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The perfect storm: How leader perfectionism fuels employee work–family conflict and presenteeism

Prior research links leader traits and employee health outcomes, but the processes connecting leaders' other-oriented perfectionism (LOOP) to employee presenteeism—particularly through work–family conflict—are not well understood. Integrating Conservation of Resources theory and the scarcity hypothesis, we propose that employees' work–family conflict mediates the relationship between team-level perceptions of LOOP and presenteeism. The hypothesis was tested using a multilevel mediation model based on a three-wave longitudinal survey collected over six months from 483 employees nested within 102 teams. Supporting predictions, shared team perceptions of LOOP were positively related to employees' work–family conflict, which, in turn, was positively linked to employees' presenteeism. These effects were observed even after accounting for baseline work–family conflict and presenteeism, and other controls (negative affect, general health, workload, job control, and demographics). Findings contribute to occupational health psychology, indicating that LOOP extends its influence beyond the workplace, impacting employee health and family outcomes.

Keywords: other-oriented perfectionism; work–family conflict; presenteeism; conservation of resources theory; multilevel mediation

Introduction

Perfectionism is a personality trait characterised by striving for flawlessness and setting exceptionally high standards (Frost et al., 1990). Although often viewed as beneficial in achievement contexts (Ozbilir et al., 2015), it is also associated with stress, burnout, and impaired wellbeing (Harari et al., 2018; Hill & Curran, 2015). In organisational settings, such tendencies shape not only self-regulation but also how individuals evaluate others, reflecting the multidimensional nature of perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism involves high personal standards, whereas other-oriented perfectionism entails imposing unrealistically high standards on others and evaluating them critically when those standards are unmet (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Shoss et al., 2015). Despite its relevance in hierarchical relationships (Stoeber et al., 2013; Stoeber, 2015), including those analogous to leader–follower exchanges, other-oriented perfectionism has received comparatively limited attention in organisational research (Stoeber, 2015), particularly within leadership contexts (Otto et al., 2021), which is surprising given leaders' central role in shaping expectations and performance norms.

We therefore examine leaders' other-oriented perfectionism (LOOP), conceptualised as a leader trait, expressed through consistent perfectionistic behaviours toward employees. LOOP involves imposing high standards, criticising shortcomings, and maintaining difficult-to-satisfy expectations (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Shoss et al., 2015). We measure LOOP at the team level, as it captures shared perceptions of leaders' perfectionistic behaviours and the resulting team climate. Shared perceptions are more predictive of employee outcomes than isolated experiences (Braun et al., 2013; Sanders & Schyns, 2006), particularly in team settings where members share leaders and work environments, fostering consensus about job characteristics (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2001).

Prior research on LOOP has focused largely on work-based outcomes, such as engagement and unethical behaviour (Jiang et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025), overlooking

spillover into non-work domains. This is a critical gap, as work and family are central life domains (Mihelič & Tekavčič, 2014), and interference between these roles—work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)—constitutes a hindrance demand that undermines individual health, wellbeing, and functioning (Amstad et al., 2011; Brandão & Matias, 2024). Leaders shape organisational norms and can foster cultures that value employees' personal lives (Sanz-Vergel & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2017), reducing the likelihood of work–family clashes. Although employees' own perfectionism predicts work–family conflict (Deuling & Burns, 2017; Mitchelson, 2009), less is known about how LOOP shapes experiences across domains. We therefore focus on work–family conflict as a key spillover mechanism through which resource-draining leader demands extend beyond the workplace and disrupt employees' non-work lives.

Work–family conflict may, in turn, trigger self-endangering responses to work demands, further impairing individual health and wellbeing (Dettmers et al., 2016; Knecht et al., 2017). One such outcome is presenteeism, defined as working despite illness (Ruhle et al., 2020), a prevalent phenomenon (Lohaus & Habermann, 2019) that, although less visible than traditional outcomes, has important consequences for productivity and long-term health (Arnold, 2016; Skagen & Collins, 2016) and is shaped by leader-driven norms (Dietz et al., 2020; Whysall et al., 2025). We examine presenteeism as a behavioural, health-related outcome through which cross-domain strain reverberates back into the workplace. Together, work–family conflict and presenteeism capture a spillover–backloop process through which the effects of LOOP unfold across domains.

Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998, 2001) and the scarcity hypothesis (Goode, 1960), we explain how collective perceptions of LOOP shapes employees' experiences across work and home contexts. The COR model outlines the principle of resource loss to explain the stress generated by perfectionistic demands (e.g.

