

Work-Family Conflict and Balance Strategies—An Analysis Based on the Work-Family Resources Model

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Abstract

This article delves into the multifaceted realm of work-family conflict, examining its diverse dimensions and proposing effective resolution strategies. Central to this exploration is the Work-Family Resource Model, a comprehensive framework amalgamating Conservation of Resources theory, role theory, and boundary theory. The model elucidates bidirectional interactions, emphasizing situational demands, and delineates the roles of individual, key, and macro resources in achieving balance between work and family domains. Strategic insights for mitigating conflict encompass establishing clear boundaries to facilitate role transitions, effective time management for task allocation, cultivating a robust social support system, and enhancing relationship quality in both familial and professional spheres. These strategies offer practical guidance for individuals and organizations grappling with the intricate challenges posed by work-family conflict in contemporary society, ultimately aiming to improve overall life quality and foster a harmonious work-life balance.

Keywords

Work-Family Conflict, Work-Family Resource Model, Conservation of Resources Theory, Role Theory, Boundary Theory, Strategies

1. Introduction

With the ongoing evolution of society and the increasing diversity in work structures, work-family conflict has emerged as a central concern in the realm of social psychology. This conflict encompasses the adverse encounters individuals

face while navigating roles in both the professional and familial spheres, stemming from incongruities and mutual disruptions in role demands. In contemporary society, characterized by shifting work paradigms, this phenomenon has gained prominence as individuals grapple with the intricate task of harmonizing their professional and familial obligations.

Initially, research concentrated on delineating the conflicts and incongruities between the realms of work and family. Nevertheless, as societal dynamics evolved and scholarly investigations deepened, researchers gradually recognized the intricate nature of this domain. Consequently, they introduced diverse theoretical frameworks and coping strategies to comprehensively address the multifaceted aspects of work-family conflict.

This paper aims to comprehensively introduce the definition, causes, and resolution strategies associated with work-family conflict. Within this framework, an exploration of the Work-Family Resources Model will be conducted. This model integrates Resource Conservation Theory, Role Theory, and Boundary Theory, providing a thorough perspective on understanding and addressing work-family conflict. Through a detailed analysis of the model's elements and explanations, we seek to unveil the essence of the complex interaction between work and family, thereby offering enhanced theoretical guidance for individuals and organizations. Ultimately, a series of practical strategies will be proposed to assist individuals in effectively managing work-family conflict, promoting a healthier and more balanced life. This comprehensive discourse is designed to furnish researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers with profound insights and practical guidance for addressing the theoretical foundations of work-family conflict.

In summary, the innovation of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing work-family conflict. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and offering practical strategies, we aim to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this crucial area.

2. Overview of Work-Family Conflict

2.1. Definition of Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict has been a longstanding focal point in social psychology, with its definition exhibiting variations due to differing perspectives among scholars. The conceptualization of these viewpoints dates back to the 1960s to the early 1980s (Kahn et al., 1964), reflecting diverse understandings of this phenomenon. Early studies, such as (Renshaw, 1976), characterized work-family conflict as the incompatibility between work and family aspects, resulting in conflict and pressure for individuals during role transitions. This definition underscores the conflicts and mutual influences between the work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

However, the widely accepted definition in the academic community comes

from (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). According to their perspective, work-family conflict is a form of role conflict, involving incongruence in role pressures between work and family, making it challenging for one role's involvement to meet the demands of the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kopelman et al., 1983). This definition emphasizes the dilemma individuals face when playing different roles, namely, the inconsistency in role demands.

To better illustrate the "Role-Relationship-Induced Work-Family Conflict" model, we present a comprehensive model diagram in **Figure 1**. This diagram illustrates the role relationships individuals have in both the work and family domains, along with the key elements leading to work-family conflict.

2.2. Causes of Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict represents a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon, with its roots embedded in individual role pressures and conflicts across work and family domains (Wayne, 2004). This paper will delve into the various dimensions contributing to work-family conflict, encompassing:

2.2.1. Time-Based Conflict

The intersection of work demands with family time requirements gives rise to time-based work-family conflict (Sieber, 1974). Juggling responsibilities between work and family within a constrained timeframe poses a significant challenge. This conflict may emerge from the competition of duties between work and family, limiting engagement in one domain while prioritizing the other (Stephens & Sommer, 1996).

