

# The Psychology of the Recession on the Workplace

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NEW HORIZONS IN MANAGEMENT

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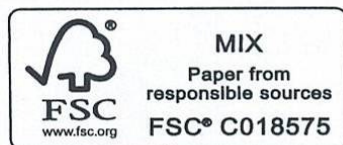
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# 17. The dynamism of balancing work and family in a developing society: evidence from Taiwan<sup>1</sup>

**Luo Lu**

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In the current economic uncertainty and constant change, employers focus more on layoffs, restructurings, mergers and acquisitions, cost reductions, and outsourcing, which puts even more pressure on employees. When the going gets tough, people are forced to work harder, and the talk of balancing work and family seems a luxury and wishful thinking. However, the potential impact that work and family conflict have on employees, family members and organizations should not be overlooked. For instance, research has found that the more time a person spends on the job, the more interference there is between work and family (work/family interference, WFI) (Bruck et al., 2002). It is also argued that work and family issues are at least as important to organizational functioning as family functioning (Barnett, 1998). A clear connection between work/family antecedents and WFI as well as a connection between WFI and strains has now been established (Allen et al., 2000; Byron, 2005). However, to influence managerial practices, especially in a recession, a more precise science with strong inferences about the causes and consequences of WFI must be produced. So far, there is a serious shortage of longitudinal data in the work and family literature which could allow us confidence to infer causation. The primary aim of this chapter is thus to provide in-depth knowledge about the processes through which WFI arises and affects employees' role satisfaction, drawing on data recently obtained through a three-wave panel study conducted with Taiwanese workers from various organizations. Such an effort can remedy the methodological limitation caused by the scarcity of longitudinal data in the existing work and family literature, which should provide a stronger basis for causality inferences than cross-sectional data. In particular, we examined the reciprocal relations of work and family pressure, WFI, and work and family role satisfaction.

A secondary aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which existing Western findings can be generalized to a Chinese population.



This is due to the fact that the vast majority of studies concerning work and family related concepts have been undertaken in the US and other Western countries. Thus a major limitation in this literature is its decidedly Western focus. In the developing societies such as Taiwan, work and family issues are only beginning to gain attention. Taiwan in recent decades has undergone fundamental transformations of industrial structures from labor-intensive to high-tech, as well as rapid social modernization in both work and life styles. Consequently, more than ever Taiwanese employees are becoming exposed to stressful Western and industrialized work situations (Lu, 1997). A recent study with a national representative sample found that Taiwanese employees on average worked 48.96 hours per week ( $SD = 14.12$ ), which is much higher than the statutory 40 hour working week (Lu, 2011). Further, with the rising proportion of females in the workforce (nearly 50 per cent as of 2009), more and more Taiwanese employees are now caught between the demands of work and family (Hsu et al., 2001; Lu et al., 2005; Lu et al., 2008), especially as family life is traditionally highly valued in a Chinese society (Lee, 1988). Although there has been an increased interest in work and family issues as Taiwan's economy develops, globalizes and transforms, and for that matter, mainland China as well, there have been no systematic efforts to summarize these emerging findings and developing trends. Thus, this chapter will attempt to review the latest empirical evidence obtained with Taiwanese employees pertaining to the negative aspects of WFI. Specifically, the findings will be organized in the antecedents WFI-consequences axis, informed by the two contrasting yet complimentary generic theoretical perspectives of stress and resources.

Finally, we will reflect on the shifting attention to positive aspects of the work and family interaction and overarching theoretical frameworks guiding this emerging trend of research in the West; followed by a brief report of results from the same three-wave panel study pertaining to the flip side of WFI, namely the dynamism of work and family enrichment.

## WFI: THE CLASSICAL STRESS PERSPECTIVE

Work and family conflict is by far the most popular WFI construct being studied within the occupational stress paradigm. It is defined as 'a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects' (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985: 77). More recently, researchers have begun to recognize the duality of work and family conflict by considering both directions: work interfering with family (termed the work-to-family conflict, WFC) and



family interfering with work (termed the family-to-work conflict, FWC) (Carlson et al., 2000; Frone, 2003; Frone et al., 1992), and it has been asserted that the two forms of WFI are discernable with unique antecedents and both need to be examined (Byron, 2005). I will also present findings on the correlates of WFC/FWC among Taiwanese employees, and those on the stability or fluctuation of these experiences over time.

