

WORK–FAMILY CONFLICT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

*Zhang Tianxi

**Oyyappan Duraipandi

Paper Received: 30.11.2025 / **Paper Revised:** 03.03.2026 / **Paper Accepted:** 20.03.2026 / **Paper Published:** 29.03.2026

Corresponding Author: Zhang Tianxi; doi: 10.46360/cosmos.mgt.420261007

Abstract

Work–family conflict (WFC) - the interrole conflict that arises when the demands of work and family roles are mutually incompatible - has long been recognized as a significant workplace stressor. This paper synthesizes empirical research on the relationship between WFC and employee engagement, drawing on role conflict theory, the job demands–resources (JD-R) model, and the psychological-conditions framework of engagement. The review of empirical studies across sectors - including hospitality, education, and healthcare - consistently shows that WFC is negatively associated with employee engagement, and that this relationship is frequently mediated by job satisfaction and moderated by factors such as person–job fit, affective commitment, and negative affectivity. A conceptual model is presented integrating these mediating and moderating mechanisms. The paper concludes with practical implications for organizations seeking to reduce work–family conflict and sustain employee engagement, along with directions for future empirical research.

Keywords: Work–Family Conflict, Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction, Job Demands-Resources Model, Person-Job Fit, Work Engagement.

Introduction

As work and family life become increasingly intertwined - through longer working hours, dual-career households, and ‘always-on’ digital connectivity - employees are more frequently required to manage competing demands from their work and family roles. Work–family conflict (WFC) is defined as a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible, such that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). WFC is now recognized as one of the most consistently documented workplace stressors, with well-established links to reduced job satisfaction, poorer mental and physical health, and lower organizational commitment (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011).

At the same time, employee engagement - broadly defined as the harnessing of organization members' full selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, to their work roles (Kahn, 1990) - has become a central concern for organizations seeking to sustain performance, retention, and well-being. Engaged employees invest vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002) and, in turn, tend to exhibit stronger job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and lower turnover intentions (Saks, 2006).

Because WFC depletes the personal resources that employees need to invest in their work roles, a growing body of empirical research has examined whether, and how, WFC undermines employee engagement. This paper synthesizes that literature to answer three questions: (1) What is the empirical relationship between WFC and employee engagement? (2) Through what mechanisms does this relationship operate? and (3) What organizational and individual factors strengthen or weaken it? The paper proceeds by reviewing the theoretical foundations of WFC and employee engagement, presenting a conceptual model integrating mediating and moderating mechanisms identified in the empirical literature, summarizing key empirical studies in table form, and discussing implications for research and practice.

Theoretical Background

Work–Family Conflict

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) proposed that WFC arises through three mechanisms: time-based conflict, in which time devoted to one role leaves insufficient time for the other; strain-based conflict, in which strain experienced in one role carries over and impairs functioning in the other; and behavior-based conflict, in which behaviors expected in one role are incompatible with behaviors expected in the other. WFC is also recognized as bidirectional: work interference with family (WIF) occurs when work demands spill over to disrupt the family life, while

*- **School of Business and Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.

family interference with work (FIW) occurs when family demands disrupt work life. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that WIF is more strongly associated with work-domain outcomes - such as job satisfaction and work engagement - while FIW is more strongly associated with family-domain outcomes, a pattern known as domain-matching (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011).

Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) introduced personal engagement as the degree to which individuals bring their physical, cognitive, and emotional selves into role performances, contingent on perceived meaningfulness, safety, and availability of personal resources. Building on this foundation, Schaufeli and colleagues operationalized work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, and developed the widely used Utrecht Work Engagement Scale to measure it (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Saks (2006) extended this work by distinguishing job engagement from organization engagement and by testing a broader model of engagement's antecedents - including perceived organizational support and job characteristics - and consequences, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced turnover intention.

The Job Demands–Resources Model as an Integrating Framework

The job demands–resources (JD-R) model offers a parsimonious framework for linking WFC to engagement. The model proposes that working conditions can be classified into job demands, which require sustained effort and are associated with exhaustion, and job resources, which facilitate goal achievement and are associated with engagement

