

The role of affective commitment and political skill in the work interfering with family (WIF) conflict–voluntary turnover relationship

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Abstract:

The present study explores how political skill affects an employee's coping behavior in response to Work Interfering with Family (WIF) conflict. Applying Conservation of Resource theory, we argue that politically skilled individuals are more cognizant of the social embeddedness of WIF, and because of cross-domain resource (e.g. time, attention, energy) depletion, lack the resources to cope with its effects. As such, they leverage their political skill to more effectively turnover from the organization than less politically skilled individuals by detaching their identity and lowering their affective commitment to their organization. We tested the hypotheses using a sample of 181 individuals from a retail firm, and results support the hypothesized model. First, a test of indirect effects confirmed that affective commitment partially mediated the link between WIF and voluntary turnover (measured six months later). Second, a moderated-mediation test revealed, as hypothesized, that affective commitment only functioned as a mediator for individual with high levels of political skill. Implications for practice and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: affective commitment | COR theory | political skill | turnover | work–family conflict

Article:

Work–family conflict has a number of negative consequences for employee functioning, including operational disruption, deteriorated performance (Staw, 1980) and poor service quality (Hausknecht, Trevor, & Howard, 2009). When employees perceive their work to be the cause of this conflict Work Interfering with Family (WIF conflict), they often psychologically detach from their organization (Carr, Boyar, & Gregory, 2008; Good, Page, & Young, 1996; Lambert,

Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar, Jennings, & Baker, 2006; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002), form intentions to leave (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Spector et al., 2007), or engage in turnover (Carr et al., 2008; Greenhaus, Collins, Singh, & Parasuraman, 1997). While much is known about the role of value-based individual differences (e.g. life vs. family role centrality, culture; Carr et al., 2008; Spector et al., 2007) in shaping employee reactions to WIF, little is known about the impact of ability-based individual differences. It from this deficiency that we posit the question, does employee skill impact employee turnover decisions when faced with WIF?

We begin answering the above question by exploring the effects of a unique and versatile type of skill in the workplace, political skill. Political skill describes the capacity of individuals to understand social nuances at work and influence others to meet their goals and objectives (Ferris et al., 2005). Not surprisingly, political skill has been linked to both enhanced performance and to effectiveness in coping with stressors (Blickle et al., 2008; Ferris et al., 2005; Hochwarter, Summers, Thompson, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2010; Perrewé et al., 2004). Unlike value-based individual differences that affect employees' *attributions of the cause* of WIF (Carr et al., 2008), we theorize that political skill, as an ability-based difference, affects employees' *personal resource management* as they cope with WIF.

WIF is an interrole stressor (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) that depletes the amount of personal resources (e.g. time, energy; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) one has available for behavior in either the work or the family domain. Such conflict typically causes stress (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011), which primarily motivates withdrawal rather than retention (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus et al., 1997). Although political skill is thought to reduce stress and resource depletion by leveraging one's existing resources to alter self-appraisals of control (i.e. emotion-focused coping; Lazarus, 1991; Perrewé et al., 2004), we expect different in the face of WIF. With no alternative resources, such as one's family or personal life, to draw feelings of control, we suggest that politically skilled employees will stem resource depletion by withdrawing from the situation (i.e. problem-focused coping; Lazarus, 1991) because they are able to efficiently recognize the threat and mobilize their existing resources in order to safely depart (Figure 1).

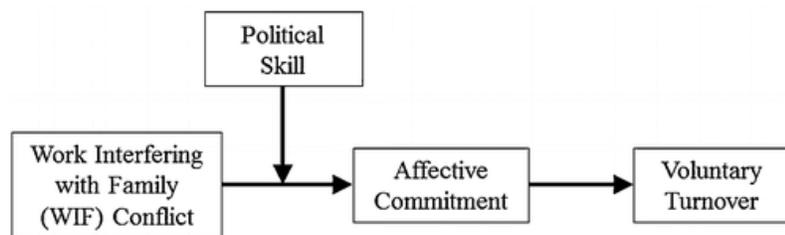


Figure 1. Hypothesized relationships between the study variables.

