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11/27/2022

Date

**Work-Family Conflict and Work Engagement During the Covid-19 Pandemic: The
Role of Autonomy, Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors and Family Hours**

A PLAN B RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNI-
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Abstract

In the wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic, there were widespread concerns about the remote work phenomenon and its impact on work-family conflict. Hays Companies, an insurance brokerage in the Minneapolis/St. Paul Area, expressed concern about the work-family conflict and engagement levels of its employees. The goal of the current study was to help Hays Companies to decide whether or not to bring employees back to the office by investigating work-family conflict and engagement differences between employees while isolating variables that would explain why some workers were doing better than others. Using a multiple regression with moderation analysis, I found that workers higher in autonomy and family supportive supervisor behaviors showed lower levels of engagement and higher levels of work-family conflict. These results contradict the vast majority of studies that have shown that autonomy and family supportive supervisor behaviors have a positive effect on work-family conflict. Additionally, the results showed that employees had above average levels of engagement and below average levels of work-family conflict, leading me to conclude that the Hays Companies workforce is doing well working from home and that bringing them back to the office is not needed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Work-Family Conflict.....	3
Work Engagement	8
Autonomy	13
Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors	15
Family Hours	16
Method	17
Results.....	23
Qualitative Analysis.....	31
Discussion	36
Limitations and Future Directions	38
References.....	44
Appendix A-D.....	53-56

List of Tables

Table 1	Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency for Study Variables	54
Table 2	Bivariate Correlation Results for Study Variables	55
Table 3	Multiple Regression and Moderation results for Study Variables	56

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Interaction between work to family conflict, autonomy, and vigor	25
Figure 2.	Interaction between work to family conflict, autonomy, and dedication	26
Figure 3.	Interaction between family to work conflict, autonomy, and dedication	27
Figure 4.	Interaction between work to family conflict, FSSB, and vigor	28
Figure 5.	Interaction between family to work conflict, family hours, and dedication	30

Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic was an unprecedented public health crisis, with millions of people getting sick or dying, losing their jobs, and/or experiencing debilitating mental health symptoms. In the United States, trade slowed down, social culture was almost entirely halted, and the unemployment rate was the highest it has been since The Great Depression (Wheelock, 2020). According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), since April 2020, four out of five people (i.e., 3.3 billion workers; 81% of the global workforce) were affected by either partial or full workplace closures (ILO, 2020). Those who were able to keep their jobs were forced to dramatically alter their lives by working remotely. This was a huge shift from the pre pandemic status quo, and many people struggled. It was found that remote workers during the pandemic experienced more frequent symptoms of depression, higher levels of stress and reduced performance. (Shockley et al., 2020; Society for Human Resource Management, 2020). In response, organizations across the U.S turned to researchers and practitioners to help them adapt and find ways to support their employees using evidence backed solutions (Rudolph & Zacher, 2021).

Although the pandemic is what prompted the transition and many resisted the change, the remote work phenomenon is likely here to stay. Many influential organizations have embraced the concept of working from home to save on the costs of operating large office spaces. Twitter and Facebook have both given their employees the option to work from home indefinitely, and Google has adopted a hybrid model where employees are given the option to work from home occasionally (Kelly, 2022; Porterfield, 2021). Additionally, research by Ladders projects that 25% of all professional jobs in North

America will be remote by the end of 2022 (Robinson, 2022). Thus, the call for research investigating how to get the most out of remote employees is valuable now and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. The current study was conducted with the intention of helping an organization that was particularly concerned about the experiences of their remote employees. The next section is devoted to discussing this organization and their unique problem.

Hays Companies, an insurance brokerage in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, expressed concern about their employees' wellbeing and sought to obtain data on the work-family conflict and engagement of their employees. In an interview with the Executive Vice President, Robert Birdwell, I was informed that some employees have been vocal about their displeasure about working from home full time while simultaneously managing family obligations and other emotional demands. Due to the pandemic, employees are understandably not performing at full capacity. Mr. Birdwell was interested in how work/family conflict was influencing his employees' engagement levels.

In an interview with an employee, I was informed that Hays Companies has traditionally been a "suit and tie company" where employees come to the office every day and get work done in their physical workplace. In this kind of environment, it is easier for employees keep their work and family lives separate because work is done in the office and family obligations are taken care of at home. Now, most employees are working from home full time. While some are reportedly doing well, others have had trouble adapting. The employees that are struggling to adapt have unsurprisingly experienced an increase in stress, which will not bode well for Hays Companies if it continues. Empirical research has shown that employees who feel stressed will be less engaged with their work and

therefore perform worse (Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti & Bakker, 2014). However, the caveat is that not everyone is struggling. Some employees have continued to perform at a high level since moving remote. Mr. Birdwell was interested in what was causing some employees to flourish and others to flounder. He expressed a desire to gather data on work-family conflict and work engagement. Thus, the primary deliverable of the current study was to provide insight on employees' work-family conflict and engagement levels, investigate why some employees are performing well while others are struggling, and provide recommendations for improvement. The following sections are devoted to briefly summarizing the theoretical framework underlying work-family conflict and engagement.

Background Literature

Work-Family Conflict

Researchers and practitioners have been interested in work-family conflict (WFC) for the past 40 years (Ford et al., 2007). WFC was originally thought of as an overarching, multi-dimensional concept made up of both work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW) with little regard for directionality (Ford et al., 2007). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) were the first to make a distinction between FIW and WIF as separate but related concepts with clear differential relationships. Additionally, WFC can be broken down into three unique forms: strain-based, time-based, and behavior-based. Strain-based conflict occurs when strain from one domain causes performance in another domain to suffer. This is usually characterized by negative feelings (anger or irritability) related to one domain spilling over and interfering with performance in another domain. Behavior based conflict occurs when habits or role expectations from

one domain carry over into the other domain. For example, assertiveness may be reinforced in work group settings but may not translate as well to the family role. Time-based conflict occurs when the amount of time devoted to responsibilities in one domain hinders the ability to successfully perform in the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For example, someone who works late and consequently misses an important family event.

WFC is distinct from other sources of conflict, such as work/non-work conflict or work-leisure conflict. WFC specifically refers to conflict between work and family role responsibilities. Work responsibilities are conceptualized as anything that someone is required to do as a part of their job. The conceptualization of family responsibilities historically is quite broad; it refers to any responsibilities that have to do with one's immediate or extended family, such as spending time with kids or spouses, performing elder care, attending children's sports games, or making dinner for one's family (Gareis & Barnett, 2009; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kalliath et al., 2011). WFC can be present in the form of strain, behavior, or time in any of the above examples if there is negative spillover. This is the conceptualization that will be used in the present study. WFC will be largely left up to the interpretation of the individual experiencing the conflict as long as the conflict is between the work and family role. This approach is consistent with Mr. Birdwell's opinion on WFC. There are reportedly many unique WFC situations within Hays companies ranging from elder care to spending time with family with the majority of conflict being attributed to employees having young, dependent children with many needs. Thus, a broad conceptualization of family responsibilities is consistent with past research and

appropriate considering the sample at Hays Companies. This study will adopt the definition created by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) which is perhaps the most agreed upon definition that is still in use today. Work-family conflict can be defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect.” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). WFC can be explained by two primary theories/models: role strain theory and the effort recovery model.

Role Strain Theory

Proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), role strain theory argues that strain results from the difficulty of fulfilling a role due to obligations and/or pressure associated with another role. According to role strain theory, WFC is characterized by an incompatibility between work and home roles. When role conflicts occur, they require time, energy, resources, and/or emotions to resolve. Because employees have a limited supply of such things, they can only devote a finite amount of resources towards resolving their conflicts. If employees lack the resources needed to reduce the negative effects of role demands, eventually one or both domains will start to give way.

Effort Recovery Model

The effort recovery model argues that strain is the result of not adequately recovering after expending energy at work (Geurts et al., 2003). The energy required to complete most work tasks is not harmful; however, the effort of repeatedly completing tasks day after day can add up over time. Without adequate recovery, employees will eventually start to become fatigued and can experience negative health outcomes, such as psychological distress and burnout. In the lens of the current study, it is possible that employees do not have as much of an opportunity to recover at home due to the nature of the

pandemic. For example, a recent study by DeFilippis et al. (2020) showed that the pandemic workday is 48 minutes longer than usual. This would explain Mr. Birdwell's comments about employees continuing to perform at a high level but experiencing significantly more stress. Employees who are forced to expend more energy due to the longer workday without a decrease in family responsibilities are likely to experience inadequate recovery periods, subsequently leading to an increase in stress. Now that I have discussed the theoretical framework of WFC, I next turn to a brief overview of WFC's nomological network.

WFC Predictors

Role Stressors

Role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload are traditionally seen as the three primary sources of stress in the role stressor framework. Role conflict refers to the extent that roles are incongruent with each other to the point where participation in one role inhibits performance in another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Role ambiguity refers to a lack of information needed to perform role tasks and responsibilities or a lack of role clarity (Glazer & Beehr, 2005; Kahn et al., 1964). Role overload refers to "the perception of having too many role tasks and not enough time to do them" (Michel et al., 2011, p. 694). All three sources of conflict show positive relationships with work/family conflict (Ford et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2011).

