

Bridging the Gap: The Role of Meaningful Work in Job Stress and Work-Family Dynamic


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Bridging the Gap: The Role of Meaningful Work in Job Stress and Work-Family Dynamic**Abstract**

Using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as a theoretical lens, this study examines the complex dynamics of work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) in the contemporary workplace via interplay between job-related stressors, meaningful work, and their collective effect on WFC. Specifically, we explored how meaningful work mediates the relationship between job-related stress, employee attitudes (including loyalty, exit, voice, neglect, and cynicism), and WFC using a two-time survey method involving 396 workers from diverse industries. Our findings suggest that job stress, especially anxiety and time stress positively associates with WFC. Furthermore, certain employee attitudes, such as the intention to leave, have indirect effects on WFC via their impact on meaningful work. These findings highlight the importance of nurturing meaningful work and managing job stress in order to improve employee well-being and reduce adverse outcomes. The conclusion of the study includes managerial implications, actionable recommendations, and potential avenues for future research.

Keywords: Meaningful work; Work-Family Conflict; Job Stress; Employee Attitudes

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of modern workplaces, the interplay between professional responsibilities and personal life has become a focal point of organizational studies. The concepts of work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC), deeply rooted in the seminal work of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and later explored by Frone (2003), continue to be pertinent. These conflicts arise when the demands of work and family roles are mutually incompatible, leading to a strain in managing these dual responsibilities. Recent societal shifts, such as the rise in remote working and the blurring of boundaries between home and office due to technological advancements, have further complicated these dynamics (Allen et al., 2021).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), offers a robust framework to examine these challenges. It posits that job demands and resources interact to influence employee well-being and performance. This model has been expanded to encompass a broader range of psychosocial factors in recent years, highlighting its adaptability in various organizational contexts (e.g., Bakker et al., 2023; Katou et al., 2022; Mazzetti et al., 2023; Nielsen et al., 2021). The model underlines the importance of balancing job demands, such as workload and time pressures, with job resources like autonomy and support in mitigating the impact of occupational stress.

Furthermore, the role of meaningful work in the JD-R paradigm has gained increasing recognition. Meaningful work, as conceptualized by Steger et al. (2012), involves deriving a sense of purpose from one's job and perceiving one's work as contributing to the greater good. In the current corporate scenario, there is a growing emphasis on the intrinsic value of work and its alignment with personal values and goals (Lysova et al., 2019). This aspect of meaningful work has been linked to enhanced employee engagement, job satisfaction, and resilience in work-related stress (Blustein et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2015; Steger et al., 2012; Williamson & Geldenhuys, 2014).

The complex relationship between job-related stressors, meaningful work, and their combined impact on WFC and FWC has not been fully explored. While the literature has identified employee attitudes, such as loyalty, exit, voice, neglect, and cynicism, as significant predictors of WFC and FWC (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018), a comprehensive examination of their interaction with meaningful work and job stress in predicting these conflicts is still lacking.

This paper aims to bridge this gap by exploring how meaningful work mediates the relationship between job-related stress, employee attitudes, and WFC/FWC. The primary gaps in this study pertain to the evolving nature of the work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) in modern work environments characterized by digital connectivity and flexible work arrangements. Traditional understandings of WFC/FWC are being challenged by these new work modalities, which necessitate a nuanced exploration of job-related stress, meaningful work, and their impacts on work-life balance. Specifically, the study addresses how meaningful work within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model can mediate the relationship between contemporary job stressors and WFC/FWC. Additionally, the study examines the changing dynamics of employee attitudes (loyalty, exit, voice, neglect, and cynicism) in relation to work-family balance, considering the shifting societal values, such as gender roles and work-life integration. This gap highlights the need for an updated understanding of work-family dynamics in response to the changing nature of work and societal expectations across diverse work sectors.

To address these gaps, we present the following research question: How does meaningful work mediate the relationship between job-related stress, employee attitudes, and WFC/FWC? To answer this question, we measured job stress, meaningful work, employee attitudes, and WFC among diverse industry workers ($n = 396$). Using a two-time survey method, we aimed to determine how meaningful work mediates the relationship between employee attitudes and job stress. This paper examines the literature pertaining to all variables and develops a theoretical model for our investigation. After establishing this framework, we evaluate the model using partial least squares

structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). We discuss our findings, offer managerial implications, recommend actionable steps for practice, and identify future research directions.

Literature Review

Work-family Conflict

Work-family conflict (WFC) and its opposite, family-work conflict (FWC), are the challenges that individuals face when managing work and family commitments (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). WFC occurs when work-related constraints conflict with family responsibilities, whereas FWC arises when family obligations conflict with professional duties (Frone, 2003). Dual-income homes and altering cultural attitudes influence the dynamics of WFC and FWC (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Long work hours, caregiving obligations, company culture, ambiguous job descriptions, and role ambiguity are all elements that contribute to these conflicts (Allen, 2001; Eby et al., 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Voydanoff, 2004). These conflicts have a variety of causes, with employment uncertainty escalating WFC and family support diminishing FWC (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Institutional norms also shape these tensions (Allen, 2001).

