



Dynamics of the relationships among work and family resource gain and loss, enrichment, and conflict over time

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ABSTRACT

Dynamics of the relationships among work and family resource gain and loss, work-to-family enrichment (WFE), and work-to-family conflict (WFC) over time were examined using the data collected from 382 employees of Chinese firms at two points of time one year apart. Work resource gain at time 1 weakened the positive relationship between WFC at times 1 and 2, and work resource loss at time 1 weakened the positive relationship between WFE at times 1 and 2. However, WFC at time 1 strengthened the positive relationship between work resource gain at time 1 and family resource gain at time 2. Overall, these results suggest the existence of complementary forces that maintain the status quo of individuals' work–family experiences, such that high losses diminish the transfer of gains and high gains diminish the transfer of losses, but also that unexpected gains may result from individuals having to deal with painful situations. Implications of these dynamics for theory, research, and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

According to conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), people are motivated to obtain and protect resources they value, including resources in their work and family roles (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). A resource is defined as “an asset that may be drawn upon when needed to solve a problem or cope with a challenging situation” (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p. 80), e.g., self-esteem, social capital, and money. Resources influence when both work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and work–family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), representing the negative and positive side of the work–family interface respectively, are likely to occur. The construct of work–family conflict is derived from the resource scarcity perspective (Goode, 1960), which suggests the difficulty of meeting demands of both roles simultaneously when they compete for the same finite pool of resources. The construct of work–family enrichment is derived from the role accumulation perspective (Marks, 1977), which suggests that resources accumulated in one role may improve individuals' experiences in the other role. The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of the relationships among work and family resource gain and loss, enrichment, and conflict over time.

The role of resources has frequently been examined in the work–family literature (e.g., Hakanen, Peeters, & Perhoniemi, 2011; Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009; Halbesleben, Wheeler, & Rossi, 2012; Hoobler, Hu, & Wilson, 2010). However, with few exceptions (e.g., Chen & Powell, 2012), prior research has focused on their levels or amounts (that is, high versus low) rather than

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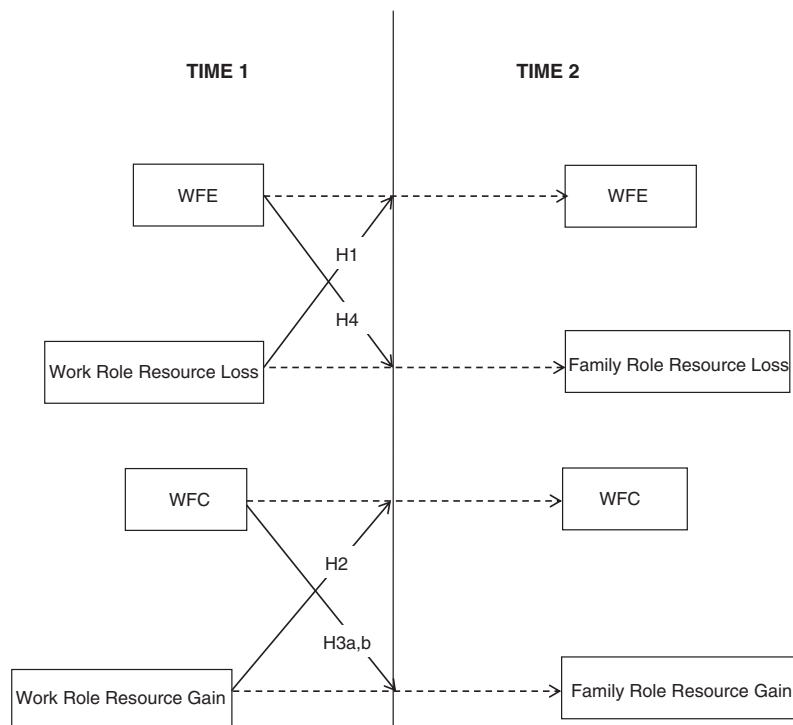
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their gain or loss (Halbesleben & Wheeler, in press). For example, in one of the earliest attempts to apply COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) to a work–family phenomenon, Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) used demographic variables such as age, marital status, and number of children to predict work–family conflict, arguing that individuals with certain demographic characteristics may have high or low level of resources. The level of resources is a fundamentally different construct than the constructs of resource gain and loss. Individuals may experience a resource gain spiral, in which the initial acquisition of resources facilitates the generation of further resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). They may also experience a resource loss spiral, in which the fear of losing or actual loss of resources leads to stress and exhaustion, which in turn contribute to resource depletion (Demerouti, Bakker, & Bulters, 2004). Overall, resource gain and loss may have more dynamic implications for individuals' work–family experiences than absolute levels of resources.

Further, resource gain and loss are not opposite ends of the same continuum, but rather independent constructs (e.g., Chen & Powell, 2012; Davidson et al., 2010; Wells & Hobfoll, 1997). Thus, individuals may experience both a resource gain spiral and a resource loss spiral simultaneously. Other theories besides COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) and the work–home resources model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) support this notion. For example, prospect theory suggests that individuals experience gain and loss disproportionately, preferring loss aversion over gain acquisition (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Regulatory focus theory argues that the presence or absence of gain and the presence or absence of loss have distinct motivational implications and emotional consequences (Brockner & Higgins, 2001).

Accordingly, the present study focuses on the constructs of resource gain and loss and their interplay with the constructs of work–family enrichment and conflict. We suggest that resource gain and loss differentially affect individuals' experiences of conflict and enrichment over time, and that resource gain and loss spirals may be attenuated by work–family conflict and enrichment. Specifically, we examine (1) the moderating roles of resource gain and loss in the dynamics of enrichment and conflict over time and (2) the moderating roles of enrichment and conflict in the transfer of resource gain and loss from the work domain to the family domain over time. Because prior work–family research has tended to rely on cross-sectional data (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007), there is limited knowledge about the dynamics of relationships among resources and work–family outcomes over time. By proposing and testing hypotheses pertaining to relationships among work and family phenomena over time, we are able to offer both theoretical and empirical contributions to the work–family literature.

Although both enrichment and conflict may be bidirectional (i.e., work-to-family and family-to-work), the present study focuses on the direction from work to family. This focus is for three reasons. First, research has consistently found that work-to-family conflict is greater than family-to-work conflict (Casper, Harris, Taylor-Bianco, & Holliday Wayne, 2011; Frone,



Note: Solid lines represent hypothesized moderations. Dashed lines represent tested but not formally hypothesized relationships.

Fig. 1. Model.

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