Over 90% of employed adults have difficulty reconciling the demands of work and family (Williams & Boushey, 2010), and the cost to organizations of turnover from work–family conflict has been estimated from 20% of that employee's annual pay (Williams & Boushey, 2010) to upwards of \$75,000 for higher level positions (Abbott, De Cieri, & Iverson, 1998). Our study provides evidence that politically skilled employees are at an increased risk of turnover from WIF, and because they are often high-performers, the cost of turnover may

be even greater. Organizations could offset such risks by more effectively managing employee identification with the organization. In general, we make three contributions to the organizational literature: (1) providing a resource depletion framework that specifies the effects of ability-based individual differences in the WIF process, (2) empirically testing the longitudinal mediating effect of affective commitment on actual voluntary turnover, not just intentions and (3) exploring the utility of political skill in coping with stressors that span more than just the work domain.

Work interference with family

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work–family conflict as ‘a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect’ (p. 77). Work–family conflict includes two forms: (1) WIF and (2) Family Interfering with Work (FIW; Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000). Though a number of studies have addressed the bidirectional nature of work–family conflict, they often found that WIF is more relevant to work-related processes and outcomes (for a review, see Byron, 2005; Carlson et al., 2000), and occurred more often than did FIW (Frone, 2003). Because the present study revolves around exploring a work-related ability-based coping resource, political skill, we examine only WIF.

Employees who experience WIF typically manifest intentions to turnover from their organization and some of these intentions result in turnover behavior (Allen et al., 2000; Amstad et al., 2011; Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Carr et al., 2008; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2001). These attitudes and behaviors are driven by the need to reduce the physiological and psychological strain that results from the WIF conflict (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus et al., 1997). One attempt to explain employee reactions to conflict is Grandey and Cropanzano’s (1999) unifying model of the WFC-strain linkage through Hobfoll’s (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) perspective.

COR and the outcomes of WIF

COR (Hobfoll, 1989) proposes that individuals possess various resources. These resources include: physical objects that are perceived as valuable conditions (e.g. hierarchical work status, marital status), personal resources that offer resilience to stress (e.g. perceptual orientation, self-esteem) and energy (e.g. money, time). When these resources are lost, threatened by potential loss, or not regained after expenditure, individuals will experience stress. Thus, Hobfoll (1989, 2002) posits that individuals are constantly motivated to accrue resources, and when experiencing stress they will act in ways that conserve present resources and ensure the capacity to generate resources in the future.

COR is often used as a theoretical foundation in the study of work–family conflict. In a meta-analysis, Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, and Hammer (2011) use it, along with two related personal resource-based stress models, to explain that resource deficits leave workers vulnerable to WIF by draining resources in the workplace that are also needed in the family-domain. They position supervisor work–family support as a resource-boosting workplace practice and find that it was inversely predicted WIF. Similarly, Odle-Dusseau, Britt, and Greene-Shorridge (2012) used the COR perspective and found a negative relationship between family-supportive supervisor

behavior and WIF, while de Janasz, Behson, Jonsen, and Lankau (2013) also found this relief effect when employees perceived work–family balance supportive organizational cultures.

While this work does much to help understand the utility of COR in understanding the antecedents of WIF, the present study is concerned with clarifying the role of COR in the consequences of WIF. Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) suggested that COR is a broad enough theory of stress to address both the importance of cross-domain resource depletion, as well as the role of individual differences in the work–family conflict process. To the former point, the results of their study demonstrated that individuals with more work-related resources, operationalized as tenure and age, experienced less WIF conflict. However, when these employees did experience WIF, it led to job stress that then affected turnover intentions, life distress, and physical health. The outcomes of WIF in this study support the idea that loss of resources from work would likewise drain resources from other domains and impair the accrual of other resources.