WFC and FWC have serious consequences, resulting in lower job satisfaction and health issues (Amstad et al., 2011; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). However, employment flexibility, organizational support, and role definition can all impact these conflicts (Allen et al., 2000; Kelly & Moen, 2007). WFC and FWC experiences differ across demographic groups, with age and gender determining how these conflicts are felt (Byron, 2005; Eagle et al., 1997; Spector et al., 2007).

Recent research has added to our understanding of WFC and FWC. For example, Barriga Medina et al. (2021) discovered that WFC and FWC positively linked with burnout while teleworking overload does not. This emphasizes the challenges brought on by remote labor and the COVID-19 epidemic. Furthermore, Huffman et al. (2013) discovered that the youngest and oldest

workers have the fewest conflicts between work and home, with family satisfaction and the age of the youngest kid impacting this association. This shows that life stage and family dynamics are important factors in WFC and FWC experiences.

The Job-Resource Demand Model: A Theoretical Framework

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, initially proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), has evolved dramatically over time. Initially focusing on the interplay between job demands and resources and their impact on occupational well-being and performance, the model has expanded to include additional elements. According to Claes et al. (2023), leadership is essential in determining job demands and resources. Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022) highlight the model's direct and indirect benefits on employees' subjective well-being beyond work-related outcomes. Personal resources, such as resilience traits, are included to emphasize their function in mediating the relationship between occupational resources and well-being. This larger breadth highlights the JD-R model's usefulness in various professional and cultural situations, making it a versatile tool for analyzing workplace dynamics, including WFC (Eby et al., 2005; Kelly & Moen, 2007).

Recent research has refined the JD-R model. Employees with rich job resources had reduced burnout and increased engagement (Brauchli et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2021), validating the model's prediction that job resources can alleviate the consequences of job demands. According to Brough et al. (2013), job resources such as assistance from supervisors and colleagues have a considerable impact on employee health and performance. Albrecht (2015) broadened the model to incorporate challenge demands and investigated the function of employee need fulfillment in mediating the relationship between job demands and engagement. In their recent publication, Bakker et al. (2023) provide multiple ways the JD-R model can be used in human resource management to assess individual and organizational strengths and weaknesses.

Several research have demonstrated the model's predictive value. Bakker et al. (2010) found that high job demands and resources were associated with task enjoyment and organizational

commitment. Job demands were connected with negative behaviors such as abuse and antagonism, while job resources positively influenced work engagement, according to Balducci et al. (2011). The model's coherence across diverse contexts and approaches was proven by Llorens et al. (2006). Job demands predict burnout and absence duration, but job resources predict organizational commitment and reduced absence spells (Bakker et al., 2003). Brauchli et al. (2015) extended the model to include health outcomes, demonstrating its applicability in this domain.

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), the JD-R model has grown into a comprehensive theory, with new research areas emerging. Boyd et al. (2011) demonstrated that resources and demands influence strain and commitment in both direct and indirect ways across time. Kinnunen et al. (2011) discovered that psychological detachment and mastery modulate the effects of job demands and resources on weariness and engagement. According to Bakker et al. (2004), job demands and resources originate psychological processes that influence organizational outcomes. Pecino et al. (2019) established a correlation between a healthy company atmosphere and increased employee well-being and satisfaction.

Job Stress and Work-family Conflict

Job stress is frequently characterized by the emotional challenges that arise when the demands of a job exceed a person's ability to manage, especially in the absence of adequate support structures. This stress is understood through the lens of the JD-R model as a consequence of an imbalance between the demands of a job and the resources available to manage them (Demerouti et al., 2001). Multiple variables contribute to this type of tension. These include demanding job characteristics, whether psychological or organizational, that require considerable effort. These demands can become overwhelming when coupled with a lack of resources or autonomy in the workplace (Bakker et al., 2003). These stressors are exacerbated by the dearth of supportive professional relationships, a crucial resource in the JD-R model.

Two fundamental facets of job stress emerge from this framework: job-related anxiety and temporal stress. Job-related anxiety refers to concerns regarding various employment factors,

including performance expectations, safety concerns, and interpersonal dynamics. The JD-R model relates the development of such anxiety to high job demands, particularly when resources, such as autonomy in decision-making, are limited (C. Smith et al., 2022). This anxiety is exacerbated in environments that lack supportive resources, such as collegial camaraderie or straightforward communication channels.

