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Off-the-job embeddedness as a moderator of the relationship between work and life conflict and turnover intention

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ABSTRACT

The impact of work and life conflict on employee performance and turnover is well-understood. In contrast, the role of off-the-job embeddedness – the attachment of an employee to his or her life outside of work – needs clarification in respect to its potential to buffer the negative effects of work and life conflict on employee turnover intention. Drawing on conservation of resources and job embeddedness theories, we argue that off-the-job embeddedness represents a collection of potential social support resources that can assist people in coping with the stressors resulting from work and life conflict. Based on a sample of 341 employees, this paper examines if off-the-job embeddedness moderates the relationship between work and life conflict and employee turnover intention. This study finds that off-the-job embeddedness weakened the impact of work and life conflict on turnover intention for more embedded employees. The implications of these findings are discussed for management practise and for the development of theory related to off-the-job embeddedness.

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social support; motivation

Introduction

Work and life conflict is associated with lower levels of performance and higher levels of employee turnover (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Nohe & Sonntag, 2014). Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides an elegant explanation. Conflict between the two domains of an employee's life can lead to the depletion of an employee's finite and scarce resources resulting in stress (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). This stress may lead an employee to withdraw their effort and their labour (Amstad, Meier,

Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011). This depletion can be minimised if the employee can access support resources sufficient to counter the work-life conflict-induced stress (Hobfoll, 1988; Halbesleben, 2006).

This paper proposes that off-the-job embeddedness (OffJE) – the attachment an employee has to his or her life out of work (Feldman, Ng, & Vogel, 2012; Zhang, Fried, & Griffeth, 2012) – represents social support resources able to weaken the negative effects of work and life conflict. Drawing on job embeddedness theory (JET, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001) and COR theory, we argue that an employee's OffJE can weaken the effect of work and life conflict on turnover intention. More embedded employees – those with greater involvement in their life out of work, their family and their local community – are less affected by work and life conflict than less embedded employees.

This research makes several contributions to the literature, building and testing theory in the work–life conflict, COR, JET and social support literatures (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). First, this research demonstrates that an employee's life *outside of work* can have a positive effect on the quality of life *at work*. In addition to providing the first evidence of the moderating effect of off-the-job embeddedness on work-life conflict, we demonstrate that social support within an employee's off-the-job embeddedness can weaken the negative effects of work–life conflict. Although the literature has emphasised workplace-based sources of social support, such as supervisors or coworkers (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011), or family-based support (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayana, & Schwartz, 2002; Haar, Roche, & Taylor, 2012), this paper demonstrates the power of community-based social support. Thus, this paper also extends the social support literature.

Second, this paper extends the existing JET–COR literature to include off-the-job embeddedness as a resource. In recent years, COR researchers have demonstrated that employee embeddedness is a form of resource abundance, able to be accumulated and invested, which can lead to increased organisational commitment, performance and retention, and can be deployed by an employee during times of workplace stress (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Kiazad, Holtom, Hom, & Newman, 2015; Kiazad, Seibert, & Kraimer, 2014; Wheeler, Harris, & Sablinski, 2012). The COR–JET synthesis provides a solution to the problem of the poorly theorised link between employee embeddedness with performance, as identified by Lee, Burch, and Mitchell (2014, p. 213). Interestingly, empirical studies have only examined the resource abundance inherent in on-the-job embeddedness. By demonstrating the resources inherent in off-the-job embeddedness, this paper increases the conceptual space of the COR–JET literature.

Finally, this paper makes a contribution to professional practice. This paper demonstrates that employer investment in work-life balance initiatives and in corporate community involvement can offer a range of benefits to employees *and* the organisation beyond increased affective commitment, employee satisfaction, organisational identification, employer branding and quality of employee life (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2006; Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007; Grant, 2012; Stites & Michael, 2011; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008; Zappalà, 2004).