Deuling & Burns, 2017; Flaxman et al., 2012), while the scarcity hypothesis suggests that energy invested in one area (e.g. work), once depleted, is no longer available for other roles (e.g. in the home domain; Goode, 1960). We propose that team-level LOOP depletes employees' resources, contributing to higher work–family conflict, which subsequently reverberates back into the workplace as self-endangering behaviour in the form of presenteeism (Dettmers et al., 2016; Miraglia & Johns, 2016). If LOOP indirectly determines working while ill via work–family conflict, it may place employees and their families at risk, underscoring the need for healthier and more sustainable workplaces.

We aim to contribute to leadership literature in three ways. First, we advance leadership theory by conceptualising LOOP as a distinct interpersonal trait reflecting leaders' tendency to impose exceptionally high standards on others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Shoss et al., 2015). While the effects of self-oriented perfectionism have been widely examined (Stoeber, 2015), other-oriented perfectionism in leadership contexts remains underexplored (Otto et al., 2021). Responding to Ocampo et al.'s (2020) call for an interpersonal approach to perfectionism in supervisor–subordinate dynamics, our examination of LOOP offers a more precise interpersonal mechanism for understanding how leaders influence employee experiences across work and home domains.

Second, we extend leadership research by conceptualising LOOP as a resource-depleting interpersonal demand that operates across domains. Integrating COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998, 2001) and the scarcity hypothesis (Goode, 1960), we test a spillover–backloop process whereby collective perceptions of LOOP deplete resources, spill over into the home domain to generate work–family conflict and subsequently loop back into the workplace as health-related attendance behaviours. In doing so, we move beyond prior research focused largely on individual and job-related predictors of work–family conflict and

presenteeism (Johns, 2011; Miller et al., 2022), highlighting team-level LOOP as an underexplored driver of cross-domain strain and its spillover–backloop dynamics.

Third, using a three-wave multilevel design, we investigate how team-level perceptions of LOOP (Time 1) shape individual employees' work–family conflict (Time 2) and presenteeism (Time 3). Examining team-level LOOP responds to calls for multilevel approaches to workplace stress that recognise leaders as key drivers of collective demands, resources, and coping (Bakker et al., 2023; Sanz-Vergel & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2017), and extends research on social antecedents of health-related attendance behaviours (Miraglia & Johns, 2021; Patel et al., 2023), moving beyond the field's traditional individual-level focus (Bakker et al., 2023).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

LOOP is expressed through critical evaluations and high-pressure demands, frequently resulting in employees being criticised for imperfections (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Song et al., 2022; Stoeber, 2015). Other-oriented perfectionists often exhibit narcissistic and antisocial tendencies, such as low helping, low collaboration, and a lack of empathy (Stoeber, 2015), which in leadership contexts may contribute to employee resource depletion (Xu et al., 2022). Hill and Curran (2015) found perfectionistic tendencies were associated with increased employee fatigue and stress. Research further indicates that negative leader characteristics can drain employees' energy and resources (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2012).

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals strive to acquire and retain resources that aid goal achievement, and experience stress when resources are lost or threatened. Resources include energy, time, skills or support (Hobfoll, 2001). Resource loss or threat prompts defensiveness and efforts to protect remaining resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Resource scarcity makes individuals more vulnerable to further losses, potentially resulting in escalating "resource loss spirals" (Hobfoll, 1998; Hobfoll et al., 2018). COR

theory is an established framework used to explain work–family conflict, since resources such as energy or time are lost in the process of juggling work and family responsibilities (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

We propose that team-level perceptions of LOOP serve as a workplace stressor that depletes employees' resources, triggering a loss spiral that extends into the home domain. Following Goode's (1960) scarcity hypothesis, which emphasises the finite nature of resources allocated across roles, we argue that the high demands associated with LOOP intensify competition between work and family roles, increasing the likelihood of inter-role conflict when resources are limited (MacEwen & Barling, 1994; Williams et al., 1991). Striving to meet leaders' excessively high standards consumes substantial resources, leaving employees with insufficient capacity to fulfil family responsibilities. Moreover, to avoid negative evaluations, employees may prioritise work over family, further constraining resources available for non-work roles and exacerbating work–family conflict. This pattern reflects spillover from work to family, whereby resource depletion in the work domain undermines functioning in non-work roles. Consistent with this reasoning, demands in one domain hinder functioning in another, generating work–family conflict (Carlson et al., 2012; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

H1: Team-level LOOP (T1) positively relates to employees' work–family conflict (T2).

Work–family conflict is associated with psychological distress, life dissatisfaction, depressive symptoms, anxiety (Amstad et al., 2011; Kinnunen et al., 2004), and a range of strain-based health outcomes (Allen et al., 2000), including fatigue (Jansen et al., 2003), somatic complaints (Adams & Jex, 1999), and overall physical ill-health (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Such deterioration in health and wellbeing may feed back into the workplace and trigger presenteeism from a health-impairment perspective (Demerouti et al., 2009; Miraglia & Johns, 2016). In other words, strain spilling over from the work–family

interface back into the work domain may increase susceptibility to illness and the likelihood of working while ill. Reduced recovery associated with sustained work–family conflict may further deplete resources and reinforce this process (Demerouti et al., 2013).