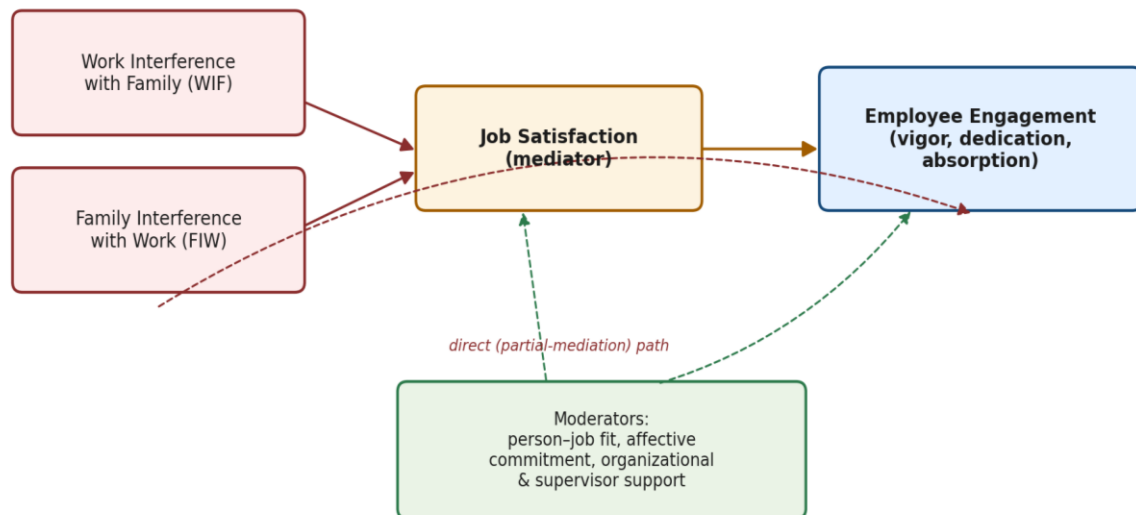
(Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Within this framework, WFC functions as a job demand that depletes the personal resources employees would otherwise bring to their work roles, thereby undermining the conditions of meaningfulness and availability that Kahn (1990) identified as prerequisites for engagement. This theoretical link is well supported empirically, as reviewed in Section 4.

Conceptual Model

Drawing on the theoretical foundations above, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the WFC–engagement relationship. Both WIF and FIW are modeled as antecedents that reduce job satisfaction, which in turn functions as a partial mediator of the negative relationship between WFC and employee engagement - consistent with the mediating role of job satisfaction identified among Chinese school principals (Yang, Qi, Zeng, Han, & Pan, 2021) and physicians (Yang, Kong, Qian, Zhang, Li, Gao, Ning, & Yu, 2024).

A direct path from WFC to engagement is also included to reflect the partial, rather than full, mediation reported in this literature. Finally, a set of moderators - person–job fit, affective commitment, and organizational or supervisor support - is modeled as conditioning the strength of these paths, reflecting empirical evidence that good person–job fit weakens the WFC–engagement link (Karatepe & Karadas, 2016) and that affective commitment shapes how strongly job satisfaction translates into engagement (Yang, Qi, Zeng, Han, & Pan, 2021).

Table 1: Drivers of Digital Transformation in Higher Education Institutions
Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Work-Family Conflict and Employee Engagement



Empirical Evidence

Table 1 summarizes five empirical studies that examine the WFC–engagement relationship, or closely related job outcomes, across different occupational sectors. Although the studies vary in sample, industry, and specific mediating or

moderating variables tested, they converge on a consistent finding: WFC is negatively associated with employee engagement or closely related job outcomes, and this relationship is rarely a simple, unconditional main effect - it is shaped by mediating psychological states (chiefly job satisfaction) and by individual or organizational moderators.

Table 1: Selected Empirical Studies on Work–Family Conflict and Employee Engagement

Study	Sample / Context	Mediator / Moderator	Key Finding
Karatepe & Karadas (2016)	Service (hotel) employees	Person–job fit (antecedent); WFC & FWC (mediators)	Person–job fit reduces WFC and FWC; WFC and FWC partially mediate a negative path from poor fit to work engagement
Yang, Qi, Zeng, Han, & Pan (2021)	358 Chinese primary/secondary school principals	Job satisfaction (mediator); affective commitment (moderator)	WFC negatively related to work engagement; job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship, more strongly under high affective commitment
Yang, Kong, Qian, Zhang, Li, Gao, Ning, & Yu (2024)	2,480 Chinese physicians, Jilin Province	Job satisfaction and work engagement (mediators)	WFC negatively associated with employee well-being; job satisfaction and work engagement both mediate this relationship
Karatepe & Uludag (2008)	Frontline hotel employees, Northern Cyprus	Negative affectivity (moderator)	Work–family conflicts are negatively related to job outcomes; the relationship is intensified among employees high in negative affectivity
Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer (2011) [meta-analysis]	427 effect sizes across many occupational samples	Domain-matching (WIF vs. FIW) as a moderator of effect size	WIF is more strongly related to work-domain outcomes (e.g., job/work engagement, job satisfaction) than to family-domain outcomes, and vice versa for FIW

Several patterns emerge from this evidence. First, job satisfaction is the most frequently identified mediator of the WFC–engagement relationship, appearing in both the school-principal study (Yang, Qi, Zeng, Han, & Pan, 2021) and the physician study (Yang, Kong, Qian, Zhang, Li, Gao, Ning, & Yu, 2024): employees experiencing WFC report lower job satisfaction, which in turn predicts lower engagement. Second, individual differences condition the strength of the relationship: person–job fit reduces WFC in the first place and weakens its downstream effects on engagement (Karatepe & Karadas, 2016), while negative affectivity appears to intensify the harmful effects of work–family conflicts on job outcomes (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). Third, the domain-matching principle identified in the broader meta-analytic literature (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011) suggests that WIF specifically, rather than WFC in the aggregate, is likely to be the stronger predictor of reduced work engagement, since engagement is itself a work-domain construct.

