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Is a Good Boss Always a Plus? LMX, Family–Work Conflict, and Remote Working Satisfaction during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationships between leader–member exchange (LMX) and workers’ perceptions of family–work conflict (FWC) and between LMX and satisfaction with remote working (SRW). It also assessed the moderating effect of employees’ ability to cope (AC) with the work in the interaction between LMX and FWC. Using a cross-sectional design, this study tested a moderated mediation model using Model 7 of Macro “PROCESS” for SPSS. The study sample consisted of 455 employees engaged in remote working activities during the COVID-19 health emergency. Surprisingly, the results showed that LMX was positively associated with FWC, while the latter was negatively associated with SWR. There were neither direct nor indirect effects of LMX on SRW, but the moderation of the AC with work on the relationship between LMX and FWC was significant and negative. In particular, the results showed that, in workers who reported lower values of AC, the increase in the quality of LMX also corresponded to an increase in FWC. Conversely, in employees with very high AC, as LMX increased, FWC decreased. Good relationships with the boss in a new and challenging situation such as remote working during COVID-19 threatens employees’ well-being when accompanied by poor coping skills. This study sheds light on these mechanisms and opens new questions in the literature about family–work conflict and remote working.

Keywords: remote working; leader-member exchange; family–work conflict; ability to cope; remote work satisfaction; COVID-19



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1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the transformation process of the labor world, encouraging the use of remote work arrangements. Remote working is one of the several forms of agile work, a type of work designed and structured to facilitate workers in carrying out their activities and, at the same time, to ensure greater productivity for organizations.

The recent health emergency has forced millions of employees worldwide to work from home by remotizing work and making houses the new office for many employees. However, in many cases, they were unprepared to manage this transition and were without guidelines or policies regulating the use of remote working (Galanti et al. 2021). These changes have had multiple and often contradictory implications. For instance, from the literature, we know that, on the one hand, remote work facilitates employees’ autonomy and enhances productivity perceptions (Niebuhr et al. 2022; ter Hoeven and van Zoonen 2015; Toscano and Zappalà 2020). On the other hand, remote working involves hyper-connection, social isolation, and the overcoming of traditional work–life boundaries (Allen et al. 2021; Molino et al. 2020; Taskin and Devos 2005).

The widespread adoption of remote working has generated the need to balance family and work commitments. When such balance was more challenging to achieve, remote working created the condition for potential family–work conflict (Galanti et al. 2021; Xiao et al. 2021; Di Fiore et al. 2021) and affected employees' satisfaction with the experience of pandemic-related telework (Toscano and Zappalà 2020). Nonetheless, work–family conflict is not the necessary result of this situation. Employees can find some help, for example, in the relationship with their superiors and their coping abilities. Research has consistently shown that support at work, especially supervisor support, is negatively related to work–family conflict (Anderson et al. 2002; Frye and Breaugh 2004). In particular, high LMX seems to be associated with a minor work interference with family (Golden 2006; Major and Cleveland 2007; Major et al. 2008). There is instead a gap in studies on family interference with work. Therefore, using data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study aims to investigate the relationship between leader–member exchange (LMX) and workers' perceptions of family–work conflict (FWC) and between leader–member exchange (LMX) and satisfaction with remote working (SRW). In addition, the study explored if the individual resource consisting of the employees' job-related ability to cope (AC) moderates the relationship between LMX and FWC.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Leader-Member Exchange and Supervisor Support

The theory of social exchange (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005) represents the theoretical foundation of LMX. According to this theory, supervisors employ a social exchange framework, in which different types of relationships are established with subordinates, ranging from lower to higher quality exchanges (Kang et al. 2011). Then, the higher the relationship quality, the higher the experience of trust, mutual bonding, and respect.

Supervisors have expectations about employees' behavior. Even employees have expectations about their bosses' behaviors. It results in a perspective that does not consider organizational hierarchy but consists of a bidirectional relationship where both parties feel that their investment deserves a response that matches it. Thereby, the relationship between leader and members has a substantial impact on different work experiences, including managing the boundaries between work and family life.