This resource depletion process can be further explained by COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), widely used to explain the antecedents and outcomes of presenteeism (Chen et al., 2021; Demerouti et al., 2009). Employees experiencing resource loss feel unable to cope with additional demands and may feel compelled to work while ill to avoid further losses, such as workload build-up, job loss, or disappointing others, including the supervisor (Lu et al., 2013; McGregor et al., 2016). In other words, work–family conflict drains personal resources, and resource scarcity (Goode, 1960) may elicit protective strategies such as presenteeism, whereby employees go to work to manage outstanding tasks and prevent further disruption to their job or private life (Lack, 2011). While presenteeism may help protect immediate work-related goals, it is a maladaptive coping strategy that can be detrimental to health and long-term work capacity (Dettmers et al., 2016). This helps explain why work–family conflict precedes presenteeism: when work and family demands compete, employees first experience strain as resources become depleted. Subsequently, they are likely to adopt behavioural coping responses, such as attending work while ill, in an attempt to regain resources in the work domain (Dettmers et al., 2016; Knecht et al., 2017). Empirical and meta-analytic evidence confirms higher levels of work–family conflict results in greater presenteeism (Miraglia & Johns, 2016; Robertson et al., 2012):

H2: Employees' work–family conflict (T2) positively relates to employees' presenteeism (T3).

Consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), team-level LOOP operates as a workplace stressor that accelerates resource loss, as the pressure to meet leaders' excessively high standards consumes employees' time, energy, and emotional resources (Al-Hawari et al.,

2020; Carlson et al., 2012). This may leave insufficient resources for family responsibilities, heightening work–family conflict (Amstad et al., 2011; Kinnunen et al., 2004) and reflecting a spillover effect consistent with Goode's (1960) role strain argument. This cross-domain resource depletion increases employees' vulnerability to experiencing resource loss spirals (Hobfoll, 1998, 2001). Under such conditions, employees may continue working while ill (i.e. engage in presenteeism) to avoid further resource loss (e.g. reduced job security or supervisor dissatisfaction), especially in the case of highly demanding leaders (Lu et al., 2013; McGregor et al., 2016), illustrating a backloop into workplace behaviour. Accordingly:

H3: Employees' work–family conflict (T2) mediates the positive relationship between team-level LOOP (T1) and employees' presenteeism (T3).

Methods

Procedure

Data were collected from part-time and full-time administrative and clerical teams at UK universities and colleges, characterised by customer-focused roles, high service demands, and frequent employee–team leader interactions. A three-wave survey design at three-month intervals (February–August 2024) spaced measurements to reduce common method bias and minimise attrition (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Of eighteen organisations approached, five agreed to participate. We ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the data and gained approval from the Human Resources (HR) departments. Eligible teams were well-established, worked towards common goals and had a co-located manager or team leader. Participants received an individualised code to facilitate matching responses across waves.

Participants

With the assistance of HR departments, we initially contacted 135 teams comprising 650 employees. At Time 1, 616 employees responded (response rate = 94%), and at Time 2, 564 employees completed the survey (response rate = 91%). Independent two-tailed *t*-tests

comparing employees who completed both Time 1 and Time 2 with those who dropped out after Time 1 revealed no significant differences in LOOP ($t(302) = –0.28$, $p = .59$) or work–family conflict ($t(363) = 0.77$, $p = .44$).

At Time 3, responses were obtained from 502 employees who had also participated at Time 1 and Time 2 (response rate = 89%). Independent t-tests and chi-square tests comparing employees who participated at Time 3 with those who did not revealed no significant differences in age ($t(543) = 0.75$, $p = .45$), gender ($\chi^2(1, N = 564) = 0.12$, $p = .72$), team tenure ($t(415) = –0.33$, $p = .74$), parental status ($\chi^2(1, N = 494) = 0.72$, $p = .39$), negative affect ($t(414) = 0.56$, $p = .58$), workload ($t(328) = –0.98$, $p = .33$), job control ($t(406) = 1.52$, $p = .22$), general health ($t(522) = –0.41$, $p = .81$), or presenteeism ($t(231) = –0.38$, $p = .25$). Additionally, Little's (1988) omnibus test was non-significant ($\chi^2(9) = 5.33$, $p = .14$), suggesting attrition did not bias the analyses.

