

Research Article

COVID-19 and Work-Life Balance: What about Supervisor Support and Employee Proactiveness?

Rajendra Kumar and Uma Mohan Mokashi

London School of Commerce, London, United Kingdom
rajendra.kumar@lsclondon.co.uk; uma.mohan@lsclondon.co.uk

*Correspondence: rajendra.kumar@lsclondon.co.uk

Received: 14th August 2020; Accepted: 19th October 2020; Published: 1st November 2020

Abstract: The authors attempted to investigate how to resolve the growing work-life balance issue occurring due to COVID-19 Pandemic in the higher education sector. On the premise of prominent literature, the study conceptualized a framework to test if supervisor support and employee's proactive work behavior could help address the work-life balance issue. Through applying the quantitative approach, the study collected data from employees working in a higher education institution in the UK. Results of the structural equation modeling found significant association and influence of supervisor support and work-life balance. The study also found a strong affiliation between proactive work behavior and work-life balance. However, proactive work behavior did not moderate supervisor support and work-life balance relationship. The study concluded that both supervisor support and proactive work behavior could be vital in helping employees to achieve their work goals effectively and efficiently without compromising their work-life balance. The study forwards prominent implications to guide practitioners, policymakers and researchers in this domain.

Keywords: *Work-life balance; Supervisor support; Proactive work behavior; Higher education*

1. Introduction

Workplaces have been consistently evolving (Smithikrai & Suwannadet, 2018), and global issues like COVID-19 Pandemic have furthered these changes (Ratten, 2020). Due to this Pandemic, most of the workforce globally were made to work from home (Waizenegger et al., 2020), what seemingly it has affected is the work-life balance. This Pandemic has disturbed the conventional official and non-official work patterns, making it difficult for employees worldwide to suffer a monumental disbalance in their lives (Anwer, 2020). This, in particular to academia, made life miserable for both teaching and non-teaching staff members (Hall et al., 2020). Resultantly, there are challenges faced by organizational scientists to unearth answers to help address these issues.

Moreover, if the outbreak is to continue, it will further damage the work-life balance amongst individuals globally. Therefore, the authors assume this is worthy of empirical attention. Traditionally, it is stated that support at work becomes key (Hutchins & Wang, 2008). For example, facilitation, support, and recognition from the immediate supervisor is seemed empirically vital in boosting individual behaviors and outcomes (Gordon et al., 2019; Aydin & Kalemci Tüzün, 2019; Sangakala et al., 2016). We speculate based on these evidences that supervisor support may turn to be even more vital in tackling challenges faced by employees, particularly in balancing the work-life issues during COVID-19. However,

no evidence is available to confirm this link. Accordingly, the current study also asserts that proactive work behavior can be another critical prospect to tackle the negative consequences of pandemics. Few empirical traces can be underlined, hinting towards the critical role of proactive behavior towards influencing and interacting work-life balance and its association with different factors (Lau et al., 2018). However, scholars are yet to confirm the direct effect of proactive work behavior on work-life balance in a crisis like COVID-19. Following this, to what length proactive work behavior of employees can help them to make the most of supervisor support to enhance work-life balance also remains a mystery. Therefore, the current study examines these critical links in an academic setting whereby teaching and non-teaching staff members are going through tough times, affecting their work-life balance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Standpoint

Conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989) conceptualizes the framework for the present study. The theory is well suited to explain the direct and moderating relationships conceptualized in the present study. According to this, individuals conserve resources that supports their wellbeing. Furthermore, the theory also asserts that individuals appreciate resources that help them to further capitalize upon the available resources to improve their wellbeing. COR is applied by prominent studies investigating supervisor support, job autonomy, and work-life balance.

2.2. Work-Life Balance

The term work-life balance (WLB) denotes how individuals see and experience working well with professional and personal responsibilities in consonance with the personal lifestyle, values, and goals (Haar, 2013). Work-life balance is a concept gaining accelerated importance and realization amongst individuals (Bouzari & Karatepe, 2020; Kelliher et al., 2019; Barber et al., 2019). Work-life balance has a significant role in boost quality of work (Bhende et al., 2020), satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Haider et al., 2018), employee commitment (Hofmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017), social life (Ola et al., 2019) and so forth. Importantly, scholars have identified the scarcity of research on the topic of work-life balance (e.g., Haar et al., 2019) whereby, limited studies have attempted to investigate how to predict WLB during the times of crisis such as COVID-19 Pandemic. The authors speculate that growing work pressures and changing work prospects require an understanding of maintaining work-life balance (Hite & McDonald, 2020; Darwish et al., 2020) to offer a way out for both organizational practitioners and social scientists.

