Emotional Spousal Support Can Have Unintended Organizational Outcomes

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Abstract

Management field studies make it clear that emotional spousal support has a positive effect on individual and organizational outcomes. However, this does not mean that all spousal supports are the same. Even when it is based on good intentions, spousal support can have unintended negative consequences. Using multiple case analyses, this research shows that spousal support efforts to protect life-partners from potential harm and to boost their self-confidence levels, if not checked, can lead to decrease in cooperation with in the work environment and ultimately affect the organization in a negative way. When vigilance and confidence levels get hyped up, they lead to distrust and a false sense of independence, both of which are critical factors that decrease the cooperation levels within the work environment. The goal of this study is to help researchers and practitioners improve the efficacy of spousal backing by highlighting that under certain circumstances spousal support can do more harm than good.

Keywords: social support, spousal support, collaboration

1. Introduction

The field of management emphasizes that for organizations to achieve their objectives, intra- and inter-unit cooperation is critical (Smith, Caroll, & Ashford, 1995). Cooperation leads to coordination of work efforts towards a common goal and without cooperation, innovative and competitive success cannot be achieved (Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990). Thomas's (1992) review of the literature on conflict demonstrates that stronger the intra- and inter-unit cooperation within the organization, the individuals and organizations perform better. Work related stress and conflicts are serious threats to cooperation within the organization. A critical resource that could help tackle work related stressors and conflicts are social support (Cohen & Mc Kay, 1984).

The level of emotional spousal support individuals receive is critical because it has a profound effect on their well being and satisfaction with life (Heffner et al., 2003). Emotional spousal support is when a spouse provides "emphatic understanding and listening, affirmation of affection, advice, and genuine concern for the welfare of his or her partner" (Aycan & Eskin, 2005, p. 455). Most social support occurs in the context of marriage through spousal interaction (Martin et al., 1996). Management studies repeatedly show that there is a positive relationship (direct and indirect) between the level of spousal support employees receive and their individual performance (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Michel et al., 2011). Spouses can cushion the negative effects of work related stressors, provide encouragement to overcome stressors and conflicts, improve attitudes towards the job and the organization and facilitate effective resource (i.e. financial, time, etc.) management (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002; Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Carr, Boyar, & Gregory, 2007; Danco, 1981; Gudmunson et al., 2009; Poza & Messer, 2001; Rowe & Hong, 2000; Danes & Olsen, 2003; Jimenez, 2009).

The field of management might overwhelmingly demonstrate the positive relationship between emotional spousal support, improved individual and organizational performance, through enhanced intra- and inter-unit cooperation; however, this does not mean that all avenues of this relationship has been completely explored. Inconsistent and inconclusive findings (i.e. Gudmunson et al., 2009; Parasurman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992) have led researchers to post-hoc discuss the possibility that not all emotional spousal support is the same. Untimely or factually incorrect spousal support, even if it is based on good intentions, might harm more than help improve cooperation within the work environment. Using these post-hoc discussions as a starting point, the aim of this research is to discover under what circumstances emotional spousal support leads to negative rather

than positive outcomes. To achieve the objective of this study, primary data was gathered through in-depth unstructured interviews from multiple cases regarding their perception of emotional spousal support and its effects on intra- and inter-unit cooperation.

2. Literature Review

Researchers generally find that emotional spousal support reduces the negative effects of work-family-conflict (WFC), alleviates work related stress, improves attitudes toward the organization, and increase job satisfactions levels (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Burke & Greenglass, 1999; Bruck et al., 2002; Carr et al., 2007; Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1986; Michel et al., 2011; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). In her meta-analytic review of the conflict literature, Byron (2005) reports that spousal support is a significant buffer that moderates both work-interference with family (WIF) and family-interference-with-work (FIW). Family interference with work can disrupt intra- and inter-unit cooperation within the organization by causing role conflicts; time management problems and resource transfer issues. Spouses can assist their life-partners to restore their work-life balance by buffering and mitigating the demands of family on work and helping them cope with stressful work situations (Van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006). Achieving and maintaining work-life balance is of utmost importance because studies have shown that it is linked to positive individual and organizational performance outcomes (Allen et al., 2000; Michel et al., 2011).

