Otherwise Engaged: The Effects of Individual and Spouses’ Work and Family Engagement on Work Family Outcomes

**Abstract**

Employee Engagement is described as the amount of focused psychological, physical, and affective energy that an employee contributes at work. Although it is widely known to have positive outcomes for the individual and the organization, is it possible for there to be too much of a good thing? The current study investigates one of the primary determinants of work engagement (meaningfulness of work), and the role of each dimension of Engagement (dedication, vigor and absorption) in predicting Work Family outcomes. As new contributions to the body of research, we explore the differences within individuals in how their engagement in the work domain versus their engagement in the family/home domain influences work family outcomes, and how an individual's perceptions interact with his/her spouse's perceptions in influencing conflict and balance. Results show that meaningfulness predicts engagement, that absorption may have negative consequences, and that cross-spouse differences in engagement predicts work family conflict.

*Keywords:* engagement, meaningfulness, work family conflict, work family balance, work family engagement

**Introduction**

In the past decade or two, employee engagement has become an important topic in the Organizational Psychology, Organizational Behavior, and Management literature. When considering work and the productivity of employees, employers cannot help but consider engagement and the role it plays within their organization. Employers often question the extent to which their employees are engaged and how that ultimately translates into work ethic. As the study of engagement has progressed, researchers have begun discussing the importance of determining how employees’ personal life can influence work engagement and how this positively influences employee performance (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2016). As operationalized in the organizational literature, engagement is considered as having employees who are “physically involved, cognitively alert, and emotionally attached” (Rothmann & Baurmann, 2014) and as an “involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work” (Ruslan, Islam, & Noor, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to further explore engagement and the role it plays in peoples’ personal lives and at work.

*Meaningfulness of work and engagement*

There have been conflicting findings on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Trepanier, Fernet, Austin, Forest, & Vallerand 2014; Kahn, 1990; Macy & Schneider, 2008; Saks & Gruman, 2014). One variable that that has been discussed frequently as a possible predictor of engagement is the perceived meaningfulness or purpose derived from one’s job (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Work meaningfulness involves people thinking about why they do what they do and the purpose of their actions in the context of their life. As such, work which is found to have meaning and purpose is likely to increase engagement (Lips-Weirsma & Wright, 2012). Indeed, May et al. (2004) found that psychological safety, psychological availability, and work meaningfulness positively predicted engagement; meaningfulness was the strongest predictor of the three. While meaningfulness has been discussed a great deal in the engagement literature, it has not been examined thoroughly. One of the barriers to investigating the empirical relationship between meaningfulness and engagement has been a lack of clarity in what constitutes meaningfulness at work and a lack of carefully constructed and validated measures of the construct. Recently, there has been a segment of research that more clearly and fully defines meaningfulness and attempts to measure it. In 2015, Bailey and colleagues conducted a synthesis of 214 studies focused on the meaning, antecedents, and outcomes of engagement and suggested that the meaning of engagement and its antecedents were related to meaningfulness, though the relationship between meaningfulness and engagement was not directly tested. In addition, in the past few years Lips-Wiersma and colleagues (2012)have conducted qualitative and quantitative research to carefully define meaningfulness of work and to develop validated measures of meaningfulness that show evidence of capturing not only the ‘what’ of meaningfulness is but also which factors bring it about at work (the ‘how’ of meaningfulness). Accordingly, meaningfulness is defined as, “the value of work goals or purpose, judging by the individual’s own ideals or standards” (May et al., 2004) and as “the degree to which life makes emotional sense and that the demands confronted by them are perceived as being worth of energy investment and commitment’ (Korotkov, 1998). If the demands of work (and home) are considered to be worth energy investment (e.g. meaningful) then individuals are likely to *engage* in this investment at work (and at home). Given the number of researchers who suggest that employees will be more engaged when they have meaning in their lives (Bailey et. al., 2015; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012), and the recent development of construct valid measures of meaningfulness at work, the initial purpose of our research is to investigate the relationship between meaningfulness and engagement.

*Hypothesis 1*: Employees who report higher levels of meaningfulness (as work and at home) will have higher levels of work-engagement.

*Work family conflict and engagement*

While work engagement has been regarded as a goal or a positive outcome in the research, it is also possible that there may be occasions where there is ‘too much of a good thing’. For example, employees who are maximally engaged at work might compromise some of their home/family life. Although there are various operationalized definitions of employee engagement, Bailey et al. (2015) reported that the most common in the literature-base treats engagement as a “positive state of mind directed toward work tasks (p.4)” and comprised of three dimensions. The first dimension, vigor, describes the level at which employees are demonstrably energetic, persevere through challenges, and apply themselves at work. The second dimension, dedication, measures whether employees are inspired and challenged by, proud of, and excited about their work and their job. Finally, absorption assesses the degree to which workers become so engrossed in their work that time is perceived to rapidly slip away (Bailey et al., 2015). By some accounts, the predominant elements of engagement are vigor and dedication, while absorption has been seen as a secondary characteristic which only manifests in detailed interviews (Gan & Gan, 2013).