When matching responses across three waves and teams, we excluded participants who transitioned into leadership roles, teams with leadership changes, employees missing Time 1 leader perfectionism data, and employees who changed teams. The final sample comprised 483 employees nested within 102 teams with complete data across all three waves.

Teams ranged from four to five employees, with an average participation of 3.7 members per team (minimum of three required for reliable aggregation). Mean participant age was 38.4 years ($SD = 7.7$); team tenure 2.33 years ($SD = 1.88$); and occupational tenure 6.4 years ($SD = 3.2$). Participants worked an average of 38.6 hours per week ($SD = 5.4$), 91% on permanent contracts; 57% were female and 64% had at least one child. Roles included Student Recruitment Coordinator, International Student Compliance Administrator, and Visa and Immigration Officer.

Measures

LOOP (Time 1)

An adapted version of Hewitt and Flett's (1991) five-item scale replaced "I" with "my leader" to capture employees' perceptions of LOOP. Sample items included: "My leader has high expectations for the people who are important to him/her" and "My leader cannot be bothered with people who will not strive to better themselves." Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The LOOP variable represents employees' collective perceptions of their leader's perfectionism at team level. To justify aggregation, we calculated intraclass correlations (ICC(1) and ICC(2)) and the reliability of team means (Bliese, 2000), $r_{wg(j)}$ as a measure of agreement within teams (James et al., 1984), and *F*-tests indicating whether average scores differed significantly across teams. Results supported aggregation: reliability was high at both the individual-level ($\alpha = .92$) and group-level ($\alpha = .88$), ICC(1) = .14, F (113, 578) = 2.33, $p < .001$, ICC(2) = .76, and $r_{wg} = .88$ (range = .82–.94). ICC(1) values ≥ .05 and ICC(2) values ≥ .70 indicate sufficient between-group variability and reliability (LeBreton & Senter, 2008), supporting the aggregation of LOOP at the team level.

Work–family conflict (Time 1 and Time 2)

Nine items from Carlson et al. (2000) measured work–family conflict at Time 1 and Time 2. Sample items included: "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I like" and "When I get home from work, I am often too frazzled to participate in family activities/responsibilities." Participants indicated agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for the work–family conflict scale were .90 at Time 1 and .93 at Time 2.

Presenteeism (Time 2 and Time 3)

Presenteeism was measured at Time 2 and Time 3 using a single item, "Over the last 3 months how many working days have you been coming to work through illness or injury?" following established approaches in the literature (Johns, 2011; Ruhle et al., 2020). We utilised a 3-month period to enhance memory recall (Ruhle et al., 2020) and align with the survey interval.

Control variables (Time 1)

We controlled for age (in years), gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), and team tenure, as these variables have shown meta-analytic associations with presenteeism (Miraglia & Johns, 2016). Given that work–family conflict is influenced by family responsibilities (Michel et al., 2011), parental status (0 = *no children*, 1 = *has children*) was also included as a control variable. To account for dispositional negativity that may bias employees' perceptions of leader perfectionism, we controlled for negative affect using 10 items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). Participants rated the extent to which each adjective described their general affective state on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Sample items included "distressed," "upset," and "irritable." The scale demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

We further controlled for team-level workload and job control, as variation in these factors may explain the LOOP–presenteeism relationship (Miraglia & Johns, 2016). Workload was measured using a 5-item scale from Spector and Jex (1998) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*less than once per month or never*) to 5 (*several times per day*). A sample item is: "How often does your job leave you with little time to get things done?" The scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .87$) and justified aggregation to the team level: ICC(1) = .11, F (104, 455) = 2.66, $p < .001$, ICC(2) = .71.

Job control was measured using a 3-item scale based on Karasek's (1985) Job Content Instrument, rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*very often*). A sample item is: "On my job, I have freedom to decide how I do my work." The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .77$) and supported aggregation to the team-level: ICC(1) = .18, F (122, 482) = 2.11, $p < .001$, ICC(2) = .77.

Finally, general health was included, as poor health at Time 1 may influence presenteeism at Time 3 independently of LOOP. A single item was taken from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (Pejtersen et al., 2010): "In general, how would you say your health is?", rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*poor)* to 5 (*excellent*).

Analysis

To ensure the temporal precedence of team-level LOOP and employees' work–family conflict over employees' presenteeism, we controlled for work–family conflict at Time 1 and presenteeism at Time 2. Group-level variables like LOOP were aggregated using the full dataset, requiring at least three responses per group.

The data had a nested structure, that is, employees (Level 1) nested within teams (Level 2). Therefore, we assessed if multilevel model is justified based on our data. For this purpose, we calculated ICC(1) values (LeBreton & Senter, 2008), which indicated small to medium effects of team membership on work–family conflict at Time 2 (ICC(1) = .14, $F(115, 633) = 1.83$, $p < .05$) and presenteeism at Time 3 (ICC(1) = .10, $F(103, 488) = 1.67$, $p < .05$). Given the effects of team membership on work–family conflict and presenteeism of this study, multilevel analysis is deemed acceptable (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Multilevel analysis was conducted using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015).