2.3. Supervisor Support

Any level of support at the organizational level has always remained significant for employee behaviors and outcomes (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Umrani et al., 2019). Supervisor support refers to facilitation, recognition, and appreciation by the workplace (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Supervisor support has received much prominence for its significant contribution towards harnessing employee and organizational outcomes. Studies have therein reported that support, troubleshooting, and appreciation by supervisors can help improve the achievement of the individual and organizational goals. For instance, Idowu and Ndidiamaka (2018) tested and found a significant relationship between supervisor support and employee performance. The study confirmed that organizations could help employees to achieve the best for them by providing them with effective supervisors at work.

Furthermore, a recent study by Winarto and Chalidyanto (2020) indicated a significant relationship between supervisor support and employees' job satisfaction. The finding is another evidence confirming the importance of supervisor support at work. In connection to work-life balance, Haar et al. (2019)

concluded that when supervisor support serves subordinates mainly through work problems and times when they are needed to achieve organizational tasks, they help employees to cope up with their official and non-official engagement, thus enhancing work-life balance. Similar was also supported by Talukder et al. (2018). Based on this empirical assertion, we speculate that supervisor support during COVID-19 to overcome work challenges and appreciate their efforts during the critical times will positively enable employees to enhance their work-life balance. Thus, we posit:

H1: Supervisor support positively relates to work-life balance.

2.4. Proactive Work Behavior

Proactive work behavior (PWB) is an active, self-initiating approach to actively improve a given situation rather than passively reacting to it (Parker et al., 2010). Proactive work behavior appears to be significant for the individual as well as organizational outcomes. For instance, studies have confirmed the significant role of proactive work behavior towards boosting sales performance, innovation, organizational commitment and so forth (Crant, 1995; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Smithikrai & Suwannadet, 2018). Proactive work behavior brings a unique approach towards work that ignites a sense of commitment and responsibility in the individuals to make a choice to strive for improvement rather than sitting back and waiting for miracles to happen (Belschak & Den Hartog 2010). Notably, apart from the direct influence of proactive work behavior, there appears to be scarce empirical evidence on its moderating potential.

Moreover, there appears to be no study investigating the moderation of proactive work behavior on the relationship between supervisor support and work-life balance. Typically, proactive posture is essential to counter crises (e.g., Fowler et al., 2010), and similar assertions were forwarded to tackle the recent COVID-19 Pandemic (Shin & Lee, 2020) at the organizational level. Though this evidence does not directly connect with individual proactive work behavior yet still, they underline the need and significance of this element to achieve the desired goals. Accordingly, few empirical traces can be underlined, hinting towards the acute role of proactive behavior towards influencing and interacting work-life balance and its association with different factors (e.g., Lau et al., 2018).

Therefore, with the underpinning of conservation of resources theory highlighting individuals valuing additional resources to maximize the benefit of available resources (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001), we assert that employees' proactive work behavior will help moderate the association between supervisor support and work-life balance. In other words, proactive work behavior of employees will help them to make the most of the support and facilitation they receive from the supervisor(s) to bring more work-life balance in their strict schedules, particularly during COVID-19 Pandemic. Hence, we posit:

H2: Proactive work behavior positively relates to work-life balance.

H3: Proactive work behavior moderates the relationship between supervisor support and work-life balance.

3. Methodology

Structural equation modelling using Smart PLS 2.0 M3 was used in the present study (Ringle et al., 2005). As per the suggested best practice, a two-stage approach was used, i.e measurement model and structural model assessment. The measurement model stage assesses the psychometric properties of the conceptual model, where the structural model tests the strength of the significance of the hypothesized relationships.

3.1. Sampling

Employees of a private higher education institution were targeted for the present study. The respondents included administrative, non-administrative, technical, and teaching staff members who had at least one direct supervisor. Based on the information from the personnel department, 119 respondents were finalized who were approached via google forms during the period of June to August 2020. The respondents were initially informed through formal channels about the conduct of this study and were also advised of the anonymity of their responses.