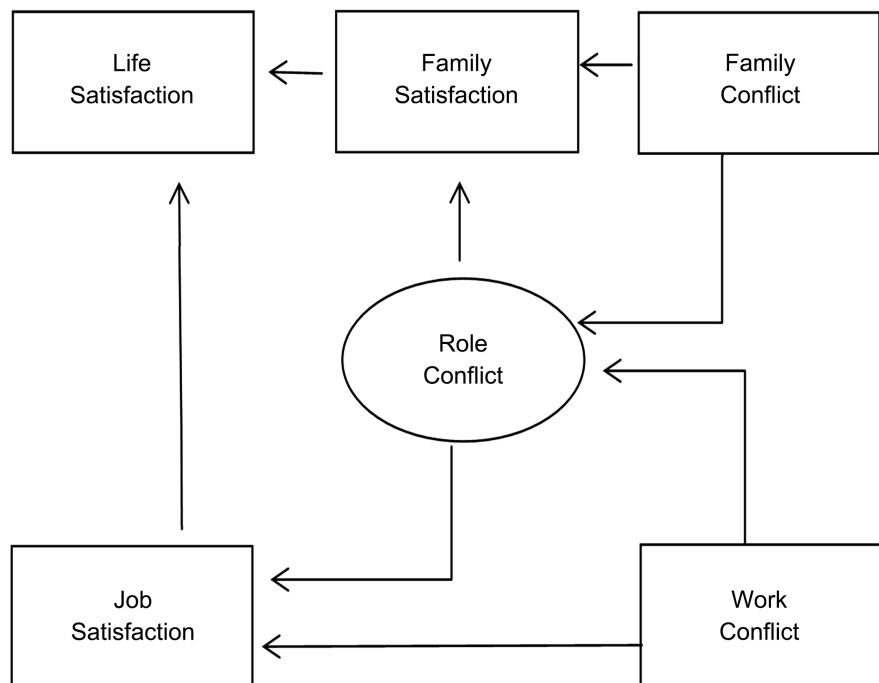


Figure 1. The role-induced work-family conflict model.

2.2.2. Mental-Based Conflict

Mental-based work-family conflict emerges from psychological stress originating in one domain, impeding individuals from meeting demands in the other. Factors like role ambiguity, conflicts, and activities crossing domain boundaries in the workplace can induce mental tension, affecting role fulfillment in the family domain, and vice versa (Burley, 1995).

2.2.3. Behavior-Based Conflict

Behavior-based work-family conflict involves the effectiveness of behavior in one domain not necessarily translating to effectiveness in another and, in some cases, yielding counterproductive effects. Divergent expectations and requirements for behavior in the work and family domains can lead to conflicts when individuals strive to fulfill one role amid conflicting demands in the other domain.

Additionally, work-family conflict is bidirectional, encompassing the impact of work on the family (Work-Interference-Family, WIF) and the impact of family on work (Family-Interference-Work, FIW). These two dimensions interact through mediating factors, featuring intricate relationships between WIF and FIW (Rotondo et al., 2003). Factors such as demands, support, and dissatisfaction in both work and family domains can directly or indirectly shape the perception of conflict in the other domain (Campbell Clark, 2001). For a more intuitive presentation of this information, **Table 1** below summarizes the characteristics, causes, and specific examples of each form of conflict.

Table 1. Features and causes of work-family conflict.

Conflict Type	Features	Causes	Examples
Time-Based Conflict	Difficulty in simultaneously engaging in work and family within a limited time frame	Competition of work and family responsibilities for time	Unable to attend a family member's birthday party due to a company meeting
Mental-Based Conflict	Generation of mental stress in one domain affecting the demands of another domain	Role ambiguity, conflict, and activities transcending domain boundaries causing mental stress	Tension at work affecting the fulfillment of roles at home
Behavior-Based Conflict	Effective behavior in one domain may not be effective in another domain	Different expectations and requirements for behavior in the work and family domains	Conflict between the objective, rational behavior required at work and the gentle, emotionally rich behavior expected at home

3. The Theoretical Foundation of the Work-Family Resources Model

3.1. Conservation of Resources Theory

The Conservation of Resources Theory, introduced by Stevan Hobfoll in 1989 (Hobfoll, 1989), centers on individuals' endeavors to acquire, maintain, and safeguard resources. The theory posits a core principle: individuals strive for the preservation, protection, and acquisition of resources due to their vital role in survival, development, and adaptation. Resources, encompassing material (money, property), social (support, interpersonal relationships), and psychological (individual capabilities, emotional stability), are broad in scope. Individuals consistently make efforts to prevent resource loss and seek new resources, with the loss potentially leading to stress and adaptation challenges. Acquiring new resources enhances adaptability, and resources are substitutable, allowing compensation for the loss of one type by acquiring another.