Bailey et al. (2015) review several competing theories of engagement, such as: personal role engagement (Kahn, 1990), multidimensional engagement (Saks, 2006), engagement as an attitude and behavior (Swanberg et al., 2011), engagement as a management technique (Jha & Kumar, 2016), and self-engagement directed at meeting performance goals (Britt, Castro, & Adler, 2005). The dedication/vigor/absorption conception is the most popular, as it is represented prominently in the literature. Furthermore, this definition of engagement is known to be the opposite of burnout. Indeed, the burnout components of exhaustion, which refer to 1) overwhelming demands, 2) of cynicism or emotional detachment from others, and of 3) inefficacy or actual and perceived weakened work performance due to emotional exhaustion, are recognized as the opposites of vigor, dedication, and absorption. As employees become more involved in their work and dedicate more of their energies and resources, they could either become be more likely to become either engaged or burnt out depending on the circumstances and responses to involvement. The conceptualizations of engagement and burnout feature opposite characteristics, as engaged individuals demonstrate high emotional energy and burnt out individuals have low emotional energy (Gan & Gan, 2013). It has been suggested that the dualistic model of passion determines which outcome prevails (Trepanier et al., 2013) – engagement or burnout.

The *dualistic model of passion* emphasizes the importance of how work tasks are “internalized into one’s identity, (i.e. ‘taking in’ the activity and its associated values; Gagne & Deci, 2005)”. This determines whether employees experience harmonious passion, which predicts engagement, or obsessive passion, which predicts burnout. People feeling harmonious passionate people apply themselves to their work without feeling obliged to do so because work does not constitute their entire identity. This facilitates easier detachment from work, allowing workers to experience greater enjoyment of additional aspects of life (such as family life) outside the workplace, because they do not feel like work dominantly defines who they are. Harmonious passion predicts better well-being, job satisfaction, and positive affect, as well as low burnout (Trepanier et al, 2013). Conversely, obsessive passion, thought to occur when work is the primary source of a person’s identity, leads employees to emotional exhaustion. Although obsessively passionate people have a penchant for their work, the way they dysfunctionally internalize stress from job demands prevents them from thoroughly enjoying their work, diminishes energy, promotes negative affect, and leaves them struggling to detach from work. This causes conflict between work and other areas of their lives, such as work-family conflict (Trepanier et al, 2013).

Considering the above, it seems that while the dedication and vigor components of engagement are additive, such that more dedication, pride, and energy lead to better outcomes, the absorption component may lead to work-family conflict. When one loses track of time and gets caught up in his/her work, it is here where there most consequentially may be a cost to other areas of one’s life. Indeed, one study found that highly engaged employees were more likely to experience work family conflict as these individuals devoted their time and energy to their workplace beyond what is basically necessary (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2016).

A great deal of research has found that engagement in work and family contexts may be mutually beneficial in a variety of contexts and job types, and influenced by a host of variables (Annor, 2016; Qing & Zhou, 2017; Sprung & Jex, 2017; Wayne, Casper, Matthews & Allen, 2013; Zhou & Buehler, 2016). Feeling balance between work and home means that employees are (or perceive they are) meeting the demands of both work and of home (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007), and work family conflict is defined has having time, strain or behavioral conflicts between the demands of work and those in one’s personal life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It is possible that a person can, to at least some degree depending on one’s energy levels and personal capacity, be dedicated and have vigor for work while still having balance between home and work demands. However, the level of engrossment in one arena is likely to conflict with demands in the other arena such that increased absorption at work is likely to increase work-family conflict and decrease work-family balance. As such, we predict a negative relationship between the absorption facet of engagement and work-family balance and a positive relationship between absorption and work family conflict, and a positive relationship between the vigor and dedication facets and WFB and a negative relationship with WFC.

*Hypothesis 2a:* The absorption component of work engagement will negatively relate to work-family balance and will positive relate to work-family conflict.

*Hypothesis 2b:* The dedication component of work engagement will positively relate to work-family balance and will negatively relate to work-family conflict.

*Hypothesis 2c:* The vigor component of work engagement will positively relate to work-family balance and will negatively relate to work-family conflict.

*Intra-individual Differences between Home and Work Engagement*

In the study, we examine an employee’s engagement in his/her work as it relates to meaningfulness of work and to work family conflict and balance. Inherent in this relationship – but not explicitly studied in any literature – is one’s perceived engagement in home life. One contribution of the current research is our parallel measurement of engagement in each of these two contexts: engagement in work and engagement in home. Given that work-family conflict considers the conflict in demands between home life and work life, it could be that as an individual comes closer to having equivalent levels of engagement in both domains, he/she will experience more conflict; more engagement in both arenas might mean more conflict between the two contexts. Or, it could be that when employees are more deeply engaged in one domain at the expense of another, this introduces more feelings of conflict. Hence, we pose the following research question:

*Research question 1*: How do intra-individual differences between engagement at work and engagement at home affect an individual’s perceived work-life conflict?