Scholars focused their attention on the role of leaders as facilitators of the employees' effective management of their work–life interactions. In particular, several previous studies point out that LMX reduces work–family conflict (Major and Morganson 2011; Major and Lauzun 2010; Michel et al. 2011), which is the interference that work has on employees' family life (Netemeyer et al. 1996). In a good relationship between the boss and employees, the two parties can establish affordable work commitments, and employees can receive the appropriate support in conducting their work. However, less clear is currently how a good relationship with superiors can influence workers' family–work conflict, which is instead the interference that the family has on the work (Netemeyer et al. 1996), and that assumes particular importance in the remote working context, where work is performed at home and, in many cases, in the presence of family members.

The relationship between supervisors and employees may not only be analyzed using the social exchange theory. It may also rely on the role theory, according to which people enact predictable behaviors based on their socially recognized role at the current time (Biddle 1986). Following this approach, supervisors—as such—should support the employees of their workgroup in accomplishing their work tasks because this is part of their role. This process should also happen with remote working, although this arrangement involves additional difficulties for supervisors, compounded by distance and more difficult monitoring possibilities (Mello 2007).

Hammer et al. (2009) theorized about supportive supervisor behaviors, a category of helpful behaviors exhibited by supervisors towards family needs. According to this framework, workers who feel well supported by their supervisor will manage family and work boundaries more effectively. Golden (2021) underlined that this boundary

management seems possible only if supervisors provide employees with adequate levels of support. This very plausible scenario finds some initial confirmation in a study conducted by Karatepe and Kilic (2007) on frontline employees in the tourism industry. However, at the moment, no study has examined this particular relationship in a remote working context, especially as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, the first hypothesis of this study is:

Hypothesis 1(H1). *In remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, LMX is negatively associated with employees' family-work conflict.*

2.2. Job Satisfaction in Remote Working

Job satisfaction indicates the extent to which employees' expectations are reflected in their work experience (Rafferty and Griffin 2009). It is related to individual and organizational behaviors such as performance, turnover, organizational citizenship behavior, and counterproductive work behavior (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2012; Judge et al. 2017).

Previous studies examined the relationship between the adoption of flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction. The meta-analysis conducted by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found strong evidence for a positive association between remote working and job satisfaction. However, other studies indicate how remote working leads to enhanced job satisfaction if it is used in conjunction with, rather than as a complete replacement for, in-person work because, in this way, face-to-face relationships with colleagues and flexibility are maintained (Allen et al. 2015; Caillier 2012).

Job satisfaction is a construct that usually reflects workers' satisfaction with their overall work experience. However, during the pandemic, job satisfaction has considerably overlapped with remote work satisfaction since work was conducted entirely, or almost exclusively, online. This analogy might suggest that LMX and FWC have, with remote working satisfaction, respectively, the same positive and negative relationship that the literature indicated for job satisfaction in the past. Even a study conducted by Golden (2006) suggested that remote workers' satisfaction is related to good relationships with supervisors and low levels of work-family conflict. Nevertheless, the existence of these relationships even in the pandemic-like context of full-time employment has not yet been explored. Hence, according to these statements, this study's second and third hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 2(H2). *In remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, LMX is positively associated with remote working satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 3(H3). *In remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, FWC is negatively associated with remote working satisfaction.*

The previous two hypotheses suggest that LMX and FWC have, respectively, a positive and a negative relationship with remote working satisfaction. This framework suggests that LMX directly affects remote working satisfaction and indirectly affects remote working satisfaction. It would reduce FWC, which would increase remote working satisfaction. This mechanism is of great interest considering that, during the pandemic, the houses were inhabited not only by remote workers but also by their family members who, similar to them, were suffering a condition of confinement (Xiao et al. 2021). Therefore, we believe that:

Hypothesis 4(H4). *In remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, FWC mediates the relationship between LMX and remote working satisfaction.*

2.3. The Moderating Role of the Ability to Cope between LMX and FWC

Finally, we point out that the relationship between LMX and FWC deserves to be further explored. According to Golden (2021), working at home modifies the traditional separation between employees' office and home, and, consequently, even the traditional balance between work and family is likely to be altered. In addition, the longer the

remote working experience, the more probable the family interferes with the job tasks that the remote worker has to carry out (Golden 2021), which becomes more relevant during the pandemic, exposing remote workers to a higher risk of FWC. For instance, many studies observed that the presence of children at home, as well as the need to contribute to household management, were associated with employees' decreased physical and psychological well-being (Donati et al. 2021; Xiao et al. 2021) and with the blurring of work and non-work boundaries (Allen et al. 2021).