Social Support

General social support is defined as "an interpersonal transaction that may include emotional expression of concern, instrumental assistance, or information" (Hammer et

al., 2006, p. 38). Social support can come from several different sources. The three primary sources are supervisors, coworkers, and the organization itself. All show significant negative relationships with work/family conflict. In other words, the more supported employees feel, the less WFC they experience (Kossek et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011).

WFC Outcomes

WFC has been shown to predict a plethora of personal and organizational outcomes. Most studies have focused on individual physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes. WFC has been demonstrated to be related to specific health conditions, such as elevated blood pressure (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), hypertension (Frone et al., 1997), high cholesterol (van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009), obesity (Gryzwacz, 2000) and insomnia (Liu et al., 2015; Olson et al., 2015), as well as subjective self-reports of physical health problems (Carlson et al., 2011; Geurts et al., 2003; Greenhaus et al., 2006). Additionally, WFC has consistently been linked to negative psychological outcomes. WFC has been shown to be associated with depressive moods (Geurts et al., 2003), clinical depression (Gryzwacz & Bass, 2003), poor general mental health (Carlson et al., 2011; Gareis & Barnett, 2009), anxiety (Frone, 2000), psychological distress (Kalliath et al., 2012), and burnout (Montgomery et al., 2003). Most importantly, WFC is associated with employee attitudinal and behavioral outcomes that are crucial to organizations and their success. Two meta-analyses by Ford and colleagues (2007) and Amstad and colleagues (2011) showed that WFC is negatively related to work satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, career satisfaction, organizational helping behaviors, and positively associated with absenteeism and turnover intentions. Lastly, WFC has been shown to be negatively related to work engagement in a sample of extension

workers (Martin, 2013). This last relationship is the one that I will attempt to extend using a different sample of professionals. The client has expressed interest in the relationship between WFC and engagement, thus it is the principal relationship of interest in this study. The following section is devoted to introducing the construct of work engagement.

Work Engagement

Work engagement has been somewhat difficult to define as it shows conceptual overlap with job attitudes, even leading some researchers to characterize it as “old wine in a new barrel” (Macey & Schneider, 2008). While very similar to job attitudes, engagement has been validated as a unique concept (Alarcon & Lyons, 2011; Christian & Slaughter, 2011). Additionally, there has been debate as to whether engagement is a state or trait level variable. The consensus is that it is mostly stable but can fluctuate over short periods of time (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Sonnentag, 2003). With these considerations in mind, engagement can be defined as a “relatively enduring state of mind referring to the simultaneous investment of personal energies in the experience or performance of work” (Christian & Slaughter, 2011, p. 95). Engaged employees “engage” with their work with energy and vigor, enthusiastically absorbing themselves and frequently going above and beyond. This definition draws both from the work of Kahn and the Utrecht Group, which I will now discuss.

The concepts of engagement and disengagement were originally posed and studied by Kahn (1990). Kahn argued that engagement is a state where employees invest their “preferred selves” into their work roles in a way that promotes connection with their work. It is a holistic investment of physical, emotional, and cognitive energies into the

tasks performed at work, as opposed to features of the organization. In this vein, engagement has to do with investing oneself in a role. Engaged employees will invest themselves further and expend more energy than disengaged employees. Similar to job characteristics theory, Kahn proposed that there are three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. In his words, the three psychological conditions were like “conditions in fleeting contracts, if certain circumstances are met, employees can personally engage in moments of task behavior.” In other words, if employees feel that it is meaningful to perform their work role, if they feel safe in doing so, and if they have availability, they are more likely to be engaged. Most recent studies on engagement reference Kahn (1990) in some capacity.

Although Kahn’s (1990) work is commonly used as a starting point for engagement research, the most dominant engagement paradigm derives from the burnout literature proposed by the Utrecht Group (Bailey et al., 2017). In contrast to Kahn (1990), who viewed engagement as a relatively transitory experience with “ebbs and flows,” the Utrecht Group sees engagement as a more stable and enduring state of mind. Engagement is viewed as the positive antithesis to burnout because the defining feature of burnout is the withdrawal or disengagement from work due to negative feelings and lack of energy, whereas work engagement is the exact opposite, being characterized by positive feelings, absorption in one’s work and a high level of energy (Bakker et al., 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). This viewpoint is guided by the job demands resources (JD-R) model, which argues that every occupation has risk factors associated with work stress. On a broad level, these factors can be classified as job demands or job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands refer to anything that requires sustained physical or psychological

effort and are associated with energy drain. Some examples are work pressure and emotionally draining interactions with clients or coworkers. Conversely, job resources refer to aspects of the job that either (a) facilitate the achievement of work goals; (b) reduce job demands and their associated costs; or (c) promote growth and learning (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Examples of job resources include feedback and autonomy. Overall, the central premise of the JDR model is that job demands and resources facilitate either job strain or motivation. Excessive job demands impair health and motivation while job resources enhance them (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Both Kahn and the Utrecht Group view engagement as a positive state of mind that ultimately leads to positive outcomes that benefit both the individual and the organization. Most recent studies on engagement reference Kahn while deferring to the Utrecht Group's views. This is the approach that I will take in the current study. My conceptualization of engagement is the positive antithesis to burnout. This view assumes that engagement is a relatively stable state of mind but that it is still influenced by proximal organizational factors, such as job resources (autonomy, social support) and leads to positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. The next section is devoted to discussing variables associated with engagement.

Work Engagement Correlates

Consistent with job characteristics theory and the JD-R model, research has found that certain characteristics of the job impact employee engagement by engendering experiences that satisfy universal human needs. Job characteristics associated with engagement include autonomy, task variety, task significance, feedback, problem solving, job complexity and social support (Christian & Slaughter, 2008). Additionally, leaders have

positive effects on employee engagement by engendering a sense of attachment to the job and promoting psychological safety (Kahn, 1990; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Most importantly, work engagement is related to several outcomes that are relevant to organizations and their bottom line. Engagement is positively associated with task performance (Christian & Slaughter, 2008), contextual performance (Christian & Slaughter, 2008), job satisfaction (Macey & Schneider, 2008), organizational commitment (Saks, 2006), positive affect (Balducci et al., 2011) and negatively associated with withdrawal and turnover (Halbelseban & Wheeler, 2008). Thus, it is not surprising why engagement was a focal point of interest for the client in this study. The last few sections have explained WFC and engagement from a theoretical perspective while also sharing how each construct manifests and relates to the healthy functioning of employees and their organizations. Yet, to truly understand the nature of the relationship between WFC and engagement, it is necessary to explain the role of stress.

Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict and Engagement

The negative relationship between work/family conflict and engagement is explained in large part by stress. Stress is an overarching term used to describe the experience of both stressors and strains. Stressors are the demands that employees are required to respond to such as excessive workloads and difficult customers. Strains are the psychological, behavioral, and/or physiological outcomes of the stress process and include responses such as anxiety, absenteeism, and physical illness (Griffin & Clarke, 2011). Employees who experience frequent stressors are susceptible to strains and feelings of burnout, particularly exhaustion and cynicism, the two core components of burnout

(Demerouti et al., 2001). Exhaustion is commonly viewed as an indicator of psychological wellbeing and is characterized by negative health related outcomes, such as fatigue, job-related depression, psychosomatic symptoms, and anxiety (Demerouti et al., 2001). Cynicism refers to a general withdrawal process wherein employees experience negative attitudes towards their work and distance themselves both mentally and physically. As mentioned earlier, burnout is negatively related to work engagement and is seen as its direct antipode. (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The defining feature of burnout is the withdrawal or disengagement from work due to negative feelings and lack of energy, whereas work engagement is the exact opposite, being characterized by positive feelings, absorption in one's work and a high level of energy. Thus, the relationship between WFC and engagement is explained in large part by the positive correlation between WFC and strain.

Prior research has shown that employees who experience WFC are more likely to experience strain, in particular feelings of depression, psychological distress, and emotional exhaustion (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Additionally, WFC has been shown to be negatively correlated with work engagement in a sample of extension workers (Martin, 2013). Given these findings and the established link between stress reactions and work engagement, it was expected that employees who report high work/family conflict would report low levels of work engagement.

Hypothesis 1: Employees who experience greater work/family conflict will be less engaged than employees who experience less work/family conflict.

In addition to studying the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement, the most impactful deliverable of this study has to do with potential differences between employees at Hays. I sought to discover potential differences while also providing

some possible explanations for why those differences might exist. The following sections are devoted to introducing moderating variables that might contribute to differences between employees in the areas of work/family conflict and engagement.

Autonomy

Perceived autonomy in the workplace is one of the most commonly studied characteristics in the work design literature, dating back 40 years to Karasek (1979) and Hackman and Oldman (1976). It was originally defined as the “amount of freedom an individual has in carrying out his or her work assignment” (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2007, p. 1323). Recent literature has expanded this notion to suggest that autonomy is comprised of three interrelated aspects: decision making autonomy (e.g., the ability to make decisions on the job), schedule control (e.g., freedom to control the schedule and timing of work), and autonomy over work methods (e.g., the freedom to decide which methods and/or procedures are used in carrying out work tasks; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2007). Thus, autonomy can be defined as “the freedom and discretion allowed of employees in facets of work method, work schedule, and work criteria to perform their tasks and responsibilities” (Lin & Ping, 2016, p. 2). With this definition in mind, the next three sections are devoted to explaining autonomy from a theoretical perspective.

