



The relationship of chronic regulatory focus to work–family conflict and job satisfaction

Xinyuan (Roy) Zhao^{a,*}, Karthik Namasivayam^b

^a Business School, Sun Yat-Sen University, S456 Shan Heng Hall, 135 Xin Gang Xi Lu, Haizhu District, Guangzhou 510275, China

^b Pennsylvania State University, 216 Mateer Building, University Park, PA 16802, United States

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ABSTRACT

The results of a field study examining the moderating role of chronic self-regulatory focus on the relationships between work–family conflict (WFC) and job satisfaction are reported here. Data from 284 hotel employees were analyzed using hierarchical regression with follow-up simple slope analyses. Results show that self-regulatory processes moderate the relationships between WFC and job satisfaction. When work interfered with family obligations, individuals reporting higher levels of chronic promotion focus were less satisfied with their jobs. On the contrary, when their family roles interfered with work tasks employees with higher levels of chronic prevention focus were less satisfied with their jobs.

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1. Introduction

Hospitality employees often experience long work hours, irregular and inflexible work schedules, heavy workloads, low wages, and demanding and difficult customers (Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe and Olugbade, 2009; Wong and Ko, 2009). Consequently, they experience role conflicts between excessive job demands and family responsibilities. Researchers have conceptualized work–family conflict (WFC) as inter-role interferences between work and family domains. WFC influences individuals' attitudes and behaviors and results in a host of counter-productive outcomes including depression, reduced performance, and turnover (Siegel et al., 2005).

Job satisfaction is defined as individuals' affective and cognitive evaluations of their jobs; WFC is commonly regarded as greatly influencing individuals' job satisfaction (Brief, 1998; Grandey et al., 2005). Research has, however, produced inconsistent results on the relationship between WFC and job satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). For example, Ghiselli et al. (2001) found a negative relationship between job satisfaction and inter-role conflict among food service managers while Bedeian et al. (1988) showed the relationships were positive; other researchers demonstrated that there was no significant correlation between WFC and job satisfaction (e.g., Aryee et al., 1999). Researchers have partially attributed these inconclusive findings to the incomplete accounting of individual

differences and their potential moderating roles (Eby et al., 2005; Ford et al., 2007).

Accordingly, the present study responds to these concerns and identifies self-regulation as an important individual-level difference that moderates the impact of hospitality employees' WFC on job satisfaction. Higgins (1997, 1998) suggested that individuals differ, chronically, in their self-regulatory focus and correspondent psychological and behavioral patterns; individuals may be either promotion or prevention focused. That is, individuals have innate (similar to a personality trait) preferences about what strategies they will adopt to regulate personal perceptions and behaviors, and these preferences are relatively consistent across situations. Chronic promotion focused individuals, usually with positive behavioral and cognitive strategies, experience WFC as providing opportunities to demonstrate their coping abilities and achieve career and life success. On the contrary, chronic prevention focused individuals adopt conservative and preventive strategies and perceive WFC as barriers to completing their job and fulfilling family responsibilities. This individual level difference has a great effect on employees' reactions to WFC and it is important to understand how this variable modifies employee behavior.

The next section elaborates on this theoretical foundation and develops hypotheses. Based on a review of appropriate literature, it is hypothesized that individuals perceive WFC differently based on their self-regulatory processes – chronic promotion or prevention focus – and then proposes theoretical linkages and investigates the effect of such perception on their job satisfaction. Researchers have noted that WFC can be decomposed into two: work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW). This study examines the relationships between each of the two dimensions of WFC (WIF and FIW), chronic self-regulation, and job satisfaction.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 20 84112721.

E-mail addresses: zhaoxy22@mail.sysu.edu.cn (X. Zhao), kun1@psu.edu (K. Namasivayam).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Work–family conflict (WFC)

WFC refers to “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77). That is, the relationships between work and family are dynamic and reciprocal: WFC concerns arise when demands in one domain (work or family) limit an individual from meeting obligations in the other domain (family or work) (Carr et al., 2008). WFC, as noted earlier, has been differentiated into two interdependent dimensions: work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW) (Frone et al., 1992a, 1997).

Research has modeled WIF and FIW with distinct antecedents and outcomes (Byron, 2005; Frone et al., 1992a,b, 1997). However, more recently both WIF and FIW are said to simultaneously influence individuals' job attitudes and behaviors. Individuals experiencing WIF related stress lower their job evaluations resulting in reduced job satisfaction and prompting actions (e.g., quitting) to reduce stress. Similarly, when family interferes with work, individuals attribute their discomfort to organizational arrangements such as the job itself, reducing job satisfaction (Boyar et al., 2003). Individuals usually appraise their jobs as the source of negative threats attributing negative consequences to management's inability or disinterest in reducing work and family role conflicts (Grandey et al., 2005). Finally, although scholars proposed distinct predictors and consequents of WIF and FIW, strong and significant correlations ($r > .2$) were found among WIF, FIW, and job attitudes (see Frone et al., 1992a, 1997). Therefore, both WIF and FIW directly and indirectly affect job satisfaction. Here, we propose hypotheses for direct effects of role conflicts on job satisfaction (we discuss the moderation effects of chronic regulatory focus more fully later in this paper):

Hypothesis 1a. WIF has direct and negative effects on individuals' job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1b. FIW has direct and negative effects on individuals' job satisfaction.