In further support of the resource perspective Wayne, Casper, Matthews, and Allen (2013) demonstrated that work–family supportive organizational policies significantly and negatively correlated with WIF, which ultimately then enhanced affective commitment to the organization via increased relational commitment from the employee’s partner. Butts, Casper, and Yang (2013) verified these findings on a larger meta-analytic scale, and demonstrated that work–family supportive policy availability reduced WIF, which then reduced negative work attitudes (partial mediation). Through a resources framework, this work lends confirmation to the idea that resources are the underlying mechanism affecting stress reactions and strain responses to workplace demands that then tax family resources.

Most broadly, Edwards and Rothbard (2000) recognized that resources are finite within work and family domains. Echoing the tenets of COR, they specifically cite the transference of attention, time and energy across work and family boundaries. Further, they postulate that the allocation of resources is typically an active decision, which implies that individuals must engage and disengage resources in one domain or another. In taking steps to conserve resources and turnover from their organization, individuals engage in various psychological responses, a common form of which is the reduction affective commitment.

Affective commitment

Defined as ‘an affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in the organization’ (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2), affective commitment is a person’s positive evaluation of, and engagement in, their work. Affective commitment is the primary form of organizational commitment studied with work–family conflict, in part because early studies mainly used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), which is primarily an affect-based measure (Allen & Meyer, 1990) focusing on identification. Research has consistently found a negative link between WIF and affective commitment (Allen et al., 2000; Carr et al., 2008), meaning that employees who experience WIF are prone to detach their values and motives from those of the organization, and to begin functioning independently.

From a COR perspective, detaching oneself from one's organization would theoretically stem resource depletion. By personally de-identifying and disengaging from their organization, employees reduce their reliance on the organization for resource accrual, which reduces their intrinsic drive to spend resources for the organization and leaves them free to invest those resources in means with greater return. Recent research has indeed found that psychologically detaching from one's work reduces the strain effects of WIF (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2009), and that a negative affective reaction to WIF, rather than a negative cognitive appraisal, is responsible for determining subsequent attitudes such as life satisfaction (Zhao, Qu, & Ghiselli, 2011). By reducing attachment and loyalty to their organization, employees can more easily re-direct their resource accrual and regulation around sources that do not drain them as excessively.

Employee turnover

Not surprisingly, affective commitment is a very strong predictor of turnover (Meyer et al., 2002) and withdrawal cognitions (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002). As a mechanism in the WIF-turnover relationship, decreasing affective commitment facilitates de-identification from the harmful workplace and serves as a means of managing one's self-concept (c.f. Elsbach, 1999). From a COR perspective, the self-concept is an important guide in one's resource regulation efforts (e.g. respect at work is a stronger resource when work plays a large role in one's self-concept), and decreased integration of work with one's self-concept can place an upper bound on the utility of the work domain. By reducing the potency of work in mitigating stress, employees will naturally seek to invest their remaining resources elsewhere. Although implied by past research, the mediating effect of affective commitment on the WIF-turnover relationship has never been fully tested. As such, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between WIF and turnover will be mediated by affective commitment.

Political skill

In a meta-analysis, Allen and colleagues (2000) found that '[a]lthough the average weighted correlation between WFC and affective organization commitment was moderately strong, the individual study results were highly inconsistent' (p. 288). Such low consistency suggests there are unknown moderators in the WIF-affective commitment link. Personal values, such as work role centrality (Carr et al., 2008) and culture (Spector et al., 2007), have already been found to affect the link by, theoretically, affecting attributions of the cause of WIF-induced stress. While such moderators would affect the perceived strength of WIF on one's existing resources, they do not address the role of employees' ability to regulate their resources overall; in beginning to explore the role of such ability-based moderators, we turn to political skill.

Mintzberg (1983) originally argued that political skill is important for influencing others in a socio-political arena, such as an organization. Ferris and colleagues (2005, p. 127) have advanced a definition of political skill as 'the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives.' Politically skilled individuals are socially astute in understanding

others and the environment as a whole, which lets them more efficiently cultivate resource-rich social networks and convey themselves in contextually appropriate ways that lend to influence success. This set of abilities assist politically skilled employees in handling stressors more effectively than those with lower levels of political skill (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000; Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005).

Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) suggest that individual differences will affect the WIF-outcomes relationship to the extent that they are, or offer, a resource that offsets existing resource depletion. To that point, political skill is 'quite obviously a personal resource in itself. However, when activated by resource threat or opportunity, political skill serves as a critical internal resource that facilitates the acquisition of valued resources ...' (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 301). With its roots in social awareness and behavioral flexibility, we theorize that political skill affects the WIF-affective commitment by: (1) enhancing employees' awareness of the forces driving their present or impending resource depletion, and (2) facilitating employees' effectiveness in actually enacting resource conservation behavior. In the case of WIF-induced resource depletion, however, these two advantages may actually enhance affective detachment and increase the likelihood of politically skilled employees turning over.

First, politically skilled individuals' astuteness to social dynamics, coupled with their proactivity (Ferris et al., 2007) and conscientiousness (Blickle et al., 2008; Ferris et al., 2005), enhances their likelihood of recognizing the institutionalized norms and social practices (Fyre & Breugh, 2004; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) that make WIF a relatively enduring aspect of their workplace. Such norms or underlying assumptions include, for instance, negative career consequences for balancing family and work life (e.g. balance leads to less advancement, etc.; Behson, 2005), poor work hour flexibility (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), and lack of managerial support (Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2005; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). By recognizing, first, the tenacity of WIF, and second, the extreme drain WIF imposes on resources in *both* work and family/life domains, politically skilled employees are more likely to perceive that they lack the existing resources necessary to cope with the potentially long-term harm of WIF.

Having recognized the threat of WIF, politically skilled employees are also more likely to take immediate action in order to reduce resource depletion (Ferris et al., 2007). Reducing affective commitment is an effective means of protecting oneself from WIF-induced stress, and politically skilled employees may affectively detach more quickly and with greater effect. Thorough detachment can ensure the least possible risk of future resource depletion, and in turn elicit feelings of control and security. Indeed, past research has found that politically skilled individuals with poor leader-follower relations increased their turnover intentions (Harris, Harris, & Brouer, 2009) and reduced their commitment when they believed they lacked the resources to deal with negative environments (e.g. they believed their manager was not politically skilled; Brouer, Kenneth, & Kacmar, 2010).

Hypothesis 2a: The relationship between WIF and affective commitment will be moderated by political skill, such that the relationship will be stronger for those with high political skill than low political skill.

Second, politically skilled employees tend to be proactive (Ferris et al., 2007) and successful in their careers (Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009), and as such may be more aware of the effects that strained resources could have their career. This likelihood is only enhanced by emerging evidence suggesting that work–family conflict is linked with decreased career satisfaction (Butt, Hu, Shafi, & Malik, 2015) and decreased career success (Wayne, Lemmon, & Wilson, 2013), which may serve as warning signals to astute politically skilled employees. Research on career growth theorizes and finds empirical evidence to suggest that when employees believe their organization has violated its implicit contract by either withholding career growth or stymieing their progress, employees end their reciprocation by reducing both their attitudinal organizational (Nouri & Parker, 2013; Weng, McElroy, Morrow, & Liu, 2010) and occupational commitment (Weng & McElroy, 2012), which led them to consider turnover. Assuming they perceive career harm in WIF, politically skilled employees may indeed detach and leave organization before the harm continues.

Politically skilled employees also have an advantage in being able to effectively leverage their social maneuverability to actually leave the organization. Their interpersonal effectiveness and well-built social networks (Ferris et al., 2007) give them the freedom to leave their organization in amiable ways that preserve their existing resources and do not incur further resource loss during the process (e.g. retaliation, reputational damage, feelings of ostracism, etc.). Some research has shown that politically skilled workers do experience heightened perceptions of career mobility (Todd et al., 2009), part of which may involve preservation of reputation and resources in the departure process. The increased sense of control and resource conservation that comes from effectively psychologically detaching can facilitate politically skilled individuals' turnover.

Hypothesis 2b: Political skill will moderate the indirect effect of WIF on turnover behavior via affective commitment, such that affective commitment will mediate the indirect effect when political skill is high but not when it is low.