Self-Determination Theory

According to self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), autonomy is a universal need that is essential for human beings to thrive. Basic need satisfaction is argued to be the underlying mechanism that directs and energizes humans’ behavior. It is considered to be so important to the functioning of humans that Ryan and Deci (2000) have compared it to the importance of water and sunshine for plants. Without autonomy,

humans will struggle to feel fulfilled at work and in life due to a fundamental need not being met. SDT specifically suggests that both employees' performance and their well-being are affected by the type of motivation they have for their job activities. SDT delineates motivation as being autonomous or controlled. Autonomous motivation is where individuals engage in a task of their own volition, whereas controlled motivation is where individuals engage in a task because they have to. SDT argues that individuals who engage in autonomous behavior fulfill their need for autonomy and tend to experience positive outcomes.

Job Characteristics Theory

The job characteristics model is similar to SDT as it also argues that humans have universal needs and that experiences at work either support or thwart these needs. However, job characteristics theory argues that autonomy is a contextual factor that leads to the fulfillment of a universal need, as opposed to being a universal need in its own right. The universal need associated with autonomy is experienced responsibility, or the degree to which employees feel responsible for the results of their work.

Job Demands-Resources Model

The JD-R model agrees with both job characteristics theory and social determination theory on a fundamental level. The JD-R model specifies that job resources are motivating by facilitating the achievement of work goals *and* by satisfying basic psychological needs. Additionally, the JDR model argues that job resources act as a buffer against the negative effects of job demands on strain. In this vein, autonomy is crucial for health and wellbeing because it gives employees more freedom to cope with stressful situations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006).

All three preceding theories provide rationale for the positive impact that autonomy has on employees. Research has shown that perceived autonomy is negatively related to anxiety, stress, and burnout (Humphrey et al., 2007), and positively related to engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance (Christian & Slaughter, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2007). It was expected that autonomy would play a similarly positive role for employees in the current study either by satisfying universal needs, facilitating the achievement of work goals, or acting as a buffer against stressful work situations.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived autonomy will be a moderator in the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement, such that the relationship will be more negative for those with less autonomy.

Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors

The concept of family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) is derived from the general social support literature. Hammer et al. (2007) primarily developed the concept to resolve “a lack of conceptual clarity” regarding the underlying dimensions that make up general social support, peer support, organizational support and supervisor support. The existing measures were often contaminated with items that did not pertain to the dimension being measured, leading to issues with construct validity. Among all the sources of support listed above, support from supervisors has been the most frequently studied due to the large impact that leaders have on their employees. FSSB is a form of support that specifically focuses on the degree of support that supervisors devote to employees’ integration of their work and family lives. The family supportive supervisor has been defined

as one who empathizes with an employee's desire to seek balance between work and family responsibilities (Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

FSSB is a superior predictor of employee well-being compared with general supervisor supportive behaviors *and* formal workplace policies that are designed to support work/family life (Kossek et al., 2007). Research has shown that employees who have supportive supervisors experience less work/family conflict (Anderson et al., 2002; Frone et al., 1997; Goff et al., 1990; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Thompson & Prottas, 2005), reduced work distress (Frone et al., 1997), increased job satisfaction (Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson & Prottas, 2005), reduced absenteeism (Goff et al., 1990), and reduced intent to quit (Thompson et al., 1999). Due to the theoretical linkages between engagement, WFC and FSSB, it was expected that employees with supportive supervisors would report experiencing higher levels of engagement compared to employees with less supportive supervisors.

Hypothesis 3: Family supportive supervisor behaviors will be a moderator in the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement, such that the relationship will be more negative for employees with less supportive supervisors.

Family Hours

Inherent in both role strain theory and the effort recovery model is the idea that people have responsibilities in their various roles (work, home) and when these responsibilities are mutually incompatible, role conflict can occur. As mentioned above, work/family conflict can be broken down into time based, strain based, and behavior-based conflict. Time based conflict is a useful guide for the current study. Employees

who are forced to devote more time to work have, objectively, less time to perform responsibilities in the family domain. Therefore, it is logical to assume that those who spend more time dealing with family responsibilities will have less time and energy to devote to their work and are therefore more likely to experience fatigue and consequently a reduction in work engagement. This idea has been supported by research; a meta-analysis by Ford et al (2007) showed that the number of hours spent tending to family responsibilities is significantly related to work/family conflict. Therefore, it was expected that family hours would moderate the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement.

Hypothesis 4: Family hours will be a moderator in the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement, such that the relationship will be more negative for those who spend more time tending to family responsibilities.

Method

Participants

A total of 78 participants were recruited from Hays Companies, a subsidiary of Brown & Brown Insurance. Hays companies is an insurance brokerage firm located in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area that specializes in employee benefits, risk management, and health insurance. Hays companies agreed to participate primarily due to the benefit of gaining valuable insight into the wellbeing of their employees. The data was meant to help shape organizational policies and guide leaders on how to manage their teams. Out of the 78 participants that were recruited, a total of 48 employees met the final inclusion criteria. Participants were included in the study if they met one of the following characteristics:

- married or in a domestic partnership

- have people in their life who depend on them for daily care.

A power analysis using the G*Power software program (Faul et al., 2009) revealed that the minimum sample size needed to detect effects was 80, so the final sample was not robust in terms of statistical power. Forty seven out of forty eight (97.9%) respondents identified as white, 17 (35.4%) respondents identified as male, 31 (64.6%) identified as female, 47 out of 48 (97.9%) respondents work full time, the average age was 43.2 years, the average hours worked per week was 42.8, the most frequent tenure was 5 plus years (58.3%), followed by 1-5 years (27.1%). The most frequent salary was over \$100,000 (45.8%), followed by \$75,000-\$99,000 (29.8%).

Procedure

I met with Mr. Birdwell in May of 2020 and through several conversations came to learn that he was concerned about his employees' engagement and work-family conflict in the midst of the Pandemic. I developed a questionnaire to collect data on the areas of concern and launched it in October of 2021. Prospective participants were notified about the study and its benefits prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Communication came from Mr. Birdwell through the company-wide email. The wording of the communication was as follows:

(insert greeting),

I have agreed to partner with an Industrial/Organizational Psychology graduate student at the University of Minnesota Duluth on an applied research project. The purpose of the project is to investigate perceptions of Work/Family Conflict and Work Engagement among all of us (at Hays). The graduate student has created a questionnaire with items

designed to measure these constructs. Participation in the research project is completely voluntary and no one who participates will be identifiable. The graduate student has assured strict anonymity and confidentiality. The goal of the project is to produce insights into how we are feeling about our work. The results will serve as a valuable source of feedback and will ultimately help us to manage everyone more effectively. Everyone is encouraged to participate. The more people who participate, the easier it will be to identify actionable trends in the data and draw valid conclusions about the state of our workforce. In a couple days, I will send out an email with a link to the questionnaire.

Once participants were informed of the study, a questionnaire was sent out via email. All responses were kept confidential, and data was only analyzed in the aggregate. The questionnaire contained questions pertaining to demographics, family hours, work/family conflict, perceived autonomy, work engagement, and family supportive supervisor behaviors.

Measures

Demographics

Participants were asked to indicate their gender, race, age, job tenure, hours worked per week, work status (full time vs part time), and salary range.

Work-Family Conflict

Work/Family Conflict was measured with an abbreviated version of the 18-item Work-Family Conflict Scale (WFCS) developed by Carlson et al. (2000). The abbreviated version was constructed by Matthews et al (2010) specifically to give researchers a shorter scale when questionnaire length is a concern. The 6-item scale is based off the original scale by Carlson et al. (2000) without sacrificing psychometric quality. The measure utilizes two sub-scales measuring work to family conflict and family to work

conflict. Example items are “I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities” and “Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work”. Responses were collected with a 5 point likert scale with higher scores indicating higher levels of work-family conflict. The measure had mixed alpha coefficients, with work to family conflict achieving a very strong score of .82, whereas family to work conflict achieved a .46.

Additionally, respondents were asked two open ended questions about their conflict situation. The two questions are “Please describe your work/family conflict situation. In other words, what exactly is happening that leads to conflict between your work and family responsibilities?” and “What kind of family responsibilities do you have?” This was done to add further clarity/information regarding how to best help employees manage their work/family conflicts.

Work Engagement

Work engagement was measured with the three-item version of the Utrecht work engagement scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). This version measures vigor, dedication, and absorption using one item from each of the original sub-scales. The vigor sub-scale measures feelings of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. The item that was used is “At my job, I feel bursting with energy”. The dedication sub-scale refers to being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. The item that was used is “I am enthusiastic about my job”. Absorption refers to being fully concentrated and absorbed in one’s work, so much

so that time passes quickly. The item that was used is “I am immersed in my work”. Responses were collected using a five-point likert scale with higher scores indicating higher levels of engagement. Due to the fact that each engagement sub-scale consisted of only 1 item, obtaining an alpha coefficient was not possible.

Autonomy

Autonomy was measured with a scale developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). The scale is comprised of three sub-scales that measure perceptions of work scheduling autonomy (3 items), decision making autonomy (3 items), and work methods autonomy (3 items). The work scheduling autonomy scale measures the degree to which employees feel they have freedom to control the schedule and timing of work. An example item is “the job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work”. The decision-making autonomy scale measures the degree to which employees feel they have the ability to make decisions on the job. An example item is “The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work”. The work methods autonomy scale measures the degree to which employees feel they have freedom to decide which methods and/or procedures are used in carrying out work tasks. An example item is “The job allows me to make decisions about what methods I use to complete my work”. Responses were collected with a 5 point likert scale with higher scores indicating higher levels of autonomy. The three sub-scales showed strong psychometric qualities with alpha coefficients of .76, .89, and .96, respectively.