### **The Role Strain Hypothesis and Evidence**

From an occupational stress perspective, the effort-recovery (E-R) model (Meijman and Mulder, 1998) has been developed to explain the stressor → WFI → strain sequence. The main proposition is that employees need adequate rest after exertion of efforts at work to recover and recharge both physically and psychologically. Failing to gain sufficient recovery will result in a depletion of psychic energy which will force individuals to increase their efforts to cope with subsequent work demands and further lead to prolonged strain. Applying this theory in the context of WFI, we can infer that when pressure from work or family exceeds the individual's capacity to cope, work and family demands come into conflict, thus depriving the individual of adequate chances of recovery from performing either the work or family role, resulting in damped role satisfaction as well as increased perceived role pressure. In addition according to the scarcity hypothesis (Kahn et al., 1964), we possess limited resources such as time and energy, performing multiple roles thus inevitably will lead to resource competition and conflict. Work overload is likely to lead to working overtime and leave the individual exhausted and strained (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), thus unable to take on family duties after work, resulting in WFC and damped work role satisfaction. Similarly, heightened disagreement among family members requires extensive time and effort to resolve the conflict (Kao and Lu, 2006), such a deprivation of time and emotional energy will likely result in FWC and damp family role satisfaction. Thus to fully understand the impact of WFC and FWC on employees, pressure from work and family domains such as workload and family conflict need to be examined simultaneously.

Corroborating findings of a meta-analytic review on WFI antecedents in the West (Byron, 2005), Taiwanese studies have confirmed that both work and family demands were consistently related to WFC and FWC respectively. In the work domain, heavier workload, longer working hours, more work constraints, greater managerial responsibilities, and greater perceived gender inequality at work (especially for women) were indeed direct precursors of WFC in Taiwan (Chang et al., in press; Chang et al., 2009; Lu, 2011; Lu et al., 2005; 2008; Lu et al., 2009; Lu et al., 2010).



Furthermore, heavier workload, greater managerial responsibilities, and greater perceived gender inequality at work (especially for women) were also direct precursors of FWC in Taiwan (Chang et al., 2009; Lu et al., 2008; 2009). In the family domain, heavier family responsibility and a perceived less than adequate share of family chores (possibly due to lack of time and energy) were found to relate positively to WFC (Kao et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2005; 2010) among Chinese workers. Furthermore, having to care for dependent (especially young) children, and having to share more than desirable family chores were found to relate positively to FWC among Taiwanese workers (Lu et al., 2005; 2008).

### **The Resources Theories in Stress Adaptation and Evidence**

In contrast to identifying stressors, resources theories put emphasis on people's potentials, capabilities and will to strive and thrive in the face of stress. Resources are generally defined as those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right (for example, self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace), or act as a means of obtaining centrally valued ends (for example, money, social support and credit) (Hobfoll, 2002). The conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is recently gaining popularity in work and family studies. The model proposes that people seek to acquire and maintain resources. The resources may include conditions (for example, married status, tenure), personal characteristics (such as self-efficacy), and energy (for example, time, money and knowledge that allow one to acquire other resources). Research in the West has found that both work and family resources were related to WFI (Geurts and Demerouti, 2007). Specifically, family-friendly policies, organizational family values, and supervisory support are the three main categories of work resources, while spousal/family support is the most important family resource.

In Taiwan, work flexibility, organizational family values, and supervisory support were found to be negatively related to both WFC and FWC (Chang and Lu, 2009; Chang et al., 2009; Lu et al., 2008; 2009). However, studies looking at family resources in the work and family context are almost non-existent in Taiwan.

