

# Keller Center Research Report

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# How Work-Family Balance Impacts Workplace Success

Merideth J. Thompson, PhD, Dawn S. Carlson, PhD, and K. Michele Kacmar, PhD

Does family really matter when it comes to workplace success? Although a great deal of research examines the processes through which the work domain influences an individual's family domain, the inverse has largely been neglected thus far.<sup>1-4</sup> To supplement an existing body of literature regarding the work-family interface, our team conducted research with the overarching goal of answering two primary questions. First, does an incumbent's family functioning work through work-family balance (WFB) to relate to that individual's interactions with coworkers and thereby shape coworkers' job attitudes and experiences? And second, does task interdependence moderate the process?



## Background and Hypotheses

Before diving into the research's intricacies, it is necessary to define the terms discussed throughout this paper, including work-family balance, conservation of resources theory, crossover theory, and task interdependence.

### *Work-Family Balance and Conservation of Resources Theory*

Work-family balance (WFB) is defined as the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and their role-related partners in the work and family domains.<sup>5</sup> Next, the conservation of resources (COR) theory is commonly used to explain how resource acquisition affects an individual's attitudes, experiences, and behaviors within a specific domain (i.e., work or family domains).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, when a job incumbent experiences family stability, intimacy, and positive relationships between family members (i.e., resources),<sup>7</sup> they have the opportunity to invest these resources in accomplishing responsibilities in both the work and family domains, which, at its essence is WFB. Thus, when applying COR theory, WFB can be conceptualized as a valuable resource that accompanies a high level of family functioning. This conceptualization led our team to our initial hypothesis: we propose that a high level of job incumbent family functioning relates positively to job incumbent WFB.

### *Crossover Theory*

Crossover theory describes the process through which an individual's experiences in one domain cross over to influence the experiences of another individual in a different domain.<sup>8</sup> In the

context of our study, COR corresponds to the incumbent's surplus of resources that accompany a high level of family functioning. These resources are then utilized to fulfill expectations in the workplace and maintain balance, thereby resulting in the crossover of the job incumbent's WFB to their coworkers' workplace experiences. Furthermore, previous literature suggests those who experience greater WFB are likely to become fully engaged in the workplace through attentiveness to and care for the responsibilities of that role, including being supportive of coworkers.<sup>9,10</sup> This supportive nature fosters positive interactions with coworkers, likely leading to enhanced coworker job satisfaction and broader sense of attachment to the organization. Thus, our team also hypothesizes that job incumbent WFB will mediate the positive relationship between job incumbent family functioning and coworker job satisfaction and commitment. We also hypothesize that WFB will mediate a positive relationship between job incumbent family functioning and their coworkers' perception of their good organizational citizenship behaviors. Similarly, we posit a negative impact on coworkers' perception of the job incumbent's incivility behaviors.

### *Task Interdependence*

Task interdependence is defined as the degree to which an individual is dependent on others, such as a coworker, to effectively carry out their work and to facilitate an individual's motivation to maintain positive relationships with others at work.<sup>11,12</sup> Furthermore, task interdependence should promote a multitude of positive outcomes such as increased cooperation, helping behaviors, and facilitating positive interpersonal relationships, since the job incumbent and coworkers must work together to get the job done.<sup>13-16</sup> Accordingly, we theorize that task interdependence will play a moderating role on the mediated relationships between family functioning and the outcomes through WFB in that crossover is more likely to occur among coworkers who interact more frequently.<sup>17</sup> Thus, our team predicts that the positive indirect relationship between a job incumbent's family functioning and the coworker's job satisfaction and commitment, as well as positive perceptions of the job incumbent's good organizational citizenship and negative perception of incivility, through work-family balance is stronger when task interdependence is high.

## **Our Research and Findings**

Our team utilized survey-based research from 226 tri-matched job incumbents (who are married and work full time), the incumbent's spouse, and the incumbent's coworker to test our hypotheses. After conducting statistical analysis, our team discovered that our mediating variable, WFB, was significantly related to our independent variable, family functioning, as well as three of our dependent variables: coworker's job satisfaction, the job incumbent's organizational citizenship behavior, and his or her coworkers' perceptions of the job incumbent's incivility. Notably, the coworkers' job satisfaction was especially pronounced when task interdependence is high, which would intuitively be consistent with a situation where people work closely together to accomplish their jobs. Further, the negative relationship with incivility

was strongest when task dependence was low. These results could indicate that job incumbents make special efforts at civility when working closely with coworkers, but not so much when successful job performance is not tied to compatibility with a coworker.