The gender of the spouse does not affect the positive contribution emotional support has on their life-partner's well being, work-life balance and work performance (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). Although, Rosenbaum and Cohen (1999) found that spousal support is extremely important for women, research shows that men's well being, work-life balance and work performance is also predominantly associated with spousal support (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Cultural context can influence how men and women display spousal support (Aycan, 2008); however, differences in cultural background do not change the positive relationship between spousal support and improved individual and organizational outcomes. For example, Lu and his colleagues (2010) in their cross-cultural research between Taiwanese and British employees found that irrespective of the cultural background, spousal support was significant in reducing WFC and improving work performance. Similarly, research conducted among employed Hong Kong parents found that the level of spousal support expectations differed between men and women but nevertheless, for both genders, it was negatively related to WFC and positively related to job satisfaction (Aryee et al., 1999). The expatriate literature also highlights that emotional spousal support is vital for employees, regardless of their gender or cultural background, when adapting to a new cultural setting (Brown, 2008; Gupta, Banerjee, & Gaur 2012; Konopaske, Robie, & Ivancevich, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2001). Tina and Graeme (2009) found that even when employees were away on short-term assignments, the spousal support they received from a distance positively affected their performance.

Spousal roles and support is widely researched within the entrepreneurship and family business literature because spouses significantly influence how founders, owners or top managers distribute their limited resources (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Edralin, 2013; Van Auken & Werbel, 2006). Due to the unique nature of spousal relationship (Gudmunson, et al., 2009), the emotional support spouses provide to their partners is very important and difficult to replicate (Bahr, 2002). Gundry and Welsch (1994) argue that the significance of spouses as stakeholders is higher in new ventures than in other more established firms. Spouses can affect an organization from start-up, to succession planning, to CEO transition, and can act as influential advisors without having a visible role in the business (Danco, 1981). When spouses are supportive of their life-partners and of their efforts in the new business venture, they become a valuable resource (Davidsson & Honig, 2003); however, a lack of support can also start turning spouses into a resource drain and towards distraction (Danes & Olson, 2003; Dyer, 2003; Foley & Powell, 1997; Van Auken & Werbel, 2006; Werbel & Danes, 2010). Spouses also have the potential to be emotional leaders they can protect the harmony between the firm and their life-partner (Jimenez, 2009) by keeping the communication channels open and making sure others' feelings are considered (Poza & Messer, 2001; Ward, 1987).

Although these different streams of research (i.e. conflict, expatriate, new business venture, family business) overwhelmingly agree that spousal support is positively related with improved individual and organizational well being and performance, there are few studies that have reported inconsistent findings (i.e. Gordon & Nicholson, 2008; Gudmunson et al., 2009; Parasurman et al., 1992). For example, in their book *Family Wars*, Gordon and Nicholson (2008), among other cases, report the conflict between the Dassler brothers (founders of the famous Adidas and Puma companies). What makes the Dassler case interesting is that spousal support, instead of mitigating the conflict, as predicted by Jimenez (2009) and Poza and Messer (2001), exasperated the discontent and mistrust between the siblings. Similarly, Parasuraman and his colleagues (1992) in their quantitative research regarding WFC were not able to find the buffering effect of spousal support. They argued that distinction should

