affective commitment*. It was proposed that a *supportive work-life culture* would operate through *perceived organisational support* to predict *affective commitment*. The Baron and Kenny (1986) approach was used to test mediation and the following steps were followed:

Step 1: The relationship between dimensions of a *supportive work-life culture* and *affective commitment* was examined. Table 1 shows that *social inclusion*, *equal work opportunities* and *managerial support* significantly positively relate to *affective commitment*. *Career consequences* and *organisational time demands* significantly negatively relate to *affective commitment*.

Step 2: The relationship between *perceived organisational support* and the dimensions of *supportive work-life culture* was examined. Table 1 shows that there is a highly significant positive relationship between *social inclusion*, *equal work opportunities*, *equal access to benefits*, *equal respect for non-work roles*, *managerial support* and *perceived organisational support*. There is also a highly significant negative relationship between *organisational time demands*, *career consequences* and *perceived organisational support*.

Step 3: *Equal work opportunities* and *managerial support* are significant when predicting the variance in *perceived organisational support*, refer to Table 3. *Equal work opportunities* ( $\beta = 0.312$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and *managerial support* ( $\beta = 0.302$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) were found to be significant predictors of *affective commitment*. A regression was fitted to identify whether *perceived organisational support* acts as a mediator between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

*Equal work opportunities* and *managerial support* were significant when trying to explain the variation in *perceived organisational support* but when *perceived organisational support* is introduced they both become insignificant when one tries to explain the variation in *affective commitment*. Refer to Table 4.

**Table 3.**

*Regression of supportive work-life culture and perceived organisational support*

	Perceived Organisational Support				
	Beta	SE of beta	B	SE of B	p-level
<i>Supportive work-life culture</i>					
<b>1 Social Inclusion</b>	0.0534	0.1014	0.0730	0.1387	0.6003
<b>2 Equal Work Opportunities</b>	0.3960	0.1081	0.5163	0.1408	<b>0.0004****</b>
<b>3 Equal Access to Benefits</b>	0.0079	0.1106	0.0094	0.1307	0.9428
<b>4 Equal Respect for Non-work Roles</b>	-0.0832	0.1106	-0.0739	0.0982	0.4511
<b>5 Equal Work Expectations</b>	-0.0577	0.1000	-0.0639	0.1108	0.5656
<b>6 Managerial Support</b>	0.4534	0.1175	0.5378	0.1394	<b>0.0002****</b>
<b>7 Career Consequences</b>	0.1308	0.1120	0.1299	0.1112	0.2466
<b>8 Organisational Time Demands</b>	-0.1571	0.1129	0.1083	0.0778	0.1684

Note.  $n = 78$  after casewise deletion of missing data \*\*\*\*  $p < 0.0001$   $R^2 = .47$

**Table 4.**

*Mediated regression analysis*

Predicting Affective Commitment	B	SE	p-level
<b>Perceived organisational support</b>	0.5636	0.1037	0.0000****
<b>Equal work opportunities</b>	0.0630	0.1011	0.5325
<b>Managerial support for work-family balance</b>	-0.0679	0.1189	0.5697

Note.  $n = 82$ . \*\*\*\*  $p < 0.00001$   $R^2 = .39$

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the work-life issues of employees who make different life choices and fully understand the impact of the perceived supportiveness of the organisational culture on their affective commitment to the organisation.

### **A uniformly supportive work-life culture**

Thompson et al. (1999) developed a construct and measure of a family-friendly culture to explore the how organisational culture can facilitate or impede employee efforts to balance the responsibilities between their work and family lives. Casper et al. (2007) investigated how the dimensions of family-friendly culture relate to the dimensions of singles-friendly culture to establish whether organisations that support employee family commitments may also be equally supportive of other non-work commitments.

Proposition 1 was supported and significant relationships between the dimensions were found. Managerial support for work-family balance exhibited the strongest relationships with social inclusion, equal respect for non-work roles and equal access to employee benefits. This finding suggests that managers who support work-family balance may also support non-work roles other than family, encourage access to benefits for all employees regardless of parental status and be sensitive to employee social needs. In a study of the work-life balance approach in four financial services organisations, Wise and Bond (2003) found that many managers informally allowed leave of absence and flexibility for a range of non-work priorities but that formal company policy focused on family-friendly allowances and benefits.