Family Hours

For parsimony, family hours was measured with one item “How many hours per day do you spend tending to family responsibilities?”. The item was a homegrown measure after parsing the literature.

Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors

FSSB was measured with the 14-item Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors scale developed by Hammer and colleagues (2008). The scale measures 4 sub-dimensions that make up the overall concept of FSSB. The 4 sub-scales are emotional support (4 items), instrumental support (3 items), role modeling (3 items), and creative work/family management (4 items). The emotional support scale measures the degree to which employees feel their supervisors care about and support them specifically regarding family matters. An example item is “My supervisor is willing to listen to my problems in juggling work and non-work life”. The instrumental support scale measures the degree to which employees feel their supervisors provide day-to-day resources or services to assist employees in their efforts to successfully manage their dual responsibilities at work and at home. An example item is “My supervisor works effectively with workers to creatively solve conflicts between work and non-work”. The role modeling scale measures the degree to which employees feel their supervisors model behaviors that help reduce work/family conflict by providing strategies and solutions. An example item is “My supervisor is a good role model for work and non-work balance”. Lastly, the creative work/family management scale measures the degree to which employees feel their supervisors take proactive actions to help subordinates manage work/family conflict. An example item is “My supervisor thinks about how the work in my department can be organized

to jointly benefit employees and the company”. Responses were measured with a 5 point likert scale with higher scores indicating higher levels of FSSB. The scale showed strong psychometric qualities with an alpha coefficient of .95.

Analytical Strategy

The primary analyses in this study were a multiple linear regression and moderation analysis using Hayes’ Process MACRO (Hayes, 2022), model 4, on IBM SPSS v27. To remain consistent with prior research, work-family conflict and engagement were analyzed in their sub-dimensions, while autonomy and FSSB were measured in the aggregate. The current dominant paradigm in the work-family literature conceptualizes work-family conflict as being made up of two unique, bidirectional sub-dimensions (work to family conflict, family to work conflict) with different nomological networks. Similarly, work engagement is typically conceptualized as three sub-dimensions (vigor, absorption, dedication) that are used as indicators for the overall construct. On the contrary, autonomy and FSSB are typically measured as a whole with different sub-scales being implemented to measure each facet of the overall construct. The reliability for each measure was obtained by testing for Chronbach’s alpha in SPSS. Most of the measures had alpha coefficients above .70 or .80. For a full breakdown of the reliability analysis, see Table 1 . Lastly, descriptive statistics were obtained and a bivariate correlational analysis was conducted. See appendix B and C for these analyses.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Employees who experience greater work/family conflict will be less engaged than employees who experience less work/family conflict

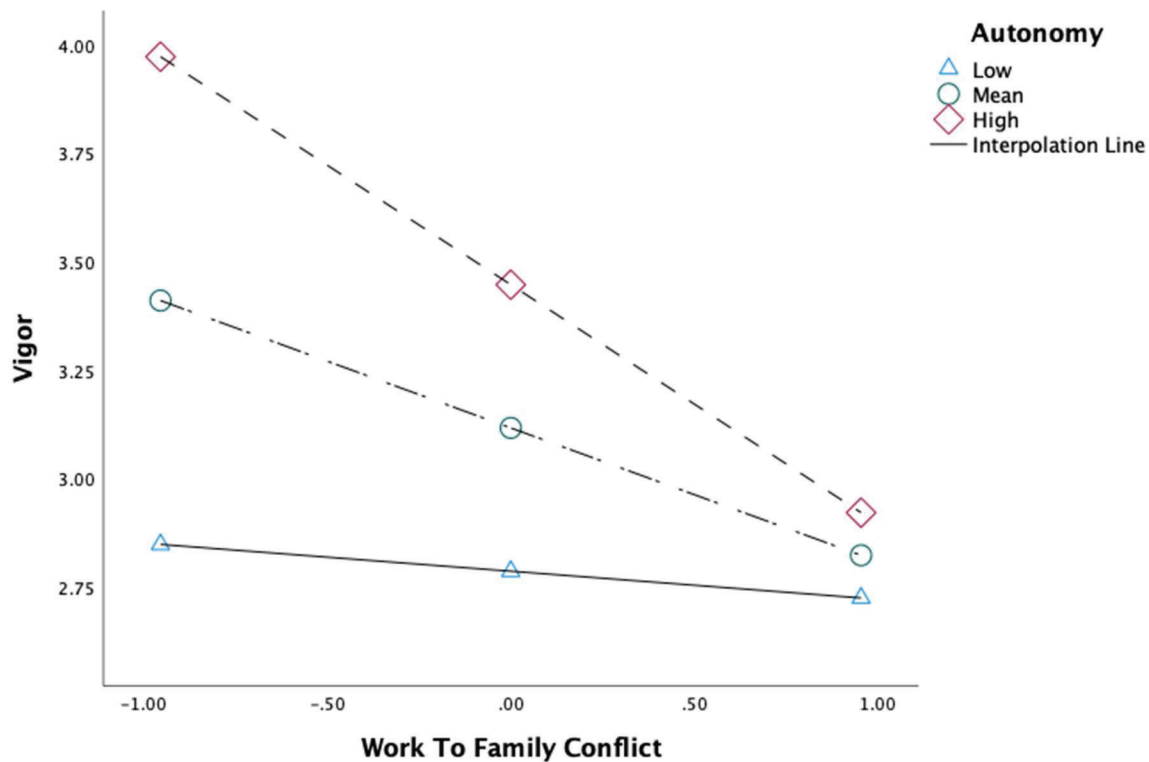
In a multiple regression analysis, work to family conflict significantly predicted feelings of vigor ($\beta = -.314, p < .05$), dedication ($\beta = -.257, p < .05$), and absorption ($\beta = .291, p < .05$). Family to work conflict was not a significant predictor of vigor ($\beta = -.029, p = .864$), dedication ($\beta = .053, p = .764$), or absorption ($\beta = -.125, p = .381$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived autonomy will be a moderator in the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement, such that the relationship will be more negative for those with less autonomy.

There was a significant interaction between work to family conflict and autonomy when predicting vigor ($\beta = -.357, p < .01$), and dedication ($\beta = -.263, p < .05$), but not absorption ($\beta = -.116, p = .268$). Contrary to expectations, a simple slopes analysis revealed that the negative relationship between work/family conflict and vigor was strengthened as autonomy increases.

When autonomy is low, there is a non-significant relationship between work to family conflict and vigor ($\beta = -.064, p = .685$). When autonomy is at the mean, there is a significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and vigor ($\beta = -.3074, p < .05$). When autonomy is high, there is a significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and vigor ($\beta = -.550, p < .01$).

Similarly, when autonomy is low, there is a non-significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and dedication ($\beta = -.076, p = .635$). When autonomy is at the mean,

Figure 1*Interaction between work to family conflict, autonomy, and vigor*

there is a non-significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and dedication ($\beta = -.255, p = .082$). When autonomy is high, there is a significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and dedication ($\beta = -.434, p < .05$).

There was a significant interaction between family to work conflict and autonomy when predicting dedication ($\beta = -.741, p < .05$), but not vigor ($\beta = -.462, p = .172$), or absorption ($\beta = .088, p = .744$). The simple slopes analysis didn't reveal significant effects, however the Johnson-Neyman output suggested that family to work conflict was a significant positive predictor of dedication only at low levels of autonomy. The relationship became non-significant as autonomy increased before trending towards a significant negative relationship at high levels of autonomy. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Figure 2

