Research on the Influence of the Work-Family Conflict on Employees' Work Engagement

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Abstract

Under the background of VUCA, the issue of employees' work engagement has received widespread attention, and it is of certain practical significance to research the influence mechanism from the perspective of employees' work and family role conflicts. Based on the conservation of resources theory and self-determination theory, this study introduces the variables of emotional exhaustion and job crafting to build a theoretical model of work-family conflict on employees' work engagement. Data were collected from 331 enterprise employees in China. The results show that: (1) work-family conflict has a significant negative impact on employees' work engagement; (2) Work-family conflict indirectly affects the level of work engagement through emotional exhaustion; (3) Job crafting negatively regulates the relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement, that is, the higher the degree of job crafting, the weaker the negative impact of work-family conflict on work engagement.

Keywords

Work-family Conflict; Work Engagement; Emotional Exhaustion; Job Crafting.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of science and technology and the increasingly fierce market competition, people's social and economic environment seems to become more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. This highly complex and changing environmental state has become the norm. In order to obtain sustainable competitive advantages, enterprises and organizations need to give full play to the potential of human capital to adapt to changes in the external environment. Personnel management plays a very important role in promoting the sustainable development and strategic development direction of enterprises under the highly dynamic VUCA background[1]. At the same time, in the post-epidemic era, the world economy has been seriously impacted, and the employment situation has become increasingly severe. People need to treat their work with a more positive attitude. As the basic ethics of employees, "dedication" is increasingly valued by all sectors of society. According to the 2022 Global Workplace Status Report released by Gallup, an American consulting agency, only 9% of employees worldwide are actively engaged, while the majority of employees in the world (57%) are not engaged and proactive in their work. It is of great practical significance to discuss the issue of work engagement derived from it. More and more surveys and research results show that employees' work engagement is the key indicator that really affects organizational performance, and employees' work engagement is regarded as the soft data to promote the growth of organizational profits. Especially in the era of knowledge economy, human resources have become the decisive factor in the success or failure of an organization. In the game of enterprise human resources, employees' work engagement is far more important than expected.

At present, domestic and foreign scholars' research on the influencing factors of employees' work engagement behavior mostly focuses on individual factors (self-efficacy [2], core self-

evaluation [3], psychological capital [4], etc.), work factors (job demands, job resources, work environment, etc. [5]) and organizational factors (organizational commitment [6], management style, leadership style, etc. [7]), etc. Few scholars have focused on the field of work and family conflict, and the existing research in the field of work and family is mostly about how the promotion and gain effects of work and family improve the level of employees' work engagement. Based on the current situation of employees' low level of work engagement, the study of its influencing factors may find the problem from the root cause. This study explores whether work-family conflict has a restraining effect on the level of work engagement from the perspective of role conflict.

With the overall progress of people's thinking, the social status of men and women tends to be equal. In addition, women recognize the importance of education and strive to improve and create their own social value, instead of blindly sticking to the shackles of family roles [8].In this way, women's family responsibilities in the family structure are relatively reduced while men need to assume corresponding family responsibilities, which makes the conflict between men and women in work and family gradually prominent. At the same time, the liberalization of the "three-child policy" has further intensified the contradiction between women's family roles and job role. The increasing aging phenomenon in China has also doubled the economic pressure and mental pressure caused by the maintenance obligations of both men and women. The joint effect of the two must be the intensification of work-family conflict. In addition, since 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID-19, remote home office has become the main form of work. Work is less and less affected by time and space, and the borderless situation of work behavior has deepened [9]. and the boundaries of work and family have gradually become blurred. Previous studies have shown that work-family conflict will not only affect the physical and mental health of employees, but also make the organization's human resources management practice face certain challenges, and even affect the improvement of organizational performance [10]. Based on this, it is of practical significance to study the impact of work-family conflict on employees' work engagement.

Based on the conservation of resources theory, this study believes that emotional exhaustion plays a mediating role in the impact of work-family conflict on employees' work engagement. This study further explores the boundary mechanism of the impact of work-family conflict on employees' work engagement. From the perspective of self-determination theory, job crafting plays a regulatory role in it.