This indicates that the companies formally recognised the work-life commitments of working parents but alternative work-life commitments such as lifelong learning, sports or artistic pursuits had not yet been formally recognized but were informally recognised by supervisors.

Greenberger et al. (1989) and Behson (2005) found that informal organisational support for work-family balance such as organisational culture, supervisor support and increased employee autonomy accounts for significant variance in employee outcomes such as job satisfaction and absenteeism. Managers and organisation norms can influence whether employees use work-family policies (Perlow, 1995; Thompson et al. (1999); Casper et al. (2007).

According to Schneider (as cited in Thompson et al., 1999) supervisors make implicit and explicit choices about which policies and procedures to adopt and which employee behaviour is rewarded. These choices reflect what is valued and rewarded in the organisation. This research highlights the role of organisational culture as a facilitator and enabler of employees' efforts to balance the demands between their commitments to work and commitments to activities to life beyond work. Organisations that provide family-friendly benefits are not necessarily unsupportive of employees without family commitments. Supportive supervisors may be sensitive to employees with commitments other than childcare.

Career consequences associated with utilising work-family benefits were strongly negatively related to social inclusion, equal respect for non-work roles, equal work opportunities and equal work expectations. The items used for this scale explored employee perceptions of organisation norms for using or participating in work-family programs or policies (e.g. "In this organisation employees who participate in available work-family programs are viewed as less serious about their careers").

This finding suggests that the deterrents to benefit utilisation are universal in an organisation and when employees believe that they will be penalised for using supportive benefits they refrain from using them (Perlow, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999; Casper et al., 2007, Swody & Powell, 2007). Benefits and policies designed to assist employees juggle the demands between their work and life roles can be thwarted if cultural norms reward employees for not using supportive benefits such as extended leave to care for newborn children or using flextime to focus on extracurricular studies.

Organisational time demands explored employee perceptions of organisation expectations that all employees prioritise work above life roles and work extended hours in order to achieve advancement (e.g. "To get ahead at his organisation, employees are expected to work more than 50 hours a week, whether at the work place or at home"). A significant negative relationship exists between organisational time demands and two dimensions of singles-friendly culture; social inclusion and equal access to benefits. When employees work long hours or spend their weekends attending to work-related matters it impedes their efforts to balance their work and life roles. It is likely that some employees will be willing to commit to prioritising work above their non-work responsibilities depending on their career or life stage or the extent of their responsibilities outside of work.

### **Supportive work-life culture and affective commitment**

The dimensions of a supportive work-life culture were reliably measured but the extent to which they related to affective commitment differed. The correlation analysis revealed highly significant relationships between the independent variables: social inclusion, equal work opportunities, managerial support for work-family balance, career consequences for utilizing work-family benefits, organisational time demands and the dependent variable: affective commitment. This finding suggests that perceptions of a supportive work-life culture influence employee attitudes towards affective commitment but the extent to which they significantly predict affective commitment is limited. Casper et al. (2007) found that social inclusion was the only dimension that uniquely predicted affective commitment. In this study Proposition 2 was confirmed in that a supportive work-life culture did not significantly predict affective commitment. Instead, perceptions of a supportive work-life culture such as equal work opportunities and managerial support influence affective commitment through perceived organisational support.

Affective commitment of employees indicates an emotional attachment to the organisation and is manifest in certain desirable in-role behaviours such as reduced intention to quit, lower absenteeism and innovation (Mathieu & Zaccaro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1990). Organisation citizenship behaviours are altruistic extra-role behaviours, offered or volunteered by the employee and are beneficial to the organisation such as innovation, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, volunteering to assist with additional tasks and assisting coworkers (Smith, Organ and Near, 1983; Lambert, 2000). Shore and Wayne (1993) investigated whether perceived organisation support or affective commitment were better predictors of organisation citizenship behaviour. The findings suggested that employees who feel they are supported by the organisation will in time reciprocate the inferred commitment by engaging in extra-role behaviours to balance the exchange. Perceived organisational support predicted a significant proportion of the variance in citizenship behaviour.