Temporal stress, conversely, is characterized by the unrelenting pressures resulting from time constraints, exemplified by stringent deadlines and the constant race against time. This tension is a symptom of excessively demanding work environments. Nevertheless, the JD-R model asserts that sufficient resources, precisely job control and autonomy, can serve as protective factors, thereby mitigating the negative effects of these time pressures (Malinowska & Tokarz, 2020; Tisu et al., 2023).

According to the JD-R paradigm, the effects of occupational stress span both individual and organizational domains. On an individual level, the effects vary from psychological concerns, such as burnout, to physiological issues, such as cardiovascular complications (Chandola et al., 2008). Stress in the workplace has been linked to decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover intentions, and a decline in overall job performance (Chao et al., 2015; DeTienne et al., 2012).

Given the complex relationship between job requirements, available resources, and the resulting tension, it is necessary to investigate further implications. The following hypothesis is proposed based on the insights afforded by the JD-R model and the evident interaction between job-related stressors and personal well-being:

Hypothesis 1: Job-related stress (encompassing both time and anxiety) will positively predict Work-family conflict.

Employee Attitudes (Loyalty, Exit, Voice, Neglect, and Cynicism) and Work-family Conflict

Job attitude is a nuanced reflection of an individual's evaluative judgments about their work, and it includes attitudes like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement. Using the JD-R model, the dynamic equilibrium between job demands and resources and their

impact on employment outcomes, including job attitudes, have been the subject of extensive research (Bakker et al., 2023). Numerous organizational and work-related factors affect these perspectives. Job intrinsic influence attitudes, including autonomy and task variety (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Conversely, organizational support and leadership styles may exert an influence. Anxieties towards employment may be altered when workers believe their contributions are valued by the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Furthermore, transformative leadership may ameliorate or exacerbate these perceptions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Work-life integration, job security perspectives, and personality traits influence workplace attitudes.

Developed by Albert Hirschman in 1970 and subsequently expanded to incorporate cynicism (Naus et al., 2007), the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect (EVLN) framework is a framework for comprehending employee reactions to discontent in the workplace and the resultant effects on WFC and FWC. At this paradigm's core lies loyalty, signifying a profound dedication to the organization. Although employees' sincere commitment is praiseworthy, it often results in prolonged work hours or added responsibilities, inadvertently increasing WFC as they attempt to manage their professional and familial duties. The significance of leader-member exchanges (LMXs) in this situation cannot be overstated, given that they can significantly reduce attrition and neglect tendencies while fostering loyalty, particularly in environments where workplace injustice is widespread (Lee & Varon, 2020).

Transitioning to exit behavior, this one involves contemplating or implementing the choice to depart from the organization due to personal dissatisfaction. This can be a mentally taxing concept, frequently leading to increased work-life balance (WLB) as personnel fixate on alternative career trajectories and the associated uncertainties (H. Kim, 2014). Simultaneously, the influence of personal opinions expressed through constructive criticism or proactive resolution of issues seems to be a dual-edged sword. Although voice can significantly impact effecting change, it also presents the potential for employees to experience emotional and cognitive fatigue, which may hinder their ability to manage familial responsibilities efficiently. This phenomenon is particularly evident in

scenarios wherein younger employees may exhibit reluctance in reporting safety concerns for fear of adverse consequences, mirroring a more pervasive apprehension towards bringing forth trouble in the professional environment (Tucker & Turner, 2015).

In addition, neglect, characterized by a decline in effort and dedication, creates a challenging environment. Although it may seem to alleviate WFC initially, it may inadvertently contribute to FWC. This occurs because families may interpret a worker's reduced presence at work as an indication of neglect, which alters the roles and dynamics within the family unit. Work-family conflict mediates the negative work-family culture and employee well-being consequences, including burnout and cynicism, further complicating the relationship between work-family culture and employee well-being (Peeters et al., 2009).

Ultimately, emotional exhaustion can result from cynicism, which is characterized by skepticism regarding the organization's legitimacy or its intentions; this can exacerbate both WFC and FWC. This response, specifically organizational cynicism, has an adverse impact on organizational commitment and attitudes toward collective actions like unionization by hastening departures and neglect (Seo et al., 2011).

The incorporation of cynicism into the EVLN framework offers crucial insights into the multifaceted ways in which employee reactions to job discontentment impact work-family dynamics. This paradigm places significant importance on the influence of organizational support, leadership quality, and workplace culture on the formation of employee attitudes and behaviors, which subsequently impact their capacity to manage work and family responsibilities effectively. Given the JD-R model's findings and the considerable discourse on job attitudes, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Employee attitudes such as loyalty, exit, voice, neglect, and cynicism will positively predict work-family conflict.

