



# Employees' work–family conflict moderating life and job satisfaction<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The top-down perspective (i.e., life satisfaction influences job satisfaction) and the dispositional perspective are the focuses of the current study's research on life–work spillovers. This study investigates the impact of life satisfaction on job satisfaction under different situations of work–family conflict. The results of a field survey reveal responses from 121 sales managers from 26 hotels in China to test the moderating effects of work–family conflict on the relationship between life and job satisfaction. Analysis involves hierarchical regression with follow-up examination utilizing simple slope analysis. The results imply that employees facing less conflict between work and family tend to carry positive aspects from daily life to the workplace. The results also support the value of managerial efforts to have an organizational climate welcoming to employees' families. Even in China, where labor resources are abundant, family-friendly policies would help to increase the business success of hotels.

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## 1. Introduction

In the present post-modern society, employee stress costs companies over \$80 billion annually due to low job morale, lost productivity, and health and disability claims (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Specifically, many hospitality employees struggle to fulfill work and family responsibilities. This struggle is due to long hours, irregular and inflexible work schedules, heavy workloads, low wages, and demanding and difficult customers (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Wong & Ko, 2009). Thus, work–family conflict can be a common work stressor of hospitality employees. Reason may suggest that differing levels of work–family conflict could generate different spillovers from life well-being to job attitude. For example, although satisfied with time commitments to life and home activities, an employee could still feel dissatisfied with his/her job and have strong turnover intentions when they cannot balance a heavy work load with family obligations. Therefore, understanding employees' work–family conflict (WFC) and encouraging a positive influence of employees' overall life well-being on job satisfaction could be cost beneficial to hospitality businesses.

Previous WFC research focuses on direct and indirect effects of WFC on life and job satisfaction but provides limited information

about the role of WFC in the relationship between life and job satisfaction. Empirical investigations over the past three decades support strong associations between life satisfaction and job satisfaction. In past work, life satisfaction is described as overall subjective well-being, and job satisfaction is determined by affective and cognitive evaluations of the job (Brief, Butcher, George, & Link, 1993). The literature presents three different theoretical perspectives to explain the observed zero-order correlation between life and job satisfaction. These perspectives are the bottom-up perspective, the top-down perspective, and the dispositional and environmental perspective. Rode (2004) describes the bottom-up perspective as job satisfaction causing life satisfaction (Brief et al., 1993). Judge and Watanabe (1993) present the top-down perspective as life satisfaction influencing job satisfaction. The dispositional and environmental perspectives claim that environmental and dispositional variables affect life and job satisfaction (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Researchers of WFC cover the bottom-up perspective extensively, while giving the other two perspectives less research attention (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Consequently, more research needs to show influences of employees' overall life well-being on job attitudes and further understanding of moderating roles of WFC.

The purpose of this research is to examine influences of employee's well-being on work satisfaction while considering the moderating roles of WFC. This research extends theoretical understanding of the relationship between life satisfaction and job satisfaction by integrating the bottom-up perspective and the dispositional view in the WFC context. In terms of specifics, several factors are relevant. One is examining the main effects of life satisfaction on job satisfaction. A second is studying how WFC moderates the relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction. The

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other matter the authors pursue in this research is determining whether work-interfering-family (WIF) and family-interfering-work (FIW) have different moderating roles on the relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Life and job satisfaction

Life and job satisfaction are key constructs for this research. Life satisfaction generally refers to an individuals' overall well-being (Karatepe, Kilic, & Isiksel, 2008), and specifically reflects an individual's quality of life including physical and material well-being, interpersonal relations, social activities, personal development, and fulfillment and recreation (Johansson & Bernspang, 2003). On the other hand, job satisfaction is an employee's internal state of some degree of favorable or unfavorable feelings from affectively and/or cognitively evaluating his or her job experience (Brief, 1998, p. 86). Research on the relationship between life satisfaction (LSA) and job satisfaction (JSA) includes both the work impact on life and non-work social matters affecting work (Steiner & Truxillo, 1987). Research supports three models known as the spillover model, the compensatory model and the segmentation model (Heller, Judge, & Waston, 2002). Heller et al. (2002) describe the spillover model as a positive association between job and life satisfaction. They also present the compensatory model as a negative correlation between job and life satisfaction. In their opinion, the segmentation model states that job and life satisfaction are not related. The spillover model receives relatively more empirical support than the other two models. Within the spillover framework, researchers can view LSA and JSA from the bottom-up, from the top-down, and from the dispositional/environmental perspectives (Rode, 2004).

