GLOBUS PUBLICATION

Globus An International Journal of Management & IT
A Refereed Research Journal
Vol 18 / No 1 / Jul-Dec 2026 P-ISSN: 0975-721X, E-ISSN: 2582-6689

BEYOND WORK–FAMILY CONFLICT: CULTURAL PATHWAYS AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES SHAPING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

*Zhang Tianxi
**Oyyappan Duraipandi

Paper Received: 05.05.2026 / **Paper Revised**: 27.06.2026 / **Paper Accepted**: 12.07.2026 / **Paper Published**: 22.07.2026
Corresponding Author: Zhang Tianxi; doi:10.46360/globus.mgt.120262002

Abstract

Work–family conflict (WFC) has long been treated as a near-universal driver of employee disengagement, yet this assumption rests largely on studies conducted in individualistic, Western contexts. This paper argues that the relationship between WFC and employee engagement is not uniform but is instead channeled through distinct cultural pathways, including individualism–collectivism, power distance, and familism norms, and is substantially reshaped by the organizational resources available to employees. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, and cross-cultural work–family scholarship, an integrative conceptual model is proposed in which culture determines how WFC is appraised and experienced, while organizational resources such as supervisor support, schedule flexibility, and family-supportive norms determine whether that conflict translates into disengagement. The paper synthesizes existing empirical patterns, presents a comparative table of cultural manifestations of WFC, and offers a conceptual figure illustrating the proposed pathways. Implications for cross-cultural human resource management and directions for future empirical testing are discussed.

Keywords: Work–Family Conflict, Cultural Pathways, Organizational Resources, Employee Engagement.

Introduction

For more than three decades, work–family conflict has occupied a central place in organizational behavior research as a primary explanation for reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and withdrawal from work roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The conventional narrative treats WFC as a role-based stressor: time, energy, and behavioral demands from one domain make participation in the other domain more difficult, and this friction erodes the psychological availability that underlies engagement (Kahn, 1990). However, a growing body of cross-cultural evidence suggests that this narrative, while broadly correct, is incomplete. The strength, direction, and even the subjective meaning of work–family conflict vary systematically across cultural contexts, and the organizational resources that buffer its effects are unevenly distributed and unevenly valued across those same contexts (Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009; Spector et al., 2007).

This paper moves beyond the assumption that work–family conflict operates identically for all employees and instead asks two related questions. First, how do cultural value orientations shape the pathways through which WFC is experienced and expressed? Second, how do organizational resources interact with these cultural pathways to determine whether conflict ultimately depresses employee engagement?

Answering these questions matters increasingly for multinational organizations, where a single family-friendly policy designed in one cultural headquarters may be received very differently by employees in a subsidiary with different normative expectations about family, hierarchy, and disclosure of personal strain.

Literature Review

Work–Family Conflict and Employee Engagement

Work–family conflict is typically decomposed into time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based forms, each describing a different mechanism by which participation in one role impedes participation in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Meta-analytic evidence confirms a consistent negative association

*-**School of Business and Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.

between WFC and job attitudes, including engagement, across many national samples, though effect sizes vary considerably (Allen, French, Dumani, & Shockley, 2015). Employee engagement itself is best understood through Kahn's (1990) formulation of vigor, dedication, and absorption, later operationalized empirically by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), who demonstrated that engagement is sustained when job resources are sufficient to offset the depleting effects of job demands, of which family-role conflict is one prominent example.

Cultural Value Orientations as Pathways

Hofstede's (2001) framework of cultural dimensions, particularly individualism–collectivism and power distance, provides a widely used lens for understanding cross-national variation in workplace behavior. In individualistic cultures, work and family are typically conceptualized as separate, boundaried domains, and conflict between them is interpreted as a personal failure of boundary management (Triandis, 1995).