Meaningful Work and Work-family Conflict

Meaningful work, or the process by which people derive meaning from their jobs, is an essential component of the employment experience. Within the JD-R framework, meaningful work

can be viewed as a vital job resource that can reduce job demands while also improving well-being (Bakker et al., 2023). The three primary dimensions of meaningful work identified by Steger et al. (2012) are Positive Work Meaning, Meaning Making, and Motivations for the Greater Good. High levels of meaningful work, according to their findings, are associated with increased well-being, job satisfaction, and a cohesive work unit environment.

Even though Steger et al. (2012) define Positive Work Meaning as "personal significance derived from one's job," the concept of finding meaning in one's work has been a topic of organizational psychology for decades. The Job Characteristics Model proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1976) proposes that job characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, and task significance contribute to the psychological state of meaningfulness at work. Humphrey et al. (2007), on the other hand, argued that these traits are more closely associated with individual outcomes than organizational outcomes.

Steger et al. (2012) define Meaning Making as the process by which individuals connect their work to a broader sense of purpose and development beyond the workplace. This dimension emphasizes the congruence between an individual's job and their personal values, life objectives, and larger life story. When people are able to make the connection between their daily tasks and a larger life purpose, they are likely to experience less job stress and greater job satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2023).

The third dimension, Greater Good Motivations, refers to the belief that one's activity positively impacts society or contributes to personal growth. This dimension emphasizes the altruistic and self-development motivations underlying a person's job roles (Steger et al., 2012). When individuals perceive that their work benefits society or contributes to their personal development, they are more likely to experience increased job engagement and satisfaction (Wrzesniewski, 2003).

The JD-R model emphasizes the equilibrium between job demands and resources, as well as how this equilibrium influences a variety of work outcomes (Bakker et al., 2023). Meaningful

work, which includes Positive Work Meaning, Meaning Making, and Greater Good Motivations, serves as a resource that can potentially alleviate the stress caused by job demands. When individuals perceive their work as having significance, they are likely better equipped to manage the demands of their job and maintain a healthy work-life balance (Pramanik et al., 2020). This equilibrium can mitigate the collateral effects that contribute to WFC and FWC (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; H. Fatima et al., 2022).

Given the JD-R model's insights and the extensive literature on meaningful labor, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Meaningful work (positive meaning, meaning-making, greater good motivation) will negatively predict Work-family conflict

The relationship between job-related stress and employee responses such as loyalty, exit, voice, neglect, and cynicism, as indicated by the preceding literature, has been a topic of considerable interest in organizational research, particularly in the context of WFC. Job stress has been shown in studies to have a significant impact on turnover intentions, with WFC acting as a mediator in this process (Khan & Muhyuldeen, 2020). Furthermore, WFC has been identified as a moderator of the relationship between various job stressors and employee psychological distress (Oshio et al., 2017). This suggests that the factors that influence WFC can significantly impact employee well-being and organizational dynamics.

Furthermore, perceived workplace culture, particularly one that values family, has been linked to lower stress and WFC (Ahmad & Omar, 2010). This finding emphasizes the significance of the organizational environment in shaping employee stress experiences and stress management. Similarly, the full mediation effect of job stress between performance appraisal satisfaction and WFC (H. Ismail & Gali, 2016) demonstrates the complex interplay of various workplace factors and their impact on employees' personal lives.

Given these insights, it is important to investigate how meaningful work may influence this relationship. As a result, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Meaningful work (positive meaning, meaning-making, greater good motivation) will mediate the relationship between Job-related stress (time and anxiety) and Employee loyalty, exit, voice, neglect, and cynicism on Work-family conflict.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The sample for this study consisted of individuals who volunteered for the Qualtrics Panel, were above 18 years of age, worked in the United States, and had a minimum of one year of work experience. The decision to utilize Qualtrics was deliberate due to its ability to yield greater consistency in composition, respondent integrity, data quality, data structure, and substantive results compared to alternative sampling approaches (S. Smith et al., 2016). Two surveys were administered from October 24 to November 24, 2021, with a one-week interval between each survey administration. Additionally, we gathered factors that were not linked to the scope of this study. On average, the participants required 54.08 minutes to finish the surveys. Specifically, the average time taken for Time 1 was 22.57 minutes, while for Time 2, it was 31.65 minutes.

A total of 396 survey responses were obtained from a sample of people employed in the United States, ranging in age from 30 to 87 years (mean = 59.01, standard deviation = 10.722). The participants had diverse educational backgrounds and work experience ranging from 5 to 70 years (mean = 35.60, standard deviation = 11.12). Nevertheless, the racial and ethnic composition of the interviewees exhibited a significant degree of homogeneity, as a substantial majority (91.162%) identified as White/Caucasian. Please consult Table 1 for demographic information.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Variables

