

The positive spillover effects from support at work and at home

Support from coworkers and support from family are more interrelated than one might think. New research finds a link that also translates into being more creative at work.



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There are benefits to being part of a couple in which both are in paid work. A dual income brings, if not necessarily great wealth, at least an element of greater economic freedom, while the relationship can be a source of love and support.

But such couples also face [particular challenges](#) related to their domestic set up and achieving a good work-life balance. There may be greater tension over who does what at home, whether that's household chores or childcare, and whose career takes priority when it comes to progression, development and time.

Such conflicts might seem to be part of the familiar distinction between home life and work life. But our [new research](#) suggests the two are more closely linked than we might think.

For example, we found that someone who benefits from a positive working environment with supportive colleagues is likely to pass on those benefits to their partner at home. In the other direction, a loving relationship at home is likely to translate into greater dedication and creativity in the workplace.

Put more simply, if you're happy at work, you'll be happier at home, which in turn will make you better at your job.

We discovered this by studying the everyday experiences of 260 dual income, heterosexual couples in the United States, over a period of six weeks, to understand how their home lives and work lives affected each other. The main goal of our research was to discover where people looked for support and whether or not they found it.

[Previous studies](#) had suggested that someone seeking to address conflicts between their work and home lives (such as asking for more flexible hours) would typically go to a manager or supervisor for help.

But our work revealed the importance of immediate colleagues in resolving such issues by providing vital support and advice. Indeed, coworkers at a similar professional level can be seen almost as "work-spouses" for emotionally challenging times.

They are the starting point of what we call a "gain spiral," in which the benefits of a supportive relationship with colleagues then transfers to an employee's home life, where they are subsequently shared with a partner.

Taking your work home with you

Essentially this means that employees take the support they receive from coworkers home with them, and in a loving relationship, transfer this support to their partners. This might mean they encourage them to open up about stresses, seek to resolve issues, or make improvements to how they juggle work and family life arrangements.

That support in a loving relationship causes partners to feel happier, more satisfied and more positive about their own work, where they subsequently become more engaged and productive. Our research highlights the role of these two key relational "resources": valued colleagues and loving partners. The two appear to be clearly linked and vital elements of a healthy work-life balance.

So perhaps it might be time to reevaluate your relationship with your colleagues. Rather than seeing them simply as people who share your workspace, think of them as people who have a significant impact on your home life too. (And you on theirs.) This is true whether you share a tightly spaced office or engage with them mostly online.

And while we don't think employers should meddle with their employees' personal lives, they may be able to contribute to the quality of relationships at home by putting policies and procedures in place to minimize work-family conflict. This may include limiting excessive working hours and reducing expectations of responding to messages outside of work. They should also be aware that if colleagues get on well, everyone benefits -- at work and at home.

A version of this article first appeared on The Conversation as "[How your colleagues affect your home life \(and vice versa\)](#)."

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