Regarding the presumed consequences of WFI, research has found it to be related to a variety of outcomes, including work-related (for example, job satisfaction), non-work-related (for example, life satisfaction), and stress-related (for example, depression) outcomes (Allen et al., 2000). Taiwanese studies have also confirmed that WFC was related to job dissatisfaction, heightened turnover intention, family dissatisfaction and lowered personal happiness (Chang et al., in press; Lu et al., 2005; 2008;



2009; 2010). FWC was found to be related to family dissatisfaction, job dissatisfaction and lowered organizational commitment (Chang and Lu, 2009; Lu et al., 2005; 2008).

The above summarized Taiwanese results suggest that the main nexus of work and family demands/resources → WFC/FWC → consequences in work, family domains and well-being are applicable to Taiwanese workers. In other words, the general theoretical framework of Western work/family research can be applied to a large extent to the Chinese context. These recent Taiwanese studies are thus an endeavor in bridging the gap of knowledge in work/family issues in a collectivist cultural context and a developing economy. More importantly, these findings can now inform effective organizational strategies for achieving work/family balance for Taiwanese workers.

## WFI: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON REVERSED CAUSALITY

Although the supportive evidence comes from cross-sectional data, causality is implied in the above mentioned Taiwanese studies, like most studies in the Western work and family literature, for instance stressors cause WFI (or, resources reduce WFI), and WFI in turn raises strains. In addition to theories such as the E-R model and the scarcity hypothesis which may explain the stressor → WFI → strain sequence, there are other equally viable theoretical explanations leading us to expect opposite pathways. For instance, the 'drift hypothesis' (Kohn and Schooler, 1983) in health research suggests that individuals with bad health drift to lower social statuses, which also go along with lower paid and more stressful jobs. Corroborating this view, Jamal (1986) pointed out that those who work the night shift (moonlighters) are generally economically squeezed and socially deprived, and so resort to working the more taxing night jobs. Using these findings in the health literature as an analogy, damped role satisfaction or problems of WFI may hamper people's role performance, pushing them to jobs with less security and/or creating more family frictions and instability, which may lead to greater role pressure. In addition, those employees who are under strain or experiencing WFI may be more easily distracted from work and family duties thus eventually creating an increasing backlog of workload and elevated family discord.

Combining propositions derived from both the role strain hypothesis and drift hypothesis, this chapter purports a dynamic view of *reciprocal relations* among work and family pressure, WFI, and well-being. The underlying belief is that the person (personality, health, coping) constantly



interacts with the environment (events, stressors) in a recursive circle rather than in a static fashion (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Heady and Wearing, 1989; Lu, 1999). Applied to the WFI context, this dynamic process goes as follows: work and family pressure evokes feelings of work interfering with family and family interfering with work, and depresses work satisfaction and family satisfaction. These feelings of dissatisfaction will subsequently give rise to more work and family pressure and WFI. Such a dynamic view of reciprocal relations can only be modeled with longitudinal data.

Longitudinal studies however, are difficult to conduct. In the WFI literature, three such studies conducted in the West found that WFC was both a causal determinant of later work pressure, and an outcome of strain (Demerouti et al., 2004; Kelloway et al., 1999; Leiter and Durup, 1996). However, all three studies used restrictive samples from a single organization and focused only on exhaustion, not generic work role satisfaction. Another common shortcoming of these studies is the neglect of the FWC process, illuminating only the one-way effect (WFC) of the WFI. We thus seek to remedy this neglect by considering the dual direction of the WFI in the first longitudinal study with non-Western workers.

The participants in our study were full-time employees working in different organizations of diverse industries across Taiwan. We employed a longitudinal design in which all variables were measured three times with six months in between the waves. We did so to both allow sufficient fluctuation over time (providing sufficient variance), and to cover a longer time period (our longest interval is one year).

The most important findings emerged from our panel study ( $N = 310$ ) regarding the temporal dynamism of WFC and are summarized in Figure 17.1. Specifically, the diagram shows that work pressure, WFC, and job satisfaction were mutually related to one another over the course of one year. Cross-lagged SEM analysis revealed that work pressure had both a medium-term (6 months) and a long-term (1 year) lagged effect on WFC, and the reversed pattern was evident as well. Furthermore, the same pattern of reciprocal relationships was found between WFC and job satisfaction: WFC had a medium-term lagged effect on job satisfaction, and job satisfaction had both a medium-term and a long-term lagged effect on WFC. However, we found no lagged effect of work pressure on job satisfaction, or vice versa. The conclusion we can draw seems to be that constructs of work pressure, WFC and job satisfaction are neither 'only' a cause nor 'only' a consequence. They are mutually and recursively interlocked in a dynamic stress process of work interfering with family.