2. Theory and Hypothesis

2.1. Work-Family Conflict and Work Engagement

Due to the scarcity of resources, when the individual's own resources can not meet the needs from work and family at the same time, the competition between these two fields for resources will lead to work-family conflict. Employees in the organization need to play different roles and assume different responsibilities due to their individual identity characteristics. Especially for Chinese employees, work is not the only role, and family roles occupy the same important position. It is difficult to balance the relationship between them, which will lead to work-family conflict.

Work engagement is a pleasant and positive behavior state [11], which is characterized by positive emotion and activation energy. But stress is the key factor that affects the individual's internal motivation behavior. Stress is negatively related to work engagement, and work-family conflict as a source of stress will affect the employees' work engagement state.

Kahn et al.(1964) pointed out that in the process of meeting the needs of various work and family roles, individuals will encounter role conflicts, role ambiguity, role overload and other role pressures[12], which is very likely to lead to resource consumption. Based on the

conservation of resources theory [13], individuals in life need to assume multiple roles at the same time due to the basic reality, but the resources they own are limited. In order to maximize their own resources and efficiency, individuals will try to maintain existing resources and strive to obtain new resources. When allocating resources, they often put resources into relatively more important roles, so as to maximize the efficiency of individual resource maintenance. The needs of work for individuals are clear and necessary. When there is too much demand for work, the resources needed by the family will be occupied by the work, resulting in the loss of family resources. The loss of family resources will break the balance of resources, resulting in the inability of employees to perform their family responsibilities normally, resulting in family conflicts. This contradiction will reverse overflow into the work, resulting in work pressure. In order to alleviate the negative state of work pressure, They will compensate for this state by consuming a lot of their own resources to achieve psychological balance. Work engagement is a positive behavior state of employees, which needs to consume relevant own resources. However, in order to make up for the psychological imbalance caused by work-family conflict, individuals have spent a lot of resources, and may not have more resources to invest in work, resulting in a significant negative impact of work-family conflict on work engagement.

H1: work-family conflict has a negative impact on work engagement.

2.2. Mediation of Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a key dimension of job burnout [14], which refers to the state that individuals pay too much emotional resources and resulting in the depletion of emotional and physiological resources. According to the conservation of resources theory, good emotion is a valuable resource for individuals. The exhaustion of emotional resources will affect the self-discipline ability of employees, making it difficult for employees to restrain their behavior and meet the requirements of their roles [15]. Employees' experience of work-family conflict will cause their emotional resources to be consumed, resulting in a sense of physical and emotional consumption at work [16]. Work-family conflict will cause employees to produce a series of negative emotions and behaviors, such as emotional irritability, aggressive behavior, etc. When employees try to control these negative emotions, they will consume their emotional resources and emotional exhaustion will occur. Based on the resource loss spiral [17], when employees face work-family conflicts, they need to spend their limited resources to deal with the stress situation. Due to the limited resources of individuals, they have to seek resources from other places. The process of seeking resources will further consume existing resources, leading to emotional exhaustion.

H2: work-family conflict has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion.

According to the model of job demand-resources [18], job demands and job resources are two aspects of work. Individual emotional resources are the work resources needed by individuals to complete the work. When an individual's emotional exhaustion indicates that the individual's job resources are consumed, and the job demands remain unchanged, the individual's work resources depletion will affect the completion of individual work and the level of work engagement.

The higher the degree of work engagement, the higher the job demands of employees. In order to maintain better work performance, individuals need to have sufficient resources in psychological, physical, family and social aspects [18]. The necessary prerequisite for work engagement is to have sufficient emotional and psychological resources [19]. In order to improve the degree of work engagement, individuals need to consume less resources in other aspects, The improvement of work engagement depends on the level of individual mental and psychological status. High-intensity efforts may affect individual physical and psychological status. Only when the individual is energetic, the individual's existing resources can meet the

need for work engagement. Once the individual is emotionally exhausted, it will lead to the exhaustion of employees and unable to participate in the work.