3.2. Measures

Supervisor support was tested through inspiring a 7-item scale from Lambert (2000). Proactive work behavior was tested via a 3-item scale by Griffin et al. (2007) whereas, a 3-item scale on work-life balance by Haar (2013) was adapted. All the responses were taken on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree.

3.3. Measurement Model

The model was tested to confirm the psychometric properties of the conceptualized framework. First, the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the latent variables were assessed. Results in Table 1 show that individual item loadings concluded higher than the suggested threshold of 0.5 (Thompson et al., 1995). Furthermore, the AVE scores also turned higher than the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Lastly, the composite reliability scores were also higher than 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2016). Henceforth, the present study confirms the psychometric properties of the model to confirm the reliability and convergent validity.

Table 1: Loadings, AVE and Composite Reliability

Description	Loadings	AVE	Composite Reliability
Proactive Work Behavior		0.8466	0.9430
	0.9045		
	0.9395		
	0.9159		
Supervisor Support		0.5654	0.9116
	0.5810		
	0.7972		
	0.8248		
	0.8030		
	0.7773		
	0.7542		
	0.7113		
	0.7389		
Work-Life Balance		0.6302	0.8361
	0.7884		
	0.8350		
	0.7560		

We also examined the discriminant validity of the model through testing the square root of AVE scores in a cross-loading table. Results in Table 2 provide further details related to discriminant validity.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	Proactive Work Behavior	Supervisor Support	Work-Life Balance
Proactive Work Behavior	0.9201		
Supervisor Support	0.6506	0.7519	
Work Life Balance	0.4013	0.5093	0.7938

Note: Values in **BOLD** refer to the square root of AVE scores

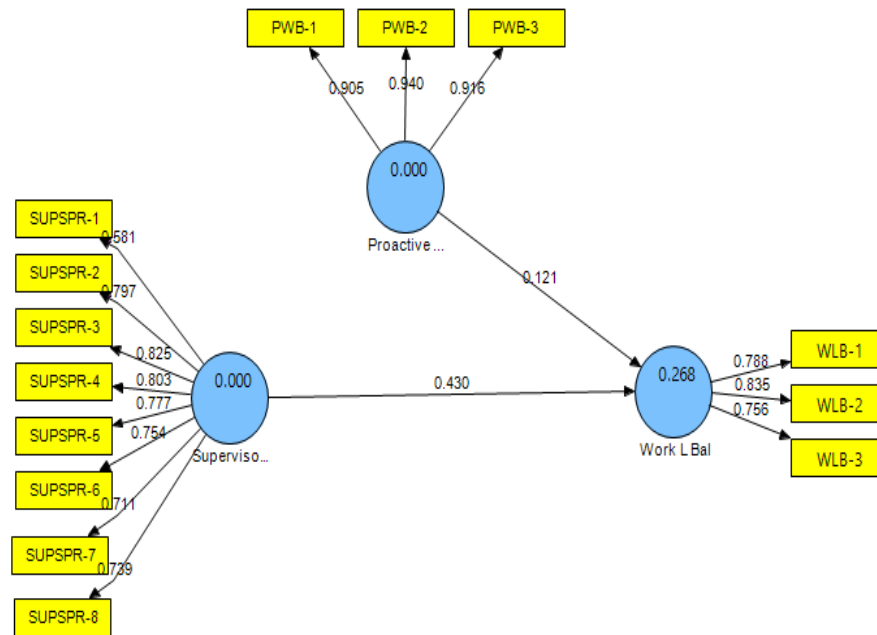


Figure 1. Measurement Mode

3.4. Structural Model

3.4.1. Direct Effects

After confirming the psychometric properties of the conceptual model, we tested the significance of the hypothesized relationships. Through applying the bootstrapping approach with 5000 bootstraps, the results confirmed the significance of supervisor support in enhancing work-life balance ($\beta = 0.430475$; $t = 6.032783$; $p < 0.000$). Similarly, the results also found a significant association between proactive work behavior and work-life balance ($\beta = 0.121261$; $t = 1.849617$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, hypothesis 1 and 2 were accepted. Table 3 and Figure 2 provides further details.

3.4.2. Moderating Effects

After confirming the direct relationships, the study tested the moderation of proactive work behavior on the relationship between supervisor support and work-life balance. The results found no statistical support for this relationship; hence hypothesis 3 is rejected.