Interaction between work to family conflict, autonomy, and dedication

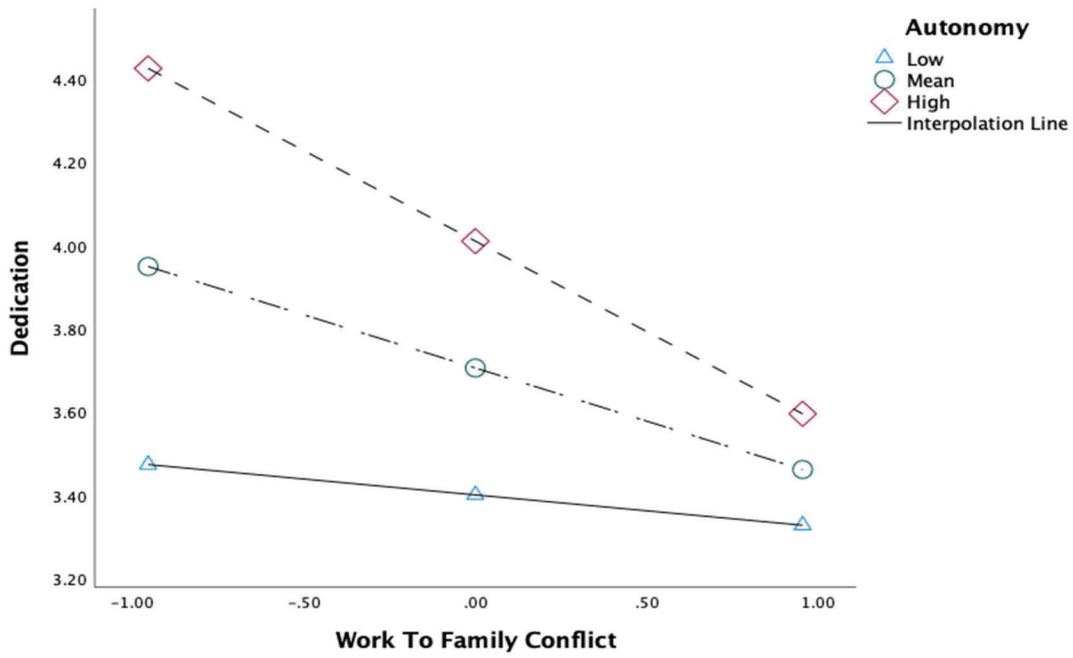
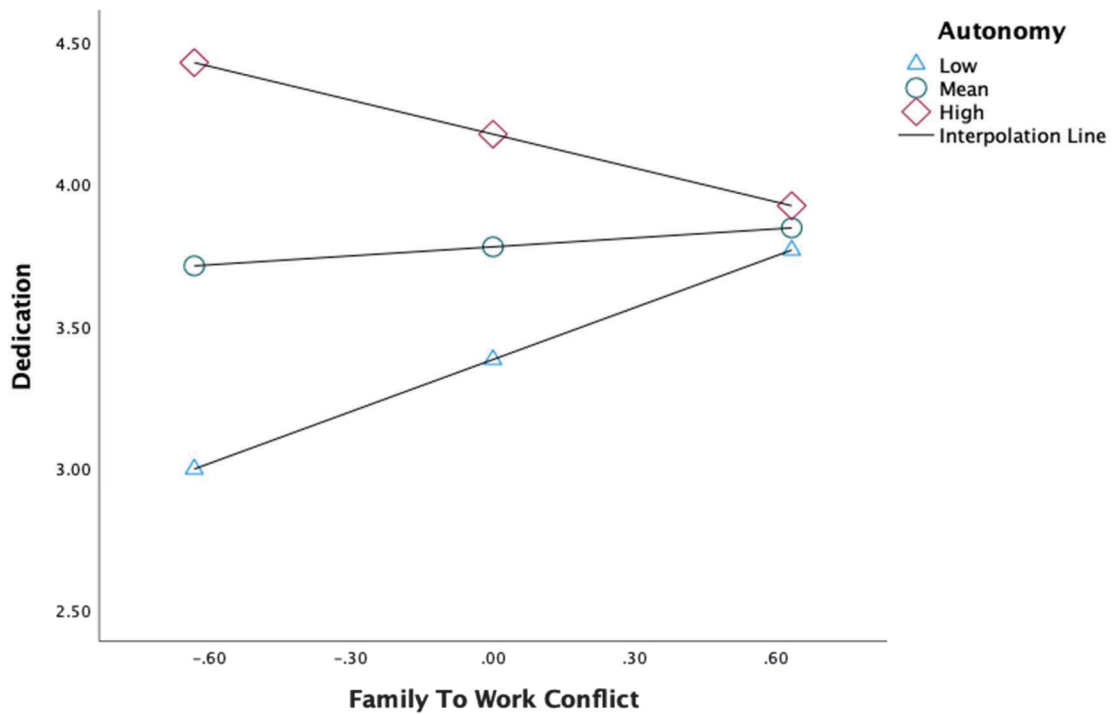


Figure 3

Interaction between family to work conflict, autonomy, and dedication



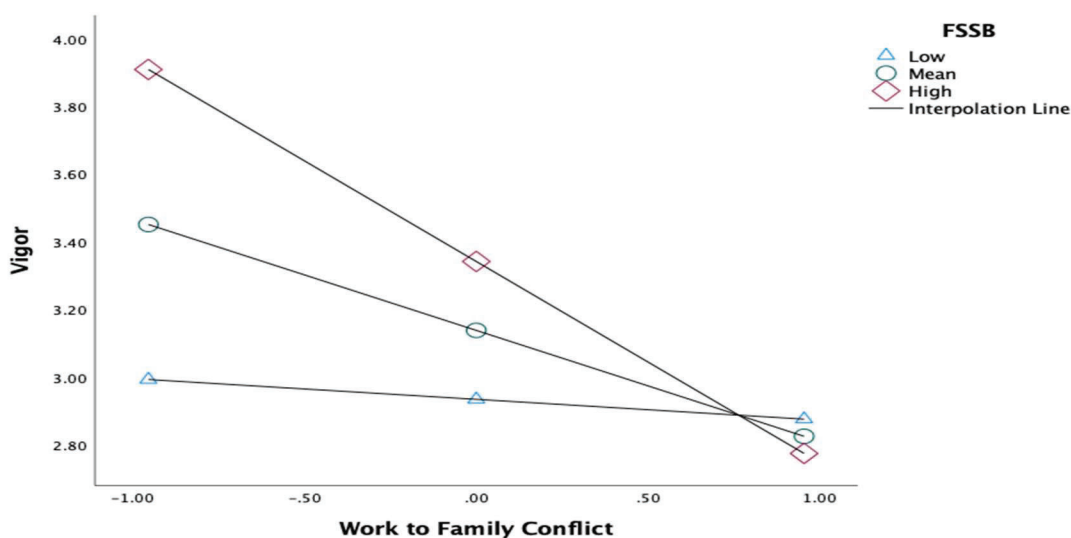
Hypothesis 3: Family supportive supervisor behaviors will be a moderator in the relationship between work/family conflict and engagement, such that the relationship will be more negative for employees with less supportive supervisors.

There was a significant interaction between work to family conflict and family supportive supervisor behaviors when predicting vigor ($\beta = -.316, p < .01$), but not when predicting dedication ($\beta = -.172, p = .145$) or absorption ($\beta = -.077, p = .416$). Contrary to expectations, work to family conflict had a stronger negative effect on vigor as family supportive supervisor behaviors increased.

When family supportive supervisor behaviors are low, there is a non-significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and vigor ($\beta = -.061, p = .653$). When FSSB is at the mean, there is a significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and vigor ($\beta = -.327, p < .05$). When FSSB is high, there is a significant negative relationship between work to family conflict and vigor ($\beta = -.593, p < .01$).

Figure 4

Interaction between work to family conflict, FSSB, and Vigor



There was no interaction between family to work conflict and FSSB when predicting vigor ($\beta = -.0290, p = .8841$) dedication ($\beta = -.472, p = .047$) or absorption ($\beta = -.029, p = .884$). It should be noted that although the interaction equation showed a significant effect, neither the Johnson-Neyman output nor the simple slopes equations reached statistical significance. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported

Hypothesis 4: Family hours will be a moderator in the relationship between work-family conflict and engagement, such that the relationship will be more negative for those who spend more time tending to family responsibilities.

There was not an interaction between work to family conflict and family hours when predicting vigor ($\beta = .1395, p = .3768$), dedication ($\beta = -.0232, p = .8818$), or absorption ($\beta = .0681, p = .5763$), however, there was an interaction between family to work conflict and family hours when predicting dedication ($\beta = .5436, p < .05$) and vigor ($\beta = .5328, p < .05$), but not absorption ($\beta = .0383, p = .8331$).

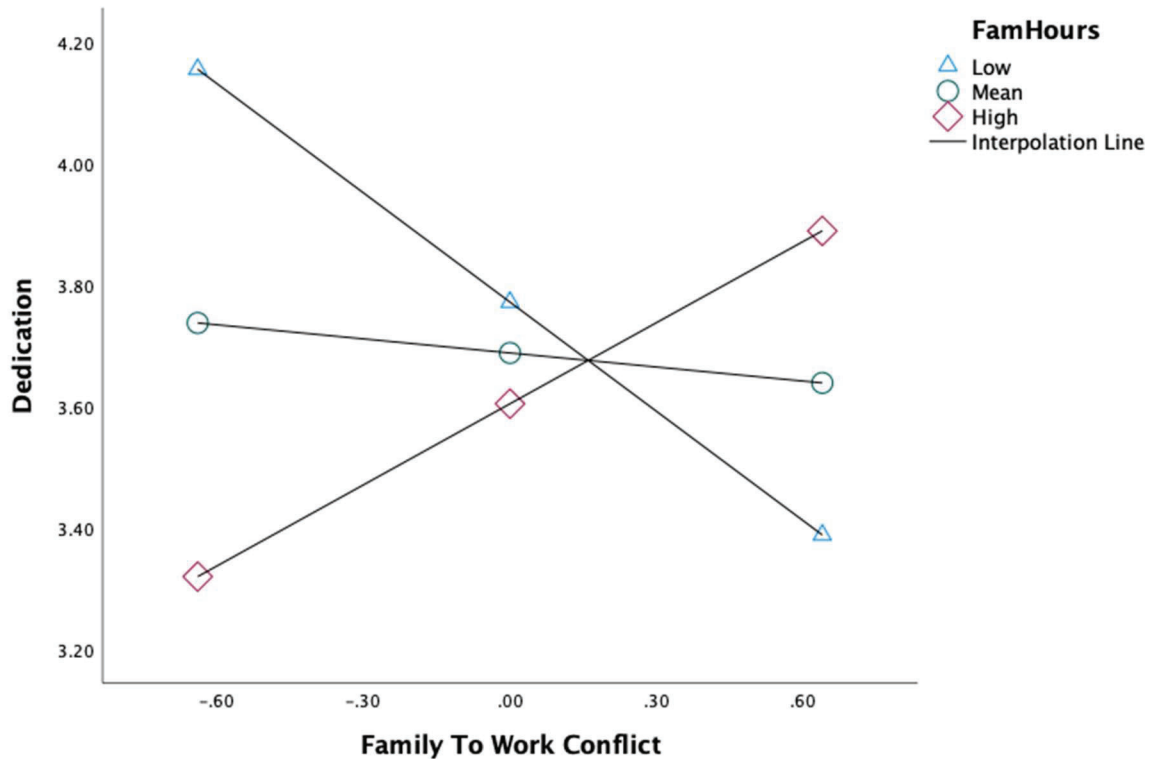
The Johnson-Neyman output suggested that family to work conflict is a significant negative predictor of vigor and dedication at extremely low levels of family hours, while also serving as a significant positive predictor at extremely high levels of family hours.