In this context, the relationship between LMX and FWC, which we assume is generally harmful, may merit essential distinctions. As noted above, the supervisor–employee relationship depends on the mutual exchange between these individuals and the expectations, even of support, that this exchange and the held roles entail. This consideration has clear, practical implications. A good relationship with the boss may support employees in managing FWC, for example, by aiding them in scheduling work in a way that is closer to their needs to balance home and work commitments. However, following the Human Agency Theory (Bandura 2001), we believe this is not enough. Employees should implement task management behaviors designed to make their FWC management more efficient, especially keeping an eye out for the unexpected, whether or not in concert with supervisor support.

Following Bandura (2001), we argue that self-efficacy, the favorable judgment about one's ability to perform tasks, plays a fundamental role as a buffer of the negative relationship between LMX and FWC. Nevertheless, in this study, we retained a form of self-efficacy that is not general, but job-related and focused on people's capacity for adjusting, even more than on performing tasks. Thus, in this study, we considered ability to cope (AC), the employees' ability to face and cope with their work tasks in the nuances of practically managing problems, understanding what is needed to do to get work done, and being confident in how to perform work when it presents snags or impediments.

Currently, no study has investigated the moderating role of AC in the relationship between LMX and FWC. Yet, several studies have found that self-efficacy is positively associated with employees' ability to cope with work (Staples et al. 1999; Bandura 1982; Saks 1995). Therefore, we considered this variable adequate to highlight our supposed moderation. To bridge a gap in the literature, we argued that high levels of AC with job tasks enhance the negative relationship between leader–member exchange and the conflict between family demands and work responsibilities. On the other hand, we argue that low levels of AC do not modify the leader's impact on family–work conflict. For this reason, our last hypothesis states that:

Hypothesis 5(H5). *In remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' job-related ability to cope (AC) positively moderates the relationship between LMX and employees' FWC.*

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Procedure

The cross-sectional study presented here was conducted from April to June 2020. The data collection took place online through a questionnaire administered via the Qualtrics platform, which took about 15–20 min to be completed. The study sample consisted of 455 employees of public and private organizations (females = 67.7%; prevalent age groups: 26–35 y.o. for 27.4% and 46–55 y.o. for 26.9%) working remotely during the COVID-19 health emergency.

Participants in the study were well educated, as 72.5% had a university education. Their average organizational tenure was 12.80 (SD = 12.05). More than half (52.3%) worked remotely from a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 90 days at the time of the questionnaire completion. A minority of them, 7.5%, had been working remotely since before the pandemic (for more than six months at the time of data collection). In addition, 75.4% of them worked at least 19 h per week remotely (84% of them, more than 25 h per week).

Information about the purposes of the study, the voluntary and anonymous participation, and privacy terms were provided on the first page of the questionnaire. Each participant provided informed consent before participating in the study.

3.2. Measures

Besides socio-demographic data (gender, age, education, tenure, etc.), the questionnaire included the measures described below. For each of these scales, a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree"—5 = "Strongly agree") was used.

Leader-member exchange (LMX) was assessed through the 7-item scale by [Graen and Uhl-Bien \(1995\)](#). An example of an item is: "My supervisor understands my job problems and needs".

Family-work conflict (FWC) was assessed by adopting three items from the scale by [Netemeyer et al. \(1996\)](#). An example of an item is: "Family stress interferes with my ability to perform work-related tasks".

Satisfaction with remote working (SRW) was measured by adapting three items from the scale by [Pond and Geyer \(1991\)](#). An example of an item is: "If a friend asked me if it was appropriate to work remotely, I would recommend it".

Ability to cope (AC) was assessed through the 4-item scale by [Staples et al. \(1999\)](#). An example of an item is: "I usually know how to handle problems that occur in my job".