Work and life conflict and turnover

The work–life conflict literature posits that employees have a finite capacity to cope with demands between their work and life domains (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Employees typically have responsibilities inside and outside the organisation; an increase in demands within one domain can spill over and may hinder the employee meeting the requirements of the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Wagner, Barnes, & Scott, 2014). There is evidence that some employees can minimise the effect of this conflict because of access to compensatory activities, situations and experiences that enable recovery and the re-energising of depleted resources (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Kossek et al., 2011). The negative effect of work and life conflict may be minimised when pleasant and rewarding activities, situations, and experiences in one domain reduce negative affect in the other (Westman, 2002). In such cases, an employee may be able to maintain their personal equilibrium and effectiveness. However, this replenishment or maintenance of equilibrium does not always occur, leaving employees with unresolved conflict and resource drain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Ongoing conflict and resource drain can lead to mental and physical health depletion; decline in quality of life for the employee, partners, dependents, friends and colleagues; disruption of relationships within the workplace; and decline in participation in community life outside family and work (Amstad et al., 2011). In the workplace, resource drain is associated with the increased likelihood of burnout (Park, Jacob, Wagner, & Baiden, 2014), decreased employee performance and an increased likelihood of employee turnover. Here we follow the literature and propose that this conflict may lead to a higher likelihood of wishing to leave:

H1: Work and life conflict is positively associated with turnover intention

Conservation of resources theory: work and life conflict as resource depletion

The central premise of COR theory is that people have an innate drive to acquire resources and resist resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). The threat

or actual loss of resources leads to stress and can result in reduced employee physical and mental health and turnover intention (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Viewed from the perspective of COR theory, work and life conflict presents a threat to an employee's resources, as work-life conflict requires the employee to apply finite resources from one domain to deal with the demands of the other domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

When confronted by threats to resources, COR theory suggests that employees with more resources are better able to cope and adjust than employees with fewer resources. For example, employees with resources are better able to cope with the immediate pressures and demands (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). The COR literature explains this in terms of *investing* resources, to use scarce resources to prevent further drain or enable the recovery from resource drain (Hobfoll, 1989). This will, however, reduce resources available for later use. Typically, the employee uses some form of cost-benefit analysis before deciding to invest: the likely loss of the resource versus the benefit of the use of those resources, given the ease with which resources can be recovered. Those with higher levels of resources are better able to invest in strategies that can assist in immediate coping and in acquiring further resources later. A strategy of withdrawal, such as moving to a less stressful job within the organisation or perhaps leaving the organisation, is more likely to be undertaken by employees with fewer resources, greater pessimism or risk aversion (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989; Kiazad et al., 2014).

The COR literature has identified several types of investment strategies. A *replacement strategy* involves using existing resources to directly replace previously lost resources. Hobfoll (1989) uses the example of a retrenched person using existing resources (such as qualifications, experience, social networks, industry knowledge) to find a new job. An employee might also *re-evaluate* a resource threat in order to cope. For example, an employee may conclude that rapid promotion may not be so important if the work effort required leads to persistent work and family conflict. Such a re-appraisal may enable the employee to minimise ongoing work and life conflict by minimising a cause of the conflict. Social support that arises out of the employee's off-the-job social networks can provide a range of resources potentially able to meet employee needs for replacement and reappraisal.

Social support as a resource

A resource is defined as 'those objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies that are valued by the individual' (Hobfoll, 1988, p. 26).

One key resource, particularly relevant to this study, is social support as the ‘assistance and protection given [by] others’ (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997, p. 95), in buffering the negative effects of resource depletion (Halbesleben, 2006). Social support can provide compensation that can buffer the negative effects of work and life conflict. Hobfoll (1988, pp. 155–156) argues that during times of resource threat, social support has two roles. First, social support can increase the resources available to a person during a time of difficulty. These additional resources, only accessible through the network of inter-personnel connections, can provide ways of coping with the practical issues of work-family conflict (Kalliath & Kalliath, 2014). Langford et al. (1997) suggest that this aspect of social support can provide two types of resources. Namely, social support can provide *instrumental support* – access to goods and services that can assist the recipient. For example, a person with greater social support is more likely to be able to find someone to provide childcare on short notice during times of great work-related stress, or to provide recreational opportunities that assist an employee in replenishing lost resources. Furthermore, a recipient may be the beneficiary of *informational support*, assistance in finding solutions to their current difficulties such as using people and services located through personal networks, the supply of new ideas, and approaches, or the provision of coaching or mentoring. In this form of support, a friend may be able to suggest alternative ways of solving a work-related problem, propose a service provider who might meet a need, or aid through coaching or mentoring.