Tansky (1993) found evidence to suggest that a causal relationship exists between perceptions of overall fairness and organisational commitment which highlights the significance role of creating a culture of fairness. Organisational justice is an area of psychological enquiry that focuses on perceptions of fairness in the workplace and consists of three dimensions (Byrne and Cropanzano, 2001). Procedural justice is the fairness of a process that leads to a specific outcome. Distributive justice is the fairness of the outcome following a process and Interactional justice describes the manner in which an outcome or a decision is administered and emphasizes the quality of interpersonal treatment Bies (as cited in Byrne and Cropanzano, 2001). Sharlicki and Folger (1997) investigated the relationship between organisational justice and deviant behaviours such as sabotage, deliberate carelessness and disobedience and found that when supervisors show adequate concern and sensitivity towards employees, employees are more likely to tolerate unfair processes and outcomes. On the other hand if employees perceive a process unfair and the way in which it is communicated is also perceived to be unfair, they may retaliate with deviant behaviours.

### **The role of perceived organisational support**

Up until recently research in the work-family literature focused on the relationship between availability of supportive benefits and desired outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Osterman, 1995; Glass & Estes, 1997). Thomas and Ganster (1995), and Behson (2005) further investigated the nature of supportive work environments and examined the role of employee perceptions and beliefs that the work environment is in fact supportive. Thomas and Ganster (1995) proposed that supportive work environments consisted of family-friendly policies and family-friendly supervisors. Behson (2005) found that informal support in the form of a supportive organisational culture, supportive supervisor and increased employee autonomy was far more effective than formal policies.



Proposition 3 explored how employees who experience a supportive work-life culture are likely to report perceived organisational support. Equal work opportunities and managerial support for work-family balance predicted a significant variance in perceived organisational support. According to Casper et al. (2007) equal work opportunities exist when employees are promoted or assigned challenging work regardless of their parental or marital status. This dimension of culture is based on a demand for equitable distributive justice and equality. Grandey (2001) defines equitable distributive justice as the distribution of rewards or allocation of resources on the basis of merit. According to the equality rule, resources or rewards are distributed equally, regardless of performance or merit. If employees believe that rewards or resources are allocated on the basis of need they are more likely to be perceived as unfair.

Grandey (2001) argues that family-friendly policies are typically need based allocations which may create perceptions of unfairness. If equal work opportunities predicted perceived organisational support it suggests that perceived fairness in allocation of promotion decisions and challenging work assignments can influence employee attitudes.

Managerial support for work-family balance also helped predict perceived organisational support. Despite the fact that this is originally a dimension of a family-friendly culture, managerial support predicts a significant amount of variance in perceived organisational support. This suggests that employees' belief in the supportiveness of the culture, regardless of demographic variables or life choice decisions is dependent on the perceived supportiveness of their manager. Thomas and Ganster (1995) found that employees who believed their supervisors supported their efforts to balance the demands between their work and family responsibilities reported more control over these demands. According to Levinson (1965) actions of organisational agents such as supervisors or managers are presumed to be actions of the organisation itself.

This personification of the organisation has significant implications for how employees experience the supportiveness of the organisation.

Proposition 3 also contended that the effects of a supportive work-life culture operate via perceived organisational support to predict variance in affective commitment of all employees. The study found evidence to suggest that equal work opportunities and managerial support for work-family balance operated via perceived organisational support to influence affective commitment to the organisation. Behson (2002) found that perceived organisation support has a stronger effect on organisational outcomes such as affective commitment than specific perceptions such as supervisor support. However, specific support perceptions can facilitate perceived organisational support and influence affective commitment indirectly. In this study managerial support for work-family balance and equal work opportunities predicted 47% of the variance in perceived organisational support.

Four of the six items in the measure of equal work opportunities used the organisation as referent. For the purpose of the present study the items with the highest factor loadings were selected and the majority referred to the organisation. This finding suggests that when decisions about advancement and promotion are made, it is important for all employees to believe that the decision is based on equality or equity but not on need. If an employee received a promotion based on the number of his/her dependents it would be perceived as unfair. Whereas if an employee received a promotion based on exceptional performance it would be perceived as fair. If the organisational culture awards promotions on the basis of performance it influences affective commitment of employees through perceived organisational support. Equal work opportunities may be equally important for employees with families in that their household is dependent on a portion of their additional income. Single employees may also be concerned about their financial stability and access to work opportunities if they are solely responsible for income, particularly if they are single parents.

