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The mediating role of flow and family-work conflict in the relation between leader-member exchanges (LMX) and career outcomes

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The role of Leader-Member Exchanges (LMX) for employee subjective and objective career success has been highlighted by previous studies (e.g., Erdogan et al., 2004; Seibert et al., 2001). The present cross-cultural study offers additional insights by exploring the role of employee perceptions of flow and family-work conflict in the relation between LMX and career outcomes. Flow is a state of consciousness where people become totally immersed in an activity and enjoy it immensely. When flow is applied to the work settings it is defined as "a short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic work motivation (Bakker, 2005, p.27). Employees who enjoy their work and feel happy tend to make a more positive judgment about the quality of their working life, be more creative and show more initiative at work. We therefore suggest that flow will be an important predictor for employee career outcomes, a relation that has not been

explored by previous studies, and that it will further mediate the relationship between LMX and career success. We also explored the role of family-work conflict in the relation between LMX and career outcomes. Family-work conflict (FWC) refers to a situation in which role pressures at home interfere with functioning at work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Few prior studies (e.g., Nikadrou et al., 2008) have explored the relation of FWC and career success and have shown FWC to be a significant predictor for career outcomes. Our sample consists of 588 supervisor-employee pairs from seven different countries (UK, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Greece, Sweden and Poland) employed in the ICT sector. Structural equation modelling analyses have shown employee-rated LMX to be a significant predictor of subjective career success as well as one aspect of objective career success, i.e., bonuses and earnings beyond base salary. Supervisor-rated LMX was a significant predictor for all objective career outcomes. Our results further suggested that flow mediated the relationship between employee-rated LMX and subjective career outcomes, whereas FWC mediated the relationship between supervisor-rated LMX and objective career outcomes. Furthermore, the results were found to be generalizable among countries.

Keywords: leader-member exchange, flow, family-work conflict, career outcomes