Hypotheses were tested via a cross cluster-level mediation model with a 2-1-1 design (Pituch & Stapleton, 2012), which examined the impact of a Level 2 variable (i.e. LOOP) on a Level 1 mediator (i.e. work–family conflict), which in turn is related to a Level 1 outcome

(i.e. presenteeism). This approach accounts for the nested structure of the data and allows us to test how team-level LOOP shapes a shared team climate, which in turn influences individual-level outcomes such as work–family conflict and presenteeism. The model assumes that the paths a_1 and a_2 are equal, which facilitates the differentiation between the within-team indirect effect (denoted by ab_1) and the unique between-team indirect effect (also referred to as the contextual effect, denoted by ab_2; Pituch & Stapleton, 2012).

The theoretical model emphasises the within-team indirect effect (cross-cluster mediation), suggesting that LOOP influences absolute levels of presenteeism through absolute levels of work–family conflict. We also report the between-team indirect effect for transparency (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The model included LOOP as a between-level predictor, work–family conflict as the mediator, and presenteeism as the outcome. Between-level controls were team workload, team job control, and average team tenure, with the team aggregate of work–family conflict at Time 2 ($\bar{M}_{ij}$) included to capture between-team effects. Within-level variables included work–family conflict at Time 1 and Time 2 (M_{ij}), presenteeism at Time 2 and Time 3 (Y_{ij}), and controls for age, gender, parental status, negative affect, and general health.

Before conducting the analyses, all Level 2 variables (i.e. LOOP, workload, job control, and team tenure) were grand-mean centred (Aiken & West, 1991). In line with recommendations by Enders and Tofighi (2007) for models focusing on Level 2 predictors, all continuous Level 1 variables (i.e. work–family conflict, presenteeism, age, negative affect, and general health) were also grand-mean centred. Binary variables (i.e. gender and parental status) were left uncentred. This approach allowed us to estimate the Level 2 effect of LOOP while accounting for individual differences at Level 1 (i.e. cross-cluster effects on employee presenteeism). Given the non-normal continuous nature of the outcome (Johns, 2011), we

used robust weighted least squares mean- and variance-adjusted (WLSMV) estimator with full information in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015), which is appropriate for mixed measurement scales and non-normal data (e.g. Nielsen et al., 2019).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables. As expected in this three-wave design, the focal constructs showed moderate temporal stability: work–family conflict and presenteeism were significantly correlated across adjacent waves (work–family conflict T1–T2: $r = .41$, $p < .05$; presenteeism T2–T3: $r = .39$, $p < .05$). Team-level LOOP at Time 1 was positively related to employees' work–family conflict at Time 2 ($r = .27$, $p < .01$), and work–family conflict at Time 2 was positively related to presenteeism at Time 3 ($r = .48$, $p < .05$).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Results of the multilevel path model

Details of the multilevel confirmatory factor analyses are provided in supplemental material (Table S1). The hypothesised three-factor model demonstrated good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 255.19$, $df = 88$, $p < .01$, CFI = .94, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .05) and fit the data significantly better than the alternative one- and two-factor models.

Table 2 presents the multilevel path analysis results. Autoregressive paths were significant (work–family conflict T1 → T2: $\gamma = .40$, $p < .01$; presenteeism T2 → T3: $\gamma = .35$, $p < .001$), indicating that prior levels predicted subsequent levels. All Time 1 control variables were included in the models; of these, workload ($\gamma = .13$, $p < .05$), negative affect ($\gamma = .14$, $p < .05$), and general health ($\gamma = –.17$, $p < .01$) showed significant associations with presenteeism at Time 3. Team-level LOOP at Time 1 positively predicted employees' work–family conflict at Time 2 ($\gamma = .47$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.66]), supporting Hypothesis 1.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Controlling for Time 1 variables, work–family conflict at Time 2 positively predicted presenteeism at Time 3 ($\gamma = .36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.73]), supporting Hypothesis 2. The within-team indirect effect of LOOP on presenteeism via work–family conflict was significant ($\gamma = .17$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.33]), confirming work–family conflict as a mediator and supporting Hypothesis 3.

As a robustness check, we tested a reverse model in which presenteeism (T2) predicted work–family conflict (T3). This relationship was not significant ($\gamma = .13$, SE = .21, $p = .10$), providing no support for the reverse pathway and supporting the hypothesised direction.