Through the integration of COR theory and crossover theory,<sup>7,8,18</sup> our study examined and emphasized the significant relationship between family functioning and WFB, and the crossover of the job incumbent's WFB to their coworker outcomes. Ultimately, we found that an individual's family functioning helped them (i.e., the job incumbent) achieve greater levels of the resource of WFB. Furthermore, WFB crosses over to the work role, developing a better workplace experience for the incumbent's coworker. Thus, our findings support the argument that the indirect and beneficial effect of family functioning relationships on coworker outcomes occurs through the job incumbent's WFB.

Though most of our hypotheses were supported, it is important to note that our study found no significant impact on the coworker's organizational commitment. It is likely the case because organizational commitment is an organization-level variable, as opposed to an individual-level variable.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, our moderating variable, task interdependence, showed that its effect on coworkers' job satisfaction was especially pronounced when task interdependence was high. However, the negative relationship with incivility was strongest when task dependence was low.

## Real Estate Implications

First and foremost, our study communicates the need to foster high levels of family functioning amongst employees. Our results indicate that actively supporting a job incumbent's family life would be of great benefit to an organization, considering a high-functioning family life strongly correlates to happier and more committed employees who treat their coworkers with more respect. From a managerial perspective, our research



provides a multitude of practical applications. Leaders can provide this support through offering work-life balance initiatives, including items such as flexible work schedules and flexible leave.<sup>20-22</sup> The vitality of fostering work-life balance is immensely transparent and offers leaders a significant opportunity to attain the competitive advantage of maintaining happier, more engaged, and more respectful employees, translating to enhanced morale and success within the organization.

Furthermore, from an intrapersonal perspective, this study is of great use to real estate professionals. Due to the nature of an agent's work, working beyond the walls of the office is accessible and frequently encouraged. However, it is vital to establish boundaries regarding work life balance. The verdict is in—family does matter. Familial relationships are not isolated from workplace success. Thus, real estate agents must prioritize investing in and developing their familial relationships, as they significantly contribute to overall organizational success.

## Recommended Readings

Thompson, Merideth J., Dawn S. Carlson, and K. Michele Kacmar (2020), "Family Matters: The Impact of Family Functioning on Coworker Outcomes," *Human Relations*, 74(9), 1504-1531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720930067>

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## About the Authors

### **Merideth J. Thompson, PhD**

#### **Professor of Management, Utah State University**

Dr. Merideth Thompson's (PhD – Vanderbilt University) research focuses on two main areas: bad employee behavior and the work-family interface. Her research has appeared in leading academic journals including the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the *Journal of Management*, *Personnel Psychology*, the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Human Relations*, and several others. Furthermore, Dr. Thompson has been interviewed and quoted by leading news outlets including The New York Times, ABC News, Fox News, Harvard Business Review, USA Today, and Business News Daily.

### **Dawn S. Carlson, PhD**

#### **Chair of Organizational Development and Professor of Management, Baylor University**

Dr. Dawn Carlson's (PhD – Florida State University) research focuses on the intersection of work and family life, including work-family conflict, enrichment, and balance. Her research has appeared in leading academic journals including the *Journal of Social Psychology*, the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the *Journal of Management*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, and *Human Relations*, amongst many others. Furthermore, Dr. Carlson has co-authored the book *Beyond Juggling: Rebalancing Your Busy Life*. Additionally, she has received several significant accolades and awards including Florida State University's *Distinguished Doctoral Alumna* for 2018, the Graduate Business Association's *Outstanding Academician* award, multiple *Outstanding Professor* awards, and multiple *Best Publication* awards.

### **K. Michele Kacmar, PhD**

#### **Professor and Endowed Chair of the Department of Management, Texas State University**

Dr. Michele Kacmar's (PhD – Texas A&M University) research interests include impression management, organizational policies, ethics, and work family conflict. Her research has appeared in leading academic journals including the *Academy of Management Journal*, the *Organizational Management Journal*, the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the *Journal of Social Psychology*, and *Human Relations*, amongst many others. Furthermore, Dr. Kacmar has co-authored the strategic management textbook *Human Resource Management: A Strategic Approach*. Additionally, she has received several significant accolades and awards including the *Michael J. Driver Best Careers Paper* award, the *Mays Distinguished Doctoral Alumni* award, and the *Best Doctoral Student Paper* award, among others.



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Baylor University | Keller Center for Research | Hankamer School of Business  
One Bear Place #98007 | Waco, TX 76798

[www.baylor.edu/kellercenter](http://www.baylor.edu/kellercenter) | [Keller\\_Center@baylor.edu](mailto:Keller_Center@baylor.edu)

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