In collectivist cultures, by contrast, family obligations are woven more tightly into social identity, and conflict is experienced relationally rather than individually, often intensified by obligations extending beyond the nuclear family. Power distance further shapes whether employees feel entitled to voice family-related needs to supervisors at all; in high power-distance contexts, employees may suppress requests for accommodation out of deference to hierarchical norms, allowing conflict to accumulate silently (Spector et al., 2007).

Organizational Resources and the Job Demands-Resources Model

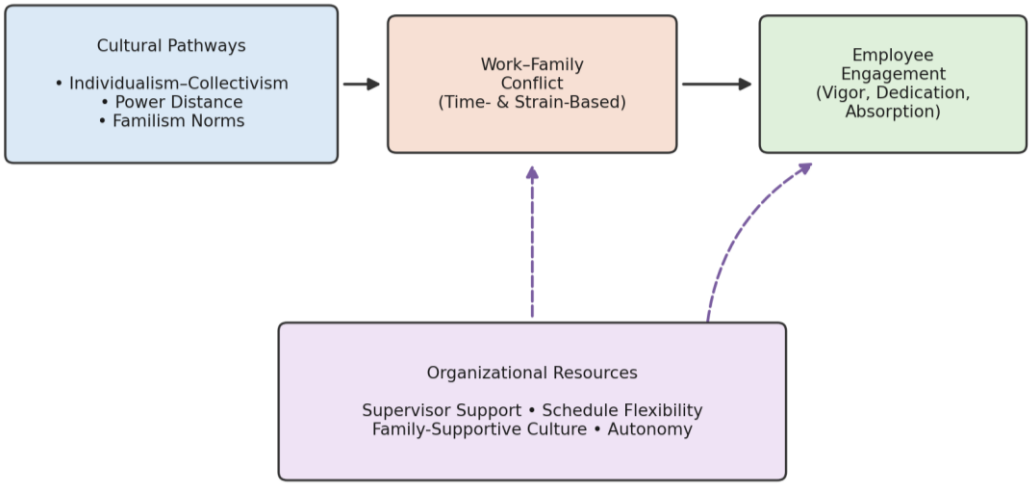
The Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) offers a complementary organizational-level explanation. Job resources, including supervisor support, autonomy, and schedule flexibility, are theorized to buffer the negative effects of job demands, including family-role demands, on employee well-being and engagement. Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 2002) adds that individuals facing resource loss in one domain will actively seek resource gains elsewhere; organizational resources that visibly compensate for family strain therefore protect engagement not merely by reducing demands but by replenishing the psychological resources depleted by conflict. Critically, the perceived value and even the perceived legitimacy of a given organizational resource is itself culturally conditioned, a point often overlooked in resource-based models developed in Western organizational settings.

An Integrative Conceptual Model

Building on the reviewed literature, this paper proposes that cultural value orientations function as upstream pathways that shape how work–family conflict is appraised, while organizational resources function as a downstream moderating layer that determines whether appraised conflict is translated into disengagement.

Figure 1 depicts this proposed model. Cultural pathways (individualism–collectivism, power distance, and familism norms) shape the form and intensity of work–family conflict; organizational resources (supervisor support, schedule flexibility, family-supportive culture, and autonomy) then moderate the extent to which that conflict erodes vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model Showing Cultural Pathways Shaping Work–Family Conflict, and Organizational Resources Moderating Its Effect on Employee Engagement



This model departs from prior frameworks in two ways. First, it treats culture not as a background control variable but as an active pathway that determines the psychological meaning of conflict, consistent with Powell et al.'s (2009) call for culture-sensitive theorizing of the work–family interface. Second, it treats organizational resources as culturally interpreted rather than culturally neutral: a flexible-schedule policy communicates support in a low power-distance culture but may be perceived as an implicit test of commitment in a high power-distance culture where deviation from fixed norms is discouraged.

Cultural Manifestations of Work–Family Conflict

Table 1 synthesizes patterns identified across the cross-cultural work–family literature, summarizing how each cultural dimension tends to manifest in the experience of conflict and which component of engagement is most vulnerable as a result.