H3: Emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on work engagement.

H4: Emotional exhaustion plays a mediating role in the negative impact of work-family conflict on work engagement.

2.3. The Moderating Effect of Locus of Job Crafting

For employees, work-family conflict is a comprehensive source of stress caused by the incompatibility of roles in the work and family fields. The above assumptions found that work-family conflict may inhibit employees' performance in work. The degree of damage caused by stressors depends on the measures taken by employees. The response measures are not the positive results that directly increase expectations, but tend to reduce the relationship between stressors and negative results by mitigating the negative effects of stressors.

Self-determination theory [20] is a macro theory that studies human motivation. It assumes that people are positive organisms. The study of work motivation based on the theory of self determination shows that the organizational environment that meets the three basic psychological needs of employees, namely, competence needs, autonomy needs and relationship needs, can strengthen and maintain employees' internal motivation, and promote the internalization and integration of external motivation, that is, when individuals meet these basic psychological needs, they will show great vitality and enthusiasm. Based on the theory of self-determination, Bakker et al. (2019) suggest that employees may optimize the work environment and meet basic psychological needs through job remodeling [21].

Job crafting is a process in which employees proactively create, shape and change work, improve work tasks, implement ideas and solve problems, and numerous studies have confirmed that job crafting is an effective way to deal with stressors. Wrzesniewski et al. (2001) argue that job crafting includes: task crafting, in which employees adjust the characteristics of the work itself, such as the form or quantity of work; Cognitive crafting, where employees change their perspective on work, such as viewing work as a dispersed or integrated whole; Relationship crafting, where employees change the scope or quality of interactions at work[22]. Employees who reshape their work can improve the knowledge and skills required for their work, have a higher degree of autonomy in their work, improve the matching of their own work resources and requirements, and have more development opportunities, which can help individuals relieve the pressure caused by work and reconstruct the meaning of work. Job crafting can achieve a higher match between employees' job demands and job resources, so that they feel that they are competent for the work, and at the same time, through the crafting of relationships can increase their sense of belonging, as the psychological needs of employees' hearts for competence, freedom and relationship are satisfied, employees will show great vitality and high enthusiasm, and personal potential will be stimulated to the maximum. Job crafting alleviates conflicts and promotes work engagement through the generation of work-family balance effects and gain effects; The conflict caused by the spillover effect of family to work can be based on autonomous job crafting, appropriately adjusting the matching of job demands and job resources, and reducing the negative impact of conflict on work engagement, and job crafting enhances the individual's ability to promote work-family balance. Based on this, this study suggests that job crafting may be effective in mitigating the negative impact of work-family conflicts, thereby promoting work engagement.

H5: Job crafting play a negative moderating role in the relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Sample

The study collected data in the form of an online questionnaire. The survey targets employees in the organization, and the research selected employees in a number of organizations such as Shandong, Beijing and Shanghai to conduct the survey, covering a variety of industries such as manufacturing, information technology services, commercial retail, medical services and education, to ensure the diversity of the survey subjects. A total of 370 questionnaires were distributed, and after deleting the questionnaires with many missing values and answering contradictory questions, 331 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, and the effective recovery rate of the questionnaires was 89.46%. A statistical analysis of the questionnaire data found that from the gender characteristics of the participants, there were 161 males (48.6%) and 170 females (51.4%).The demographics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Variable	Category	Percentage	Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	48.6%	Properties of the Company	Government departments	4.5%
	Female	51.4%		Institutions	19.3%
Age	Between 18 and 25 years old	15.1%		Foreign/Joint Venture	9.7%
	Between 26 and 30 years old	31.1%		State-owned enterprises	15.1%
	Between 31 and 40 years old	23.9%		Private enterprises	40.2%
	Between 41 and 50 years old	15.1%		Other	11.2%
	Between 51 and 60years old	9.1%	Position	Ordinary employees	41.1%
	Over 60 years old	5.7%		Grassroots management	31.4%
Tenure	Less than 1 year	9.4%		Middle management	18.1%
	Between 1 and 5 years	37.5%		Top managers	9.4%
	Between 6 and 10 years	20.8%	Marital Status	Single	34.4%
	Between 11 and 20 years	17.5%		Married without children	15.4%
	Over 20 years	14.8%		Married with children	44.4%
Education	Primary or secondary education	12.7%		Divorced without childless	1.8%
	Vocational college education	16.9%		Divorced with children	3.9%
	Bachelor's degree	55.6%			
	Master's degree or above	14.8%			