Control variables: According to the literature on remote working ([Allen et al. 2015](#); [Gajendran and Harrison 2007](#); [Galanti et al. 2021](#); [Xiao et al. 2021](#)), we decided to include (1) gender (1 = M; 2 = F), (2) age group (1 = under 25; 2 = 26–35; 3 = 36–45; 4 = 46–55; 5 = 56–65; 6 = over 65), (3) hours in a week spent working remotely (1 = 1–6; 2 = 7–12; 3 = 13–18; 4 = 18–24; 5 = 25+), (4) number of house occupants (1 = 0; 2 = 1; 3 = 2; 4 = 3; 5 = 4+), and (5) experience with remote working (1 = Less than a month; 2 = 1–3 months; 3 = 4–6 months; 4 = 6–12 months; 5 = Over 12 months) as control variables. These variables were measured in the first part of the questionnaire, in the section related to the socio-demographic variables.

3.3. Data Analysis

To assess the structure of the measurement model and validate the measures used, we ran two confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs), one by grouping all items into their respective factors and one by grouping all items into a single factor. Convergent and divergent validity and the reliability of the scales were evaluated by computing, respectively, the average variance extracted (AVE), the maximum shared variance (MSV), and the composite reliability (CR). After evaluating the validity and reliability of the measures, we computed descriptive analyses, correlations, and Cronbach's alphas. We computed Pearson's correlations for testing correlations between continuous and dichotomous (gender) variables. We used Spearman's correlations to assess the relationships that each model study construct had with the ordinal control variables. Finally, we tested the study hypotheses using Model 7 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS ([Hayes 2017](#)). All analyses were performed using [IBM Corp's \(2020a, 2020b\)](#).

4. Results

4.1. Validity and Reliability of the Scales

The structural independence of the measures was evaluated by conducting two CFAs. The fit of the model in which the four scales were grouped in four different factors was satisfactory (chi-square = 357.40; df = 113; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.05). On the other hand, the fit of the model in which all the items were grouped in a single factor was very poor (chi-square = 2408.00; df = 119; CFI = 0.50; TLI = 0.43; RMSEA = 0.21; SRMR = 0.19).

In the four factors model, the minimum standardized factor loading was 0.62. The minimum CR value was instead 0.76, while the minimum AVE and the maximum MSV were, respectively, 0.44 and 0.13. All these values, together with the fact that the square

root of every AVE value was larger than any correlation among pairs of factors, suggested that the measured scales had optimal reliability and validity.

4.2. Descriptive Analyses and Correlations

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach's α s are reported in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows moderate levels of LMX and good perceptions of RW satisfaction and ability to cope. The experienced FWC was lower than the intermediate value of the response scale.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas (between brackets), and Pearson's correlations between continuous/dichotomous (gender) variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. LMX	3.59	0.96	(0.93)	−0.01	0.07	0.20 **	−0.07
2. F–W conflict	2.13	1.09		(0.88)	−0.32 **	−0.23 **	0.06
3. RW satisfaction	3.91	1.04			(0.90)	0.21 **	−0.05
4. Ability to cope	4.11	0.63				(0.75)	−0.12 *
5. Gender	1.68	0.47					

Note: $n = 466$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlations of the study variables with the ordinal control variables.

	Age	Hours of RW	N. House Occupants	RW Experience
LMX	−0.03	0.02	0.08	0.02
F–W conflict	−0.03	−0.06	0.19 **	−0.02
RW satisfaction	0.00	0.17 **	−0.01	0.21 **
Ability to cope	0.20 **	−0.01	0.04	0.14 **
M	3.28	4.19	2.39	3.28
SD	1.24	1.25	1.25	0.97

Note: $n = 466$; ** $p < 0.01$.

The correlations between study variables show that RW satisfaction was associated with all the other model variables, except with LMX, since the correlation was not significant. As expected, AC was positively correlated with LMX ($r = 0.20$; $p < 0.01$) and RW satisfaction ($r = 0.21$; $p < 0.01$) and negatively correlated with FWC ($r = -0.23$; $p < 0.01$). Finally, RW experience was correlated with several studied variables.