When family hours are low, there is a significant negative relationship between family to work conflict and dedication ($\beta = -.6002, p < .05$). When family hours are at the mean, there is a non-significant negative relationship between family to work conflict and dedication ($\beta = -.0773, p = .6910$). When family hours are high, there is a non-significant

positive relationship between family to work conflict and dedication ($\beta = .4457, p = .1084$).

Figure 5

Interaction between family to work conflict, family hours, and dedication



The interaction between family to work conflict and family hours when predicting vigor did not have a significant simple slopes analysis. However, the Johnson-Neyman output suggested that there could be a significant negative relationship between family to work conflict and vigor at very low levels of family hours and a significant positive relationship between family to work conflict and vigor at very high levels of family hours. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Qualitative Responses

There were a total of 27 qualitative responses. To analyze them, I followed the principles of attribution content analysis, which “examines the frequency with which certain characterizations or descriptors are used” (Stewart & Rook, 2007, p. 119) in qualitative data samples. My method was a simple counting and sorting exercise. I counted up the number of responses that contained similar words, descriptive phrases, adjectives, adverbs, and qualifiers and grouped them together into common themes. Below are some of the most common themes that emerged during the analysis.

1. Working from home has made it easier to balance work and family responsibilities. Several respondents indicated that they either had no work/family conflict whatsoever or that they are now experiencing little or no work/family conflict because of the ability to work from home. Remote work has seemingly been a positive experience for the vast majority of the employees who responded, and it has helped them manage aspects of work/family conflict that they might not have even known about prior to the pandemic. Respondents used words like ‘godsend’ and ‘flexible’ when recounting their experiences. Due to the nature of remote work and the demand for workers to be self-motivated, the fact that most employees report decreases in work/family conflict as a result of working from home is a good indicator that the current workforce is comprised of people that are self-motivated in their approach to work.

“Working in the office so far from home makes it difficult to be present for family responsibilities without interfering with work. Working from home has been a godsend for our

family. I can fulfill both roles as employee and parent and feel that I have become better in both roles due to the flexibility working from home provides.”

“I have worked hard and learned to balance my work/family responsibilities so I have no conflicts at this time.”

2. A high number of job/client demands, and the subsequent stress that arises makes it difficult for some people to be positive and loving with their families. These people indicated that sometimes, there can be so many client demands that it seems like “there are not enough hours in the day” to get everything done. This can lead to stress and a reduction in the quality and quantity of family time.

“My personal life struggles fairly regularly because I have so much work to keep up with. Work/Life balance is not a “thing” I get to experience.”

“Not enough time in the work day to meet all the client needs - need additional teammates, or allow OT for teammates.”

3. Family responsibilities sometimes take precedence over work responsibilities.

This can lead to negative affective reactions or working longer hours to compensate for the time spent dealing with family responsibilities.

4. A few respondents noted how the commute was cutting into their day. This was frequently discussed in the lens of the aforementioned positive experience theme. Respondents indicated that working from home has eliminated their otherwise daily commute to and from work, which for some people was as long as two hours. This has enabled them to more easily attend to family responsibilities as they arise. This is a good explanation for why most people aren't experiencing

work/family conflict. Cutting out the daily commute turns a half hour drive into a 20 second walk.

“Since Covid and working at home, discovered a 2 hour commute was really cutting into family time each day.”

5. 9-5 culture sometimes makes it difficult to accommodate certain family responsibilities such as picking up/dropping off kids from school. These people indicated that it can be difficult to accommodate family responsibilities if there is a strong emphasis on working until 5 pm regardless of when you get started working in the morning. In particular, it can be hard to pick kids up from school or drive kids/other family members to appointments.
6. Meeting times should be respected. It is inherently harder to connect with colleagues when working from home, it is even harder to connect with colleagues if meeting times are not respected when working from home. It can make it more difficult to manage responsibilities in both the work and family domains if meeting times are pushed back or cancelled even somewhat frequently. Consequently, there should be an extra emphasis to really try and honor pre-determined meeting times. By doing this, employees will be helping to mitigate the inherent disadvantage of communicating via long distance.

Discussion

Work to family conflict being a significant negative predictor of engagement was not a surprise, as this is consistent with prior research. Family to work conflict not being a significant negative predictor was noteworthy, because it indicates that family to work conflict is not as large of a factor as work to family conflict. This serves to strengthen the

idea that work to family conflict and family to work conflict are related but separate sub-dimensions of work-family conflict.

Instead of serving as a shield and weakening the negative relationship between work-family conflict and engagement, autonomy and FSSB served to strengthen it. One semi-plausible explanation for the autonomy findings is that autonomy is associated with workload. Perhaps those in positions with autonomy also have the highest workload. However, when separating people based on hours worked, the mean ratings indicate that employees who work more than 40 hours per week have more work/family conflict ($M = 2.53$) and less autonomy ($M = 4.11$) than employees who work up to and equaling 40 hours per week ($M = 2.00$, $M = 4.49$). One can still make the argument that number of hours worked does not approximately translate to workload, after all everyone works at a different pace. Still, hours worked is a relatively close proxy for workload. It is possible that the pandemic is simply causing impediments that are hard to quantify with the variables being measured in the current study. For example, the pandemic has caused many workers to communicate long distance as opposed to face to face. Long distance communication has drawbacks that are not present in face-to-face settings (Shockley et al., 2021). Additionally, many workers are not accustomed to collaborating with others in a remote setting. It is reasonable to speculate that the pandemic is simply disrupting workers' normal routines to the point where established job resources like autonomy or supervisor support are not having their normal effect because everything feels so atypical within a remote setting.

Similarly, instead of acting as a buffer against the negative effects of work-family conflict, FSSB amplified the negative effects of work-family conflict. One explanation

for these findings is individual differences between people. Perhaps there are individual differences in how job resources are perceived among the employees at Hays Companies. A job resource is only a resource if employees perceive it to be. With the current environment, most people are working longer hours than normal, maybe they are viewing supervisors who reach out as simply another job demand that needs attending to because they are so busy. If this is the case, then it would be useful to examine fluctuations in FSSB. As employees transition to working from home, communication might fluctuate on a day-to-day basis. It could be that employees are simply receiving support at the wrong time, so it would be useful to ascertain on which days employees feel they have more demands vs which days they have support. This would help to determine if support is welcomed or not.

Perhaps the pandemic is interfering with the normal flow of communication between managers and their employees. Communication has long been cited as an important factor in job performance (Marlow et al., 2018) and long-distance communication has drawbacks that are not present in face-to-face settings (Shockley et al., 2021). Due to the number of factors subsumed by communication, there are many scenarios in which this could be manifesting and effecting employees. Maybe employees are not receiving enough feedback since going remote, or maybe appreciation has become less impactful now that it is delivered through a screen. Considering how fundamental communication is to leadership (Judge, 2002), any kind of disruption caused by the pandemic could cause employees to perceive leaders differently, which would help to explain how FSSB could be detrimental to employees in this particular sample.

Family hours was a moderator, but not in the way that was expected. The results indicated that as family hours increased, the relationship between family to work conflict and engagement turned positive and grew in strength. Perhaps this indicates that there are individual differences in how people handle stressors. Everyone is different when it comes to managing and overcoming stress, and there are a variety of factors that influence this process. For example, neuroticism is associated with withdrawal coping mechanisms (Boyes & French, 2010). Some people work to distract themselves whereas others withdraw from the source(s) of their stress (Boyes & French, 2010). Perhaps the employees at Hays Companies are the type to respond to family stress by engaging more intently with their work.

Limitations and Future Directions

It should be noted that this study was an applied project, so the goal was not to generalize the findings to other populations. Instead, the goal was to obtain findings that would help Hays Companies make decisions that are in the best interest of their employees, specifically the decision whether or not to continue remote work. That being said, one of the limitations of the project was the number of participants who were included in the study. Although Brown & Brown is the sixth largest insurance company in the world, only the employees from Hays Companies, a subsidiary of Brown & Brown, were included in the study, which lowered the overall sample size. Additionally, only employees with families met the criteria to be included, which further decreased the pool of participants. This was not a glaring issue considering the effect sizes and significance values, but it was still worth noting because the power level (.80) that was used to determine the needed sample size; $n = 80$ was the lowest cutoff value that is considered acceptable. To

remedy this, future projects at Hays companies should study a broader dimension of work/life balance, such as work/non-work conflict, to include employees who did not meet the cutoff criteria. This would provide Hays Companies a more comprehensive look at their workforce. It might also be fruitful to reach out to other subsidiaries of Brown & Brown Insurance. Doing this would provide insight into how the results might vary by company, occupation, or region, and provide a better understanding of how others have adapted to remote work.