be made whether the support is appropriate to the situation or not and whether it is requested or not (Parasuraman et al., 1992). Unfortunately, the authors do not elaborate much on this distinction and leave it to future researchers to explore. In more recent research, Gudmunson and his colleagues (2009) using Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), explore whether emotional spousal support contributes to business owners' perceived work–family balance while launching a family business. Their findings indicate that spousal support received for business concerns does not have a direct significant effect on the work–family balance of the business owner. Using the COR theory the researchers discuss this lack of significance by pointing out that social support becomes a valuable resource when it fits in with situational needs (Hobfoll, 1989) and over time, under prolonged stress conditions, its effectiveness diminishes (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). In an emotional support interaction it is not only the "giver" that makes an investment (time and taking up psychological load), but the "receiver" also invests resources and expects a return (Hobfoll, 2001). Emotional support requires energy in the form of time and personal attention of the receiver to participate in this interaction and an ill-fitted support would mean a diminished net gain of personal resources (Gudmunson et al., 2009). Hence, depending on the circumstances, emotional spousal support may lead to a satisfying boost in communication about matters that the business owner faces at work; however, it could also serve as a nagging reminder of the challenges and detract the individual from the time that is needed to meet those challenges (Gudmunson et al., 2009). Similarly, Gudmunson and his colleagues (2009) leaves it to future researchers to explore under what circumstances emotional spousal support can be a detraction, and whether their explanation holds up in more established organizations and not just in new family business ventures.

3. Methodology

To be able to explore "how" and "why" emotional spousal support has unintended organizational consequences within the context which it occurs (Yin, 2008), a multiple-case study approach was adopted for this research. The sensitive nature of the research topic (i.e. talking about spouses) necessitated data collection to be in close proximity to the phenomenon within its embedded context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To be able to probe for more substantive and vividly descriptive answers, with exception to the questions about the personal and business profile of the participants, all the interviews were unstructured. The unstructured interviews were designed to capture the respondent's perception regarding the effects of spousal support.

The interviews lasted between 1.5-2 hours. Since topics involving spouses can be sensitive, to ensure the participants felt comfortable talking about this subject several measures were taken. Any information, that could be used to identify the participants or the people they were talking about, was removed. Transcripts were sent to the participants so they could approve it, request to edit or choose to decline to be part of the study. None of the participants chose to rescind or edit their testimonials. The interviews were done one-on-one, at locations and times chosen by the participants.

Four Turkish top-managers/owners were conveniently selected for the purpose of the study. The focus was on top-managers/owners because they have the power to shape organizational strategy, influence various stakeholders and affect organizational performance (Finkelstein, 1992; Luthans, Rosenkrantz, & Hennessey, 1985). The central positioning of top-managers/owners also provides them a vantage point to observe the effects of spousal support on themselves and others. Participants were sought in Turkey due to convenient access to top-managers/owners through personal contacts within the Independent Businessmen Association (MUSIAD).

All of the participants of this study were male. Although invitations were sent to female top-managers/owners to participate in this study, they declined. In Turkey only 11% of top-management/ownership positions are held by women (Aycan & Eskin, 2005) and these low numbers hampered the efforts to find alternative female participants. The average age of the participants was fifty-one, ranging from early middle age to senior. All of the participants were married, which was important for this research. The average length of marriage was twenty-seven years, ranging from seven years to forty-one years. The participants also had many years of work experience, averaging about twenty-nine years. Except for one (Case 1) all participants had multiple children. Table 1 presents the distribution of the case study participants' profile. To protect the privacy of the participants, their names and the names of people they mentioned were replaced with alphabetically arranged English names based on the interview order. The case vignettes presented below are short extracts of extensive case descriptions. These extracts represent the comprehensive empirical data that support the interpretation and results of this study.

Table 1. Participant profile

	Case 1 Alex	Case 2 Bob	Case 3 Calvin	Case 4 Doug
Age	35	57	49	65
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married
(No. of Years)	(7)	(34)	(27)	(42)
No. of Children	0	2	3	3
Educational Attainment	MBA in Management BA in Architecture	BS in chemistry	MBA in Management BA in Business	High School
Working for No. of years	12	35	20	48

3.1 Case 1

Alex with his two older brothers is the managing director of a real-estate development company. It was their father who started the firm back in the 1950's as a construction supply company. When the brothers took over the business, they shifted the firm's focus to the more profitable real-estate development sector. The controlling shares of the company were split between the three brothers; one-third each. Alex was responsible for developing and monitoring projects, his older brother was head of marketing and the oldest headed the finance. The three brothers had to decide on strategic matters unanimously.