Second, Hobfoll (1988) also suggests that social support can assist the employee in dealing with the psychological issues of resource depletion, by bolstering self-esteem and enthusiasm and reducing negative affect. This aspect of social support enables the employee to better access their own knowledge, skills, experience and judgement (Halbesleben, 2006). In this regard, Langford et al. (1997) outline two additional relevant aspects of social support. Social support may provide *emotional support*, the ‘provision of caring, empathy, love and trust’ (p. 96), that ‘[r]einforce[s] the positive aspects of the self when stressful times have led one to lose sight of them ... and would improve one’s perceptions of personal accomplishment’ (Halbesleben, 2006, p. 1135). This form of support provides reassurance and emotional support during times of difficulty. Relatedly, *appraisal support* may provide mentoring to the recipient, improving their self-awareness and coping capacity, thus improving the employee’s capacity to make decisions about their current situation (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). Emotional support through friendship networks – such as quick coffees or telephone calls and weekend

catch-ups, for example – can provide assurance and comfort to tired, frustrated and conflicted employees. Appraisal social support – when a friend provides alternative perspectives, plays devil’s advocate or helps an employee identify and resolve worrying issues – can assist an employee in dealing with the strain and behaviourally based issues presented by work and family conflict.

Off-the-job embeddedness as a store of social support resources

JET (Mitchell et al., 2001) argues that turnover is constrained by the set of connections the employee has with their job and the organisation (on-the-job or organisational embeddedness), and their life out of work (off-the-job or community embeddedness) (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004). Employees are attached through their connections to the organisation and community (*link* embeddedness), by their fit with the activities, people and culture of their organisation and community (*fit* embeddedness), and by the loss that they would experience if they left the organisation or community (*sacrifice* embeddedness). JET research has found the greater the embeddedness, the less likely the employee is to decide to leave, regardless of dissatisfaction or unfolding-theory ‘shock’ events (Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell, & Lee, 2010). Furthermore, employees with higher levels of off-the-job embeddedness typically had lower levels of turnover and absenteeism and higher levels of in-role and extra-role performance (Feldman et al., 2012; Jiang, Dong, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012; Lee et al., 2004; Ng & Feldman, 2014a).

Researchers have demonstrated the moderating role of employee embeddedness across a wide range of employee attitudes and performance in addition to turnover. This research is organised in Table 1. The majority of these studies highlight the moderating role of total job embeddedness (the aggregate of on- and off-the-job embeddedness) and on-the-job embeddedness, as well as its components. Relatively little is understood about the distinct moderating role of off-the-job embeddedness, with only four papers examining the moderating effect of off-the-job embeddedness. This paper is the first paper examining the moderating role of OffJE during work-life conflict.

Although some job embeddedness researchers have looked at the relationship between on-the-job embeddedness and work and life conflict (see, for example, Karatepe, 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2012; Portoghese, Galletta, & Bastelli, 2011), little research has been undertaken into the impact of off-the-job embeddedness on an employee’s work and life balance. In the only paper to look at the moderating effect of job

Table 1. Summary of the moderating effects of embeddedness.

Embeddedness type	Moderating effect of high levels of embeddedness	Author(s)	
Total job embeddedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the negative effect of job satisfaction on job search intention for less embedded employees 	Crossley et al. (2007)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the positive effect of positive leader-member exchange on organisational citizenship behaviours 	Sekiguchi, Burton, and Sablynski (2008)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the positive relationship between job search and turnover 	Swider, Boswell, and Zimmerman (2011)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the negative impact of perceived organisational and coworker support on turnover intention and service recovery performance 	Karatepe (2012)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the negative effect of distributional, procedural and interactional justice on employee turnover intention 	Karatepe and Shahriari (2014)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the positive effect of abusive supervision on deviance behaviours 	Avey, Wu, and Holley (2015)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the negative effect of distributive justice and management trust on turnover intention 	Akgunduz and Cin (2015)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the effect of an employee's experience of workplace bullying on subsequent aggression to other employee 	Burton (2015)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the relationships between quality of change communication and procedural fairness on threat appraisal 	Biggane, Allen, Amis, Fugate, and Steinbauer (2016)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the positive effect of person-organisation fit and perceived organisational support on organisational citizenship behaviour 	Afsar and Badir (2016)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the negative effect between organisational trust and workplace deviance 	Marasi, Cox, and Bennett (2016).	
	On-the-job embeddedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the effect of job performance, organisational citizenship behaviours and absenteeism on voluntary turnover 	Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton, and Holtom (2004)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the negative effect of unfolding theory-type shocks on employee performance and organisational citizenship behaviours. 	Burton, Holtom, Sablynski, Mitchell, and Lee (2010)
On-the-job embeddedness components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link embeddedness increased innovation after psychological contract breach (PCB), while sacrifice embeddedness reduced PCB's effect on innovation 	Kiazad, Seibert, and Kraimer (2014)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client embeddedness weakened the negative effect of pay satisfaction on turnover intention 	Treuren and Frankish (2014).	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link embeddedness weakened the effect of work and life conflict on turnover intention, sacrifice strengthened the effect 	Treuren (2017, Early view)	
Off-the-job embeddedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the negative effect of organisational citizenship behaviours on voluntary turnover 	Lee et al. (2004)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakened the negative effect of on-the-job embeddedness on turnover intention 	Dawley and Andrews (2012)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened the negative effect of paternalistic leadership on employee in-role performance 	Ozcelik and Cencki (2014)	