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

We tested the hypotheses of this study by running the moderated mediation model in PROCESS for SPSS, controlling for gender, age group, hours in a week spent working remotely, the number of house occupants, and experience with remote working. Figure 1 shows that LMX was significantly but positively related to FWC ($B = 0.88$; $p < 0.01$), thus supporting Hypothesis 1 for the existence of a significant relationship, but showing a direction opposite to the hypothesized one. In contrast, LMX was not associated with RW satisfaction ($B = 0.07$; $p = 0.14$), not supporting Hypothesis 2. The relationship between FWC and RW satisfaction was instead positive and significant ($B = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$), supporting H3. The mediation hypothesis (H4), according to which LMX relates through FWC with RW satisfaction, was not supported. The conditional effects of X on Y at each level of AC were not significant, although a comparison of these not-significant indirect effects showed significant differences among them (index of moderated mediation $B = 0.06$; [0.01; 12]). Hypothesis 5 was instead supported because AC moderated the relationship between LMX and FWC ($B = -0.21$; $p < 0.01$), albeit with a different sign from that hypothesized. Given the opposite sign resulting from H1 and H5, this result was coherent with the hypothesized reasoning, because AC shows anyway to be a resource for workers when considering the relationship between LMX and FWC. Figure 2 shows the plot of the moderation of AC on the relationship between LMX and FWC.

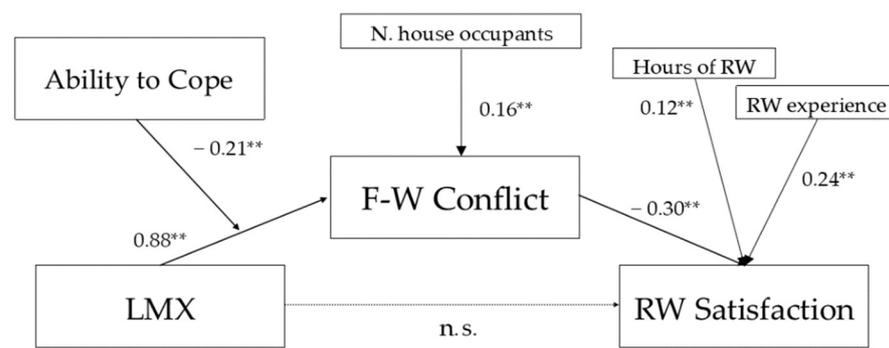


Figure 1. Tested model. ** $p < 0.01$; n.s. = not significant.

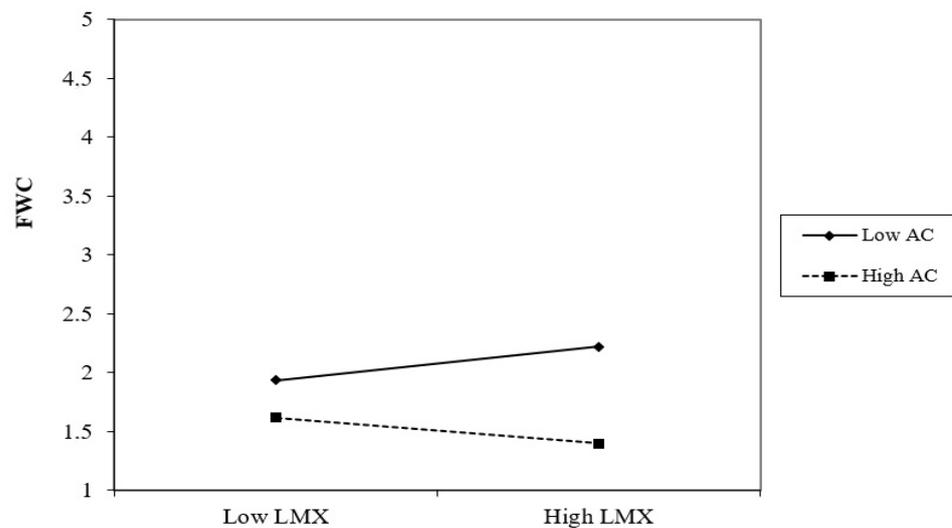


Figure 2. Moderation effect of AC on the relationship between LMX and FWC.

Figure 1 shows the tested model and reports the values of the control variables having a significant effect on the model testing. About this last point, it is noted that the number of house occupants showed a significant effect on FWC ($B = 0.16$; $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the hours per week of remote working ($B = 0.12$; $p < 0.01$) and the experience of employees with the RW ($B = 0.24$; $p < 0.01$) was positively related to the RW satisfaction.

5. Discussion

This study focused on remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic and assessed whether family–work conflict mediated the relationship between leader–member exchange and RW satisfaction. Furthermore, the study addressed the role of the ability to cope in modulating the supposed negative relationship between LMX and FWC.