We employed a variety of established measures to assess different workplace-related constructs alongside several control variables, as recommended by Bernerth and Aguinis (2016), to eliminate potential alternative explanations for the hypothesized relationships. The Work-Family Conflict scale by Bellavia and Frone (2005), consisting of 8 items, measured the interference

between work and family responsibilities (Shapiro-Wilk $W = 0.857$). The Meaningful Work construct, developed by Steger et al. (2012), assessed the extent to which individuals find their work significant and purposeful. It included 10 items in total, divided into three components: Positive Work Meaning (4 items, $W = 0.732$), Greater Good (3 items, $W = 0.923$), and Meaning Making (3 items, $W = 0.900$). Job Stress was assessed using Parker and DeCotiis' (1983) scale, which included 5 items for Job Anxiety ($W = 0.858$) and 8 items for Time Stress ($W = 0.844$). Additionally, constructs from Naus et al. (2007) measured employee responses to workplace conditions, with 5 items each for Exit ($W = 0.945$), Voice ($W = 0.894$), Loyalty ($W = 0.933$), Neglect ($W = 0.892$), and 6 items for Cynicism ($W = 0.933$), totaling 26 items. Control variables such as Age, Gender, Hours per Week, Years in the Organization, and Years of Experience were included to provide a comprehensive insight into the multifaceted nature of employee experiences and responses within organizational settings.

Due to the non-normal distribution observed in all variables of our study, as evidenced by the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, it is imperative to utilize non-parametric techniques in our analysis. These methods play an essential role when data deviate from the assumption of normalcy, a frequent occurrence in social science research (Field, 2013). Non-parametric techniques possess advantages due to their independence from parametric assumptions regarding mean and standard deviation. Consequently, they provide a more appropriate methodology for analysing data that exhibits skewness or contains outliers (Corder & Foreman, 2014). Notably, these methods serve as a protective measure against the escalation of type I error rates, a potential concern in parametric testing when the assumptions of normality are broken (Pallant, 2020). In the field of organizational research, it is common for survey data to deviate from normalcy due to several reasons, such as ceiling and floor effects. Non-parametric tests are employed to ensure a more accurate and valid analysis (Salkind, 2010). Hence, the utilization of non-parametric analysis in our study is not only warranted but imperative for a precise interpretation of the data.

Results

Our analysis included an extensive exploration of sixteen variables within a workplace context, ranging from demographic factors like age and gender to professional metrics such as work hours and tenure, and extending to psychosocial aspects including work meaning and job stress. We first evaluated variables based on correlations and then explored the paths in our theoretical model with structural equation modeling. In the following paragraphs, we will present the findings in prose and with tables for visualization.

A key finding was the pronounced positive correlation between age and years of experience, illustrating a natural progression where increased age typically aligns with greater professional experience. In contrast, gender dynamics revealed younger females in our sample, presenting an intriguing demographic pattern.

Delving into work meaning, we observed robust positive interconnections. Achieving positive meaning was strongly linked with altruistic motivations and practical efficacy in workplace tasks. In the realm of job stress, a critical factor emerged: a strong positive association with both time spent at work and employee anxiety. This stress was not just confined to the workplace; it significantly correlated with intentions to leave the organization and feelings of cynicism, and notably, it also exacerbated work-family conflict. Please see Table 2 for a detailed visualization of the correlations of all variables explored in this study.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Transitioning to a more detailed analysis, we utilized Process in the SmartPLS software for direct and indirect path analysis. Owing to SmartPLS’s method of analysis, the only model fit measure available was SRMR (0.0XX) and not RMSEA, TLI, or other fit measures traditionally found in other SEM software tools like AMOS. The analysis revealing intricate relationships between job stress (JS), work meaning (MW), employee voice and loyalty (EVLNC), and work-family conflict. Anxiety, a component of job stress, detrimentally impacted work meaning, with negative associations with meaning-making through work ($\beta = -0.30$, $t = 3.29$, $p < .01$) and positive

meaning ($\beta = -0.43$, $t = 6.18$, $p < .01$), and a positive association with work-family conflict ($\beta = 0.18$, $t = 4.23$, $p < .01$).

The employee voice and loyalty component (EVLNC) revealed diverse impacts. Cynicism negatively related to meaning-making through work ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$), while loyalty positively correlated with greater good motivations ($\beta = 0.16$, $t = 3.81$, $p < .01$) and meaning-making ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 3.35$, $p < .01$). Interestingly, the intention to exit was negatively associated with greater good motivations ($\beta = -0.17$, $t = 4.83$, $p < .01$) and positively with work-family conflict ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 2.56$, $p < .05$). The variable time (JS) also showed significant positive relationships with work meaning and work-family conflict. Please see Table 3 for a visualization of the direct effects of our model.