Discussion

This multilevel study examined how team-level perceptions of LOOP trigger a spillover–backloop process, in which resource depletion spills over into work–family conflict and subsequently feeds back into the workplace as presenteeism. Findings suggest that shared perceptions of leaders' perfectionist behaviours toward employees are associated with higher work–family conflict and, in turn, presenteeism, highlighting the broader interpersonal impact of LOOP on employees' personal lives and wellbeing.

Our research advances leadership theory by positioning LOOP as a distinct and underexplored interpersonal leadership trait. Unlike dark-side traits and leadership styles that rely on dominance, self-focused motives, or control (e.g. authoritarian, narcissistic, or abusive leadership; Schaubroeck et al., 2017; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000), LOOP operates through perfectionistic demands directed toward employees, expressed via excessive standards, criticism, and dissatisfaction with others' performance (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Shoss et al., 2015). By conceptualising LOOP as an interpersonal driver of workplace dynamics, this study extends leadership theory beyond traditional power- or motivation-based frameworks and highlights how LOOP is associated with employee-level outcomes. The present study contributes to a relational view of leadership (Ocampo et al., 2020) by showing

how collective perceptions of LOOP reflect an interpersonal dynamic that is expressed and experienced in leader–follower relationships.

Grounded in COR theory and the scarcity hypothesis, this study identifies team-level LOOP as an indirect predictor of employees' presenteeism via work–family conflict, uncovering a cross-domain spillover–backloop process linking work and home domains. Consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1998), team-level perceptions of LOOP are associated with resource loss and a spiral of depletion among employees (Hobfoll et al., 2018). As employees invest substantial energy in meeting these high standards, fewer resources remain available for family responsibilities (Goode, 1960), which is linked to higher work-family conflict. This reflects a spillover process, whereby strain originating in the work domain extends into employees' non-work lives. In turn, to protect remaining work-related resources—such as maintaining performance or avoiding negative evaluations from supervisors—employees may engage in self-endangering behaviours, such as attending work while ill (Dettmers et al., 2016; Knecht et al., 2017), illustrating a backloop process in which strain from the work–family interface feeds back into workplace behaviour. Accordingly, work–family conflict operates as a mediating mechanism between team-level LOOP and individual presenteeism. In doing so, we respond to calls for deeper examination of how leader behaviours—and the underlying traits, such as LOOP—influence employee wellbeing (Inceoglu et al., 2018), highlighting the role of work–family dynamics in cross-domain processes.

Our study also advances leadership research methodologically and conceptually by employing a multilevel framework (Bakker et al., 2023; Sanz-Vergel & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2017) to examine associations between shared team-level perceptions of LOOP and individual employees' work–family conflict and presenteeism. Leadership processes unfold within collective contexts, yet prior meta-analyses on work–family conflict have rarely

accounted for team-level factors or leader traits (Michel et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2022). While previous research has shown that transformational (Hammond et al., 2015) and servant (Tang et al., 2016) leadership are linked to lower work–family conflict, our findings extend this by indicating that LOOP tendencies are associated with higher levels of employee work–family conflict and subsequent presenteeism. By adopting a multilevel design, this study responds to calls within leadership research (Bliese et al., 2002; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008) to examine how leaders relate to shared team climates and their associations with individual experiences and health-related outcomes.

Finally, our findings contribute to research on leadership and presenteeism, extending the study of social antecedents of health-related attendance behaviours (Miraglia & Johns, 2021; Patel et al., 2023). Prior work links presenteeism to leaders' attendance behaviour (Dietz et al., 2020), leadership styles (Miraglia & Johns, 2016; Nielsen & Daniels, 2016), and leader–follower relationships (Wang et al., 2018). Our results indicate that shared perceptions of high expectations and critical demands toward others are associated with presenteeism via work–family dynamics, suggesting that presenteeism is shaped not only by supervisor modelling (Dietz et al., 2020) or direct pressure (Nielsen & Daniels, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), but also by broader relational and spillover processes.

Practical implications

The study highlights unintended negative effects of LOOP on employees' work–family conflict and presenteeism. Organisations should use 360-degree leadership assessments to identify leaders with LOOP traits and support them with training to tolerate errors, encourage experimentation, deliver constructive feedback, and foster a safe, motivating environment (Xu et al., 2022). Training on work–family dynamics can help leaders model positive behaviours and reduce work–family conflict (Sanz-Vergel & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2017). Additionally, leaders prone to LOOP should be encouraged to take microbreaks for relaxation

and socialising to help manage irrational beliefs and reduce perfectionist rumination (Kim et al., 2018).