Another limitation is the possibility of response bias. I invited around 120 employees to participate in the study. There were around 80 individuals who did not respond to the questionnaire or meet the final cutoff criteria. There is the possibility that the 48 employees who were studied shared similar characteristics that are not representative of the company as a whole. For example, the majority of respondents reporting an annual income of over \$100,000. Prior studies have shown that individuals with a high annual income share similar characteristics, such as conscientiousness (Shaffer, 2020), and locus of control (Rosopa et al., 2019), which have repeatedly been demonstrated to be negatively correlated with neuroticism, which is positively correlated with stress (Horner, 1996). Further, perhaps the employees who participated in the project represent the portion of the Hays Co workforce that is doing well working remotely and therefore had time in their day to participate in the study. When the questionnaire launched in October 2021, Hays Co was just entering their busy time of the year where the majority of clients are renewing and/or modifying insurance plans. Perhaps the employees who are struggling did not respond to the survey because they did not have time or did not meet the final cutoff criteria. This would make it hard to use the findings to draw conclusions about

the state of Hays Companies' workforce due to the sample population having characteristics that differ from Hays Companies as a whole. As mentioned above, it would be wise for subsequent projects at Hays Companies to increase sample size by collecting data on a broader dimension of work-life balance while also branching out to other subsidiaries of Brown & Brown Insurance.

Another possible limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study. I carried out this project during a pandemic that has been constantly changing and evolving, yet I only collected data at one time point. Data was collected in October 2021 right around when kids were going back to school and Hays companies was beginning their busy time of year. Hays Companies had time to adapt to working from home at that point, so the results are likely different from what they would have been at the very beginning of the pandemic. In light of this, it would be beneficial to study responses over a period of time either in a longitudinal or daily diary format. It is likely that results will change as time goes by and work situations continue to evolve in response to the pandemic. Capturing these changes would be a valuable source of data for Hays Companies moving forward.

Practical Implications for Hays Companies

Respondents in this study were asked to respond to the various measures using a five-point likert scale. On this type of scale, anything below three (neutral) can be considered below average, and anything above three can be considered above average. I made these cutoff points to correspond with the anchors that were used on the likert scale for each measure. The verbal anchors of the likert scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Mean ratings can be biased due to outliers, so means were obtained before and after removing outliers. The difference in mean ratings after removing outliers

was no larger than (.1) for each construct. Thus, biased means were not a big concern for this project. With that in mind, the results suggest that the employees at Hays Companies are functioning rather well. Work to family conflict and family to work conflict were both below average at ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.95$) and ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.63$), respectively. FSSB and autonomy were both above average at ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.84$) and ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.70$), respectively. Additionally, the majority of qualitative responses praised remote work and/or reported having little to no work/family conflict (e.g., “I do not currently have conflict between my work and family responsibilities. The ability to be able to continue to work from home has really improved any conflicts that may have come up prior to being able to be remote.”). There were numerous respondents who commented on Hays being flexible and supportive when it comes to dealing with family responsibilities (e.g., “I don't feel that I have any work/family conflict. Hays Companies has always been flexible when working around family commitments/responsibilities.”). These results indicate that employees at Hays companies have supportive supervisors, freedom in carrying out their work, and healthy work/family conflict and engagement levels. Based on the results, and in light of Mr. Birdwell’s comments about productivity remaining the same, I see no reason to recommend that Hays Companies bring employees back into the office full time. Rather, it will be beneficial for Hays Companies to continue to let employees choose their own work environment.

Despite the overall positive results, there is still room for improvement. Family to work conflict was below average and was mentioned less often in qualitative responses, suggesting that it is not as prevalent as work to family conflict. Work to family conflict

was below average, but only slightly, and several respondents indicated in their qualitative responses that work can sometimes “be all consuming” and require a lot of hours to be put in, sometimes at the expense of family responsibilities. A few people suggested being more flexible with start and stop times, instead of there being an expectation to work until 5:00 PM every day regardless of start time. There were also a few employees who wrote that it is sometimes hard to pick up or drop off family members because of meetings in the afternoon. Based on these responses, it might be worth it to schedule meetings in the morning so employees have more freedom to deal with pickups/drop-offs in the afternoon.

Additionally, Hays Companies might consider eliciting feedback from employees regarding standard communication practices while working remote. As mentioned previously, the results showed that increases in FSSB are associated with increases in WFC and decreases in engagement. One possible reason is employees perceiving FSSB as a hindrance rather than a resource due to the nature of remote communication. Eliciting feedback will help to ensure that communication is tailored to each specific employee, thus increasing the likelihood that FSSB is perceived as a helpful resource, and not a draining hindrance.

Interestingly, vigor ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.82$) was only slightly above average and the lowest rated sub dimension of engagement (absorption: $M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.63$; dedication: $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.81$). Twenty of the forty-eight (20/48) respondents reported as neutral, suggesting that a large portion of the sample size was on the fence. Vigor is the sub-dimension that corresponds with what most people would call energy or drive, and is the opposite of physical exhaustion, a sub dimension of burnout. When looking at the effects

of work-family conflict and how it contributes to burnout, there is a series of steps that unfold over a period of time. Physical exhaustion is typically the first step that is reached, followed by detachment and reduced interest in work. It is unlikely that anyone is actually trending towards being physically exhausted when considering the robustness of autonomy and FSSB. As mentioned previously, autonomy and FSSB are considered job resources that positively correlate with engagement. If physical exhaustion was a legitimate concern among the employees at Hays Companies, I would expect autonomy and FSSB to be lower than they were. However, physical exhaustion is certainly worth monitoring moving forward. Approximately 64.5% of respondents indicated that they work over 40 hours per week, and several qualitative responses mentioned workload being a hindrance. Prior studies have shown that workload is highly correlated with physical exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Therefore, feelings of vigor might be liable to decrease if workload related stress remains the same.

It might be beneficial to implement job crafting, a strategy that gives employees the freedom to actively alter their jobs in ways that promote satisfaction and engagement. Employees can take on more or fewer job tasks, change the scope of their tasks, or change how a task is carried out to better suit them and their interests. Further, it would be useful to look at doing a process analysis, a procedure that takes a deep look at all the processes that employees are asked to do. It could be that process inefficiencies are contributing to overall workload, in which case a process analysis would help to reduce workload by cutting out steps or rearranging job responsibilities. For example, there might be burdensome administrative processes that are out of date. A process analysis

would flag these and optimize them, allowing employees to spend more time doing processes that they enjoy.

Similarly, it would be beneficial for Hays Companies to measure engagement levels in a daily diary format on an ongoing basis moving forward. This kind of approach involves employees answering engagement questionnaires on a daily or hourly format over a certain period of time. Daily diary studies are able to capture fluctuations in engagement levels. This is highly beneficial because it gives employees an opportunity to identify specific factors that either engage or disengage them. These factors can then be noted and strategies implemented to promote energizing work days while mitigating any negative effects and/or process inefficiencies that arise from hindering job demands. The only drawback to doing a daily diary study centered on engagement is the possibility that asking employees to respond to questions on a hourly or daily basis might be perceived as a hindrance, in which case the project might be diminished due to employees not giving their full effort, forgetting to answer questions or dropping out entirely.

Lastly, as mentioned previously, the results showed that increases in FSSB are associated with increases in WFC and decreases in engagement. One possible reason is employees perceiving FSSB as a hindrance rather than a resource due to the nature of remote communication. It might be beneficial for Hays Companies to implement more frequent performance evaluations. This would be beneficial because it would give managers and their employees frequent opportunities to sit down one on one and work out any misunderstandings, problems, or ideas related to working remotely. Frequent interaction is important in fostering relationships as well as improving communication quality. The idea would be to encourage open, uninterrupted communication regarding remote work

practices and performance. If implemented, this process could help to resolve any disruptions to communication or supervisor support that working remotely may have caused.