embeddedness on work and life conflict, Treuren ([Early view](#)) found that on-the-job link embeddedness weakened the positive effect of work and life conflict on turnover intention, while on-the-job sacrifice embeddedness increased the positive effect.

COR researchers provide a different explanation for the embeddedness-turnover relationship. In this approach, embeddedness represents

employee resource abundance (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Kiazad et al., 2015; Wheeler et al., 2012), available for resisting resource depletion and enabling future resource acquisition. So far, this literature has emphasised on-the-job embeddedness. In this paper, however, we extend the COR-job embeddedness literature by proposing that an employee's off-the-job embeddedness may also represent a store of potential social support, and may be a resource available to buffer the negative consequences of work and life conflict.

Off-the-job embeddedness reflects the degree to which the employee has attachments to the community in which they live (Singh, Shaffer, & Selvarajan, 2018). The greater the community involvement of an employee, the greater the likelihood of developing social support networks. More embedded employees are more likely to be able to access the social support resources able to be used to deal with work-life conflict. Based on such resources, JET researchers recognise that an employee's attachment is influenced by the extent of anticipated loss, should they decide to leave the local area (*sacrifice* embeddedness). This relates to how difficult a more embedded person might find leaving their friends and the activities associated with, for example, the parent's committee and the tennis club. This type of embeddedness reflects the depth of connection the person has with the local community, and in part, reflects, the acquired social networks.

These aspects of embeddedness reflect the potential for a more embedded employee to acquire social support resources. This potential is acquired in two ways. First, employees who are more involved in the local community – typified by higher levels of community linkage and fit embeddedness – are more likely to have higher levels of social integration, which creates the potential for greater social support (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000). Seeman and Berkman (1988), for example, found that the greater the number of people within an elderly person's social network the greater the person's access to emotional and informational support. Research into involvement in local sporting clubs (Nicholson, Brown, & Hoye, 2014) and religious groups (Merino, 2014) have found evidence that involvement is positively associated with increased perceptions of social support. Second, following social identity and self-categorization theory, an employee with higher levels of community fit embeddedness to a specific group within the community is more likely to form a closer association with people within that group (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Research into religious group membership has demonstrated that shared identity and group membership improves the chances of the employee being able to access social support from other members of the group (Merino, 2014).

Accordingly, we propose that more embedded employees are better able to access social support resources and more likely to deploy social support resources during times of work–life conflict. As a result, more embedded employees will be better able to buffer the negative effect of work–life conflict, and better manage work–life conflict. Accordingly, we propose:

H2: Off-the-job embeddedness moderates the relationship between work and life conflict and turnover intention, such that employees with higher levels of off-the-job embeddedness report a weaker relationship between work and life conflict and turnover intention than less embedded employees.

Method

Participants

The data were collected via an online survey in 2015. Responses were received from 391 working adults in Australia. As this study looks at work–life conflict, we analysed data from the 341 (87.2%) respondents who worked more than 30 hours a week. Of this sample, 44% were men and 56% women. The average respondent was between 36 and 40, with an average tenure of 83.3 months (SD = 92.8 months).

Measures

All items, except for the fill-in-the-blank questions and the intention to leave scale, were measured using 5-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Intention to leave

Intention to leave was measured as the unweighted mean of Wayne, Shore, and Liden's (1997) five-item scale. An example item is 'I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.' These items were measured on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree), and reverse-coded where necessary prior to analysis.

Work and life conflict

This paper measured work and life conflict using Pocock, Skinner, and Williams' (2008) three-item work–life interference scale. This scale has been used in studies of work and family conflict and work hours (Fein & Skinner, 2015) and work intensification (Fein, Skinner, & Machin, 2017).