According to Alex, when he and his brothers got married and the spouses entered the picture, things started to change. The distance between the brothers started to increase and more disagreements started to erupt.

"…I didn't care what my brothers had in their homes, what kind of house they lived in, what kind of car they drove or what title they carried in the business. I am sure neither did them. I never recall any of us rushing to buy a bigger screen TV after seeing my brother buy a big one. When there was a soccer game, we all just hung out at his place and watched it over there. This was a good bonding experience for us. We worked hard, we took decisions together, we listened to each other's ideas and whoever needed money could go to the company safe and take as much money as they needed with no question asked."

"It is not like that anymore. We are now more formal with each other, disagreements are occurring more frequently and it is taking us longer to resolve them."

"Why? There are several reasons but I think being married is big a factor."

Alex claims that so long as he was single, he did not fully understand why these changes were occurring.

"When my brothers got married their behaviors changed. As if an invisible wall started to rise between them. They were on good terms but the vibe between them became different. It is hard to explain, but things were not the same. I thought this was just a phase a growing company goes through and that things would return the way it was; however, it didn't. Instead I found myself behind these walls."

However after he got married the interaction between him and his wife helped him figure out that the cause was not work related but spouse related.

"Honestly at first I didn't realize it [*the change in his brothers' behaviors*], but when I did, I didn't care much about it; and then when I started to care about it, I didn't understand it. It took me several years and a marriage to finally figure out what was happening to us. …"

Ashley [*Alex's spouse. The name was changed for anonymity*] would say things like 'do not worry, sooner or later they will see you were correct', 'You are the brains of the business' or 'they do not have a vision like you do.' You know things you like to hear, especially after a difficult day. But after a while you start believing these comments and start thinking as if you are single-handedly carrying the business and everyone else is just a drag. I am sure my brothers were hearing similar stuff at home and feeling the same way as I was."

Alex believes that the constant encouragement, without any meaningful criticism, provided by the spouses fueled a self-serving bias among the brothers. He does not blame the spouses but believes that the brothers should have been more careful in order to prevent their egos from driving a wedge between them.

"Don't get me wrong I love my wife and respect my sister-in-laws as my own sisters. They take care of the home, the children and us. But when you tell someone the world revolves around him, he will quickly believe it. We

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International Journal of Business and Management
Vol. 11, No. 5; 2016

should have been smart and not allowed our egos to be bloated. The problem is that it's like an addiction … you cannot totally stop believing it."

"I think spouses should not only tell us what we want to hear, but also what we ought to hear; otherwise, the work place will be filled with people who think they are the ones who created the high mountains *[a Turkish expression of unsubstantiated feeling of grandeur]*."

Despite these obstacles, the brothers have so far been able to manage the company successfully and grow its revenue. However, Alex is not sure if they will be able to continue like this. He believes the success of their business has to do more with the exponential growth in the real-estate market of Turkey rather than their strategic management. He fears, if they cannot figure out a way to control their egos, the partnership between the brothers will tear apart at the seams. Alex admits, that this research was the first time he voiced his feelings. He neither told his wife nor his brothers what he thought about the influence spouses have over them. He does not know how to approach them without causing any misunderstanding and offence.

3.2 Case 2

Bob talked about how "homes are like hard drives; they store everything- good and bad." He explained that his father and uncle had split up their partnership because they were never able to forgive and forget. Currently Bob is the general manger and 50% owner of a construction company, while his younger brother owns the other half. To prevent a similar fate for their partnership, Bob claims he has taken a lot of lessons from the experiences of his father and uncle. For Bob, partnership split-ups, especially amongst family members, is problematic because it means dividing the already limited assets further and losing valuable resources.

"My grandfather and his two brothers were the first to open a yarn factory in their province. They made good money and our family's reputation grew. Then one day, the youngest brother gets married and the new wife has problems getting along with the rest of the spouses. This causes serious arguments within the family, so the youngest brother leaves the partnership. My grandfather was so heartbroken with this incident, eventually he also left the business and moved to a different city and started a new business. When my father and uncle started the new business, you might have thought they would have avoided the same situation, but it recurred. The business and wealth of the family were again split between the brothers. Thank God, my brother and I do not have the same problem. However, I cannot guarantee that it will not happen to us if we are not careful. Think of it, if my dad's uncles and my own uncle were able to operate together, with all the resources pooled it could have taken us to new heights. We could have been among the biggest construction companies within our region or maybe even in our country."