The most important findings regarding the temporal dynamism of FWC are summarized in Figure 17.2. Specifically, the diagram shows that family pressure, FWC, and family satisfaction were mutually related to one



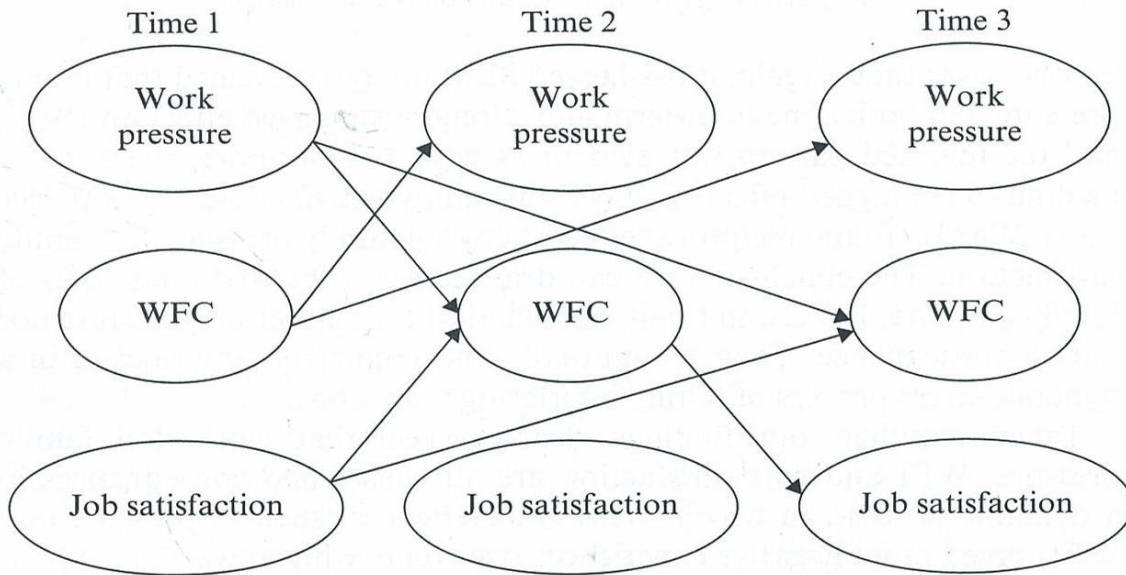


Figure 17.1 Significant lagged paths ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the reciprocal model of WFC, showing both causal and reversed causal relations among work pressure, WFC and job satisfaction ( $N = 310$ )