Researchers have given the bottom-up perspective more attention than the other two perspectives. Rode (2004) notes that previous research provides limited clues about the variables that may confound the relationship between job and life satisfaction. He also points out that limited results elucidate dispositional stressors (e.g., WFC) moderating the spillover from the life domain to work outcomes. This finding implies that researchers should apply the top-down and dispositional perspectives more widely in work–family conflict research. The present study examines an integrated model of the two perspectives. An examination of the top-down perspective, this section develops the first hypothesis reflecting the relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction. The next section focuses on the dispositional perspective and suggests WFC as an employees' dispositional factor and develops the hypotheses on WFC's moderating roles in the relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction. Thus, the research integrates the top-down and dispositional perspectives in the hypothesized model.

Three theoretical views illustrate the importance of examining the top-down perspective (i.e., the relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction). First, following Orpen's (1978) valence–expectancy perspective, a high level of fulfillment with life aspects (e.g., family and recreation) often associate with feelings of high self-esteem and sense of control that produce strong expectancy and instrumentality beliefs. The expectancies and beliefs increase work motivation magnitudes and ultimately employees obtain high performance and job satisfaction (Orpen, 1978). The second perspective draws on cognitive-dissonance theory. Cognitive-dissonance theory suggests that in the case of incongruence between high life fulfillment and job dissatisfaction, individuals tend to reduce this dissonance and achieve congruence by spilling over their positive feelings with family and recreation to their work attitudes (Orpen, 1978). Finally, the information processing perspective explains how employees who feel satisfied with life are also more likely to have high job satisfaction since positive affective disposition toward life frames interpretation of

job conditions and past job outcomes (Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994).

The relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction warrants further investigation among hospitality employees. First, relative to previously tested samples (e.g., manufacturing workers), hospitality employees have specific patterns of life and job situations that cause difficulties in balancing work and family (Karatepe et al., 2008). They have specific work schedules (e.g., weekend hours), job requirements (e.g., keep smiling), and reward systems (e.g., based on customer satisfaction). Hence, they might face difficulties in balancing excessive family demands and obtaining positive spillovers from life to job satisfaction. Further, research during the 1990s demonstrates that life and job satisfaction are highly relevant among expatriate hotel managers in Asian Pacific countries (Li, 1996).

Based on the theoretical and empirical support above, the researchers hypothesize that the top-down perspective is relevant among hospitality employees. Individuals who feel satisfied with life tend to have greater motivation to perform well and approach higher job satisfaction. They are also more likely to spill over positive life feelings to work. They interpret job events more positively by their positive affective disposition toward life. Such positive spillover from life to job also holds among hotel managers.

In summary, the current study proposes that individuals with high life satisfaction tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than those with low life satisfaction.

**H1.** Individuals with high levels of life satisfaction are more likely to feel satisfied with their job than those with low levels of life satisfaction.

### 2.2. The moderating role of WFC

Relationships among work–family conflict, job satisfaction and life satisfaction have been the subject of a stream of research. Work–family conflict (WFC) refers to a form of inter-role conflict resulting from the mutually incompatible role pressures between work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Previous empirical investigations and meta-analyses demonstrate the close relationship between job and life satisfaction and individuals' WFC levels (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). However, studies do not conclusively show an understanding of the moderating role of WFC in the relationship between LSA and JSA. Previous studies point out that some dispositional variables could moderate the relationship between LSA and JSA. Moderators include work-induced guilt, the ability to manage work resources (Hochwarter, Perrewe, Meurs, & Kacmar, 2007), and core self-evaluation (Judge & Watanabe, 1993).

From the dispositional perspective, the present study proposes WFC as an employees' dispositional factor moderating the relationship between LSA and JSA. Two different dimensions of WFC are work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW). WIF and FIW induce similar moderating effects on the relationship of life satisfaction to job satisfaction (Frone et al., 1992). Individuals tend to give back commensurately what they have received (Siegel, Post, Brockner, Fisherman, & Garden, 2005). When perceiving strong WIF or FIW, employees are more apt to attribute either positive or negative influences to work attributes or overall life quality (Siegel et al., 2005). Additionally, when individuals lack the abilities and resources to balance work and family, they tend to adjust their home lives first (Frone et al., 1992). The adjustment in employees' family life in turn affects work behaviors because employees may not believe, in the long run, willing to suffer stress in family life.

Therefore, in addition to the main-effect proposition (i.e., H1), the integrated model suggests moderating effects of WIF and FIW on the relationship between life satisfaction and job satisfaction. First, WIF and FIW associate with individual differences in attention, time and behavior towards how employees transfer life well-being into job

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