The results supported most of the hypotheses, although some in the opposite direction than expected, and they did not support other hypotheses. LMX was related to FWC, which, in turn, was related to RW satisfaction. However, the relationship between LMX and FWC was in the opposite direction than expected, and there was no significant correlation between LMX and RW satisfaction. These results are against our expectations.

In particular, the positive relationship between LMX and FWC seems particularly relevant. It suggests that a good relationship with the boss, related in previous research to multiple good outcomes, in remote working during the pandemic, risks fueling FWC. Although theories suggest that the relationship between LMX and FWC is expected to be negative, the pandemic probably created the condition in which leaders contributed to increased family–work conflict. According to social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005), the supervisors' expectations that remote workers maintained the same performance standard as in the office prompted homeworkers to work harder during the

pandemic, neglecting their family members' needs. For example, intense work at home stemming from the desire to meet supervisors' expectations might have led employees to neglect their duties of care for children, elderly parents, or generally occupants of the home. These people, seeing themselves disregarded, may have sought the employees' help and support, interfering with their work. Therefore, the too-close relationship with the boss might have acted as a trigger for family–work conflict. At the same time, it is noteworthy that workers with a less positive relationship with their supervisor report less family–work conflict.

However, the positive and robust relationship between LMX and family–work conflict does not seem to be the same for everyone. The tested moderation shows the ability of workers to cope with their work makes the difference. According to our results, the positive relationship with the leader results in increased family–work conflict in employees with a lower ability to cope with the work. Conversely, the positive relationship with the leader is associated with a decrease in FWC in workers with a very high AC. This unexpected result might be justified, considering that workers who can better manage their tasks' accomplishments can also better meet supervisors' expectations, thus experiencing lower FWC.

Another unexpected result of this study concerns the absence of any direct relationship between LMX and RW satisfaction. This suggests that employees' satisfaction with remote working is not related to their relationship with the supervisor. Instead, it has to be noted that satisfaction with remote working was positively associated with the number of hours spent working remotely and the experience with remote working. The first result could have different explanations. Typically, the scientific literature suggests that the relationship between remote working adoption and satisfaction is curvilinear. The optimal amount of remote work related to higher satisfaction is around 12–15 h per week (Golden and Veiga 2005; Virick et al. 2010). However, in contrast to previous studies, this one was conducted when COVID-19 represented an unknown and significant threat, with high mortality rates. Working all week long from home may have been an alternative to continue working without the risk of getting sick. Therefore, the possibility of working from home may have acted as a positive surprise for many workers and a reason for satisfaction with this working arrangement.

Regarding the role of previous experience with remote working, a kind of seniority with remote working, the results of our study essentially confirm previous research and show that teleworkers need some time to adjust and fully enjoy the possibilities of this mode of working (Allen et al. 2015; Staples et al. 1999). Thus, employees with more extended remote working experience were more satisfied than those who started working remotely during the pandemic.

A brief comment has to be devoted to the expected but not observed relationship between age and gender from one side, and most of the study variables. Despite the differences in profiles and adaptive abilities between generations (Donati et al. 2021; Raišienė et al. 2020), the advantages and disadvantages of each generation of employees may have been balanced out (Zappalà et al. 2021). For example, younger people may not have much FWC because they are not yet engaged in children's care, but, at the same time, they may have less ability to handle work tasks because of their less work experience. Conversely, middle-aged workers might be engaged in family caregiving activities but be more capable of organizing themselves on the job. Finally, older workers may not have—such as younger workers—much FWC, but they may have less energy and ability to adapt to new work conditions.

Finally, the only difference observed between men and women concerns the ability to cope with one's work, with women reporting lower levels of AC with the work. Anyway, there were no correlations between gender and the study variables of LMX, FWC, and remote working satisfaction. This absence of differences does not mean that men and women have the same problems. Instead, it might emphasize women's adaptability, despite a division of labor generally to their disadvantage (Allen et al. 2015) and their

greater resilience to contexts and challenges demonstrated in crises ([Galanti and Cortini 2019](#)), among which it is possible to include remote working during the early pandemic.