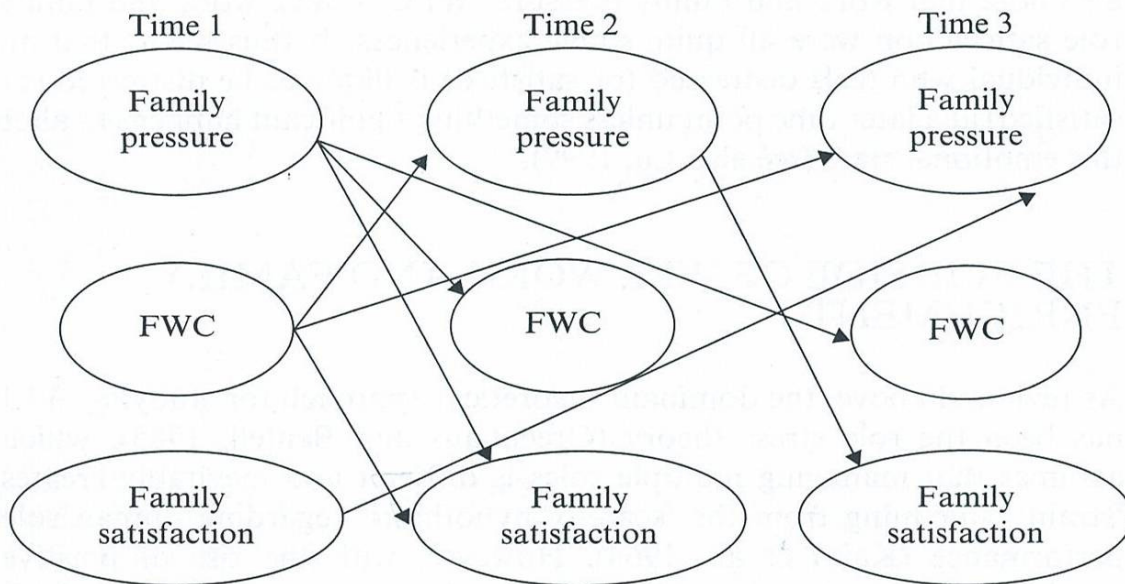


Figure 17.2 Significant lagged paths ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the reciprocal model of FWC, showing both causal and reversed causal relations among family pressure, FWC and family satisfaction ( $N = 310$ )



another over time. Again, cross-lagged SEM analysis revealed that family pressure had both a medium-term and a long-term lagged effect on FWC, and the reversed pattern was evident as well. Furthermore, there was a medium-term lagged effect of FWC on family satisfaction, but not vice versa. We also found reciprocal effects between family pressure and family satisfaction. The conclusion we can draw seems to be that constructs of family pressure, FWC and family satisfaction are neither only a cause nor only a consequence. They are mutually and recursively interlocked in a dynamic stress process of family interfering with work.

Taken together, our findings clearly reveal that work and family pressure, WFI and role satisfaction are all causes *and* consequences in a dynamic process, in which stressful experiences (such as pressure and WFI) breed more negative experiences over time, while rewarding experiences (such as role satisfaction) protect people from subsequent negative experiences. These 'reciprocal relations' imply that theories accounting for the work and family interface need to move away from the simplistic one-way causal models, to capture the more fluid and recursive nature of relationships between focal constructs.

In addition to our findings of reciprocal relationships over time, we also note that work and family pressure, WFC, FWC, work and family role satisfaction were all quite stable experiences. It thus seems that an individual who feels distressed (or satisfied) is likely to be distressed (or satisfied) at a later time point unless something significant happens to alter this emotional state (see also Lu, 1999).

## THE FLIP SIDE OF WFI: WORK AND FAMILY ENRICHMENT

As reviewed above, the dominant theoretical approach for studying WFI has been the role stress theory (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), which assumes that managing multiple roles is difficult and inevitably creates 'strain', stemming from the 'scarcity hypothesis' regarding human role performance (Kahn et al., 1964). However, with the rise of positive psychology, recent evidence has portrayed a more optimistic outlook of human role experiences, that of positive spillover between work and family domains (Frone, 2003; Geurts and Demerouti, 2007; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000). Evidence has already shown that negative and positive spillovers are discernable bi-directional constructs forming a four-factor structure of the work/family interaction (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000). Although research focusing on the positive side of the interaction is gaining momentum in the West, empirical evidence has been largely



based on studies with cross-sectional design. While there have recently been a few longitudinal studies on WFC as mentioned above (for example, Demerouti et al., 2004), only one has looked at the positive aspects of the work and family interaction (Hammer et al., 2005), and none have been conducted with non-Western workers. Thus, data collected in the above mentioned three-wave panel study with Taiwanese employees will be presented, with the aim of delineating the processes through which positive work and family interaction arises and affects role satisfaction. In particular, we examined the *reciprocal relations* of work and family resources, positive work and family interaction, and work and family role satisfaction. Such an effort is unprecedented in the field, which should provide a stronger basis for causality inferences and generalizability of theories and results to non-Western samples.

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) suggested that work-family enrichment best captured the essence of positive work and family interaction, and defined it as 'the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role' (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006: 73). Carlson et al. (2006) further defined work-to-family enrichment (WFE) as family roles benefiting from work roles through developmental resources, positive affect and psychosocial capital derived from involvement in work. Similarly, they defined family-to-work enrichment (FWE) as work roles benefiting from family roles through developmental resources, positive effect and gains in efficiency derived from involvement in family.