We also acknowledge that with variables involving work and family interactions, an individual's experiences and attitudes should not be considered in isolation. Instead, we surmise that an employee's situation at home, including their relationship with their spouse, influences the level of work-family conflict and the ability to balance between domains. In other words, measuring only one spouse’s engagement and sense of balance is considering half of the home dynamic. It would seem valuable to explore differences between spouses’ engagement at work as well as partner differences between home engagement in order to influence whether having similar levels of engagement or highly different levels of engagement are more likely to result in higher or lower levels of work-family conflict and balance. Several studies have found that work-family conflict and balance levels of one spouse influences the degree of marriage satisfaction for that spouse and the other partner (Hammer, Cullen, Neal, Sinclair, & Shafiro, 2005; Liu, Ngo, Cheung, 2016; Zheng et. al. 2015). While not specifically looking at differences between partners work engagement, these findings suggest that that partner dynamics can be related to work family issues. In the current research, we examine how partner differences in work-engagement influence their degrees of work life balance.

*Research Question 2*: How do partner differences in work engagement

affect the couple’s work life balance?

*Research Question 2a*: How do partner differences in home engagement

affect the couple’s work life balance?

**Methods**

*Participants*

To qualify for the study, individuals must have been in a dual-income family, with both partners working at least part time and having at least one child under the age of 18. Participants who met this description were recruited in one of two ways. First, researchers utilized a snowball sampling approach by contacting close friends, family, and local institutions that had access to such individuals (e.g., day care centers); accordingly, anyone who was contacted was encouraged to share the survey with his/her spouse/partner and to refer additional people who met qualifying criteria. Participants were also recruited through Qualtrics’ Panel Services. The vendor identified couples who met selection criteria and managed their timely completion of the survey. In exchange for participation, Panel Service respondents were compensated for their time and effort.

Data were collected from 386 individuals, with 155 having complete partner data. Within the sample, 44% were men and 56% were women. The average participant age was between 30-39 years of age, and ranged from under 20 years old to 60 or older. 95% reported being married, 4% were in domestic partnerships, and 2% were single but living with a significant other. In terms of employment, 86% reported working full time (categories of ’36 to 40’ hours per week and higher). Participants’ occupations were highly varied, with roles including office and administrative support occupations, education, training, and library occupations, healthcare support occupations, computer and mathematical occupations, personal care and service occupations, business and financial operations occupations, management occupations, sales and related occupations, legal operations, food preparation occupations, life, physical, and social science occupations arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations, personal care and service occupations, protective service occupations, installation, maintenance, and repair occupations, farming, fishing, and forestry occupations, architecture and engineering occupations, construction and extraction occupations, and transportation and materials moving occupations. Most participants (24%) reported a household income between $75,000 and $100,000, 18% earned less than $50,000 in their household, 19% earned between $100,000 and $125,000, 10% earned between $125,000 and $150,000, 4% earned between $150,000-$175,000, 7% earned between $175,000-$200,000, and 13% earned more than $200,000. Most participants (33%) reported having a bachelor’s degree, 4% had less than a high school degree, 16% had a high school degree, 13% had some college without a degree, 22% had an associate’s degree, and 13% have a graduate degree. The average number of children per couple was 2 (ranging from 1 to 5 children), with children’s ages ranging from less than a year to 24 years old (those with adult children also had to have a child under 18 and still living at home).

*Procedure*

In the snowball sampling recruitment method, individuals were sent a message via e-mail inviting them to participate in the study. The text of the e-mail message detailed the general purpose of the survey, estimated time of completion, a link where individuals could access additional information, the informed consent statement, and a link to continue to the survey itself. These participants were asked to invite their spouse/partner to complete the survey, and were encouraged to share the survey with other people who fit the qualifying criteria.

With the Qualtrics Panel population, the research team shared the online survey and all qualifying criteria with the vendor’s project manager, who sourced participants from their participant pool. They specifically recruited couples, where each partner completed his/her half of the survey in turn.

Participants from each sampling method were instructed to complete the survey without their spouse/partner in the room. The goal of including this statement in the survey was to increase honest responses from each individual partner. All participants completed the survey online and were thanked for their participation.

*Materials*

The online survey collected a host of demographic and personal background information. These included gender, age, education, marital status, the number of children and their ages, race, religious affiliation, household income, occupation, and hours spent a week working. In addition, participants were asked to rate the level of importance they placed on various life values (on a scale of 1 to 5, from “not at all important” to “extremely important”): marriage/relationship, children, friends, education, work, volunteer service, health/fitness, travel, hobbies, religion, and wealth. The following validated measures were used to test the study’s hypotheses.