Table 1: Cultural Dimensions, Associated Manifestations of Work–Family Conflict, and The Engagement Pathway Most Affected

Cultural Dimension	Typical Manifestation of Work–Family Conflict	Engagement Pathway Most Affected
Individualism	Conflict framed as a personal time-management failure; guilt is self-directed	Reduced dedication when boundaries are violated by employer demands
Collectivism	Conflict experienced as relational strain; obligations to extended family intensify pressure	Absorption suffers most when family role demands compete for attention
High Power Distance	Employees are reluctant to request accommodations from superiors	Vigor declines due to perceived powerlessness to negotiate demands
Low Power Distance	Open negotiation of flexible arrangements with supervisors	Vigor and dedication both buffered through participative dialogue
Familism (strong family orientation)	Family needs are prioritized and normalized within the workplace narrative	Engagement is sustained when organizational resources validate family roles

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The proposed model reframes work–family conflict as a culturally situated experience rather than a universal psychological constant. This has implications for how researchers specify moderators in cross-national studies: rather than treating national culture as a covariate to be controlled away, culture should be modeled as a substantive pathway variable that determines the meaning and salience of conflict itself. It also extends JD-R and COR theorizing by suggesting that the effectiveness of a given resource is partly a function of its cultural fit, not solely its objective availability.

Practical Implications

For multinational organizations, the model suggests that family-supportive policies cannot be transplanted across subsidiaries without cultural calibration. Supervisor training that legitimizes voicing family needs may be more impactful in high power-distance contexts than flexible-schedule policies alone, since the underlying barrier is not resource scarcity but a perceived lack of permission to draw on existing resources. Conversely, in individualistic, low power-distance contexts, autonomy-based resources may be sufficient because employees already feel entitled to negotiate boundaries independently.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper is conceptual rather than empirical, and the proposed pathways require testing through multilevel, multinational survey designs capable of separating individual-level cultural values from national-level cultural context. Future research should also examine within-country heterogeneity, since individualism–collectivism and power distance vary meaningfully across regions, generations, and organizational subcultures within a single nation. Longitudinal designs would further clarify whether cultural pathways shape the onset of conflict, its persistence over time, or both.

Conclusion

Employee engagement is not eroded by work–family conflict in a uniform, culture-free manner. Cultural value orientations shape how conflict is appraised and expressed, while organizational resources determine whether that conflict is absorbed or allowed to spill into disengagement. Moving beyond a single universal model of work–family conflict toward a culturally calibrated, resource-sensitive framework offers a more accurate account of employee engagement in an increasingly global workforce, and a more actionable set of levers for organizations seeking to support employees across diverse cultural settings.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors in this manuscript.

References

1. Allen, T. D., French, K. A., Dumani, S., & Shockley, K. M. (2015). Meta-analysis of work-family conflict and interventions. Journal of Applied Psychology, 100(3), 858-887.
2. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The Job Demands-Resources model: State of the art. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 22(3), 309-328.
3. Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. Academy of Management Review, 10(1), 76-88.
4. Hobfoll, S. E. (2002). Social and psychological resources and adaptation. Review of General Psychology, 6(4), 307-324.
5. Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
6. Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. Academy of Management Journal, 33(4), 692-724.
7. Powell, G. N., Francesco, A. M., & Ling, Y. (2009). Toward culture-sensitive theories of the work-family interface. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 30(5), 597-616.
8. Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25(3), 293-315.
9. Spector, P. E., Allen, T. D., Poelmans, S. A. Y., Lapierre, L. M., Cooper, C. L., O'Driscoll, M., et al. (2007). Cross-national differences in relationships of work demands, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions with work-family conflict. Personnel Psychology, 60(4), 805-835.
10. Triandis, H. C. (1995). Individualism and collectivism. Westview Press.