Method

Sample and procedure

The data were collected from a retail firm in the northeast United States. The participants were mainly front-line service workers, and were a mix of full-time and part-time workers. Surveys were addressed and sent via postal service to each participant personally (to deter others from opening them) at their place of employment, and turnover data were gathered from company human resource records approximately six months after those initial surveys were delivered. All surveys sent to participants were labeled with a randomly assigned number, and participant names were deleted once we correlated them with company turnover data; further, participants were provided pre-paid business reply envelopes addressed to the authors, and were encouraged to complete the survey in private and mail it from an off-site location. Among the 995 surveys sent out, 205 usable surveys were returned, which yielded a response rate of 20.6%. The sample consisted of 45% females, and 55% males, with an average age of 31.22 years. Missing data and filtering for employees who only turned over voluntarily, left a sample of 181.

Measures

Political skill

The 18-item Political Skill Inventory was used to assess political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). Sample items include 'I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say and do to influence others' and 'I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others.' The Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate of this scale is .90.

Work interference with family

A four-item measure of work–family conflict was used to assess self-reported WIF (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). A sample item is: 'After work, I come home too tired to do some things I'd like to do.' This measure uses a five-point Likert-scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' The Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate of this scale is .84.

Affective commitment

An eight-item measure of affective commitment was used to evaluate self-reported organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). A sample item is: 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this company.' This measure is an eight-item measure. The Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate of this scale is .83.

Voluntary turnover

Turnover data were obtained from company records approximately six months after the initial survey. Among these people who turned over, 21 were involuntary, and 105 were voluntary. Employees who quit voluntarily were coded as '1', and those that did not resign were coded as '0'. Involuntary terminations were not included in the analyses. This yielded a turnover rate of roughly 58%, which is within the bounds of retail industry turnover statistics within the past half-decade. A 2012 report found that hourly workers in retail generally face high turnover, with median turnover rates of 22% for full-time hourly workers and 67% for part-time hourly workers (Hay Group data as reported in: 'Employee Turnover in Retail Industry is Slowly Increasing,' 2012). Other accounts put the tally for part-time worker turnover at 100% in 2005 and down to 74.9% in 2013 (Hay Group data as reported in: Gustafson, 2014), and for overall retail turnover at 5% per month (Stock & Bhasin, 2015). Taking into account the employee mix of our sample, 58% turnover is high yet still possible.

Control variables

The current study controlled for age, sex and job tenure as they have been found to affect people's perception of work–family conflict. Sex has been shown to affect both antecedents and outcomes of work–family conflict (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). Job tenure has often been used as a control variable in work–family conflict studies as well (e.g. Carr et al., 2008). For sex, we coded 0 = *female* and 1 = *male*. Job tenure was recorded in years.

Results

Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations for the study variables are presented in Table 1. All of the study variables are associated in the direction expected. Data were analyzed in two steps: (1) a simple mediation model (H1) was tested with Sobel test and (2) a moderated mediation model (H2a & H2b) using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations of Variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Age	31.22	10.65	–					
Sex ^a	.45	.50	-.01	–				
Job Tenure	1.62	1.68	.31**	.01	–			
WIF	3.20	.95	-.08	.17*	.08	–		
Affective Commitment	4.24	.99	.22**	-.09	.03	-.22**	–	
Political Skill	5.31	.75	.04	-.10	-.10	-.09	.22**	–
Voluntary Turnover	1.36	.48	-.24**	-.14	-.16*	.06	-.23**	-.02

Note. $N = 181$; Reliability scores in parentheses where applicable.

^a for sex, female is coded 0, male is coded 1. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ two tailed.

Test of mediation

The results for Hypotheses 1 are presented in Table 2. Full support was found for Hypothesis 1, wherein WIF negatively affected affective commitment, affective commitment negatively predicted turnover (measured six months later), and WIF exhibited a positive indirect effect on turnover via affective commitment (see Sobel test and bootstrapped confidence interval with 5,000 resamples; Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Table 2. Regression results of simple mediation.