Bob believes the emotional support his father and uncle received at home might have been acceptable from an individual point of view but was damaging to the partnership. For example, Bob claims his mother as a very past-oriented person. Her way of interpreting present events was to remember and remind others what she thought were similar incidents in the past, and then try to extrapolate lessons from them. Bob believes his mother's and aunt-in-law's constant reminders of past incidents in the name of being supportive "rehashed old wounds and prevented them from healing."

"My dad rarely discussed work related matters at home. However, when he did, mother would first listen quietly and then would start reminding him of endless incidents from the past. Especially when the topic was my uncle, mom would remember the time when my dad did him a favor, which he did not repay nor acknowledge or simply said a thank you. She would remind him of the time when my uncle disagreed with him but eventually my dad's suggestion ended up being the correct one, or of the time when he worked so hard and overtime while my uncle was not around."

"If I described someone like this, would you like to be partners with him? Mom was maybe narrating a true story, but she was compiling two decades of ill behavior and pushing it through a tiny hole."

"She wasn't doing this because she hated my uncle. She just wanted to help my dad and to be supportive."

Bob agrees that learning from past mistakes is important but "in a partnership, there are times you have to look the other way or quickly forget things, if you want to keep a good relationship with your partner." He argues that the easiest way to end a partnership is to "seek perfection from your partner." Bob reports that to ensure his partnership with his brother is not negatively influenced, he has instructed his wife not to say anything even if he complains about his brother's behavior.

"No relationship is perfect. I have disagreements with my wife, I have disagreement with my brother, but I trust them both and I do not want anything damaging this."

3.3 Case 3

Calvin reported that his aunt-in-law, in order to protect her husband's (Calvin's uncle) interest in the business, prevented him from signing off on crucial decisions, which eventually led to the dissolution of their partnership. Calvin's father originally established the garment manufacturing business that went bankrupt shortly after the dissolution of the partnership. As the business grew, Calvin's father felt sorry for his brother (20 years younger), who did not have a job and gave him a job in the company. Over the years, the young brother learnt the job and was rewarded with an equal partnership opportunity. When Calvin completed his education, his father retired and left him his general manager title and 50% of the company shares. Calvin was no stranger to the business because while he was studying for his undergraduate and graduate degrees, he was also working at the sales department of company. Calvin reports that the handoff from his father was not well planned because when he took over his father's title and shares, a situation was created with his new partner, his uncle.

"Before my father retired, both him and my uncle would say 'all this is yours you have to learn to take care of it', 'we are here today but not indefinitely, so be prepared to run the business on your own' and similar stuff. But when dad, out of nowhere, announced that he was tired and retiring, leaving everything to me, all that support from my uncle disappeared."

"I understand him *[Calvin's uncle];* for years you anticipate the day you are going to take over the business and be your own boss and then realize the struggle is far from over. I am sure he thought due to seniority, he was the lead partner and I should have just followed him and believe me, I loved him and respected him so much I would have had no problem with him taking the lead on management issues, but this does not mean that I was simply going to blindly do whatever he wanted. At the end of the day this was my dad's firm and I was a rightful partner who knew about the business as much as my uncle."

Calvin reported that at first, whenever he came up with new ideas his uncle would enthusiastically approve them but the next day informs him that he had changed his mind. This frustrated Calvin because liberalization of the country's economy meant they had to adapt to the new market realities, yet his partner (i.e. uncle) was preventing this. Calvin strongly believed it was actually what his aunt-in-law said at home that made his uncle refuse all his suggestions. He claims that he has nothing personal against his aunt-in-law but through the grapevines and conversations with other family members, he has confirmed his suspicions.