### **The Role Expansion Hypothesis and WFE/FWE Dynamism**

Such a positive view of human role experiences has its root in Marks' expansion approach on the fulfillment of multiple roles and human energy (Marks, 1977). The basic assumption is that the fulfillment of multiple roles is not necessarily difficult, nor is it invariably associated with the spending or depletion of energy resources which in turn leads to the development of strain. In contrast, participation in multiple roles might provide a greater number of opportunities and resources to the individual that can be used to promote growth and better functioning in other life domains (Barnett, 1998). Similarly, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) reviewed earlier also breaks from the traditional role stress perspective, and asserts that the fulfillment of multiple roles is not inevitably related to strain; rather, each role might also offer resources that help individuals to deal with other demands associated with the fulfillment of other roles.

Putting resources at the center of generating positive work and family interaction, research guided by the COR theory or role enhancement perspective has shown that work and family resources were more strongly



related to positive interaction than to negative interaction between both domains (Geurts and Demerouti, 2007). However, similar to the WFI literature, and even more so in this emerging field, nearly all supportive evidence comes from cross-sectional studies, which may unnecessarily constrain our view of a complex human phenomenon and turn it into an artificially flat and simplistic version.

In fact, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) emphasizes the dynamism of creating, conserving and utilizing various resources in the process of human adaptation. Nonetheless, empirical studies testing this theory, restricted by the nature of cross-sectional design, tend to replace the process model with a content model, stagnating dynamic loops into a linear flow from resources to (reduction of) strains. Similarly, Marks' (1977) role expansion hypothesis purports that the process of consumption of human energy is inseparably related to the process of production of human energy. Even while we are spending energy we are also converting more of it for later use. In other words, adequately managing multiple roles may create energy and enhance the availability of resources.

Drawing insights from the above theories, we propose that in addition to the path of resources leading to work-family enrichment and role satisfaction, the opposite paths may also operate in the work-family interaction. That is, fulfillment and enhanced performance in one or two roles may generate further resources to enable later positive interactions between the two domains, thus completing a positive feedback loop. This is the opposite of the so-called 'loss spiral' observed in the WFC process (Demerouti et al., 2004). Unfortunately, no study has formulated and tested these reciprocal relations among resources, enrichment and role satisfaction. The only longitudinal study with a panel design in the positive work and family interaction literature attempted to predict depressive symptoms from both positive and negative work and family spillover while controlling for baseline depression (Hammer et al., 2005). These researchers did not measure work and family resources, nor test for the possibility of reversed causality (i.e. earlier depression leading to later work and family spillover).

### **Evidence from a Taiwanese Longitudinal Study**

Incorporated into the earlier described three-wave panel study with 310 Taiwanese employees from various organizations, we assessed work and family role resources, WFE, FWE, work and family satisfaction at three times with a 6-month interval between each assessment point. This design allowed us to investigate not only the fluctuations of the study variables, but also their relations over an extended period of time (the longest time lag being one year).