To address presenteeism, organisational policies can encourage employees to prioritise health via wellness programs, mental health initiatives, and clear communication about the importance of sick leave (Kinman & Grant, 2021). Policies should discourage a presenteeism culture that promotes an "always on" mentality, rather than facilitating disclosure of illness and taking sick leave when needed (Ruhle & Süß, 2020). Targeted interventions, including stress management workshops and resilience training, can further support employees most affected by LOOP to mitigate negative effects and enhance employee wellbeing.

Limitations and directions for future research

Some limitations should be noted. First, all variables were self-reported, which may introduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To mitigate, we employed a three-wave longitudinal design. Future research could incorporate multiple data sources—e.g. supervisors' self-ratings of LOOP and peer or supervisor assessments of employee presenteeism. Second, presenteeism was assessed using a single self-report item over a 3-month period. While this approach shows acceptable reliability (r = .79; Miraglia & Johns, 2016) and may reduce recall bias compared to longer timeframes (Johns, 2010), the optimal recall period is unclear (Ruhle et al., 2020). Future research could explore the effects of different timeframes. Third, we did not measure employees' self-oriented perfectionism, which may inflate relationships between key variables. We partially addressed this by controlling for negative affect (Hummel et al., 2023; Stoeber et al., 2014) and aggregating LOOP to the team level. Particularly, examining team-level LOOP contributes to reduce individual biases and capture shared perceptions of leadership. Future research should assess employees' self-oriented perfectionism and explore potential moderators, such as coworker or team support. Fourth, although LOOP is a distinct leader trait reflecting externally directed

perfectionistic standards, its behaviours (e.g. criticism or pressure) may resemble other negative leadership constructs, such as abusive supervision or authoritarian leadership. Future research could directly compare these constructs to clarify LOOP's incremental validity and conceptual distinctiveness. Finally, the sample may limit generalisability. Future research could examine high-stress sectors (e.g. healthcare, IT, or finance), where pressure may augment LOOP and its negative effects.

Conclusion

This study indicates that team-level perceptions of LOOP deplete employees' resources, which is linked to higher presenteeism via work–family conflict. The findings suggest that other-oriented perfectionism is not only an interpersonal leadership trait but also has broader implications for employees' family lives, reflecting spillover from work to non-work domains and a subsequent loop back into health-related attendance behaviours. Organisations can mitigate these effects through targeted leader interventions and employee stress management support, thereby reducing work–family conflict and promoting healthier workplaces.

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Data availability statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics, and correlations between the study variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Age	38.4	7.7	—	.02	.21*	.11	–.05	–.03	–.06	–.05	–.09	–.13	–.16*	–.08	–.03
2 Gender	0.43	0.49	–.09	—	.05	.04	.06	–.18*	.02	.23*	–.06	.19*	.22**	.05	.04
3. Parental Status	0.64	0.48	.11*	.07	—	.15	–.09	.04	.05	.03	.01	.16	.18	.10	.13
4 Team Tenure	2.33	1.88	.18**	–.03	.09	—	.02	.04	–.06	.06	.11	.06	.13	–.09	–.12
5 Workload	2.69	1.25	.05	–.09	.06	.02	(.71)	–.19*	.17*	–.28**	.12	.15*	.20*	.18*	.19*
6 Job Control	3.11	0.82	.01	.03	.01	.08	–.15*	(.77)	–.13*	.19**	.02	–.13*	–.17**	–.13	–.09
7 Negative Affect	1.66	0.93	–.11	.08	.07	–.06	22***	–.19*	(.88)	–.13*	.23**	.15	.19	.06	.08
8 General Health	3.55	0.71	–.15*	.18*	–.10*	.07	–.24*	.21**	–.26*	—	.05	–.24**	–.33**	–.17*	–.23*
9 LOOP (T1)	2.46	1.59	.03	.02	.04	.06	.04	.00	.18*	.01	(.88)	.19**	.27**	.31*	.39**
10 WFC (T1)	2.69	1.23	–.18*	.14	.19*	.05	.34**	–.21*	.23***	–.15*	.29*	(.90)	.35*	.28**	.32*
11 WFC (T2)	2.93	1.95	–.23*	.26*	.21**	.08	.27*	–.33*	.25*	–.18*	.54**	.41*	(.93)	.34**	.38**
12 P (T2)	1.12	1.38	–.10	.07	.09	–.06	.12*	–.13	.14**	–.19*	.37**	.32*	.25*	—	.51**
13 P (T3)	1.97	2.55	–.08	.09	.11	–.05	.16*	–.07	.17*	–.22**	.44**	.35**	.48*	.39*	—

Note. $N = 483$ employees nested in 102 teams; 0 = *female*, 1= *male*; Reliabilities in parentheses along the diagonal; Standardised correlations on the within-level ($N = 483$) below the diagonal and on the between-level ($N = 102$ teams) above the diagonal; LOOP = leader other-oriented perfectionism, WFC = work–family conflict, P = presenteeism; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Results of Multilevel Path Analysis.