"I later learned that every time my uncle informed her about my idea she would start saying that I was after the whole company and that these were plots to take over the business and push him aside. She would say to my uncle that as he had worked in this company longer, he should have more control over the business. Even the things I bought became a problem. She would say to him 'you are driving an old model car while your nephew has bought a new one for himself; he is wasting firm's resources for his luxury.' Everything I did became an action against them and a power struggle."

Calvin believes his aunt-in-law made his uncle see him as a threat. Calvin understood that a spouse might want to protect her family and its interests but "the cure should not be more destructive than the illness." According to Calvin, if his aunt-in-law were more supportive of the partnership and the well being of the company and not just her husband's interests, both partners would have received what they desired from the business.

"Her thought was that, if they controlled the business, people would respect them more and they could live in more luxury. In the end neither happened. This situation led to serious arguments that led to bigger family conflicts. Brothers stopped talking to each other and nephews/nieces started ignoring each other. Eventually the partnership ended and shortly afterwards, my uncle had to declare bankruptcy for his share of the business."

"All this aggravation, but what was it for? Did I really want to take over the whole company? No. I was happy to work with my uncle. Today one half of the family does not talk to the other half, let alone show respect. Both sides of the family suffered with the end of partnership and loss of business."

Calvin claims it is not the loss of the business that saddens him the most but being perceived as a threat to certain family members. He feels "blessed" his wife is the total opposite of his aunt-in-law, making him a "more grounded person" and a "better situation analyzer." Calvin reports that at every suitable occasion he shares his story openly with people so that they could avoid similar mistakes.

3.4 Case 4

Doug's family was very poor so after finishing high school, he had to find a job to support himself and his family. He started as an apprentice, training to become a lathe and milling machine operator. The more he learnt about the machining the more he realized the business potential behind it. After saving enough money he managed to buy a secondhand lathe and rented a small space. From this humble beginning, Doug grew his business into a

multi-million dollar 'aluminum window profile' manufacturing company. He employed around thirty people in his manufacturing plant and another twelve at the headquarters of the business. According to Doug, the secret of his success was the hardships he faced in his past. He is married and has three children, none of whom are interested in working at or taking over, the business.

Doug claims that his wife is always supportive of him. Even when they had very little and he had to work long hours, she would never complain; she would manage the house and take care of the children. He admits that despite all the hardships he had endured in his life, he could not do what his wife had done for him.

"The business world is a dirty place. When I go home I want peace. Dorothy *[Doug's spouse. The name was changed for anonymity]* has given me exactly this. I don't know how she does it; however, one thing I do know is that if I were in her shoes, I couldn't do the things she does for us."

Doug's only concern regarding his wife's support was that of her pessimistic view of others. According to Doug whenever he talks about work at home, his wife would always find the negative side of events and people. He believes he does not allow his wife's comments spillover into his business decisions but he also admits he is vigilant about it.

"She would say things like 'remember the time he did this to you' or 'everyone has self-interest, so be careful and do not trust them completely.' If I am not careful and forget my wife's way of looking at the world, I could start suspecting everyone and trust no one."

"By now I know whom to trust and whom not to; when it comes to business, I know whose advice to listen to and what to ignore. However, you know the saying, if you tell a normal person he is crazy forty times he starts acting crazy. Well, the same thing here, I have to be careful and not allow this pessimism to cloud my judgment."

4. Analysis

Findings of this research confirm that spousal support is a critical factor that influences individual attitudes and organizational outcomes. Support from spouses is generally expected and appreciated; however, this appreciation is not *carte blanche*. The content of the backing matters more than the level of support. Aside from their intentions, what spouses communicate to their life-partners for the sake of being supportive can have positive or negative consequences. Hence, if the content of spousal support leads to negative consequences, greater levels of support will not improve the outcome but make it worse.