4. Discussion

The current study attempted to examine some critical links to address the ongoing issue of work-life balance due to COVID-19 Pandemic. Through scholarly support from prior studies, the study tested to outline the prominence of supervisor support in predicting work-life balance. The findings found a strong statistical link confirming some preliminary empirical evidence (Haar et al., 2019; Talukder et al., 2018). The findings suggest that supervisory assistance, troubleshooting, help in troubleshooting, and recognition of efforts put during critical times can help employees make much of space for themselves to maintain work and personal life conveniently, thus predicting work-life balance. Similarly, the study also found a

significant relationship between proactive work behavior and work-life balance. The results outline lends support to prior studies highlighting the significance of proactive work behavior in predicting employee behavior and outcomes (Crant, 1995; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Smithikrai & Suwannadet, 2018). However, in connection to work-life balance, the findings are novel.

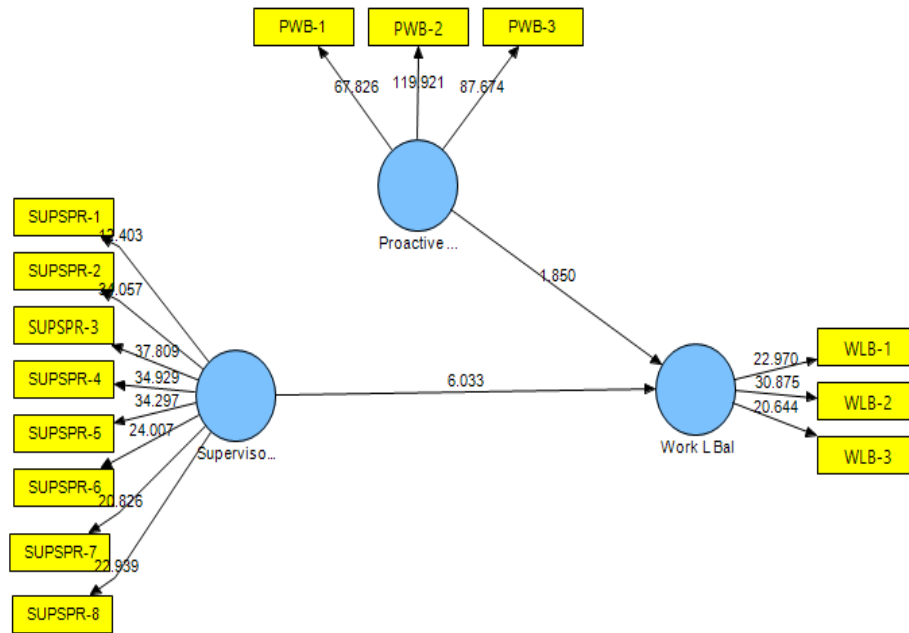


Figure 2. Direct Effects

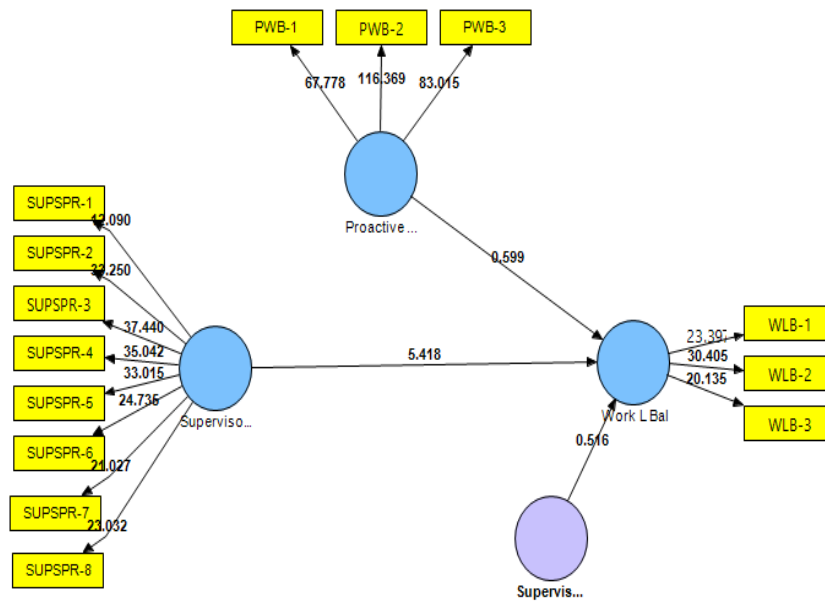


Figure 3. Moderation Effects

The results suggest that employees can make the best at work through being proactive, thus actively completing the required tasks, which helps them to maintain work-life balance. Surprisingly, proactive work behavior failed to moderate the relationship between supervisor support and work-life balance, which is contrary to what was hinted by Lau et al. (2018). Moreover, the interaction effect of proactive behavior also negatively affected its direct association with work-life balance. Since the study found supervisor support to be highly significant in predicting work-life balance ($P < 0.000$), this could be why proactive work behavior failed to bring any further energy in the association. However, further studies may be conducted before making claims in this regard.