In the realm of work-family conflict, the Conservation of Resources Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals manage and adapt resources in both work and family domains. The theory finds applications in this context:

1) Time Resources: Individuals allocate time between work and family to maximize the acquisition and maintenance of time resources, thereby avoiding time conflicts.

2) Social Resources: Social support and interpersonal relationships, considered essential psychological resources, play a crucial role. Individuals seek support to alleviate pressures in both work and family domains while maintaining relationships to obtain social resources.

3) Emotional Resources: Maintaining emotional stability in family and work domains is integral to resource conservation. Individuals may adapt emotionally to meet the demands of both work and family.

The Conservation of Resources Theory offers crucial insights for both organizational practices and individual strategies.

3.2. Role Theory

Role theory, a widely employed concept in social science, focuses on the roles individuals enact in society and organizations, exploring the impact of these roles on their behavior, cognition, and emotions (Biddle, 1979). This theory asserts that individuals consistently shift between various roles in society, influencing their identity and behavior. Roles comprise behaviors, responsibilities, and rights individuals are expected to fulfill in specific social or organizational contexts, often encompassing professional, family, and social roles simultaneously. Conflict or complementarity may arise among these roles, shaped by societal and organizational expectations (Kahn et al., 1964). Over life cycles or due to career development and societal changes, individuals play different roles, leading to

identity shifts and behavioral adjustments.

In the realm of work-family conflict, role theory establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding role transitions and conflicts between work and family. Key applications in this context include:

1) **Role Conflict:** Individuals may encounter conflict between work and family roles when expectations in these domains are inconsistent. For instance, working overtime may conflict with family responsibilities.

2) **Role Undertaking:** Individuals must undertake roles in diverse domains, such as professional and parental roles. This can impose limitations on time, energy, and emotional resources, contributing to work-family conflict.

3) **Role Boundaries:** Managing boundaries between work and family roles is essential. Blurred or challenging boundaries may lead to conflicts between the two domains.

4) **Role Support:** Obtaining support in both work and family domains is crucial. Lack of support heightens the risk of role conflict, while support helps alleviate conflict.

For organizations, comprehending employees' role transitions and conflicts aids in crafting flexible work policies and providing robust support systems. Individuals can mitigate work-family conflict by effectively managing role expectations, seeking support, and establishing clear boundaries.

3.3. Boundary Theory

Boundary theory focuses on how individuals delineate and manage boundaries between work and family, emphasizing the significance of achieving balance between these domains (Ashforth et al., 2000). It advocates for individuals to clearly define and flexibly adapt to boundaries, aiming for an improved work-family balance. These boundaries encompass physical aspects (such as the conclusion of work hours), cognitive elements (shifting thoughts and attention), and emotional engagement in different domains. While not rigid, boundaries require flexible adjustments based on diverse situations and needs (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Individuals must learn to adapt boundaries at different times to accommodate various demands and actively manage them, including setting clear work hours, concentrating on the current task, and making effective psychological transitions between work and family.

Key applications of boundary theory in understanding and resolving work-family conflict include:

1) **Boundary Conflict:** Work and family boundaries may clash, like overtime encroaching on family time or family matters interfering with work. Understanding these conflicts aids in better boundary management.

2) **Boundary Setting:** Individuals must clearly define boundaries between work and family, specifying the end of work hours, establishing a dedicated workspace, and focusing on family matters at home.

3) **Boundary Adjustment:** Flexibility is crucial. In certain situations, individuals may need to adjust boundaries, such as taking urgent family calls during work or concentrating on work tasks during family time.

4) **Boundary Sharing:** Sharing individual boundary management strategies with family members and colleagues fosters support and understanding, reducing the risk of work-family conflict.