It appears that when spouses, in the name of being supportive, regularly remind past deviances/transgressions of others, encourage self-serving bias and promote a pessimistic view of others, their life-partners become hyper-vigilant and/or hyper-confident. Hyped-up vigilance and hyper-confidence decreases trust levels towards others and negatively impacts the ability to accurately judge the true levels of interdependence. As distrust and inaccurate judgment of interdependence increases, there is considerable decrease in intra- and inter-unit cooperation within the workplace. As a consequence of decreased cooperation within the work environment, organizational performance declines and existential threats emerge. Figure 1 presents the circumstances when emotional spousal support can be harmful towards life-partners' work environment and organizational well being.
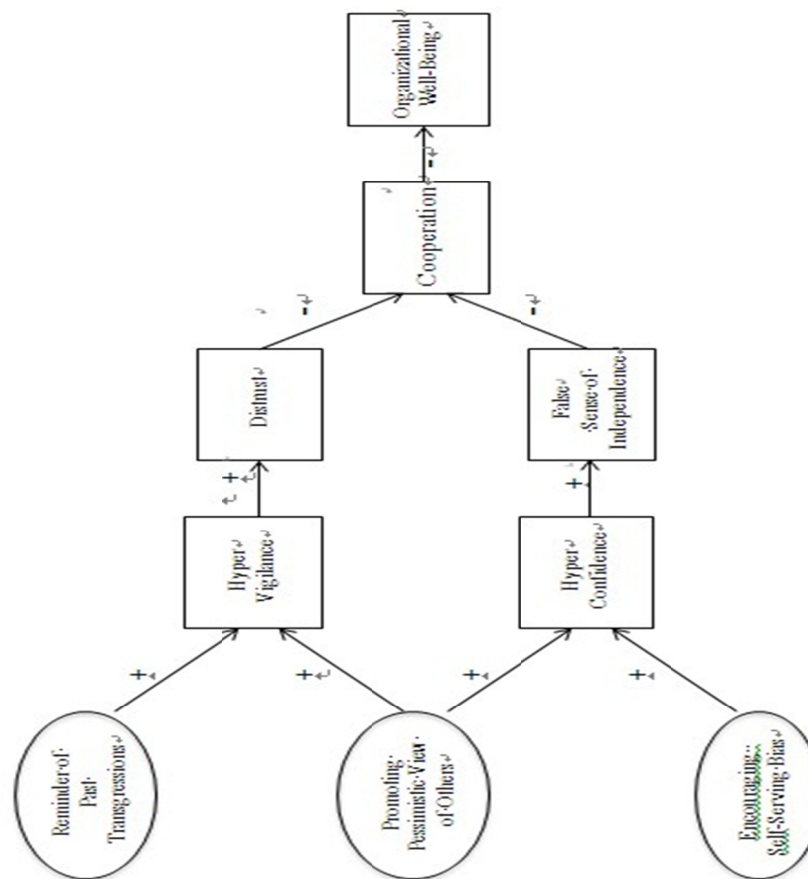
Figure 1. Circumstances under which spousal support has negative consequences

All human beings, knowingly or unknowingly, are misled, deceived or transgressed by others. Vigilance to avoid being harmed, especially by repeat offenders, is not only a natural instinct but also a smart managerial decision (Boles, Croson, & Murnighan, 2000; Khantzian & Mack, 1983; Lewis & Saarni, 1993). However, when vigilance turns into hyper-vigilance, distrust between individuals increases (Lewicki & Hanke, 2012). There are several ways spouses can over-stimulate their life-partners' vigilance to a point that they no longer trust others' intentions or abilities. One way emotional spousal support can make a life-partner hyper-vigilant is by constantly reminding him or her of past incidents of harm, deceptions and transgressions. The spouse might be trying to encourage their life-partner to learn from past mistakes and avoid repeat offenders; however, all people make mistakes, to resolve these conflicts and move forward and function together, we have to forgive and leave these transgressions behind us (McCullough, Paragament, & Thoresen, 2000). Constant reminders of negative incidents make it difficult for individuals to *forgive and forget* and place them in a hyper-vigilant state towards others. Another way emotional spousal support can make an individual hyper-vigilant is by promoting pessimistic views about others. When spouses convey the view that people around them have bad intentions and/or are incompetent in doing their jobs, it increases the life-partner's desire to be on the constant lookout for any potential problem.