Glass and Estes (1997) found that employees who feel that their prospects for promotion or reward will be jeopardised by taking advantage of work-family benefits and will avoid using them. This finding highlights the significance of the perceived supportiveness of the organisational culture. If for example employees believe that the organisation rewards those who do not utilize supportive benefits and awards promotions on the basis of face time or prioritising work above non-work it may influence the perceived supportiveness and indirectly affective commitment of employees. In a comprehensive review of the perceived organisational support literature, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that fairness of organisational procedures had the strongest positive relationship with perceived organisational support followed by managerial support and then organisational rewards such as promotion and pay decisions.

Managerial support for work-life balance was another dimension of a supportive work-life culture that influenced affective commitment via perceived organisational support. Thompson et al. (1999) found that managerial support was not directly related to affective commitment which is inconsistent with previous research (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Greenberger et al., 1989).

Perceived organisational support describes an attitudinal response to the organisation as a whole which is distinct from employee attitudes towards their supervisor (Allen 2001). However it is possible that aspects of the organisational culture such as managerial support for work-family can influence affective commitment indirectly through perceived organisational support. In addition employees may believe that their supervisor is supportive but may hold a general belief that the organisation as a whole is unsupportive (Allen, 2001). According Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) affective commitment is the organisational outcome most strongly associated with perceived organisational support.

The significance of this finding is that equal work opportunities and managerial support for work-family predict perceived organisational support and operate via perceived organisational support to predict variance in affective commitment.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

This study was an exploration of the work-life issues of employees in order to further understand the impact that perceptions of a supportive work-life culture have on employee attitudes and behaviour. The past decade of research on the work-life issues of individuals reflects a fixation with the work-life issues of married and single employees with childcare and parenting responsibilities. Recent research in the literature reflects the need for a broader analysis of the work-life issues of all employees, regardless of their life choices (Casper et al., 2007; Ransome, 2007; Swanberg et al. 2005).

The response rate in this study was too small to conduct a factor analysis to provide evidence that the items used are indicative of the underlying construct of a supportive work-life culture. Future researchers should ensure a larger sample size so that factor analysis can be conducted.

Future researchers are advised to investigate differences across groups as group membership may affect perceptions of a supportive work-life culture. For example, Casper et al. (2007) found that employees with families were more likely to perceive fairness of cultural norms such as equal work expectations and equal work opportunities than single employee with no children. According to Ransome (2007) there are two moments of choice that determine the scope and nature of employees' total responsibility burden. The first moment of choice occurs when individuals make choices about life-style and life-planning such as family size, marital status and preferred standard of living.

The second moment of choice arrives at the point where work-life balance decisions are made about how individuals will meet their commitments to their choice. The scope and nature of employees' total responsibility burden will vary according to their life choice but the extent to which they believe the organisation is uniformly support of their need to balance the demands between their work and life roles requires further study.

According to Kirby and Krone (as cited in Casper et al. 2007) single childfree workers are expected to travel more frequently than employees with families and are subject to greater overwork than employees with family obligations. Swanberg et al. (2005) also found that parents were more likely to get time off than non-parents.

Allen (2001) conducted a study that investigated the differences between global perceptions of the supportiveness of the culture and perceptions of the supportiveness of the supervisor and found that global perceptions of supportiveness were strongly related to affective commitment. If single employees feel they are under-rewarded as a result of their life choice not to have children it raises concerns about how these beliefs will influence their attitude towards the organisation as it does imply a violation of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1997). In addition the manner in which supervisors manage perceived unfairness has a significant impact on employee retaliation tendencies. Sharlicki and Folger (1997) found that employees are willing to tolerate perceived violations of procedural and distributive justice if they believe that their supervisor has shown adequate sensitivity and concern and treated them with dignity and respect.

Thompson et al. (1999) developed and tested a measure of a family-friendly culture but the demographic profile of the respondents was highly educated white collar employees. Casper et al. (2007) found that less educated employees and clerical employees felt that the organisation was less supportive of their need to balance their work and life roles. Further study of the role of occupational and education level has on perceptions of the supportiveness of the culture is needed.

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