Organizations can support employees in achieving a better work-family balance by implementing flexible work schedules, offering remote work options, and encouraging the establishment of clear work boundaries. Individuals should cultivate boundary management skills to adeptly adapt to the demands of different roles.

4. Key Components of the Work-Family Resource Model

The Work-Family Resource Model offers a systematic framework for comprehending the positive and negative interactions between work and family. Key features encompass a thorough exploration of how individual resources, including emotions and time, transition between the work and family domains. Specifically, the model dissects the impact of work on the family (Work to Family Conflict, WFC), the enrichment of family life through work (Work to Family Enrichment, WFE), the impact of family on work (Family to Work Conflict, FWC), and the enrichment of work through family life (Family to Work Enrichment, FWE).

This model is a bidirectional process involving dynamic interactions between the work and family domains. Individual resources, such as emotions and time, are influenced by the demands of work and family, giving rise to conflict or enrichment effects (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Situational demands encompass quantitative, emotional, physical, and cognitive aspects. The model also specifies the sources of individual resources, including internal facets like physical, psychological, and intellectual aspects, alongside external societal support and contextual factors. The structure of the model is shown in **Figure 2** (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

The Work-Family Resources Model seeks to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework for a profound understanding of the intricate interactions between the work and family domains. Key elements within this model encompass situational demands, resources, key resources, and macro resources.

Situational demands denote the diverse requirements and pressures individuals encounter in the work and family domains, encompassing task quantity, emotional needs, physical demands, and cognitive requirements. In the work environment, individuals may need to efficiently complete tasks, handle emotional pressure, expend physical effort, and engage in complex cognitive work. In the family environment, addressing family members' needs, managing emotional challenges, and handling cognitive demands related to family affairs are crucial.

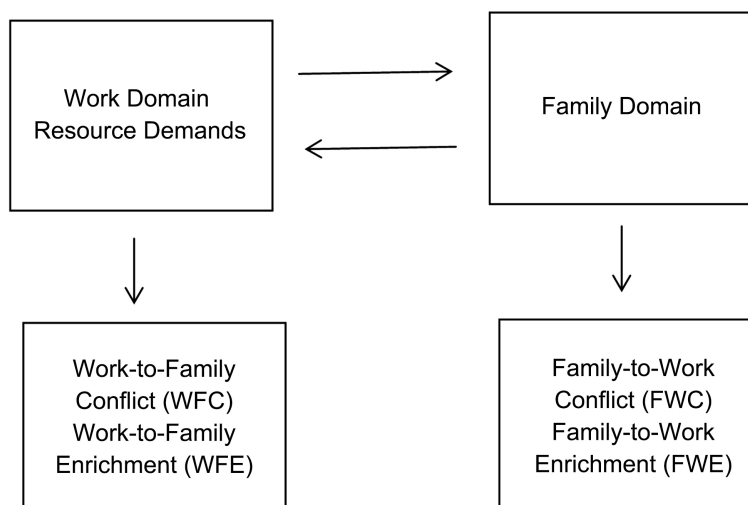


Figure 2. Structure of the work-family resource model.

Individual resources and situational resources are pivotal components of the model. Individual resources encompass the individual's abilities and traits in aspects such as physical, psychological, intellectual, and emotional factors, enabling adaptation to various situational demands. Situational resources comprise the support and contextual factors in the social and organizational environment, including social support, organizational culture, and policies. These resources offer external support and conditions for individuals to cope with challenges.

The model further distinguishes between key resources and macro resources. Key resources refer to traits contributing to an individual managing other resources, such as optimism and goal intensity. These key resources encourage individuals to adopt more positive and effective coping strategies, alleviating pressure from situational demands. Macro resources encompass the broader characteristics of social, cultural, and economic systems, including national policies, government administrative efficiency, and social networks. These macro resources influence individuals' utilization of available resources and their effectiveness.

The Work-Family Resources Model emphasizes the bidirectional process between work and family, where the flow of individual resources can lead to both conflicts and gains. Key resources assist individuals in better managing situational demands, while macro resources reflect broader societal and cultural influences on work-family relationships. The model elucidates how these resources impact individual positive coping and overall well-being, providing robust theoretical support for understanding the complex relationship between work and family.

5. Strategies for Balancing Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict is a complex and widespread phenomenon arising from individuals' role transitions between work and family, resulting in inconsistent

demands and pressures. To address this conflict, individuals can implement strategies to better adapt to the demands of both work and family domains.