Discussion and Practical Implications

Reducing Work Interference with Family

Because WIF appears to be the more work-relevant driver of reduced engagement, organizations seeking to protect engagement levels should prioritize reducing work-to-family spillover specifically - for example, through manageable workloads, schedule flexibility, and norms that discourage after-hours work demands - rather than treating work–family conflict as an undifferentiated construct (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011).

Protecting Job Satisfaction as a Buffer

Given the consistent mediating role of job satisfaction, interventions that support employees experiencing WFC - such as manager check-ins, workload adjustment, and family-supportive supervisor behavior - may help preserve engagement even when conflict cannot be eliminated entirely, by protecting the job-satisfaction pathway through which WFC's effects

are transmitted (Yang, Qi, Zeng, Han, & Pan, 2021; Yang, Kong, Qian, Zhang, Li, Gao, Ning, & Yu, 2024).

Attending to Person–Job Fit in Selection and Placement

Because person–job fit both reduces WFC and buffers its effects on engagement (Karatepe & Karadas, 2016), organizations may benefit from attending to fit during recruitment, selection, and internal placement decisions, not only for performance reasons but as an indirect lever for protecting employee engagement under conditions of work–family strain.

Building Organizational and Supervisor Support

Consistent with the JD-R model's emphasis on job resources as a counterweight to job demands (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), organizational and supervisor support can function as a resource that offsets the demand represented by WFC, helping to sustain the conditions of psychological availability and meaningfulness that underlie engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Limitations and Future Research

This paper is a narrative synthesis of existing empirical studies rather than a new primary study, and the specific mediating and moderating relationships reviewed here have been established in particular occupational and national contexts - hospitality employees in Turkey and Northern Cyprus, school principals and physicians in China - that may not generalize uniformly to all sectors. Future research should test the integrated conceptual model presented in Figure 1 directly, using longitudinal designs capable of establishing the temporal ordering implied by the mediation pathways, and should examine whether the domain-matching pattern (WIF predicting engagement more strongly than FIW) holds specifically for engagement as an outcome, since most domain-matching evidence to date has been aggregated across a broader set of work- and family-domain outcomes (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011).

Conclusion

The empirical literature reviewed in this paper indicates that work–family conflict is a meaningful and consistent threat to employee engagement, operating primarily through reduced job satisfaction and conditioned by factors such as person–job fit, affective commitment, and negative affectivity. Rather than treating WFC and engagement as a simple cause-and-effect pair, organizations and researchers alike are better served by attending to the mediating and moderating mechanisms identified here - job satisfaction as a transmission channel, and

fit, commitment, and support as buffers - when designing interventions or future studies aimed at protecting employee engagement in the face of competing work and family demands.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this manuscript. Results have been deduced objectively; nothing influenced this result by any individual, monetary, or institutional interests. In effect, utmost endeavors were in order to conduct a bias-free operation of gathering and analyzing the data into interpretation and producing a study based on merit, away from research inconsistencies.

References

1. Amstad, F. T., Meier, L. L., Fasel, U., Elfering, A., & Semmer, N. K. (2011). A meta-analysis of work–family conflict and various outcomes with a special emphasis on cross-domain versus matching-domain relations. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 16(2), 151-169. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022170>
2. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 499-512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.499>
3. Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 76-88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258214>
4. Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692-724. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256287>
5. Karatepe, O. M., & Karadas, G. (2016). Service employees' fit, work-family conflict, and work engagement. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 30(5), 554-566. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-02-2015-0066>
6. Karatepe, O. M., & Uludag, O. (2008). Affectivity, conflicts in the work-family interface, and hotel employee outcomes. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(1), 30-41.
7. Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(7), 600-619. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940610690169>
8. Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3,

- 71-92. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326>
9. Yang, X., Kong, X., Qian, M., Zhang, X., Li, L., Gao, S., Ning, L., & Yu, X. (2024). The effect of work-family conflict on employee well-being among physicians: The mediating role of job satisfaction and work engagement. *BMC Psychology*, 12, Article 530. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02026-8>
 10. Yang, Z., Qi, S., Zeng, L., Han, X., & Pan, Y. (2021). Work-family conflict and primary and secondary school principals' work engagement: A moderated mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 596385. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.596385>