The relation between engagement and work interference with family: Examining between- and within-person differences

Abstract:
Organizations are continuously striving for employee engagement, a positive state of work behavior. However, recent research has suggested that there may be a dark side to engagement, as high employee engagement can result in interference of work roles with familial roles (i.e., work interfering with family; WIF), one form of work-family conflict. Conservation of resources (COR) theory posits a positive relationship between engagement and WIF, however, tests of this hypothesis have been mixed with some showing positive and others showing negative relations. Study 1 tests this relationship meta-analytically to uncover the true nature of the relationship. I suggest that positive relations are only found where working conditions are poor, with long hours and little leisure time. Further, I suggest this effect is not observed in cross-sectional studies, wherein high momentary engagement contaminates WIF, resulting in a negative relation regardless of conditions. Results confirm the proposed interaction. I extend these findings in Study 2 using experience sampling methodology to test a potential mediator between engagement and WIF: organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Past research has argued that engagement leads employees to enact more OCBs, expending resources that could be applied toward familial roles, leading to higher WIF. I argue that the engagement-WIF link may be better specified by differentiating between OCBs that are enacted at work (e.g., physically being at work while helping a co-worker learn a new skill) versus OCBs enacted at home (e.g., physically being home while helping a co-worker learn a new skill). Additionally, I test two moderators of this relationship – the traits of workaholism and conscientiousness. Preliminary results provide partial support for these hypotheses.