An example item is ‘How often does your work interfere with your responsibilities or activities outside of work?’

Off-the-job embeddedness

Following Ng and Feldman (2012), off-the-job embeddedness was measured using a five-item version of Crossley, Bennett, Jex, and Burnfield’s (2007) reflective global job embeddedness scale, where ‘community’ was substituted for references to ‘the organisation’. An example item is ‘I’m too caught up in this community to leave.’

Gender

Respondents were asked their gender, with female respondents coded as 0, and male respondents as 1.

Age

Respondents were asked to specify their age. Age was coded into age spans, starting with ‘1’: Less than 18 years; 2: 18 to 25, 3: 25 to 30, and so on at intervals of five years up to ‘Older than 85’.

Tenure

Respondents were asked to specify (a) the number of years in their current position; (b) the number of months in their current position. Tenure was calculated as the total number of months the employee had been in that position.

Procedures

Regression

Hypothesis 1 was examined using regression. Hypothesis 2 was examined using Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS Model 1. Regression coefficients, product terms and simple slopes were calculated using bias-corrected bootstrap samples to minimise the possibility of Type 2 error. The small amount of missing data (<1%) was mean-replaced.

Use of control variables

The gendered experience of work–life conflict is well understood in the literature (see, for example, Blanch & Aluja, 2012). Men and women acquire and use social support differently (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intention to leave	3.05	1.63	(.90)					
2. Work-life conflict	2.95	0.97	.17**	(.89)				
3. Off-the-job embeddedness	2.80	0.89	-.22***	.00	(.90)			
4. Gender	0.44	0.50	.15**	.14**	.12*	–		
5. Age	5.05	2.39	-.26***	.03	.13*	-.05	–	
6. Tenure	83.31	92.77	-.17**	.07	.05	.06	.42***	–

$n = 341$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: Cronbach's alpha reported on the diagonal.

Age and tenure are negatively associated with employee intention to leave but have different effects (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). Accordingly, gender, age and organisational tenure were controlled.

Assessment of common method bias

The extent of common method bias was assessed using the common latent factor method outlined in Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon, and Podsakoff (2003). Confirmatory factor analysis of two models representing the hypothesised relationship (one where all items could load onto a common latent factor, and the other where the pathways between the items and the common latent factor were constrained to 0) were compared, indicating that common method bias inflated estimates by an average of 14%. This represents a relatively low level of bias compared to the average estimated bias of 25% reported in Williams, Ronald Buckley, and Cote's (1989) meta-analysis.

Results

Table 2 reports on the descriptive statistics of the data of the sample.

Hypothesis 1 proposes that work-life conflict is associated with higher levels of turnover intention. Table 3 reports on a regression analysis testing this hypothesis. As can be seen, work-life conflict is statistically significant although modest: $b = .27$, $t(336) = 3.14$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .01$. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that OffJE moderates the impact of work and life conflict on an employee's turnover intention, such that an employee with high levels of OffJE would be less likely to want to leave than a less embedded employee. Table 3 reports on this regression. The interaction term was statistically significant ($b = -.17$, $t(334) = -2.03$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .05$). At low levels of OffJE, in this case one standard deviation below the mean, the slope of the curve is positive: $b = 0.44$, $t(334) = 3.79$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$. At high levels of OffJE, the slope of the equivalent curve is not statistically significant: $b = 0.12$, $t(334) = 1.02$, $SE = 0.12$, $p > .05$. Thus, the relationship between work

Table 3. Hypothesis 1 and 2 regression analyses.

	Turnover intention					
	H1			H2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e</i>	95% CI
Constant	2.97***	0.32	2.29, 3.60	2.35**	0.88	0.68, 4.01
Gender	0.40*	0.17	0.08, 0.73	0.31*	0.17	0.02, 0.08
Age	-0.15***	0.04	-0.23, -0.08	-0.14**	0.04	-0.22, -0.07
Tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00, 0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00, 0.00
Work-life conflict (WLC)	0.27**	0.09	0.10, 0.44	0.78**	0.26	0.27, 1.29
Off-the-job embeddedness (OffJE)				0.20	0.28	-0.35, 0.76
WLC × OffJE				-0.17*	0.09	-0.35, -0.01
R^2	.12			.17		
F	11.90***			11.22**		