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>		
Turnover regressed on WIF	.13	.16	.77	.44		
Affective commitment regressed WIF	-.22	.08	-2.95	.00		
Turnover regressed on affective commitment, controlling for WIF	-.50	.17	-2.90	.00		
Turnover regressed on WIF, controlling for affective commitment	.02	.17	.12	.90		
	Value	SE	LL95% CI	UL95% CI	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Indirect effect and significance using normal distribution</i>						
Sobel	.11	.06	.00	.22	2.01	.04
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	LL95% CI	UL95% CI		
<i>Bootstrap results for indirect effect</i>						
Effect	.12	.07	.02	.27		

Note. $N = 181$; unstandardized regression coefficients are reported; bootstrap sample size = 5000; LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ two tailed.

Test of moderated mediation

The results of testing H2a and H2b are presented in Table 3. Full support was found for Hypothesis 2A; controlling for age, sex and tenure, affective commitment significantly regressed upon the interaction of WIF and political skill, and simple slopes analysis using standard deviation-based slopes (Aiken & West, 1991; O’Conner, 1998; Figure 2) revealed a statistically

significant and negative slope for high political skill (simple slope = $-.33$, $t = -3.69$, $p < .01$), yet not for low (simple slope = $-.01$, $t = -.06$ ns). Full support was also found for Hypothesis 2B, wherein the indirect effect of affective commitment on the WIF-turnover relationship was only significant for employees with high levels of political skill.

Table 3. Regression results of moderated mediation test.

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
<i>Mediator Variable Model</i>				
WIF (A)	-.15	.08	-1.96	.05
Political Skill (B)	.27	.09	2.92	.00
A × B	-.20	.09	-2.25	.03
Sex	-.08	.14	-.56	.58
Job Tenure	-.01	.04	-.22	.82
Age	.02	.01	2.59	.01
<i>Dependent Variable Model</i>				
Affective Commitment	-.47	.19	-2.51	.01
WIF	.10	.18	.54	.59
Sex	-.82	.35	-2.35	.02
Job Tenure	-.16	.12	-1.34	.18
Age	-.04	.02	-2.23	.03
Political Skill	Conditional Effect at Political skill = mean and +/- 1 SD			
	Indirect Effect	SE	LL95%CI	UL95%CI
4.65 (low)	.00	.72	-.15	.14
5.31 (mean)	.07	.06	-.01	.22
6.07 (high)	.14	.08	.02	.33

Note. N = 181; LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

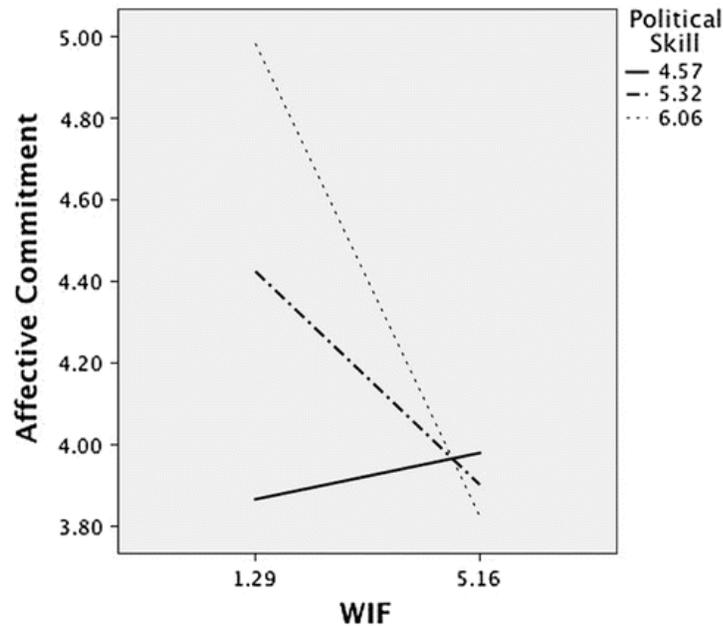


Figure 2. Interaction graph of political skill and WIF.