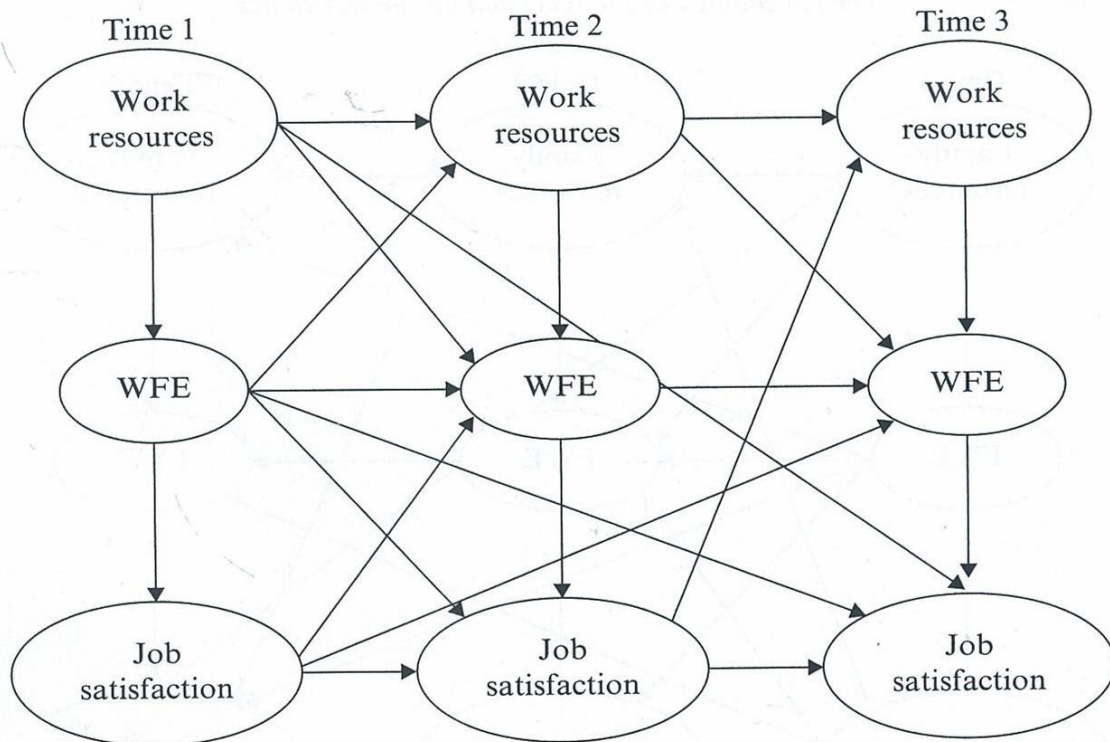


Figure 17.3 Significant paths ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the reciprocal model of WFE, showing both causal and reversed causal relations among work resources, WFE and job satisfaction ( $N = 310$ )

The most important findings that emerged are: (1) While modeling work-to-family enrichment, work resources, WFE and job satisfaction were mutually related to one another over time; (2) While modeling family-to-work enrichment, family resources, FWE and family satisfaction were mutually related to one another over time. Regarding the first finding (see Figure 17.3), cross-lagged SEM analysis revealed that work resources had a medium-term (6 months) lagged effect on WFE, which in turn had both medium- and long-term lagged effects on job satisfaction. Work resources had a further long-term positive effect on job satisfaction. The same pattern of reciprocal relationships was found between WFE and job satisfaction. In addition, we found a medium-term (6 months) lagged effect of WFE on work resources, and a medium-term lagged effect of job satisfaction on work resources. The conclusion we can draw seems to be that constructs of work resources, work-to-family enrichment, and job satisfaction are mutually and recursively interlocked in a dynamic process of positive work and family interaction.

Regarding the second finding (see Figure 17.4), cross-lagged SEM analysis revealed that family resources, FWE and family satisfaction were



