

Work engagement: A double-edged sword? A study on the relationship between work engagement and the work-home interaction (0185)

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The aim of this study was to investigate the possible costs and benefits of work engagement to academics' work-home balance. A lack of such a balance, typically defined as increased work-home conflict, has been shown to cause adverse outcomes for both individuals and organizations (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Studies have indicated that academics may be especially vulnerable to such interrole conflict as enhanced demands and workloads cause employees in the academic sector to stretch their work time (Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006). This has been further found to increase their levels of stress and work-home conflict (Bell, Rajendran, & Theiler, 2012; Pejtersen, Kristensen, Borg, & Bjorner, 2010). Examining the effects of work engagement on academics' work-home balance may therefore be of particular relevance.

Work engagement has become a popular concept both in business and in academic research due to its relationship with a number of positive organizational outcomes; such as increased employee performance (Christensen, Dyrstad, & Innstrand, 2015), organizational commitment (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008), and well-being (Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). However, although work engagement has been defined as a positive psychological state consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), researchers have noted one potential downside to engagement. They question whether employees may become so engrossed in their work that this negatively affects other parts of their lives, such as their work-home balance (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009). Others have argued that since highly engaged employees usually are in a positive mood and have better access to job resources, they are likely to experience a positive work-home balance through increased work-home facilitation (Culbertson, Mills, & Fullagar, 2012; Siu et al., 2010). Rodríguez-Muñoz, Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, and Bakker (2014) therefore call for more research on this subject in order to "better understand how work engagement relates to experiences lived outside the work domain" (p. 279).

Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a theoretical framework, the present study contributes to existing research in several ways. Firstly, when

examining the relationship between engagement and the work-home interaction, few studies have included both the positive (i.e. facilitating) and negative (i.e. conflict) aspects of the intercept between work and home life (Hakanen, Rodríguez-Sánchez, & Perhoniemi, 2012; Hakanen & Peeters, 2015). Furthermore, few studies have examined which parts of engagement are most important to this intercept. Considering that studies have found that the work engagement subscale, absorption, can be related to another negative type of heavy work investment, namely workaholism (Hakanen et al., 2012), examining the subscales of engagement separately might provide a deeper insight into its relationship with the work-home interaction. Using a large sample of academic workers from the university sector in Norway, the present study therefore examines how feelings of vigor, dedication, and absorption at work affects employees' work-home interaction.

*Hypothesis 1:* Work engagement (i.e. vigor, dedication, absorption) is significantly related to work-home facilitation (WHF)

*Hypothesis 2:* Work engagement (i.e. vigor, dedication, absorption) is significantly related to work-home conflict (WHC)

## Methods

The data for this study stems from a work environment and climate study, developed by and for the university sector in Norway, called the ARK Intervention Program (Norwegian acronym for "Working environment and working climate surveys").

**Sample.** A total of 4378 respondents were included in the analyses. The participants consisted of employees working as research personnel in the university sector in Norway. Of these 56.5 per cent ( $n = 2474$ ) were men and 45.5 per cent ( $n = 1903$ ) were women. Most of the participants were between the age of 50-59 (28%), 40-49 (27%), and 30-39 (19%).

**Measures.** The items used for the purpose of this study consisted of 9 items measuring work engagement (i.e. vigor, dedication, and absorption) from the UWES scale developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova (2006). Work-home facilitation and work-home conflict and was measured using 8 items from a scale developed by Wayne et al. (2004) and adapted for use in Norway by Innstrand et al. (2009).

**Statistical analysis.** A PLS-SEM analysis was conducted in order to test the effects of the work engagement subscales (i.e. vigor, dedication, and absorption), as well as the control variables (i.e. gender and age), on the outcome variables. The PLS-SEM model was analyzed

and interpreted sequentially in two stages, by first examining the measurement model, followed by an assessment of the structural model. This was to ensure that the measures were valid and reliable before attempting to draw conclusions regarding the relationships among the constructs.

### **Results**

The first hypothesis predicted a significant relationship between vigor, dedication, and absorption, and work-home facilitation. The results indicated that dedication ( $b = .309$ ,  $p < .01$ ) had a strong positive effect on WHF, while vigor ( $b = .117$ ,  $p < .01$ ) had a slightly weaker effect. Absorption however, was not significantly related to WHF. The first hypothesis was therefore only partially supported. The second hypothesis predicted a significant relationship between work engagement and work-home conflict. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between absorption and WHC ( $b = .139$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and significant negative relationships between vigor ( $b = -.287$ ,  $p < .01$ ), dedication ( $b = -.167$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and WHC. The second hypothesis was therefore supported.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In line with the positive view of engagement, the results of this study indicate that the benefits of feeling vigorous and dedicated to one's job outweighs the potential detrimental effects of absorption, thus creating an overall favorable relationship between work engagement and the work-home interaction. It therefore seems that work engagement as a whole is not in fact a double-edged sword. However, being absorbed at work seemed to come at a cost to academics' work-home balance. Consistent with the findings of Halbesleben et al. (2009), it therefore seems that work engagement may have the potential to create interrole conflicts. This finding highlights the importance of developing further knowledge and measures on how to ensure a good balance between work and home life among academics.

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