5.1. Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has some limitations that reduce the possibility of generalizing the results to other contexts. A first limitation concerns the data collection period, which corresponds to the first wave of COVID-19. In this period, there was a rapid shift toward remote working together with other severe confinement measures. Future studies should thus observe whether the conclusions of this study are replicated even in less peculiar periods when remote working has become the “new normal” way of working. In addition, the cross-sectional design of the study described only associations between variables and did not account for cause-and-effect relationships. Future studies might examine these same relationships using a cross-lagged or longitudinal design. Third, despite the good sample size, the selection of participants for this study did not follow specific criteria ensuring the sample’s representativeness. On the contrary, we used a convenience sample composed mainly of well-educated employees, with limited experience of remote work, of which we do not have precise details on their working situation (e.g., precise role covered, occupational sector), whose characteristics have in some cases been measured through ordinal variables, as was the case for age.

Future studies should aim to increase the sample representativeness, use more detailed measures and possibly methodologies better considering and detailing the actual experience of the remote workers, such as a multi-method (quantitative and qualitative) design, and more precise measurement instruments.

Despite these open points, we believe that this study enhances knowledge about the so-called “dark side” of LMX, according to which overly close relationships risk generating mutual expectations and tensions, similar to those found in friendly relationships ([Lunsford 2016](#)). We consider we have identified a key factor, the ability to cope with work, as a reducer of the adverse effects of LMX. However, we believe that research needs to identify additional factors to counteract the dark side of LMX.

In addition, recognizing the need to deepen further knowledge on FWC, which is significantly less studied than WFC but equally important, we believe that further studies should also focus on the relationship between FWC and other outcomes, such as employees’ productivity or coworkers’ satisfaction, and not just remote workers’ satisfaction.

Despite all the limitations of the study, we finally underline, however, that we used all the necessary attention for good data collection (e.g., straight-to-the-point language, clear explanations before items, questionnaire pre-tests made by administering it to other researchers and workers before it was officially distributed, etc.). Furthermore, we adopted measures to avoid the risk of common method bias (e.g., positioning of questions in different parts of the questionnaire, use of scales with reverse items, etc.). In addition, we used measures with a solid theoretical basis and good psychometric characteristics, as supported by the results reported in this study.

5.2. Practical Implications

The sudden, unexpected, and extensive adoption of remote working during the pandemic can be interpreted as an indication of workforce agility that, according to [Harsch and Festing \(2020\)](#), can contribute to achieving organizational agility. This latter type of agility is characterized by adaptability and response to environmental changes. More concretely, the pandemic has been a natural experiment showing that both employees and organizations can quickly adapt to this work arrangement. Building on this adaptation experience, taking time to design and implement remote working more adequately will represent an opportunity to reconsider organizational and task procedures, update technological and IT tools, and rethink Human Resource Management strategies (HRM) and enabling systems ([Zappalà et al. 2021](#)).

Organizations and HR officers will have to devote particular attention to leaders' contribution to improving a workforce's effective and satisfactory adoption of remote working. Leaders will have to show commitment to remote working (Kwon and Jeon 2020) to sustain the motivation and involvement of workers and, at the same time, provide them solutions to support their work–life balance. Following Wang and Cotton (2018), adopting a differentiation approach (Becker et al. 2009) in a remote working setting is critical. Our study showed not only that workers are different (e.g., have different levels of coping ability), but also that an indispensable resource, such as LMX, can be a double-edged sword in the experience, at least, of pandemic remote working. For this reason, organizations and HR departments should encourage and train leaders to modulate their relationships with their subordinates to support, especially, employees with lower coping skills. HRM officers should also enhance employees' ability to cope with the activities they have to perform in all circumstances, even in places and with different tools from those used in the office. In addition, to help employees better balance their work and family responsibilities, organizations should design tasks in ways that better suit remote working, figure out the reasonable workload that employees can manage remotely, and monitor remote workers' performance using a goal-oriented approach. Technological and managerial strategies might concern adopting platforms that optimize the asynchrony of work within the workgroups or the planning of hybrid remote working plans, in which working at home alternates with working at the office in the same week. Finally, many organizations and countries are considering introducing the right to disconnection. The goal is to improve not only remote working satisfaction but also remote working performance.

We believe that these ideas are of considerable importance and should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in the human resources departments, taking care, as pointed out by Taskin and Devos (2005), that the management of remote working arrangements remains the ultimate responsibility of the leader and the HR departments and not the individual.

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