(Insert Table 3 about here)

Further, our mediation analysis revealed subtle yet significant indirect effects. The intention to exit indirectly affected work-family conflict via its negative impact on work meaning ($\beta = -0.02$, $t = 2.12$, $p < .05$). Loyalty and voice both had small but significant positive indirect effects on work-family conflict through meaning-making (Loyalty: $\beta = 0.01$, $t = 1.90$, $p < .05$; Voice: $\beta = 0.02$, $t = 1.99$, $p < .05$). Similarly, time spent at work (JS) showed a positive indirect effect on work-family conflict through work meaning ($\beta = 0.02$, $t = 1.92$, $p < .05$). Please see Table 4 for a visualization of the indirect effects in our model.

(Insert Table 4 about here)

These findings underscore the complex interplay between job stress, work meaning, and employee attitudes, highlighting their significant impact on work-family conflict. The results emphasize the importance of managing job stress and fostering positive work meaning to mitigate adverse employee outcomes and enhance well-being. While some job attitudes and stress aspects indirectly affect work-family conflict through work meaning, these effects, albeit small, indicate a complex and nuanced relationship that warrants further investigation for a deeper understanding of their implications on employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Discussion

We investigated the association between job-related stress and work-family conflict (WFC) in the first hypothesis of our study and discovered a significant positive correlation. This is consistent with the JD-R paradigm, which suggests that higher job demands, typically manifested as stress, have a negative impact on an employee's work-life balance. Our findings, which echo Karasek's Demand-Control model and are supported by recent research such as Choi et al. (2015) and Karakas and Sahin (2017), show that stress, specifically from excessive workload and emotional demands, spills over into family life, exacerbating WFC and potentially affecting public health. H. Ismail and Gali (2016) emphasize the significance of job stress in mediating the relationship between performance appraisal satisfaction and WFC, emphasizing the significant influence of employee views on their WFC experience.

Our investigation of Hypothesis 2 demonstrates that the intention to leave a job considerably affects WFC, lending credence to Hirschman's Exit-Voice-Loyalty construct. Beutell et al. (2019) and Awan et al. (2021) find a positive association between WFC and intention to leave, particularly in contexts of role conflict and self-employment. This research adds nuance to the JD-R model by underlining the significance of including employee exit intentions in the work-family interface. Sardeshmukh et al. (2021) and Mansour and Tremblay's (2018) research support this broader perspective, relating WFC to emotional weariness and emphasizing the moderating impact of external factors such as childcare demands.

We discovered a contradictory dynamic when we studied the association between meaningful work and WFC in Hypothesis 3. While meaningful work is commonly thought to be helpful to employee well-being, our research reveals that it may unwittingly lead to WFC. This paradox, as Antino et al. (2022) also noted during the COVID-19 shutdown, stems from the enormous time and emotional engagement required by meaningful employment, which might eclipse family duties. Addressing this contradiction necessitates a multifaceted strategy, as

advocated by Lu et al. (2017) and Vong and Tang (2017), combining individual efforts such as better time management with corporate policies that promote flexibility and stress management.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 investigated the function of meaningful work as a moderator in the link between job stress, employee attitudes, and WFC. We discovered that a lack of purpose in one's profession, frequently expressed by a desire to leave, can increase WFC. This finding is supported by Bragger et al. (2021), who propose that creating a workplace climate where employees may find meaning and purpose could be a method for reducing WFC. Furthermore, Dick and Stegmann (2016) contend that employment meaningfulness can mitigate the impact of WFC on organizational identification, implying a complicated interaction between meaningful work and employee attitudes. This highlights the importance of well-balanced organizational policies and individual work practices in creating situations where meaningful work improves, rather than hinders, work-life balance.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

Recent literature supports practical and tangible recommendations to address the pressing need for workplace interventions that reduce job-related stress and its impact on work-family conflict. Work-family conflict and burnout are moderated by perceived organizational support (POS), with emotional and practical support having different effects (Lingard & Francis, 2006). Workplace interventions that address work-family conflict can reduce job stress and turnover intention (Vong & Tang, 2017). Workplace stress is reduced by increasing job control and decreasing job demands (Jetha et al., 2017), whereas marital enhancement interventions that combine marital enrichment and stress management techniques can prevent distress associated with work/home conflicts (Kushnir et al., 1996).

A perceived family-supportive work culture is associated with less workplace stress and less work-family conflict (Ahmad & Omar, 2010). Work-related stress and work-to-family conflict can be reduced with time off for family responsibilities and a supportive work-family culture

(Voydanoff, 2005). Work-family resources in the workplace and social support from family members predict levels of inter-domain conflict and satisfaction over time (Brough et al., 2005).

A workplace parenting intervention can also reduce work-family conflict, occupational stress, and improve family functioning in teachers who balance work and family (Haslam et al., 2013). Supervisor support weakens the relationship between job dissatisfaction and turnover, assisting nurses in navigating common workplace constraints and improving job satisfaction (Modaresnezhad et al., 2020). Construction companies should look into ways to reduce work-family conflict in order to reduce burnout and improve employee well-being (Lingard & Francis, 2005).