*Meaningfulness of Work*.

As discussed above, Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) identified four important dimensions for meaningful work: developing the inner self, unity with others, service to others, and expressing full potential.  These four dimensions are measured by 28 items. Cronbach’s alpha for the overall instrument is .94. The first dimension, *Developing Inner Self*, is dependent upon an individual's unique perspective on the world and is defined as wanting to be a good person, or becoming the best an individual can be. Examples of the three items from this dimension include “At work we face up to reality,” “I feel inspired at work,” and “In this work I have the time and space to think.” This subscale Cronbach’s alpha was .82. The second dimension, *Unity with Others*, refers to the Meaningfulness of Working together with other individuals through a common bond of shared values and belonging. A sample item is, “We openly talk about our values when we make a decision.” There are six items in this dimension, and the Cronbach’s alphas was found to be .92. The third dimension, *Expressing Full Potential*, is focused on expressing talents, creativity and having a sense of achievement. It is different from developing the inner self in that it is active and outward directed, whereas the former is inward and reflective. An example item is “I create and apply new ideas or concepts”.  There are four items in this dimension, and the Cronbach’s alpha was .86. The final major dimension is *Serving Others*, which describes meaningfulness derived from making a contribution to the wellbeing of others on both and individual level and, on a larger level, the world. There are four items in this dimension, and one sample item is “I feel I truly help our customers/clients”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .85. Of the three additional dimensions, *Inspiration* describes the drive and creativity of an individual to achieve goals and balance and is measured by four items. An example item is, “The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future.” The Cronbach’s alpha for *Inspiration* was .87. On the other hand, *Reality* describes the practical perceptions that one feels and maintains in pursuit of these goals and balance. Of the three items, an example is “We recognize that life is messy and that is OK.” The Cronbach’s alpha for *Reality* was .74. Finally, *Balancing Tensions* nicely wraps this balance continuum by describing the conflicts individuals face in being and doing. Four items make up this scale, and an example is “I have a good balance between the needs of others and my own needs.” The Cronbach’s alpha for *Balancing Tensions* was .86.

*Meaningfulness at Home*. To examine participants’ perceived meaningfulness of home life in a way that is parallel to his/her perceived meaningfulness at work, the researchers adapted the 28-item Meaningfulness of Work scale to relate to home life. For example, *Meaningfulness of Work* item “The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future” was rewritten as “Regarding my family/personal life, how we live makes me feel hopeful about the future.” The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 94. *Developing Inner Self* Cronbach’s alpha .88. *Unity with Others* Cronbach’s alpha .94. *Expressing Full Potential* Cronbach’s alpha .87. *Serving Others* Cronbach’s alpha .83. *Inspiration* Cronbach’s alpha .88. *Balancing Tensions* Cronbach’s alpha .89.

*Work-Family Conflict*. Levels of Work Family Conflict were assessed using an 18 item 7-point agreement scale instrument developed by Carlson, Kacmar & Williams (2000). The scale consists of two, nine-item subscales that attempt to measure Family Interfering with Work (e.g. “Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work”) (Cronbach’s alpha .93) and Work Interfering with Family (e.g. “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like”) (Cronbach’s alpha .92). Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .96 for the entire work-family conflict scale.

*Work-Family Enrichment* was measured with an 18-item scale developed by Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, and Grzywacz (2006). Whereas the Work-Family Conflict scale is based on the interference of one domain on the success of the other, this Work Family Enrichment scale is based on the facilitation of one domain from the other domain. Examples of items include “My involvement in my work helps me acquire skills, and this helps me be a better family member” and “My involvement in my family puts me in a good mood, and this helps me be a better worker.” Similar to the Work-Family Conflict scale, the Work Family Enrichment scale includes two subscales: Work-to-Family Enrichment and Family-to-Work Enrichment. Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .95 for the entire enrichment scale.

*Work-Family* *Balance* was measured with a 6-item scale developed by Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska (2009).  Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements on a 5-point Likert-style agreement scale. Sample items include, “I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family” and “My co-workers and members of my family would say that I am meeting their expectations.” Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .90.

*Work Engagement* was measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006), which was reported in a recent review to be the most widely used measure of Employee Engagement in the literature base (Bailey et al., 2015). The UWES is comprised of 17 items, where participants are asked to indicate how often they experience a series of feelings on the job using a 7-point scale, ranging from 1, never to 5, everyday). There are three subscales in the UWES: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor relates to energy, resilience, and the willingness to invest effort and persist. Sample items include: “At work, I feel bursting with energy,” and “At my job, I am very resilient, mentally.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was found to be .89. Dedication is deriving a sense of pride and satisfaction from one’s work. Sample items include “My job inspires me,” and “I am proud of the work that I do.” Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .90. Finally, absorption is being “totally and happily immersed in one’s work.” Sample items include “When I am working, I forget everything else around me” and “Time flies when I’m working.” Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .87. The overall aggregate engagement scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .95.