3.2. Variables Measurement

The scales used in this study are mature scales widely used at home and abroad, and the measurement scales were all measured using a Likert 5-point scale, with 1 to 5 points from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

（1）Work-Family Conflict Scale：According to the research needs, this study selected the questions in the work intervenes in the family in the work-family conflict scale [23] developed by Carlson (2000), which were divided into three levels: time, stress and behavioral conflict, of which each dimension had 3 questions. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was 0.966.

（2）Work Engagement Scale：Using a short version of the 3-dimensional scale developed by Schaufeli (2002), it contains a total of 9 questions. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was 0.953.

（3）Emotional Exhaustion Scale：According to the domestic characteristic background, domestic scholar Li Chaoping (2003) revised Maslach Burnout Inventory-Gerneral Survey Chinese version scale that contains three subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. This study uses the emotional exhaustion subscale, which contains 5 questions. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was 0.947.

（4）Job Crafting Scale：In this study, a three-dimensional metric scale prepared by Smelp et al. (2013) was used [24], which had good cross-cultural consistency, including task crafting, cognitive crafting, and relationship crafting, and each including 5 questions. The Cronbach'α coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.972.

（5）Control variables：In order to control for the possible influence of other factors on this model, the control variables were selected as gender, age, tenure, education, properties of the company, position, and marital status in demographic variables after referring to other relevant studies.

4. Empirical Analysis and Results

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, the benchmark model was compared with other alternative models in terms of fitting indicators, and the results are shown in Table 2. The results show that in the benchmark model, $\chi^2/df=2.057$, IFI=0.953, TLI=0.949, CFI=0.953, RMSEA=0.057, its fitting indicators are all within the acceptable range, and it is significantly better than other alternative models. This shows that the benchmark model has the best fitting effect, that is, the four factors in this model have good discriminant validity.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis competition model results

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
One-factor model	5944.337	665	8.939	0.637	0.615	0.636	0.155
Two-factor model	3391.246	664	5.107	0.813	0.801	0.812	0.112
Three-factor model	3130.457	662	4.729	0.830	0.819	0.830	0.106
Four-factor model	1324.654	644	2.057	0.953	0.949	0.953	0.057

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Analysis

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Work-family Conflict	1			
2. Work Engagement	-0.733**	1		
3. Emotional Exhaustion	0.858**	-0.753**	1	
4. Job Crafting	-0.564**	0.693**	-0.545**	1
Mean	3.2595	2.9218	3.1934	3.4608
Standard Deviation	1.03116	0.97551	1.03318	0.86455

Note:N=331,*=p<0.05,**=p<0.01,***=p<0.001.

Table 3 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlation of the relevant variables. From the correlation coefficient, it can be found that work-family conflict is significantly correlated with

emotional exhaustion (r=0.858, P<0.01) and work engagement (r=-0.733, P<0.01). Emotional exhaustion was significantly associated with work engagement (r=-0.753, P<0.01). Job crafting was significantly associated with work-family conflict (r=-0.564, P<0.01) and work engagement (r=0.693, P<0.01). Thus, preliminary support is provided for subsequent hypotheses.

4.3. Hypothetical Testing

4.3.1. Main Effect Test

This study uses the hierarchical regression method to verify the impact of work-family conflict on work engagement. The work-family conflict is taken as the independent variable, and the work input is taken as the dependent variable. At the same time, the gender, age, working years, highest education, nature of the unit, position and marital status of the research object are taken as the control variables into the model, and the hierarchical regression analysis is carried out. The results are shown in Table 4. As shown in model 4, work-family conflict is significantly negatively correlated with employees' work involvement(β=-0.728, p<0.001). Hypothesis 1 was verified.