To reduce work-related stress, organizations should clearly explain job roles, responsibilities, policies, guidelines, and expectations to employees (Alias et al., 2019). Higher levels of emotional and instrumental support from family are linked to lower levels of work interfering with family, which can have an impact on job and life satisfaction (Adams et al., 1996). Significant amounts of variation in job stress are explained by organizational norms governing work performance and social relations, as well as work-to-family conflict (Hammer et al., 2004).

Limitations and Future Research

The study provides significant insights into the relationship between job stress, meaningful work, and work-family conflict, but it is important to acknowledge its limitations and suggest future research directions. The demographic makeup of the sample, predominantly White/Caucasian participants from specific industries in the United States, is a significant limitation that limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim for a more diverse sample to capture various experiences from various cultural and industrial contexts. While the study's cross-sectional design provides valuable insights, it limits the ability to establish causality (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). Longitudinal studies are recommended to understand the temporal dynamics between these variables better. Furthermore, relying on self-reported data increases the risk of bias, such as social desirability or recall bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Objective

measures like physiological stress indicators could be used in future studies to validate and improve the findings.

Future research should prioritize interventional studies to evaluate workplace programs aimed at reducing job stress and enhancing meaningful work, as these studies are crucial in guiding the development of effective organizational policies and programs (Jetha et al., 2017). To fully understand the impact of these interventions, such research should focus on diverse cultural and geographical contexts and include both subjective and objective measures (Ferreira, 2021; Vignoli, 2015). It is also critical to investigate the role of interventions in reducing work-family conflict and occupational stress, as well as the efficacy of strategies targeting techno-stressors and coping mechanisms (Gaudio et al., 2017; Haslam et al., 2013). This comprehensive approach will not only add to the academic literature, but it will also provide practical insights for organizations seeking to improve employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study explored how job stress, meaningful work, and WFC/FWC interact. We discovered meaningful work functions as both a resource and a stressor using the JD-R model, contributing to the complex dynamics of WFC in the modern workplace. These findings advance theoretical understanding while also providing important insights into public health and occupational policy.

This study confirms previous research that job stress has a significant impact on an employee's ability to balance work and life, emphasizing the importance of effective workplace stress management. In public health, chronic job stress has an impact on family and community health. Job stress should be addressed by policymakers and healthcare professionals as a public health issue, not just an organizational one.

While affirming its positive aspects, the study's findings about the paradoxical nature of meaningful work highlight the need for a balanced approach. This balance is necessary to avoid

WFC overload from the benefits of meaningful work. Organizations must develop policies and programs that encourage meaningful work while mitigating risks.

The findings also call occupational health psychology models and theories into question, particularly the JD-R model. The dual role of meaningful work encourages future theoretical exploration and model refinement. It compels us to reconsider the binary relationship between job demands and resources, as well as their complexities.

According to the study, organizational interventions can reduce job stress and promote a healthy work-life balance. Offering flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, and supportive workplace cultures that address employees' diverse needs and attitudes are all examples of this.

The study suggests several areas for future research. Longitudinal and interventional studies are required to establish causality and evaluate workplace interventions. Future research should focus on diverse and global populations to improve generalizability and investigate cultural influences on job stress, meaningful work, and WFC.

The findings of this study are critical to understanding work-life balance in the modern workforce. They demonstrate the complexities and dynamism of job stress and meaningful work. They encourage organizations, policymakers, and researchers to work together to develop employee well-being and public health strategies. Addressing these issues can help individuals, families, and communities improve their workplace health and sustainability.

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Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Age		<i>n</i>	%
30-35		14	3.534
36-40		16	4.040
41-45		31	7.828
46-50		22	5.556
51-55		34	8.871
56-60		71	17.929
61-65		81	20.455
66-70		93	23.485
71-75		23	5.808
76-80		9	2.273
81		2	0.505
<hr/>			
Education		<i>n</i>	%
High School		27	6.818
Vocational Training		9	2.273
Some College		43	10.859
Associates Degree		37	9.343
Bachelor's Degree		169	42.677
Master's Degree		82	20.707
Doctorate Degree		27	6.818
Other		2	0.505
<hr/>			
Race		<i>n</i>	%
Asian		18	4.545
Black or African American		5	1.263
Hispanic/Latino		2	0.505
White or Caucasian		361	91.162
Multiracial or other		6	1.515
Prefer not to answer		4	1.010
<hr/>			
Industry with SIC code		<i>n</i>	%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	<i>01-09</i>	5	1.263
Mining	<i>10-14</i>	4	1.010
Construction	<i>15-17</i>	18	4.545
Manufacturing	<i>20-39</i>	55	13.889
Transportation and Public Utilities	<i>40-49</i>	72	18.182
Wholesale Trade	<i>50-51</i>	15	3.788
Retail Trade	<i>53-59</i>	41	10.354
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	<i>60-67</i>	37	9.343
Services	<i>70-89</i>	100	25.253
Public Administration	<i>91-99</i>	49	12.374