*Family Engagement*. To examine participants’ engagement in home/family life in a way that is parallel to his/her engagement at work, the researchers adapted the UWES to relate to home life. For example, the Work Engagement item “I am immersed in my work” was adapted to “I am immersed in my home life.” The vigor subscale of family engagement had a Cronbach’s alpha of .89. The dedication subscale of family engagement had a Cronbach’s alpha of .73. The absorption component of the family engagement scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .85. Finally, the family engagement scale as a whole had a Cronbach’s alpha of .94.

*Recoding process for Engagement partner comparisons.* Difference score variables were calculated for each item, subscale, and scale scores. Female scores were subtracted from male scores for all variable calculations. For gay couples one person in the partnership was randomly chosen as partner 1. Mean difference variables were calculated for the scale overall, subtracting overall mean score for females from male partner overall mean score. The absolute value of differences was used as the variable such that the size but not the direction (e.g. male had higher scores than females vs. females has higher scores than males) was considered in analyses.

*Recoding process for intra-individual differences.* Difference variables were calculated for each participant’s home and work engagement item scores, subscale scores and total scale scores for the following variables; work dedication and family dedication, work vigor and family vigor, work absorption and family absorption and work meaningfulness and family meaningfulness. The absolute value of differences was used as the variable such that the size but not the direction (e.g. work or home engagement was higher or lower) was considered in analyses.

**Results**

In order to assess the predicted relationships between variables, we used multiple regression to analyze our hypotheses and research questions. Means for the Meaningfulness of work scale and facets, work and home engagement and facets, and work family conflict, balance and enrichment are presented in Table 1.

*Hypothesis 1* assessed the aggregate of the Work Meaningfulness subscales (WM) as a positive predictor of work engagement (WE) (See Table 2) and was found to be significant, (β = .66, *t*(381) = 17.14, *R*2 = .50, *p* < .01). When looking at the work meaningfulness facets, it was found that four of the seven facets were significant predictor of WE; Unity with others was a significant predictor of WE, (β = .28, *t*(374) = 3.26, *.p* < .01); as was Expressing one’s full potential, (β = .35, *t*(374) = 3.66, *p* < .001); Developing one’s self, (β = -.08, *t*(374) = -2.13, *p*<.05); and Inspiration at work, (β = .34, *t*(374) = 5.17, *p* < .001). Neither the Ability to Serve Others (β = -.11, *t*(374) = -1.18, *p* > .05), the balance of ‘Dreaming’ with reality (β = .09, *t*(374) = 1.30, *p* > .05) or the Balance between self and others predicted (β = .08, *t*(374) = 1.55, *p* > .05) Work Engagement. Overall, the results support to Hypothesis 1 that meaningfulness of work would predict being engaged in one’s work.

*Hypothesis 2*a: explored our prediction that the absorption component of WE would negatively predict work-family balance (WFB), and positively predict work-family conflict (WFC) (See Tables 3 and 4). Multiple regression analysis revealed that the absorption component of WE was, indeed, a significant predictor of WFC, (β = .73, *t*(376) = 7.55, *p* < .001). In Addition, Absorption also had a negative effect on WFB, β = -.489, *t*(376) = -5.246, *p* < .001.

*Hypothesis 2b*: explored our prediction that the Dedication component of WE would have a negative effect on WFC and positive effect on WFB. Our hypothesis was supported in that Dedication had a negative effect on WFC (β = -.34, *t*(376) = -3.36, *p* < .01) and had a positive effect on WFB (β = .27, *t*(376) = 2.71, *p* < .001).

*Hypothesis 2c*: explored our prediction that the Vigor component of WFC would have a negative effect on WFC and a positive effect on WFB. The results supported our hypothesis in that vigor was found to have a negative effect on WFC (β = .27, *t*(376) = 2.71, *p* < .001) and a positive effect on WFB (β = .55, *t*(376) = 5.21, *p* < .01).

Overall, the three facets of engagement were considered predictors of WFC providing support for Hypothesis 2. Higher levels of absorption predicted higher levels of work family conflict and lower levels of work family balance, while higher levels of dedication and vigor predicted lower work family conflict and higher levels of work family balance. Absorption held the highest β weight, suggesting that perhaps the absorption component of engagement may play the biggest role in family conflict.

*Research Question 1* investigated the how individual differences in between Work Engagement (WE) and Home Engagement (HE) relate to a person’s level of Work-family conflict (See Tables 5 and 6). The results indicated when measuring scale level (mean difference between entire Work Engagement and Home Engagement Scale means) intra-individual differences in engagement, that the size of the differences did not significantly predict WF,C (β = .02, *t*(378) = .29, *R*2 = -.002, *p* > .05). However, when looking at the intra-individual differences on the facets of engagement, differences between home and work vigor and home and work absorption were found to be significant predictors of WFC (vigor, β = .19, *t*(376) = 2.18, *p* < .05; absorption, β = -.27, *t*(376) = -3.18, *p* < .05). Dedication was found to be nonsignificant (β=.09, *t*(376)= 1.10, *p >.*05). These findings suggest that greater intra-individual differences in vigor predict higher levels of WFC, whereas larger partner differences in absorption lead to less WFC.