Findings of this research also show that spousal support increases distrust and a false sense of independence among their life-partners by hyping up their confidence levels. Self-confidence is a critical trait for success in the business world (Judge & Bono, 2001); however, over-confidence is as harmful as having lack of it (Crocker & Park, 2004; Lewicki, & Hanke, 2012). Baumeister and his colleagues (2003) argue that individuals with a heightened sense of self-confidence are more willing to speak up in groups but they are also more willing to harshly criticize the group's approach. They also argue that those with high levels of self-confidence "show stronger in-group favoritism, which may increase prejudice and discrimination" (Baumeister et al., 2003, p. 1) and disrupt intra-unit harmony. High levels of self-confidence lead individuals to feel superior over others (Brown, 1986), all the while underestimating their shortcomings and overestimating their abilities (Wilson & Ross, 2000). Individuals with hyper-confidence tend not to trust others' judgments and ignore interdependencies

for the sake of pursuing personal needs and feelings (Crocker & Park, 2004).

Spouses can unrealistically inflate their life-partner's self-confidence by encouraging their self-serving biases and/or by continuously downplaying others' accomplishments and contributions. When providing support, if spouses highlight only the strengths or successes of their life-partners and downplay their failures or faults, they lead their life-partners to have a biased view of themselves. The stronger an individual's self-serving bias is, the higher their self-confidence becomes (Blaine & Croker, 1993). Hence, when spouses encourage the self-serving biases of their life-partners, it leads them to be overconfident about their abilities, make them distrust others' capabilities and think that they could do the tasks at hand better by themselves. Another way spouses hype-up their life-partners' confidence level is by downplaying, belittling or totally ignoring other stakeholders' abilities and contributions. There is a negative relationship between individuals' self-confidence level and their perception about others' capabilities (Crocker & Park, 2004). To improve their life-partners' confidence, spouses can downplay other stakeholders' capabilities; however, if this pessimistic view of others is promoted continuously, the resulting hyper-confidence leads to distrust towards others and a false sense of independence.

Feelings of mutual trust and a correct sense of interdependence are "among the most important antecedents to cooperative behavior" (Lundin, 2007, p. 652). A decrease or lack of cooperation among partners, co-workers and/or key stakeholders is a concern because it adversely affects organizational outcomes (Smith et al., 1995). Findings of this research show that increase in distrust and false sense of independence among key stakeholders creates a work environment where frequency and intensity of conflicts increase, and intra- and inter-unit cooperation decrease to a point at which the organization ceases the ability to operate in its existing structure.

In conclusion, spousal support is a valuable resource for any life-partner; however, if the content of that support constantly reminds past transgressions, encourages self-serving biases and promotes pessimistic view of others, it leads to more harm than benefit for the organization. The harm to the organization is caused by the decrease or disappearance of cooperation within the work environment. Cooperation within the work environment gets damaged when spousal support hypes the life-partner's vigilance and confidence to a point where they no longer trust others and falsely underestimate their interdependence.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This research takes us one step closer to a better understanding of how spousal support, which is deemed crucial for individual and organizational well-being, can cause damage rather than good when delivered with the wrong content. The goal of researching the negative consequences of spousal support is not to discourage spousal support, but to improve its efficacy. Like the *yin-yang*, every positive comes with its negative. If we are then aware of the negatives, we can prepare for them and attempt to control the side effects.

This study is, however, not without its limitations. For example, the case study methodology provided an excellent opportunity to get in-depth information and discover new relationships, but the small number of cases limits the generalization of the findings. The next step for this line of research could be to test the generalization of the relationships using quantitative methodology. The literature review section of this research (above) clearly shows that although both genders appreciate and value spousal support, their expectations regarding the nature of the support differ. Hence, it should not be presumed that negative consequences of spousal support might develop differently for both genders. This study portrays the negative consequences of spousal support from a male perspective. To shed light on the other half the picture, future research should include data collected from women as well.

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