4.3.2. Mediation Test

First of all, Hypothesis 1 test results show that work-family conflict has a significant negative impact on employees' work engagement. Secondly, the regression analysis of work-family conflict on emotional exhaustion is conducted. The results of model 2 in Table 4 show that work-family conflict has a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion(β=0.856, p<0.001), assuming that Hypothesis 2 is verified. Then test hypothesis 3, and the result of model 5 in table 4 shows that emotional exhaustion has a significant negative impact on employees' work engagement(β=-0.736, p<0.001),assuming H3 is verified. Finally, work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion are included in the regression equation of employees' work engagement at the same time. Model 6 in Table 4 shows that work-family conflict is significantly negatively correlated with employees' work engagement(β=-0.331, p<0.001), but the absolute value of the regression coefficient decreased significantly (0.728>0.331), which indicates that emotional exhaustion plays a part of the intermediary role between work-family conflict and employees' work involvement, assuming that H4 is verified.

Table 4. Regression test results of main and mediating effects

Variable	Emotional Exhaustion			Work Engagement		
	M_1	M_2	M_3	M_4	M_5	M_6
Gender	-0.254***	-0.007	0.197***	-0.013	0.010	-0.016
Age	-0.125	0.018	0.063	-0.059	-0.029	-0.050
Tenure	-0.046	0.010	0.080	0.032	0.046	0.037
Education	-0.048	-0.009	-0.008	-0.041	-0.043	-0.045
Properties of the Company	0.192***	-0.004	-0.246***	-0.079*	-0.104**	-0.081*
Position	0.048	-0.067	0.029	0.126*	0.064	0.095
Marital Status	0.171*	0.036	-0.168*	-0.054	-0.042	-0.037
Work-family Conflict		0.856***		-0.728***		-0.331***
Emotional Exhaustion					-0.736***	-0.464***
R^2	0.120	0.740	0.105	0.553	0.582	0.609
ΔR^2	0.101	0.733	0.085	0.542	0.572	0.598
F	6.275***	114.409***	5.396***	49.854***	56.024***	55.628***

Note: N=331,*=p<0.05,**=p<0.01,***=p<0.001.

4.3.3. Moderating Effect Test

This study assumes that job carfting plays a moderating role in the impact of work-family conflict on employees' work engagement, so the hierarchical regression method is used to

verify the moderating effect of job crafting, that is, to verify the impact of Interactive item of work-family conflict and job crafting on work engagement.

First, put the control variables into the regression equation to get the model 1 in Table 5. Secondly, put work-family conflict and job crafting into the regression equation to obtain model 7 in Table 5. Finally, put the work-family conflict, work remodeling and their interactive term into the regression equation to get the model 8 in Table 5. In order to reduce the impact of multicollinearity problems on the analysis results, the work-family conflict and job crafting variables involved were centralized before calculating the interactive term. The regression result of the moderating effect of job crafting on work-family conflict and employee's work engagement shows that the interactive term has a significant positive impact on work engagement(β= 0.096, $p<0.05$), which indicates that job crafting plays a significant role in regulating the relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement of employees. Assuming that H5 is supported, that is, the higher the level of job crafting, the weaker the inhibition level of work-family conflict on work engagement.