Scale level intra-individual differences between work engagement and home engagement predicted Work Family Balance (WFB) (β = -.16, *t*(378) = -3.23, *R*2 = .02, *p* < .05). Additionally, differences between WE and HE at the facet level were significant predictors of WFB (dedication, β = -.16, *t*(376) = -2.10, *p* < .05, vigor, β = -.18, *t*(376) = -2.05, *p* < .05, absorption, β = .17, *t*(376) = 2.08, *p* < .05). Larger differences between work and home dedication and vigor predicted lower work-family balance whereas larger differences between work and home absorption meant increased work family balance. Together the results of our analysis suggest that intra-individual differences in home and work engagement predict work family balance and work family conflict.

*Research Question 2* investigated the relationship between the inter-individual (between the couple) differences between Work Engagement and WFC, WFB, and WFE and inter-individual differences between Family Engagement and the work family variables (See Tables 7, 8 and 9). At the scale level, the inter-individual differences in WE were a significant negative predictor of WFC, (β = -.13, *t*(306) = -2.31, *R*2 = .01, *p* < .05), with larger differences between partners on WE predicting lower levels of WFC. The inter-individual differences in FE were not significant predictors of WFC, (β = .09, *t*(306) = 1.56, *R*2 = .01, *p* > .05). The inter-individual differences in WE were found to be a significant negative predictor of WFB, (β = -.16, *t*(306) = -2.87, *R*2 = .02, *p* < .05), with larger differences between partners between WE predicting less work family balance. Inter-individual differences in FE were also a significant predictor of WFB, (β = -.24, *t*(306) = -4.39, *R*2 = .06, *p* < .01), with larger differences between family engagement between partners predicting less work family balance. Finally, WE and FE partner differences were both significant predictors of WFE; (WE, β = -.39, *t*(306) = -7.30, *R*2 = .15, *p* < .01; FE, β = -.28, *t*(306) = -5.09, *R*2 = .08, *p* < .01), with larger differences between partners in Family Engagement and larger differences between partners in Work Engagement predicting less work family enrichment. These findings suggest that partner differences in work engagement both lessen conflict and lessen balance and enrichment, and that larger differences between Family Engagement can lessen Work-family Balance and Enrichment.

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| **Table 1** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations* | | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Variable | *M* | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Work Meaningfulness | 3.85 | 0.66 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Unity | 4.00 | 0.84 | .865\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Serving | 4.19 | 0.76 | .789\*\* | .624\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Expressing | 3.94 | 0.83 | .847\*\* | .693\*\* | .698\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Developing | 3.88 | 1.08 | .369\*\* | .298\*\* | .205\*\* | .199\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Reality | 3.74 | 0.85 | .634\*\* | .456\*\* | .451\*\* | .427\*\* | .082 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Inspiration | 3.52 | 1.00 | .847\*\* | .640\*\* | .656\*\* | .732\*\* | .067 | .542\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Balance | 3.57 | 0.93 | .764\*\* | .585\*\* | .468\*\* | .581\*\* | .096 | .471\*\* | .675\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Work Engagement | 4.85 | 1.26 | .660\*\* | .570\*\* | .480\*\* | .616\*\* | .035 | .427\*\* | .663\*\* | .543\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dedication | 5.05 | 1.35 | .704\*\* | .576\*\* | .543\*\* | .643\*\* | .118\* | .453\*\* | .703\*\* | .545\*\* | .940\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Vigor | 4.89 | 1.28 | .661\*\* | .580\*\* | .459\*\* | .608\*\* | .051 | .410\*\* | .652\*\* | .569\*\* | .957\*\* | .868\*\* |  |  |  |  |  |
| Absorption | 4.65 | 1.35 | .527\*\* | .473\*\* | .377\*\* | .513\*\* | -.054 | .358\*\* | .543\*\* | .439\*\* | .946\*\* | .824\*\* | .852\*\* |  |  |  |  |
| Work Family Conflict | 2.70 | 0.92 | -.193\*\* | -.132 | -.147\*\* | -.096 | -.504\*\* | -.032 | -.037 | -.079 | .060 | -.021 | .002 | .174\*\* |  |  |  |
| Work Family Balance | 4.16 | 0.62 | .421\*\* | .328\*\* | .356\*\* | .369\*\* | .220\*\* | .183\*\* | .339\*\* | .358\*\* | .318\*\* | .345\*\* | .369\*\* | .203\*\* | -.252\*\* |  |  |
| Work Family Enrichment | 3.88 | 0.67 | .631\*\* | .506\*\* | .468\*\* | .551\*\* | .161\*\* | .360\*\* | .621\*\* | .544\*\* | .577\*\* | .577\*\* | .585\*\* | .484\*\* | -.074 | .620\*\* |  |
| *Note.* \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01 | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| **Table 2** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Engagement* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| Work Meaningfulness | .66\*\* | .074 |
| R² | .434 |  |
| Unity | .184\*\* | .085 |
| Serving | -.065 | .093 |
| Expression | .229\*\* | .095 |
| Development | -.082\* | .045 |
| Reality | .058 | .066 |
| Inspiration | .340\*\* | .083 |
| Balance | .081 | .071 |
| R² | .498 |  |
| *\* p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01, |  |  |