Conclusion

While the results were surprisingly not aligned with previous research, the goal of the project was to gather insights on the employees at Hays Companies regarding work-family conflict, engagement, autonomy, supervisor support, and family responsibilities. I was able to accomplish this goal by informing Hays Co leadership that work-family conflict is not a concern and that autonomy, engagement, and supervisor support were all above average. This is encouraging given Hays Co current period of transition regarding remote work. In conversations with my client contact, Robert Birdwell, I was informed that Hays Co was already leaning towards letting employees choose to continue working from home. These results have served to reinforce that decision. Further, the results have highlighted additional opportunities for exploration that might not have been considered prior to this study being conducted. For example, workload was a theme that emerged during the content analysis. It appears that employees sometimes struggle with the amount of work/client demands that they have, and while most appear able to cope, it is worth monitoring moving forward. Lastly, Hays Companies should take heed of the limitations of the current study and interpret the results with caution. The data suggests that employees are doing well right now, but that could easily change in the near or distant future as the novelty of working from home wears off and the effects of the pandemic dissipate. Follow up studies should look at a broader conceptualization of work-life balance, such as work-nonwork conflict. A broader conceptualization would allow Hays Co to capture a more nuanced story of what employees go through on a daily basis as there are

several other areas outside of the family domain. Similarly, Hays Co should target a much larger sample size to achieve strong statistical power. The current study did not have adequate power and suffered as a result. Lastly, it would be prudent to do a follow up study that looks at fluctuations in the constructs that were measured. In particular, engagement, work-family conflict, and FSSB would probably show a fair amount of fluctuations in response to day to day work and family events. It would be valuable to identify what specific factors cause fluctuations and from there strategies can be implemented to ideally craft employees' jobs to maximize efficiency and minimize draining hindrances. Overall, the project goal was accomplished and Mr. Birdwell now has an objective source of data to reference when making decisions, as well as several promising directions for follow up studies.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency of Study Variables

	Mean	SD	α
1. Vigor	3.27	.818	N/A
2. Dedication	3.83	.808	N/A
3. Absorption	3.90	.627	N/A
4. Work to Family Conflict	2.52	.955	.815
5. Family to Work Conflict	2.13	.632	.465
6. Decision Making Autonomy	4.21	.672	.891
7. Work Methods Autonomy	4.16	.777	.956
8. Work Scheduling Autonomy	4.21	.731	.762
9. Engagement Aggregate	3.66	.575	.636
10. Work Family Conflict Aggregate	2.33	.642	.696
11. Autonomy Aggregate	4.19	.679	.945
12. Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors	3.69	.843	.956
13. Family Hours	2.89	.844	N/A

Appendix B

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations of Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Vigor	—												
2. Dedication	.713	—											
3. Absorption	.181	.133	—										
4. Work to Family Conflict	-.357	-.352*	.368*	—									
5. Family to Work Conflict	-.068	-.357	-.072	.278*	—								
6. Decision Making Autonomy	.284	.332*	-.084	-.523*	-.146	—							
7. Work Methods Autonomy	.209	.271*	-.260*	-.561**	-.059	.812*	—						
8. Work Scheduling Autonomy	.261	.243*	-.140	-.630**	-.072	.777*	.840*	—					
9. Engagement Aggregate	.874*	.855*	.511*	-.198	-.095	.259*	.130	.186	—				
10. Work Family Conflict	-.299*	-.300*	.239	.881**	.699*	-.461*	-.446*	-.504**	-.194	—			
11. Autonomy Aggregate	.267*	.300*	-.177	-.612**	-.096	.918*	.950*	.935**	.201	-.503**	—		
12. Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors	.358*	.352*	-.094	-.469**	-.209	.681*	.484*	.485**	.301*	-.452**	.583*	—	
13. Family Hours	-.016	-.016	-.016	.068	.358*	-.085	.019	-.078	-.168	.227	-.049	-.1	—

Appendix C

Table 3

Regression and Moderation Results for Study Variables

Effect	β	SE	t	95% CI		p
				LL	UL	
Work to Family Conflict>Vigor	-.314	.120	-2.51	-0.56	-.062	<.05
Work to Family Conflict>Dedication	-.257	.123	-2.10	-0.55	-.053	<.05
Work to Family Conflict>Absorption	.291	.099	2.94	0.08	.466	<.05
Family to Work Conflict>Vigor	-.029	.172	-.172	-0.33	.427	.864
Family to Work Conflict>Dedication	.053	.175	.303	-0.35	.407	.764
Family to Work Conflict>Absorption	-.125	.142	-.884	-0.47	.099	.381
Work to Family Conflict>Autonomy>Vigor	-.357	.125	-2.85	-.609	-.105	<.01
Work To Family Conflict>Autonomy>Dedication	-.263	.126	-2.08	-.517	-.009	<.05
Work to Family Conflict>Autonomy>Absorption	-.116	.103	-1.12	-.325	.093	.269
Family to Work Conflict>Autonomy>Vigor	-.462	.332	-1.13	-1.13	.209	.172
Family to Work Conflict>Autonomy>Dedication	-.741	.307	-2.41	-1.36	-.121	<.05
Family to Work Conflict>Autonomy>Absorption	.088	.267	.329	-.451	.627	.744
Work to Family Conflict>FSSB>Vigor	-.316	.111	-2.85	-.540	-.092	<.01
Work to Family Conflict>FSSB>Dedication	-.172	0.11	-1.48	-.404	.061	.145
Work to Family Conflict>FSSB>Absorption	-.077	0.09	-0.82	-.267	.112	0.42
Family to Work Conflict>FSSB>Vigor	-.029	0.23	-.147	-.427	.369	.884
Family to Work Conflict>FSSB>Dedication	-.472	0.229	-2.04	-.939	.006	<.05
Family to Work Conflict>FSSB>Absorption	-.029	0.198	-.147	-.427	.369	.884
Work to Family Conflict>Family Hours>Vigor	.139	0.156	.893	-.175	.455	.377
Work to Family Conflict>Family Hours>Dedication	-.023	0.155	-.150	-.336	.290	.881
Work to Family Conflict>Family Hours>Absorption	.068	0.121	.563	-.176	.312	.576
Family to Work Conflict>Family Hours>Vigor	.533	0.221	2.41	.086	.979	<.05
Family to Work Conflict>Family Hours>Dedication	.544	0.215	2.53	.109	.978	<.05
Family to Work Conflict>Family Hours>Absorption	.038	0.181	.212	-.326	.402	.833

Appendix D

Full Measures

Demographics

1. Which gender do you most identify with?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender
 - d. Non-Binary
 - e. Agender

2. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
 - f. White

3. How old are you?

4. What is your marital status?
 - a. Single
 - b. Married, or in a domestic partnership
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced

- e. Separated
5. How long have you been employed by Hays Companies?
 - a. Less than 6 months
 - b. 6-12 months
 - c. 1-5 years
 - d. 5+ years
 6. On average, how many hours do you work per week?
 7. What is your current employment status?
 - a. Full time (40 or more hours per week)
 - b. Part time (up to 39 hours per week)
 8. What is your current salary?
 - a. Less than 20,000
 - b. 20,000-34,999
 - c. 35,000-49,999
 - d. 50,000-74,999
 - e. 75,000-99,000
 - f. Over 100,000

Family Hours

1. Are there people in your life who depend on you for daily care?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. If so, who in your life requires the most care?

- a. Children
 - b. Spouse/Partner/Significant Other
 - c. Parents or grandparents
 - d. Extended family members (cousins, aunts & uncles)
3. Do you have children?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
4. If so, how many children do you have?
- a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4+
5. What are the ages of your children?
- a. Text response
6. Are you a single parent?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Of the following, which family responsibility requires the most time/attention?

- a. Spending informal quality time with immediate or extended family
 - b. Making/preparing meals for immediate or extended family
 - c. Essential caregiving responsibilities for immediate or extended family
(changing diapers, administering medications, bathing, etc.)
 - d. Emotional support for immediate or extended family
 - e. Household tasks for immediate or extended family (doing dishes, mowing the lawn, etc.)
 - f. Running errands for immediate or extended family (grocery shopping, giving rides)
8. What is the average number of hours that you spend on daily family responsibilities?
- a. Less than 1 hour per day
 - b. 1-2 hours per day
 - c. 3-4 hours per day
 - d. 5-6 hours per day
 - e. 7-8 hours per day
 - f. 9-10 hours per day
 - g. 10+ hours per day

9. Please describe in as much detail as possible what your daily family responsibilities entail

Work/Family Conflict

1. I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities.
2. I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family.
3. The behaviors I perform that make me effective at work do not help me to be a better parent and spouse.
4. I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities.
5. Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work.
6. Behavior that is effective and necessary for me at home would be counterproductive at work.
7. Please describe your work/family conflict situation. In other words, what exactly is happening that leads to conflict between your work and family responsibilities?
8. Please describe what kind of family responsibilities you have

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Vigor

1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy

Dedication

1. I am enthusiastic about my job

Absorption

1. I am immersed in my work

Autonomy

Work Scheduling Autonomy

1. The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work.
2. The job allows me to decide on the order in which things are done on the job.
3. The job allows me to plan how I do my work.

Decision-Making Autonomy

1. The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work
2. The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own
3. The job provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions.

Work Methods Autonomy

1. The job allows me to make decisions about what methods I use to complete my work.
2. The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work.
3. The job allows me to decide on my own how to go about doing my work.

Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors

Emotional Support

1. My supervisor is willing to listen to my problems in juggling work and nonwork life.

2. My supervisor takes the time to learn about my personal needs.
3. My supervisor makes me feel comfortable talking to him or her about my conflicts between work and nonwork.
4. My supervisor and I can talk effectively to solve conflicts between work and nonwork issues.

Instrumental Support

5. I can depend on my supervisor to help me with scheduling conflicts if I need it.
6. I can rely on my supervisor to make sure my work responsibilities are handled when I have unanticipated nonwork demands.
7. My supervisor works effectively with workers to creatively solve conflicts between work and nonwork.

Role Modeling

8. My supervisor is a good role model for work and nonwork balance
9. My supervisor demonstrates effective behaviors in how to juggle work and nonwork balance.
10. My supervisor demonstrates how a person can jointly be successful on and off the job.

Creative Work/Family Management

11. My supervisor thinks about how the work in my department can be organized to jointly benefit employees and the company.
12. My supervisor asks for suggestions to make it easier for employees to balance work and nonwork demands.

13. My supervisor is creative in reallocating job duties to help my department work better as a team.
14. My supervisor is able to manage the department as a whole team to enable everyone's needs to be met.