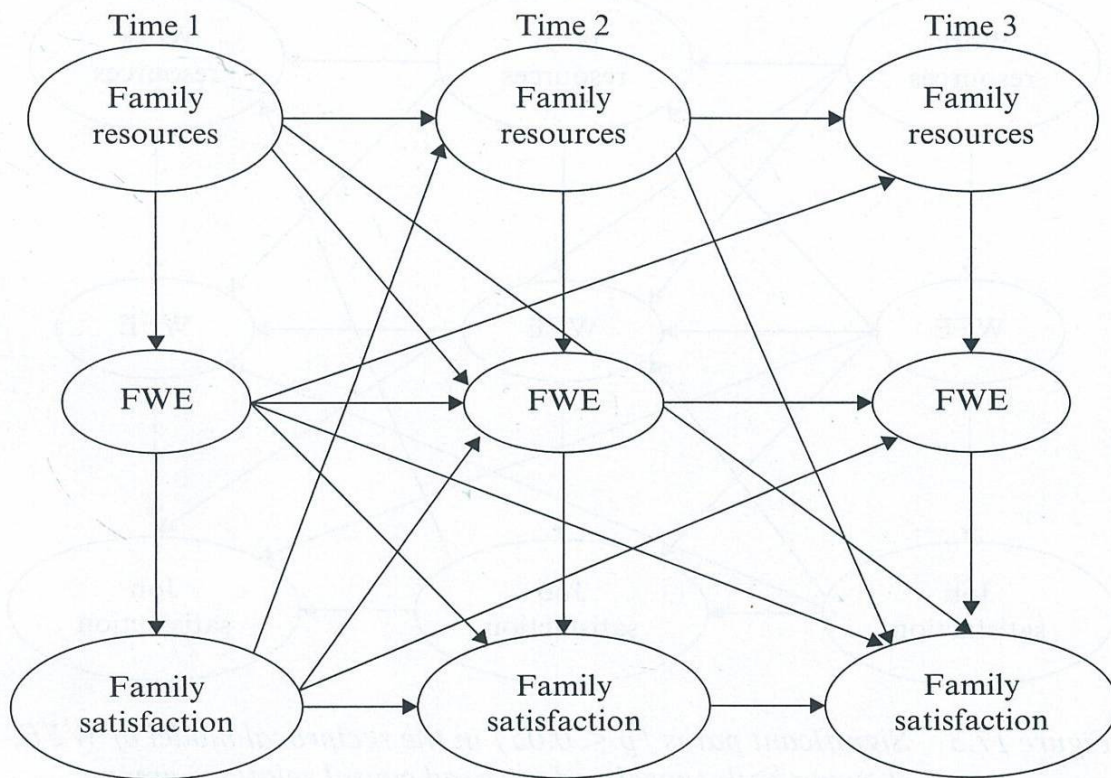


Figure 17.4 Significant paths ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the reciprocal model of FWE, showing both causal and reversed causal relations among family resources, FWE and family satisfaction ( $N = 310$ )

mutually related to one another over time. These diachronic relations were both medium- and long-term ones. The conclusion we can draw seems to be that constructs of family resources, family-to-work enrichment, and family satisfaction are mutually and recursively interlocked in a dynamic process of positive work and family interaction.

Taken together, our findings revealed that work and family resources, WFE/FWE, work and family role satisfaction are all causes *and* consequences in a dynamic process. While our findings are the first to be reported in the work and family literature, they mirror results of previous studies on WFC in the West (for example, Demerouti et al., 2004) and our own findings pertaining to both WFC and FWC among Taiwanese employees (reported above). In contrast to the ‘loss spiral’ dynamism in WFI, our first-time unraveled reciprocal relationships among role resources, WFE/FWE, and role satisfaction may be termed a ‘gain uplift’ to depict the dynamism in positive work-family interaction.

Again mirroring findings pertaining to WFI, we noted that work and family role resources, enrichment, and role satisfaction were all quite stable



experiences over the period of one year. It seems that an individual who feels supported (or satisfied) is likely to be supported (or satisfied) at a later time point unless something significant happens to alter this emotional state.

Finally, as our longitudinal study is the first to examine both the positive and negative aspects of the work and family interaction (for instance, enrichment and conflict), as well as the two directions of these interaction (from work to family, from family to work), we are uniquely blessed by data to test for the validity of these focal constructs in a non-Western sample. A series of structural model comparisons revealed that the four-factor model consistently outperformed other alternative models in all three batches of data collected. For example, using data from our Time 1 sample of 351, the four-factor model was the best fit ( $\chi^2 = 250.71$ ,  $df = 100$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , GFI = 0.92, CFI = 96, RMSEA = 0.04), compared to one-factor and two-factor (distinguishing only conflict and enrichment, or distinguishing only work-to-family and family-to-work) models. We are now confident in claiming that work and family as two most important life domains do interact and this interaction can be positive or negative, depending on the ever evolving and unfolding dynamism brought about by both demands made of and resources available to the individual in both arenas. The challenge now for organizations and individuals is to break the destructive circle of pressure → conflict → strains, and to further nurture and create sufficient resources to initiate the constructive circle of support → enrichment → satisfaction, especially when the pressure is mounting for everyone in a recession.

## NOTE

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