Source(s): Author's own creation/work

Table 2: Correlation matrix

	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Age	59.49	10.54	--															
2	Gender			-.19*	--														
3	Hours per Week	43.02	31.19	.05	-.07*	--													
4	Years in Organisation	17.43	11.83	.32**	-.09*	-.02	--												
5	Years of Experience	35.53	11.85	.82**	-.19*	.02	.36**	--											
6	Positive Meaning (MW)	7.68	1.93	.07	-.02	.02	.17**	.03	--										
7	Meaning making things work (MW)	9.91	1.93	.02	.04	.08*	.16**	-.00	.68**	--									
8	Greater good motivation (MW)	17.57	4.44	-.09*	.18**	.04	.07	-.14*	.76**	.61**	--								
9	Time (JS)	16.76	7.15	-.13*	.03	.04	.04	-.11*	-.25*	-.08*	-.16*	--							
10	Anxiety (JS)	10.86	4.48	-.16*	.09*	.00	.02	-.09*	-.43*	-.19*	-.29*	.84**	--						
11	Exit	15.42	4.58	-.26*	.04	.05	-.12*	-.15*	-.33*	-.14*	-.32*	.40**	.46**	--					
12	Voice	15.20	3.40	-.18*	.01	.06	-.18*	-.18*	.36**	.30**	.36**	-.08*	-.17*	.18**	--				
13	Loyalty	10.17	3.25	-.16*	.00	.03	-.05	-.16*	-.22*	-.03	-.13*	.43**	.39**	.56**	.12**	--			
14	Neglect	13.78	3.80	-.10*	-.07	-.03	.07	-.07	-.11*	.00	-.11*	.19**	.19**	.38**	.25**	.55**	--		
15	Cynicism	12.12	3.17	-.20*	.40	.04	-.02	-.07	-.18*	-.06	-.21*	.27**	.35**	.62**	.17**	.48**	.48**	--	
16	Work-family conflict	15.51	5.59	-.20*	.09*	-.07	-.03	-.18*	-.23*	-.04	-.11*	.72**	.68**	.38**	-.07	.36**	.20**	.24**	--

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $P < .001$; Gender (dummy coded '0'- Male, '1'-Female); JS= Job-related stress; MW= Meaningful Work

Table 3: Path Coefficient

Path Coefficient	Coeff	T statistics
Anxiety(JS) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	-0.03	0.70
Anxiety(JS) -> Meaning-making through work (MW)	-0.30	3.29**
Anxiety(JS) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	-0.43	6.18**
Anxiety(JS) -> Work-family Conflict	0.18	4.23**
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	0.03	0.64
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Meaning-making through work (MW)	-0.14	2.04*
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	0.08	1.47
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.03	0.90
Exit(EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	-0.17	4.83**
Exit(EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW)	-0.40	6.67**
Exit(EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	-0.29	7.68**
Exit(EVLNC) -> Work-family Conflict	0.08	2.56*
Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.02	0.59
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	0.16	3.81**
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW)	0.25	3.35**
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	-0.07	1.26
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.01	0.15
Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.05	2.14*
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	-0.11	2.35*
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW)	-0.09	1.25
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	-0.08	1.57
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Work-family Conflict	0.05	1.65
Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Time (JS) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	-0.00	0.06
Time (JS) -> Meaning making through work (MW)	0.44	5.39**
Time (JS) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	0.26	4.06**
Time (JS) -> Work-family Conflict	0.38	9.19**
Voice (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW)	0.23	6.76**
Voice (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW)	0.35	6.15**
Voice (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW)	0.43	9.55**
Voice (EVLNC) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.05	1.43

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $P < .001$; JS= Job-related stress; MW= Meaningful Work

Table 4: Specific Indirect Effects

SPECIFIC INDIRECT EFFECT	Coeff	T statistics
Exit(EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.01	1.90*
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Exit(EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.00	0.57
Time (JS) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.03
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.28
Time (JS) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Voice (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Anxiety (JS) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Anxiety (JS) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.02	1.64
Voice (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.02	1.99*
Loyalty (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.57
Time (JS) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.02	1.92*
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Positive Meaning (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.00	0.00
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.00	0.53
Neglect (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.00	0.98
Anxiety (JS) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.00	0.31
Exit(EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.02	2.12*
Cynicism (EVLNC) -> Meaning making through work (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	-0.01	1.48
Voice (EVLNC) -> Greater good motivations (MW) -> Work-family Conflict	0.01	0.58

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $P < .001$; JS= Job-related stress; MW= Meaningful Work

BRIDGING THE GAP

4

The Impact of Job-Related Stress and Employee attitude on Work-family conflict, with Meaningful Work as a Mediating Factor