Discussion

The results of the present paper demonstrate that lowered affective commitment is a mediating mechanism in the WIF-turnover relationship, and that its effect is enhanced in the case of politically skilled employees. Theoretically, since WIF causes stress that drains resources from both work and family domains, thus reducing the availability of resources to cope with WIF, politically skilled employees will be likely to leave the taxing work environment in favor of one that affords them more resources. Politically skilled employees, more so than less skilled employees, may do so because their social astuteness lets them better recognize the ongoing and normative causes of resource depletion in their work environment that sustain it as a threat, and are better able to proactively take action in the most effective way possible to detach their identity from their work and leave.

The present research contributes to our understanding of the WIF-turnover process in two ways. First is the conceptualization and testing of the mediating effect of affective commitment on actual voluntary turnover instead of just turnover intentions. Although often conceptualized (e.g. Good et al., 1996), the role of affective detachment and disengagement in relation to voluntary turnover had yet to be fully tested, and our longitudinal test offers evidence for confirmation of the theoretical mechanism. Second, we complement existing evidence supporting trait-based moderators (e.g. age, gender, values, culture; Butt et al., 2015; Carr et al., 2008; Cloninger, Selvarajan, Singh, & Huang, 2015; Spector et al., 2007) of the WIF → commitment relationship, by demonstrating similar effects with an ability-based moderator. We theorize that rather than shaping perceptions of existing resources and threats, ability-based moderators (such as political skill) alter workers' capacity to regulate those resources. Expanding on Grandey and Cropanzano's (1999) work, we find that resources seem to play as important a role in resolving employees' experience of WIF as they do in forming it, and ability-based individual differences may be a primary avenue for shaping those reactions; because skills and abilities are easier to alter than traits, this suggests that employees can develop ways to handle WIF.

The present research also contributes to our understanding of political skill. Past work suggests that political skill acts as a personal coping resource that lets employees feel a heightened sense of control in the face of stressors (Perrewé et al., 2004), which, in theory, reduces the negative effects of their secondary stress response (Lazarus, 1991). We build on this by not only showing that political skill functions in the framework of WIF, but also that it facilitates affective detachment as an additional means of reducing the stress. This particularly interesting finding suggests that political skill contains some degree of cross-domain functionality within the broader experiences of an employee's life. Meaning, politically skilled employees are aware that their current organization and employment is but one of many options, and they may be socially astute enough to see it as just another resource to be leveraged for their benefit. Indeed the 'big picture' thinking exhibited by politically skilled employees as they gain social influence may have wider career ramifications that are yet to be acknowledged.

While suggesting that the politically skilled will leave an organization when faced with WIF, rather than remain and navigate it, may imply that politically skilled individuals are *less* resilient than their less skilled counterparts, upon further reflection, these findings suggest the opposite. As opposed to value-based individual differences (e.g. Carr et al., 2008), political skill affects the

perception of danger in the first place, thus allowing such individuals to adapt quickly and leave before they suffer enduring stress. In this case, reducing one's affective commitment and eventually leaving the organization is how the politically skilled choose to cope with WIF. This strategy can potentially release the strain resulting from WIF because political skilled employees detach their identification with the organization, and no longer struggle to meet the competitive demands from work and family.

Implications for practice

Our findings highlight two important considerations for managers and human resource professionals. First, while politically skilled employees are typically high performing individuals (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008; Todd et al., 2009), they are highly sensitive to WIF. Our application of COR theory suggests that it isn't necessarily work demands themselves that cause detachment and turnover, but the fallout of those demands for one's family or personal life. Coaching and supportive leader behaviors (Kossek et al., 2011; Odle-Dusseau et al., 2012), as well as workplace practices that reduce the depletion of time, attention and energy (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) in the family domain, such as on-site child care, self- or time-management training, increased amount of non-specific personal days, or facilitated access to elder or child care services may be of great utility. Tactics such as job-sharing or telecommuting, however, may be of limited use, because reducing politically skilled employees' capacity to directly socially influence others will limit the accrual of resource that they gain from their social adroitness in the first place.