2.2. Chronic regulatory focus

Higgins et al. proposed that individuals have inherent and chronic tendencies to adopt certain (promotion or prevention) self-regulatory strategies in their daily experience and that such preferences are relatively consistent across situations (Higgins, 1997; Liberman et al., 2001). Individuals' past history of success with either a promotion or prevention focus will lead them to use the correspondingly successful regulatory focus in a new task (Cesario et al., 2004). Thus, chronic regulatory focus is regarded as a dispositional variable of individuals and is relatively stable across contexts.

Individuals who are chronically promotion focused utilize different patterns of perception and corresponding behaviors compared to those individuals who are chronically prevention focused. Chronic promotion-focused individuals are sensitive to the presence or absence of desired end-states, use eagerness strategies, insure hits, guard against errors of omission, and have emotional responses (e.g., disappointment) along a cheerfulness–dejection continuum. Contrarily, chronic prevention-focused individuals are sensitive to the presence or non-presence of undesired end-states, use vigilance strategies to insure correct rejection, guard against errors of commission, and respond emotionally along a quiescence–agitation continuum (Shah and Higgins, 2001). The following

section describes how chronic regulatory focus moderates the relationship of WFC with job satisfaction.

2.3. WFC, chronic regulatory focus, and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is “an internal state that is expressed by affectively and/or cognitively evaluating an experienced job with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Brief, 1998, p. 86) and is one of the most frequently examined consequences in WFC research (Grandey et al., 2005). However, previous work has produced mixed results on the relationship between WFC and job satisfaction.

Meta-analytic studies found that individuals with high levels of conflicts between work and family roles are less satisfied with jobs. For example, Allen et al. (2000) reported the mean sample weighted correlation coefficient between WFC and job satisfaction was significantly negative ($r = -.24$). Kossek and Ozeki (1998) found a slightly stronger negative association between WFC and job satisfaction ($r = -.31$). Recently, a strong negative correlation ($r = -.37$) between one dimension of WFC – WIF – and job satisfaction was reported (Carr et al., 2008).

However, several other studies have reported mixed results for the relationships between WFC as a composite measure, each of its two dimensions and job satisfaction. Bedeian et al. (1988) found that WIF was positively associated with job satisfaction ($r = .27$ for married female accountants and $r = .29$ for married male accountants) while O'Driscoll et al. (1992) found slightly weak but positive correlation between FIW and job satisfaction. Composite measures of WFC were also found to have positive correlations with job satisfaction: $r = .17$ for Michigan teachers (Cooke and Rousseau, 1984), $r = .20$ for employed mothers of adolescents (Frone et al., 1994), and $r = .13$ for executives (Lyness and Thompson, 1997). WFC was found to have no significant correlation with job satisfaction in several other studies (e.g., Aryee et al., 1999; Thompson and Blau, 1993; Wiley, 1987). A recent meta-analysis found that WIF and FIW have only low relationships with satisfaction outcomes (Michel et al., 2009).

Karatepe (2010) pointed out that such mixed findings also exist in research conducted among hospitality employees. For example, Karatepe and Sokmen (2006) found that for frontline employees in the Turkish hospitality industry family–work conflict (i.e., FIW; $r = -.25$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$) had significant negative impacts on job satisfaction but not work–family conflict (i.e., WIF; $r = -.24$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.07$, $p > .05$). Karatepe and Kilic (2007) found that for frontline employees in Northern Cyprus hotels WIF ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$) had a significant negative effect on job satisfaction, whereas FIW did not ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.05$, $p > .05$). However, Karatepe and Kilic's (2009) more recent investigations in Northern Cyprus found that both WIF ($r = -.04$, $p > .05$; $\beta = -.11$, $p > .05$) and FIW ($r = -.13$, $p > .05$; $\beta = -.03$, $p > .05$) had negative, but not significant, relationships to job satisfaction.

Compared to previously studied samples (e.g., manufacturing workers), hospitality employees have specific patterns of life and job situations making it difficult to balance work and family (Karatepe et al., 2008). That is, they have specific work schedules (i.e., week-end hours), job requirements (i.e., keep smiling), and reward systems (i.e., based on customer satisfaction). It is important to investigate the relationships of WIF/FIW with job satisfaction especially given the specific work and family characteristics of hospitality employees and the mixed findings in extant research.

Researchers have attributed the mixed results both to methodological and theoretical reasons. Methodologically, Kossek and Ozeki (1998) pointed out that the varying results may be because of the different samples and measures used. Other methodological issues such as overreliance on cross-sectional designs, single-source self-report survey data, poorly validated measures, and an

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