Table 5. Regression test results of moderating effect

Variable	Work Engagement		
	M_3	M_7	M_8
Gender	0.197***	0.011	0.022
Age	0.063	-0.017	-0.014
Tenure	0.080	0.015	0.030
Education	-0.008	-0.003	0.006
Properties of the Company	-0.246***	-0.010	-0.010
Position	0.029	0.096*	0.082
Marital Status	-0.168	-0.025	-0.028
Work-family Conflict		-0.505***	-0.532***
Job Crafting		0.406***	0.334***
Interactive Term			0.096*
R^2	0.105	0.659	0.664
ΔR^2	0.085	0.649	0.653
F	5.396***	68.814***	63.149***

Note: N=331,*=$p<0.05$,**=$p<0.01$,***=$p<0.001$.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Analysis Conclusion

First, regarding the relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement, the results of this study support a decline in work-family conflict levels. This is consistent with the relationship between work-family conflicts and employees' work engagement in previous scholars. Based on the theory of resource conservation, when an individual experiences work-family conflict, due to the conflict between the two roles, the individual spends his own resources to resolve the conflict, resulting in the individual not having enough resources to solve the problem at work or family, in order to maintain the balance of his own resources at work, the employee adopts the behavior of reducing work input, and resource consumption leads to a decrease in work input.

Second, about the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. In this study, data analysis verified that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the negative correlation between work-family conflict and work engagement. Individual resources are limited, accompanied by the continuous consumption of resources by individuals in work or life, when a large amount of

resources are put into work, resulting in individuals lacking resources to invest in the family and unable to fulfill the requirements of family roles. The results show that work-family conflicts will continuously consume employees' personal emotional resources and cause individual emotional exhaustion. When an individual experiences emotional exhaustion, it reduces the commitment to work. The negative effect of work-family conflict on work engagement is through the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion.

Finally, this study confirms that job crafting can moderate a decline in work engagement levels due to work-family conflict. Employees reshape their behavior through work, that is, by adjusting work tasks, changing work cognition, and improving interpersonal relationships, so that their own resources can be effectively supplemented, improve work status, reduce work conflicts with families, alleviate the pressure of work family conflicts, and then alleviate the decline in work engagement.

5.2. Practical Significance and Enlightenment

First, work-family conflict is a common phenomenon, and managers can give employees more autonomy. Managers need to coordinate and work the work requirements of employees, give employees a certain degree of autonomy in work, and allow employees to maximize the allocation of time in work and life, so as to reduce work-family conflicts caused by excessive time occupation of work, so that employees can put more personal resources into work, rather than using limited personal resources to deal with conflict resolution. Enterprises need to put forward relevant plans to balance employees' family and working hours, formulate effective employee leave systems, such as paid leave, growth training and flexible office, etc., introduce a set of practical systems related to them, and ensure the implementation of the system.

Secondly, enterprises should pay attention to the emotional state of employees and pay attention to the psychological state of employees. In the daily work life to strengthen the psychological construction of employees, relevant departments regularly carry out psychological counseling and psychological counseling activities, timely help employees to relieve distress, so that employees can get out of negative emotions as soon as possible and work more efficiently. Adopting a positive leadership style to make employees feel more cared for and supported in the workplace, and creating a democratic working atmosphere can also effectively reduce the psychological burden of individuals.

Finally, companies should support the reinvention of their workforce. Job crafting can alleviate employees' work-family conflicts, promote employees' work engagement, and show that the meaning and value of job crafting do exist in work. Enlightenment organizations should give more work resources when employees reshape their jobs, and social support, career development opportunities, and performance feedback at work are all indispensable work resources. In the management process, employees are given a social support environment, fully trust and support employees, and achieve a certain degree of decentralization, so that employees can give full play to their enthusiasm and initiative in the face of work pressure and work tasks.

5.3. Research Limitations and Prospects

Although this study verifies the effect of work-family conflict on work engagement, and the hypotheses are validated, there are still some shortcomings. First, all the scales in this study are filled in by self-test, which is self-perceived by employees, and there may be a certain homologous error problem. Second, the independent variable of this study is work-family conflict, which is actually the conflict between work and family, and the conflict between work and family is two-way, and there must be differences in the impact of two-way influences, and future research can conduct two-way analysis on the basis of this model to study its impact. Third, this study uses cross-sectional data, but the impact of work-family conflict on work

engagement may be a continuous phased process, and future studies can adopt cross-time survey methods to improve the accuracy and completeness of the study, increase the heterogeneity of data sources, and improve the scientific nature of data collection.

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