Recent research by Allen and colleagues (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013; Allen et al., 2014) sheds some light on specific workplace practices that may fulfill some of the above functions. Allen et al. (2013) use meta-analytic data to demonstrate that both flextime and flexplace (the freedom to operate from any location for part of one's work) availability and use both significantly reduced reported experiences of WIF, with flextime having more of an impact than flexplace. Further work by Allen et al. (2014) also found that paid sick days significantly negatively correlated with WIF, yet paid parental leave and paid annual leave did not affect WIF. As long as such policies and practices can be adapted to lessen stressors in the family domain (not just resource accrual in the work domain), they may aide politically skilled workers in coping with WIF. Practical effect size in both of the above studies, however, was small, which suggests that perhaps other, more psychologically-based, practices may be required.

The second finding highlighted by our research indicates another path to managing WIF, and that is through the importance of employee identification and affective attachment in the WIF-turnover process. Ensuring the presence of high personal identification with work may be especially important for retaining politically skilled employees. If politically skilled workers are highly personally invested in their work (e.g. they have high autonomy in their choice projects, they work in domains that match their unique specialization, etc.) and faced with WIF, they may be compelled to use their skill to reduce resource depletion fallout in ways besides turnover. This can be made even easier if they are given access to resource-rejuvenating practices (e.g. flextime, paid sick days, onsite childcare, etc.) that enhance their commitment or are contingent on them demonstrating that commitment.

Even beyond politically skilled employees, organizations will benefit from such company-wide interventions for all employees (Cinamon & Rich, 2005). When offering commonly employed benefits, such as flexible work hours or telecommuting (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007), these practices will be successful to the extent that they preserve the sense of affective attachment employees have with their organizations. Enhancing perceptions of organizational support and justice (Meyer & Smith, 2000) when implementing work–family balance practices, as well as enhancing the perception that such practices are innovative (Agarwala, 2003), may enhance affective commitment.

Limitations and future directions

The current study has several limitations. First, there was a relatively low response rate of 20.1%. This response rate, however, is not unusual for survey data and low response rates have been found to be valid (Hikmet & Chen, 2003). Another sample-related limitation is that all study variables except for turnover were collected at the same time and the cross-sectional characteristic may impede our ability to test the hypothesized causal relationships between predictors and the mediators, and lead to potential common method variance biases. To alleviate these concerns, we collected outcome variables, turnover, six months after the other variables were measured, which reduced the effects of common method bias, as the dependent variable was collected from a secondary source (i.e. Human Resource Department records) and longitudinally (e.g. Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Moreover, political skill is believed to have enduring or trait-like qualities (Ferris et al., 2007), suggesting it would be less affected by more state-like assessments of work–family conflict or affective commitment, and work–family conflict is theoretically more affected by the external environment than one’s internal state (as is affective commitment), which suggests a different causal source.

Analytically, first, we were not able to include measures of participant’s family situations within the analysis due to legal constraints regarding personal information. However, our study examined perception of work–family conflict not objective measure of it. Therefore, the family information was not necessarily relevant to ones’ perception of the stress resulting from the interrole conflict between work and family. Second, due to the research question of interest, we excluded those participants who were fired by the organizations from the current analysis, and this reduced our sample size to 181. The reduced sample size leads to less power in the analysis. Beyond this, the current study still possessed a solid sample size for the analysis, and the theoretical model was supported by the data analysis.

While our findings are among the first to demonstrate that a disposition (i.e. political skill) moderates the work–family conflict-outcome relationship, future research may benefit from the further exploration of the interaction between dispositions and other personal characteristics. For instance, research finds that due to societal norms and personal expectations, women often experience greater perceptions of work–family conflict than men (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Since politically skilled workers are often central and high performing individuals, we can infer that they may have greater involvement in their work. Future research could expand on both gender and political skill literature by investigating the interaction of political skill and sex, or perhaps gender role expectations, as it impacts the work–family conflict-affective commitment relationship.

In conclusion, we used a time-lagged research design and discovered that affective commitment mediated the relationship between WIF conflict and employee voluntary turnover. In addition, the politically skilled employees were more sensitive to WIF, and thus were more likely to lower their affective commitment in response to increased WIF. This lowered commitment, in turn, lead to increases in actual turnover.

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