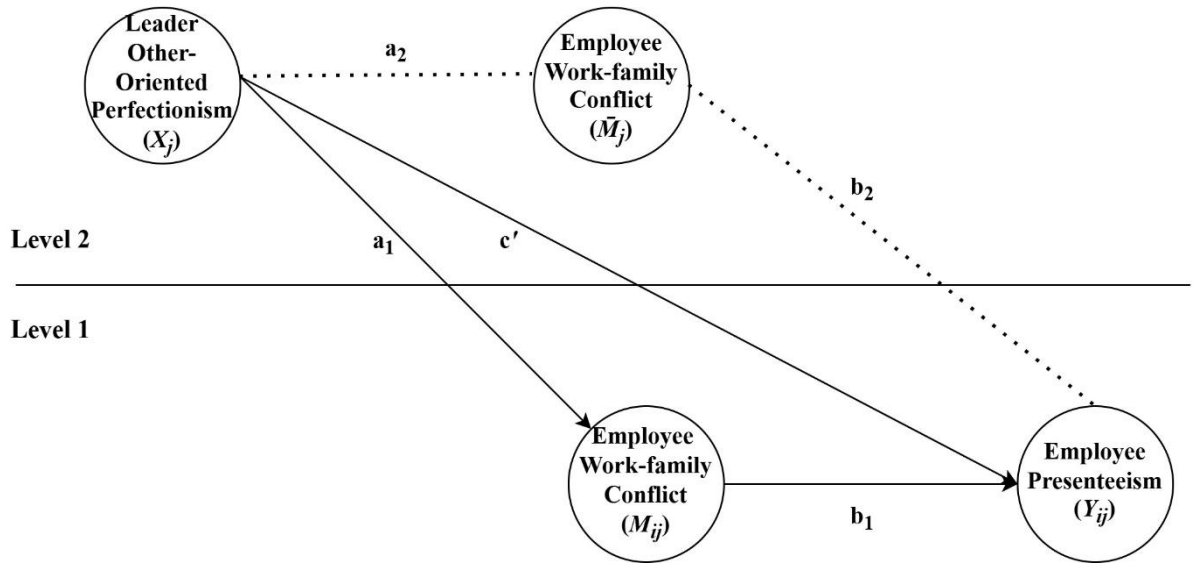
		γ (SE)
Stabilities		
WFC (T1) → WFC (T2)		.40 (.06)**
P (T2) → P (T3)		.35 (.05)***
Controls	**Employee WFC T2**	**Employee SP T3**
Age	.05 (.07)	.03 (.11)
Gender[a]	.06 (.04)	.09 (.03)
Parental Status[b]	.11 (.05)*	.06 (.07)
Team Tenure	–.12 (.05)	.08 (.17)
Workload	.11 (.04)*	.13 (.02)*
Job Control	–.07 (.06)	–.09 (.06)
Negative Affect	.18 (07)**	.14 (.06)*
General Health	–.21 (.08)**	–.17 (.19)**
a-path[c]		
LOOP (T1) → WFC (T2)		.47 (.09)**
b_1 - paths		
WFC (T2) → P (T3)		.36 (.13)***
b_2 - paths		
WFC (T2) → P (T3)		.38 (.19)*
Within-Indirect Effects[d]		
LOOP (T1) → WFC (T2) → P (T3)		.17 (.07)*
Between-Indirect Effects[d] (Contextual Effects)		

LOOP (T1) → WFC (T2) → P (T3)	.19 (.05)
Direct Effects	
LOOP (T1) → P (T3)	.18 (.09)
c`-paths[d] (Total Effects)	
LOOP (T1) → P (T3)	.35 (.26)

*Note***.** N = 483 employees nested in 102 teams; [a] 0 = *female*, 1= *male*; [b] 0 = no children, 1 = has children; [c] The a_1- and a_2-path from Figure 1 are assumed to be equal in this model; standardised estimates, except for indirect, and total effects; [d] unstandardised estimates. LOOP = leader other-oriented perfectionism, WFC = work–family conflict, P = presenteeism. For reasons of parsimony, correlations between T1 variables are not reported (but were included in the model). $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Figure 1

Hypothesised Model



Note. Design of the 2-1-1 model with cross-cluster and unique cluster-level mediation represented by solid and dotted lines, respectively. X_j represents leader other-oriented perfectionism for team *j*, and M_{ij} and Y_{ij} represent employee work–family conflict and presenteeism, respectively, for employee *i* in cluster *j*. $\bar{M}_j$ represents the team aggregate of employee work–family conflict. The a_1 and a_2 paths are assumed to be equal in this model.