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| **Table 3** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Conflict* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| Absorption | .730\* | .065 |
| Dedication | -.343\* | .069 |
| Vigor | -.321\* | .079 |
| R² | .126 |  |
| *\* p* < .01 |  |  |

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| **Table 4** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Balance* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| Absorption | -.489\* | .043 |
| Dedication | .266\* | .045 |
| Vigor | .554\* | .052 |
| R² | .191 |  |
| *\* p* < .01 |  |  |

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| **Table 5** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Conflict* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| IdE | .015 | .053 |
| R² | -.002 |  |
| IdE Absoption | -.265\* | .072 |
| IdE Dedication | .086 | .077 |
| IdE Vigor | .191\* | .089 |
| R² | .021 |  |
| *Note. IdE = Intraindividual differences in Engagement* | | |
| *\* p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01, |  |  |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 6** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Balance* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| IdE Overall | -.164\*\* | .036 |
| R² | .024 |  |
| IdE Absoption | .173\* | .049 |
| IdE Dedication | -.162\* | .052 |
| IdE Vigor | -.179\* | .060 |
| R² | .036 |  |
| *Note. IdE = Intraindividual differences in Engagement* | | |
| *\* p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01, |  |  |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 7** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Conflict* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| InterWE Overall | -.131\* | .060 |
| R² | .014 |  |
| InterFE Overall | .089 | .085 |
| R² | .005 |  |
| *Note. InterWE = Interindividual differences in Work Engagement; InterFE = Interindividual differences in Family Engagement* | | |
| *\* p* < .05 |  |  |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 8** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Balance* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| InterWE Overall | -.162\* | .039 |
| R² | .023 |  |
| InterFE Overall | -.243\* | .055 |
| R² | .056 |  |
| *Note. InterWE = Interindividual differences in Work Engagement; InterFE = Interindividual differences in Family Engagement* | | |
| \* *p* < .01, |  |  |

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| **Table 9** |  |  |
| *Linear regression predicting Work Family Enrichment* | | |
| Variables | *B* | SE |
| InterWE Overall | -.385\* | .040 |
| R² | .146 |  |
| InterFE Overall | -.279\* | .059 |
| R² | .075 |  |
| *Note. InterWE = Interindividual differences in Work Engagement; InterFE = Interindividual differences in Family Engagement* | | |
| \* *p* < .01, |  |  |

**Discussion**

*Findings*

The purpose of the current research was to investigate the antecedents and consequences of engagement, empirically investigating how measures of meaningfulness relate to work engagement, explore how facets of engagement relate to work-family measures, and determine how potential intra-individual and inter-individual differences in engagement influence work family conflict, balance, and enrichment. Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature by applying a well-developed and validated current treatment of Meaningfulness of Work in investigating its relationship to engagement. Analysis of our first hypothesis reveals that work meaningfulness positively predicts work engagement. Unity with Others, Expressing One’s Full Potential, Developing One’s Self, and Inspiration at Work facets of meaningfulness predicted engagement, while the Ability to Serve Others, Balance Dreaming with Reality, and Balance Between Consideration of Self and Others meaningfulness facets did not. Our results reinforce and extend what is currently known about employee engagement. After all, meaningfulness was one of the three determinants in the modern coverage of engagement (Kahn, 1990).

A great majority of employee engagement research has focused on the benefits of being cognitively, attitudinally, and behaviorally invested at work. Analysis of hypothesis 2 of the current study suggests that this may be too much of a good thing. Specifically, as individuals become more absorbed in their work (e.g. behaviorally speaking, they lose track of time and get ‘caught up’ in their work), there may be unintended negative consequences in the work/family domain. The present study finds that engagement predicts work family conflict as we predicted in Hypothesis 2, but that whether the relationship is negative or positive depends on the facet of engagement assessed. We found the absorption facet of engagement was related to higher conflict and less balance while the vigor and dedication facets were related to less conflict and more balance.