$n = 341$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

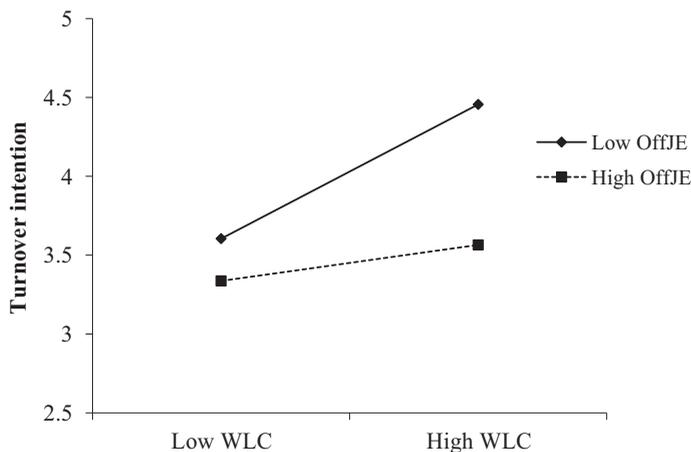


Figure 1. The interaction between Off-the-job embeddedness (OffJE) and Work-life conflict (WLC).

and family conflict and turnover intention is weaker for employees with high levels of off-the-job embeddedness. [Figure 1](#) depicts this relationship. Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Discussion

This paper investigates whether an employee's off-the-job embeddedness buffers the negative effect of work life conflict on turnover intention. Drawing on COR theory and the JET framework, we proposed that the social support embodied in off-the-job embeddedness could ameliorate the resource-depletion resulting from work and life conflict. Specifically, we proposed that an employee's off-the-job embeddedness contained the

potential for social support, where employees with more social support would have better access to instrumental and psychological resources able to assist the employee to cope with the stresses of work and life conflict.

In respect to non-work areas beyond the family, there is little empirical or conceptual work that promotes understanding of how resources are conserved and used across multiple life domains – more conceptual and empirical work is required in these areas (Keeney, Boyd, Sinha, Westring, & Ryan, 2013). Furthermore, there is a need to promote a better understanding of how community embeddedness affects the well-being and critical life events of employees (Ng & Feldman, 2014b). The literature surrounding informal work accommodations to family that are made to address work–life conflict (Behson, 2002) and the larger literature on proactive coping both indicate a pressing need to examine sources of off-the-job resources such as off-the-job embeddedness in respect to providing coping resources to employees (Kirchmeyer, 1993).

The findings of the present research contribute to meeting these needs and they are an important step towards expanding the understanding of how resources outside of the immediate family may affect employee capacity to work. We found that work and life conflict did have a direct and negative effect on employee turnover intention. We then found that off-the-job embeddedness moderated that relationship. Employees with more off-the-job embeddedness reported a weaker relationship between work and life conflict and turnover intention, and this supported the explanation proposed in this paper.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications. First, this paper demonstrates that an employee's life *outside* work can influence how an employee copes with difficulty *at* and *from* work. Specifically, this paper contributes to the work and life conflict literature by demonstrating that an employee's life out of work, represented by off-the-job embeddedness, can buffer the negative impact of work and life conflict on turnover intention. In the theory proposed by this paper, an employee with higher levels of off-the-job embeddedness is better able to cope with work and life conflict and less likely to want to leave. We argue that this is because their more active life outside of work better enables them to acquire social support. During times of work and life conflict, this social support increases the availability of ameliorating resources that assist the employee in coping with the various challenges created by work and life conflict.

Second, this finding contributes to the growing literature that integrates employee embeddedness into the conservation of resources framework (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Kiazad et al., 2014, 2015; Wheeler et al., 2012). As noted earlier, this literature understands employee embeddedness to be a form of resource abundance, able to be invested to develop further resources or to ward off depletion. This literature, however, has looked primarily at the role of on-the-job embeddedness. This paper adds to that literature by providing evidence that off-the-job embeddedness, the other component of the job embeddedness construct, also represents a form of employee resource, and that this resource can act to mitigate the negative effects of work and life conflict.