5.1. Establishing Clear Boundaries

Setting explicit boundaries between work and family is crucial for mitigating conflict. This involves specifying the end time of work, shutting down work electronic devices during family time, and focusing on work tasks during working hours. By establishing clear boundaries, individuals can facilitate smoother role transitions, prevent the intrusion of work into family life, and provide distinct signals for such transitions. The core of this strategy lies in creating and strictly adhering to daily time plans. Developing work schedules and family activity calendars ensures sufficient time for each domain. Additionally, maintaining these boundaries requires cultivating a strong ability to reject work disturbances and adhering to designated work and family time.

5.2. Effective Time Management

Reasonable scheduling and time management are pivotal in avoiding work-family conflict. Creating detailed schedules helps organize work and family tasks in a systematic timeline. Setting clear priorities and distinguishing between urgency and importance ensure the proper allocation of time. This includes establishing dedicated work and family time to maintain balance. In terms of time management, the use of tools and techniques is crucial. For instance, leveraging calendar apps, reminders, and task lists helps track work and family responsibilities. Through these tools, individuals gain better control of their time, minimizing conflicts and overlaps between tasks.

5.3. Seeking Social Support

Establishing a robust social support system is crucial for coping with work-family conflict. Sharing challenges with family members, colleagues, and friends and seeking understanding and support are essential. Social support not only alleviates psychological pressure but also provides practical assistance and advice. When seeking social support, establishing positive communication channels is key. Openly sharing emotions and needs with others while actively listening to their perspectives is essential. Actively participating in social and team-building activities helps expand the social network, providing individuals with additional support resources.

5.4. Enhancing Relationship Quality

The quality of family and work relationships significantly impacts the level of conflict. Positive communication plays a crucial role in fostering healthy relationships. Effective communication, involving the sharing of mutual needs and expectations, facilitates understanding and support. Engaging in family activities

and responsibilities strengthens family bonds, while establishing good teamwork and colleague relationships at work helps alleviate pressure. Furthermore, individuals can improve interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills through participation in social activities and team-building training, thereby enhancing overall relationship quality.

In summary, work-family conflict is an extensively studied topic in social psychology, encompassing various dimensions of inconsistency and mutual influence between work and family domains. The root causes involve dimensions such as time, mentality, and behavior, creating a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Work-family conflict is bidirectional, involving the impact of work on family and vice versa. The Work-Family Resource Model, a theoretical framework, integrates Conservation of Resources theory, role theory, and boundary theory, providing robust support for understanding the intricate relationship between work and family. The model emphasizes the transfer and impact of individual resources between the work and family domains, covering crucial elements such as situational demands, individual resources, key resources, and macro resources. Through in-depth analysis, the model reveals how individuals achieve balance in both domains and the role of key and macro resources in this process.

To address work-family conflict, several strategies are proposed. Firstly, setting clear boundaries is crucial for enabling individuals to switch roles between work and family, avoiding interference. Secondly, effective time management is foundational for conflict resolution, ensuring a balanced arrangement of work and family tasks through rational scheduling. Seeking social support is also essential; establishing a robust social support system can provide assistance at both psychological and practical levels. Lastly, enhancing relationship quality is key to alleviating conflict; active communication and strengthening family and work relationships contribute to creating a healthy interactive environment. By comprehensively applying these strategies, individuals can better balance work and family, reduce conflict, and enhance overall life quality. These theories and strategies offer valuable guidance for organizations and individuals facing the challenges of work-family conflict in modern society.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, work-family conflict remains a prevalent and complex issue in modern society, affecting individuals across various dimensions of time, mentality, and behavior. The Work-Family Resource Model provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates multiple theories to offer robust understanding and insight into the intricate relationship between work and family domains. Through in-depth analysis of the model's key elements, it becomes evident that achieving balance in both domains requires careful management of individual resources and the identification of critical resources that facilitate this process. To effectively address work-family conflict, individuals are advised to

adopt strategies such as setting clear boundaries, practicing effective time management, seeking social support, and enhancing relationship quality. By implementing these strategies, individuals can mitigate conflict, improve their work-life balance, and enhance their overall quality of life. These theories and strategies serve as valuable guidelines for organizations and individuals grappling with the challenges of work-family conflict in today's society.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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