4.1. Implications

The study forwards prominent theoretical and practical implications. For theory, the present study has added confirmation to the critical role of resources at work, such as supervisor support and personal resources like proactive work behavior towards predicting employee behaviors and outcomes, supporting the assertions of conservation of resources theory. The study has also confirmed supervisor support and proactive work behavior as notable in predicting work-life balance during crises such as COVID-19 Pandemic. For practice, the findings imply that the supervisory role has a monumental contribution towards assisting their subordinates in managing work and family engagements in a balanced way. Higher education institutes based on this are encouraged to help guide employees holding all such roles to guide, support, assist and counter problems for their subordinates to help them bring a healthy balance in their life, which would ensure they keep striving for the business with vigor and commitment.

4.2. Conclusion

The present study tested the associations between supervisor support, proactive work behavior, and work-life balance during the COVID hit a period in a higher education institution in the UK. The study found a significant link between supervisor support and proactive work behavior with work-life balance. However, the study could not find any statistical support for the moderation of proactive work behavior on the supervisor support and work-life balance association.

References:

- Anwer, M. (2020). Academic Labor and the Global Pandemic: Revisiting Life-Work Balance under COVID-19. *Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence and ADVANCE Working Paper Series*, 3(1), 5-13.
- Aydın, E., & Kalemci Tüzün, I. (2019). Organizational support sources and job performance relations: what about occupational commitment?. *Anatolia*, 30(3), 379-389.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 16(1), 74-94.
- Barber, L. K., Conlin, A. L., & Santuzzi, A. M. (2019). Workplace telepressure and work-life balance outcomes: The role of work recovery experiences. *Stress and Health*, 35(3), 350-362.
- Belschak, F. D., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2010). Pro-self, prosocial, and pro-organizational foci of proactive behaviour: Differential antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83(2), 475-498.
- Bhende, P., Mekoth, N., Ingallahli, V., & Reddy, Y. V. (2020). Quality of Work Life and Work-Life Balance. *Journal of Human Values*, 26(3), 256-265.
- Bouzari, M., & Karatepe, O. M. (2020). Does optimism mediate the influence of work-life balance on hotel salespeople's life satisfaction and creative performance?. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 19(1), 82-101.
- Crant, J. M. (1995). The proactive personality scale and objective job performance among real estate agents. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80(4), 532-537.
- Darwish, S., Ahmed, U., & Pahi, M. H. (2020). Innovative work behavior during COVID-19 for medical representative in the pharmaceutical industry: Test of a moderation model in bahrain. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Research*, 12(4), 1927-1934.

- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied psychology, 71*(3), 500-507.
- Fowler, K. L., Kling, N. D., & Larson, M. D. (2007). Organizational preparedness for coping with a major crisis or disaster. *Business & Society, 46*(1), 88-103.
- Gigliotti, R., Vardaman, J., Marshall, D. R., & Gonzalez, K. (2019). The role of perceived organizational support in individual change readiness. *Journal of Change Management, 19*(2), 86-100.
- Gordon, S., Adler, H., Day, J., & Sydnor, S. (2019). Perceived supervisor support: A study of select-service hotel employees. *Journal of hospitality and Tourism Management, 38*, 82-90.
- Griffin, M. A., Neal, A., & Parker, S. K. (2007). A new model of work role performance: Positive behavior in uncertain and interdependent contexts. *Academy of Management Journal, 50*(2), 327-347.
- Haar, J. M. (2013). Testing a new measure of work-life balance: A study of parent and non-parent employees from New Zealand. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24*(17), 3305-3324.
- Haar, J. M., Sune, A., Russo, M., & Ollier-Malaterre, A. (2019). A cross-national study on the antecedents of work-life balance from the fit and balance perspective. *Social Indicators Research, 142*(1), 261-282.
- Haider, S., Jabeen, S., & Ahmad, J. (2018). Moderated mediation between work life balance and employee job performance: The role of psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with coworkers. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 34*(1), 29-37.
- Hair Jr, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C., & Sarstedt, M. (2016). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Sage publications.
- Hall, J., Benedict, B. C., Taylor, E., & McCulloch, S. P. (2020) Managing Uncertainty in a Pandemic: Transitioning multi-section courses to online delivery. *Navigating Careers in the Academy: Gender, Race, and Class, 73-83*.
- Hite, L. M., & McDonald, K. S. (2020). Careers after COVID-19: challenges and changes. *Human Resource Development International, 23*(4), 427-437.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist, 44*(3), 513-534.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2001). The influence of culture, community, and the nested-self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resources theory. *Applied psychology, 50*(3), 337-421.
- Hofmann, V., & Stokburger-Sauer, N. E. (2017). The impact of emotional labor on employees' work-life balance perception and commitment: A study in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 65*, 47-58.
- Hutchins, H. M., & Wang, J. (2008). Organizational crisis management and human resource development: A review of the literature and implications to HRD research and practice. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 10*(3), 310-330.
- Idowu, A. I., & Ndidiamaka, A. E. (2018). The influence of supervisor/subordinate social support on employee performance in the South African retail sector. *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research, 12*(3).
- Kelliher, C., Richardson, J., & Boiarintseva, G. (2019). All of work? All of life? Reconceptualising work-life balance for the 21st century. *Human Resource Management Journal, 29*(2), 97-112.
- Lau, S. Y., Chua, C. Y., Yap, P., Tay, L. P., & Ma, K. L. (2018). *Job stress, work-life balance and life satisfaction among hotel employees: Proactive coping as a moderator* (Doctoral dissertation, UTAR).
- Ola, O. O., John, W. O., Simeon, O. A., & Mutiu, O. A. (2019). Impact of Work Life Balance on the Social Life of Workers Living in Lagos Metropolitan Borders. *Annals of Contemporary Developments in Management & HR (ACDMHR), 1*(2), 50-59.
- Parker, S. K., Bindl, U. K., & Strauss, K. (2010). Making things happen: A model of proactive motivation. *Journal of Management, 36*(4), 827-856.
- Ratten, V. (2020). Coronavirus (covid-19) and entrepreneurship: changing life and work landscape. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship, 32*(5), 503-516.
- Ringle, C. M., Wende, S., & Will, A. (2005). SmartPLS (Version 2.0) [computer software]. *Hamburg, Germany: SmartPLS*.
- Sangakala, M., Ahmed, U., & Pahi, M. H. (2016). Empirical investigating on the role of supervisor support, job clarity, employee training and performance appraisal in addressing job satisfaction of nurses. *International Business Management, 10*(23), 5481-5486.
- Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L., & Crant, J. M. (2001). What do proactive people do? A longitudinal model linking proactive personality and career success. *Personnel Psychology, 54*(4), 845-874.

- Shin, Y. J., & Lee, J. Y. (2020). South Korea's proactive approach to the COVID-19 global crisis. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12(5), 475.
- Smithikrai, C., & Suwannadet, J. (2018). Authentic leadership and proactive work behavior: Moderated mediation effects of conscientiousness and organizational commitment. *The Journal of Behavioral Science*, 13(2), 94-106.
- Talukder, A. K. M., Vickers, M., & Khan, A. (2018). Supervisor support and work-life balance. *Personnel Review*, 47(3), 727-744.
- Thompson, R., Barclay, D. W., & Higgins, C. A. (1995). The partial least squares approach to causal modeling: Personal computer adoption and use as an illustration. *Technology studies: special issue on Research Methodology*, 2(2), 284-324.
- Umrani, W. A., Afsar, B., Khan, M., & Ahmed, U. (2019). Addressing the issue of job performance among hospital physicians in Pakistan: The role of job security, organizational support, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Biobehavioral Research*, 24(3), e12169.
- Waizenegger, L., McKenna, B., Cai, W., & Bendz, T. (2020). An affordance perspective of team collaboration and enforced working from home during COVID-19. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 1-14.
- Winarto, Y., & Chalidyanto, D. (2020). Perceived supervisor support and employee job satisfaction in private hospital. *Eurasian Journal of Biosciences*, 14(2), 2793-2797.



© 2020 by the author(s). Published by Annals of Contemporary Developments in Management & HR (ACDMHR), under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license which can be accessed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.