The findings of this paper have practical implications for both employees and employers. This study suggests that employees with a more active life outside of work are better able to cope with work and life conflict. Employees who are experiencing work-related stress might be able to cope with their work duties by taking time off from work and participating in non-work activities instead. This research has two immediate implications for employers. First, employers may be able to improve employee capacity to cope and reduce employee turnover intention by implementing workplace arrangements that increase the ability of employees to develop their life out of work. This could occur through implementing increasingly flexible work arrangements better enabling employees to participate in community activities. Second, an implication of this research is that employers can receive a retention benefit through their employees' increased participation in corporate community activity, such as employee volunteering, providing pro bono services, and involvement and sponsorship of community organisations and events. Thus, we argue that increased employee participation in community-related activities offers the possibility of the employee broadening their social network and community involvement, potentially leading to increased social support.

Limitations and further research

This research has several limitations. First, although this paper proposes an innovative and important hypothesis that contributes to the COR, JET, work–life balance and social support literatures, the argument of the paper is reliant on cross-sectional data to make inferences about employee behaviour that evolves over time. Longitudinal analysis would provide stronger evidence on the impact of employee embeddedness on the relationship between work and life conflict and intention to leave (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Nevertheless, the insights of this paper

are not substantially weakened because of the use of cross-sectional data for two reasons. First, cross-sectional data analysis might lead to inflated model co-efficient estimates as a result of common method variance (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). However, as noted earlier, regression estimates in this data are not substantially inflated due to common method variance. Second, cross-sectional data analysis does not clarify the direction of causation (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). However, we have seen no theoretical or empirical evidence in the literature that turnover intention predicts work–life conflict, although the literature strongly supports the hypothesis that work–life conflict has a negative relationship with turnover intention.

The second limitation relates to the self-reported and perceptual nature of the data. The analysis is based on employee perceptions, and thus subject to social desirability bias and common method bias. Although common method bias was found to be low in this sample, subsequent research could further reduce error in parameter estimation by obtaining actual turnover data or work-life data from multiple sources, such as a partner, manager or co-worker, or at different points in time. Furthermore, although turnover intention is the strongest predictor of actual turnover (see, for example, Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010), the impact of off-the-job embeddedness on actual turnover remains unclear. Further research is needed on this question. Despite these limitations, we can see several avenues for future research that have been opened by this paper. First, in what circumstances do on-and off-the-job embeddedness moderate the employee experience of work and life conflict? Apart from this paper and Treuren ([Early view](#)), the moderating role of employee embeddedness to explain employee responses to work-life conflict remains unexplored. In this respect, we advocate for studies that include crossover effects (e.g. Hammer, Allen, and Grigsby (1997). Crossover effects occur when the effects of resources occur not only between the work and family domains, but also include effects between persons in different domains, thus producing inter-individual effects among dyads (Ho, Chen, Cheung, Liu, & Worthington, 2013). The notion of crossover effects between partners has been investigated (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Ho et al., 2013), but we could find no research on crossover effects in respect to other types of dyads (e.g. employee-community other) making this a fruitful area for future research.

Second, researchers should examine what aspects of social support (such as instrumental, informational, emotional, appraisal) embodied in off-the-job embeddedness are important in moderating negative aspects of employee experience. In particular, studies should investigate if the moderating effect is related to gender, tenure or age or triggered by psychological contract breach.

Third, we have developed the argument that off-the-job embeddedness will lead to both access to social support resources and the higher deployment of social support resources. Of course, the access to resources must be present before persons can deploy such potential social support in the process of buffering the effects of constructs such as work life conflict. Future research should test these relationships with longitudinal data at different levels of measurement, because it is possible social support occurs at multiple levels. Furthermore, if off-the-job embeddedness provides benefits to the organisation, we question what organisational practices would cultivate its growth. Certainly, it would be reasonable to test our notion that the amount of access to social support at some base time will permit the more successful deployment of social support at some later time.

Finally, it is possible that the beneficial effects of off-the-job embeddedness will enhance valued outcomes in communities and families as well as organisations. Although in this research we have articulated the case for off-the-job embeddedness to affect turnover intention as a valued organisational outcome, it is quite possible that off-the-job embeddedness will also have positive effects on outcomes located in the family and community space. This idea accords strongly with recent work addressing the expansion of COR-based mechanisms into areas of employee's life domains beyond the immediate family (Keeney et al., 2013). In summary, there is much to be learned about the effects of off-the-job embeddedness. Research in this area is very young. Much more empirical and conceptual research is required. However, the extant evidence presents a strong case for the development of further research into the effects of off-the-job embeddedness across multiple domains such as family and career. In addition, we suggest the growing research in this area address the strength and stability of effects from domains of origin for off-the-job embeddedness to new work and non-work domains.

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