In addition to our hypotheses, we also examined several research questions, the first of which asked whether intra-individual differences between one’s engagement at work and his/her engagement at home would influence perceived work family conflict and balance. Results from analysis of this research question indicated that the more individuals differ in their levels of work and home vigor (facets of engagement), the more likely they are to report more work family conflict and the more individuals differ in home and work absorption the less likely they are to report work family conflict. Larger differences between overall work and overall home engagement and in work and home dedication and vigor predicted lower work-family balance whereas larger differences between work and home absorption meant increased work family balance. The second research question investigated the influence of partner differences between engagement (home engagement and work engagement respectively) on work family conflict and balance and found greater differences predicted less work family conflict and balance.

*Theoretical and Practical Implications*

There was a negative relationship between the size of the partner differences in work engagement and work family conflict, work family balance, and work family enrichment. While researchers of work-family constructs note that work-Family Balance is not simply an absence of conflict or evidence of enrichment but is its own distinct concept, in much of the work family research finds the factors that increase balance decrease conflict and vice versa. As such these results do conflict the literature in that increased differences between partners were predictive of both less conflict *and* less balance and enrichment.This could be related to the direction of those partner differences or other moderating factors, and as such, these relationships should be further studied.

Our analyses also found that the absorption facet of engagement is positively related to work-family conflict, but that dedication and vigor are negatively related to work family conflict. The differences in results occurring depending particular facet of engagement may be related to differences between harmonious and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion is bolstered by job resources, which are favorable aspects of work that promote better job performance and help employees triumph over job demands that could lead to obsessive passion. For example, unity among coworkers produces feelings of security and camaraderie from having a supportive network, which relates to harmonious passion, and this can relate to their dedication at work (Fernet, Austin, Trepanier, & Dussalt, 2013; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008). Employees who feel inspired at work, who derive a sense of satisfaction and pride from doing work they believe is worthwhile can feel harmonious passion (Vallerand, 2010) resulting in vigor and dedication to work. Detaching from work when at home may be easier for those who have harmoniously passionate because they enjoy their jobs and therefore apply themselves at work without feeling forced to do so. Individuals could alternatively be characterized by having obsessive passion, which case would indicate employees have too much absorption and engagement levels have become ‘too much of a good thing’ and prevent employees from detaching from work while at home. This is may be because of the way obsessively passionate people absorb their job into their identity (Vallerand & Houlfort, 2003). For example, obsessively passionate people may hold a job because it increases their sense of self-worth. When their work has been absorbed into their identity, they are constantly engrossed in their job even if they are at home, resulting in conflict between work and other areas of life, and ultimately draining their energy (Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010). In this way, harmonious passion gives employees more energy, while obsessive passion eventually exhausts them (Trepanier et al., 2013). Therefore, employees’ family lives benefit from dedication and vigor at work, but according to our results family life suffers from work absorption. This could mean that there is a curvilinear relationship between work engagement and work-family conflict and balance instead of a linear one. This relationship should be examined more closely.

Finally, the greater the differences between partners in their work engagement, the less likely they were to experience both work family balance and work family conflict. These findings contradict other research on work family conflict, which in general has found that variables that relate negatively to work-family conflict relate positively to work family balance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003).Future research should investigate whether the direction of the partner differences (e.g. whether mothers or fathers are higher or lower than their partner in work engagement and home engagement) influences the nature of the relationship between the partner differences and work-family variables. Further investigation may also investigate whether gender, race, or other variables influence the form of the relationship. Spillover, compensatory or segregation work-life models might suggest different relationships between partner similarities and differences on work engagement and work family conflict and balance (Barber, Taylor, Burton, & Bailey, 2017; Madsen & Hammond, 2005; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Perhaps a study designed comparing two or more of these models can explain the seeming contradictory relationships.

*Limitations and Future Directions*

Although our research makes important contributions to the engagement literature regarding its relationship to meaningfulness and work family variables, as with all research it has some limitations.Our research is subject to social desirability bias because our data were collected through self-reports. Although anonymity was established, which theoretically serves to reduce social desirability, it is possible that some participants worried that their partners might see their responses, and that this influenced their responses. Further, self-reports pose a risk of common method variance, particularly because participants typically responded in one sitting.Our study found that the size of differences between partners on work engagement negatively related to both work family conflict and balance, which contradicts with much research in the work-family arena. Future research should investigate mediating and moderating variables that could be influencing these relationships. Future research should also investigate partner differences in intra-individual differences between work and home engagement to see how they relate to meaningfulness and work family variables.

While not perfect, this research was an important start in solidifying the theoretically established relationship between meaningfulness of work and work engagement. It also was the first investigation of the relationship between the absorption, dedication and vigor facets of work engagement and work family conflict and balance, and in investigating how similarities and differences between home engagement and work engagement and partner differences in engagement (home and work) predict work family variables. Our research was innovative in comparing engagement at work to engagement at home and in comparing partner similarities and differences in engagement. Future research should continue to investigate how meaningfulness of work influences engagement and how engagement in turn influence work family variables and how partner differences influence these relationships.

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