

Personality and Work-Family Conflict from the Perspective of Service Industry in Malaysia

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Abstract

Despite broader coverage of multidisciplinary work-family research, issues related to work and family interface are still not well understood. Consequently, the implementation of work-family policies has been ineffective in reducing conflict experienced by those who juggle multiple roles. This study was devised to analyze the level of work-family conflict among service employees in Malaysia as well as to examine the association between personality and work-family conflict. The findings indicate that the employees in service industry in Malaysia cope quite well with the pressure of managing multiple social roles. In general, extraversion and conscientiousness appear to negatively associate with work-family conflict. The strongest relationships detected were between neuroticism and both directions of work-family conflict (WFC and FWC). This study highlights the importance of tailored benefits that cater different individual needs. The limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: *extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, work-family conflict, service employees*

1 Introduction

Malaysia post-independence economic has witnessed radical transformation from commodity-based in 1950s to manufacturing-based in the 1970s to the 1980s. However, starting in 1990s until the present day, the economic growth of Malaysia is driven mostly by the service industry. Between 2010 and 2014, service industry in Malaysia contributed more than 50 percent to Malaysia GDP and had the greatest expansion rate of 6.3 percent compared to other sector in 2014 (Central Bank of Malaysia, 2015). According to the Annual National Report of 2015, service and manufacturing sector contributed a whopping 77.34 percent of the GDP of Malaysia. In effort to strengthen the economy of Malaysia, 8.01 million of 10.2 million paid employees were in service sector (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014).

In the service industry, employees' outcomes are the main part of the product that determines organizational profit (Leidner, 1999). Jobs in the service sector have high emotional and psychological demands that can either result in stress or drive employees to perform better. Personality and the utilization of emotion are essential for employees in service industry to function. Therefore, organizations take an interest in employees' appearance, thoughts, emotions, and the usefulness of their time (Leidner, 1999). Aside from meeting business goals, organizations are also responsible of creating a family-friendly workplace to accommodate employees' multiple role demands.

Most individuals are occupied with multiple social roles. It is an indication of transformation from a simple being to a more complex one. Family roles for instance, demand specific set of expressed emotions and behaviors, which can be rewarding or draining, physically exhausting and stressful. Nevertheless, the obligations as caring parents, supportive spouses, and concerned sons/daughters need to be fulfilled regardless of feeling physically or emotionally drained (Yanchus, Eby, Lance, and Drollinger, 2010). Issues pertaining work and family interface are still not well-understood despite of broader coverage of multidisciplinary work-family research. Consequently, the implementation of work-family policies has been ineffective in reducing conflict experienced by those who juggle multiple social roles. Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977) argue that participating in multiple social roles offer an opportunity for personal growth by providing resources that allow one to function better in other domains. Nevertheless, this study is specifically highlights the negative perspective of work-family interface, work-family conflict.

Individual react differently to rapid and uncontrolled role transition. Some are able to manage it well, while others struggle to manage it effectively. Work-family conflict can manifest as reoccurrence of stressors that transfer negative affect and behaviors from one domain to another (Grzywacz, Almeida, and McDonald, 2002). Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate work-family interference beyond behavioral preoccupation. Dispositional attributes such as personality traits, personal and professional characteristics were reported in previous research to have significant influences on work-family interface (Eby, Wendy, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley, 2005).

The effect of situational factors was often over-estimated and little attention was given to person-environment fits (Kreiner, 2006). However, the recent researches started to show more interest in individual differences such as personality, socio-demographic backgrounds, and boundary management preference and their role in work-family interface. Limited number of work-family research focused on employees of service-industry in Malaysia. This study is fitting as a preliminary platform to examine the level of work-family conflict in Malaysia.

The study also intends to investigate the role selected personality traits on work-family conflict. The main aim of this study is to investigate the role of personality on work-family conflict among employees in service industry. Three main objectives of this study are as follows:

- a) To identify the level of work-family conflict from both directions, work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC) among service employees in Malaysia.
- b) To determine the relationship between different personality traits on work-family conflict experience.
- c) To identify the most prominent personality trait in work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC).

The findings of this study are vital as a foundation to explore the level of work-family conflict in Malaysia. Selecting employees in service industry seems fitting for this study since more than 60 percent of Malaysia's labor force is from service-related industry.

2 Background and Brief Summary of Existing Research

2.1. Issues and challenges of employees in service industry

According to the Economic Planning Unit (2015), 59.4 percent (6.84 million) of the Malaysian workforce is in the service industry. The number has since surged to 8.40 million (60.9 percent) in 2015, and estimated to increase to 9.55 million (62.5 percent) in year 2020. Despite of its promising outlook, employees in service industry are still struggling with emotional labor (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Lings, Durden, Lee and Cadogan, 2014). Emotional labor, which refers to the need to alter emotional expression to conform with the norm of service provision and organizational requirements, was first highlighted in the literature by Hochschild (1979).

Employees are required to maintain a pleasant demeanor and display socially emotional expression in face-to-face service transaction (Yanchus et al., 2010). Great first impression during service-contact is vital to attract potential long-term client (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Therefore, employees in service industry are obligated to abide and exhibit a set of behavior and emotional display as authentic as possible with little prompting. Faking emotions and inauthentic behavior can have negative consequences in a long-run despite of proper training to manage and absorb emotions on a daily basis (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Lings et al., 2014; Yanchus et al., 2010). Employees are more prone to strain when forced to display unauthentic emotions too often (Wharton, 1999).

The management of emotion especially emotional display and behavior patterns is supposed to be a private act and should not control by other party (Wharton, 1999).

2.2. Work-family conflict

According to Goode (1960), role strain occurs due to an over-demanding role system. Each of multiple roles was detachable from the system (Goode, 1960). However, Mark and MacDermid (1996) believed role strain is a product of poorly managed personal interests. Strain can also arise due to a competition among roles of multiple domains for individual's limited time and energy. Personal resource such as energy tends to decline significantly faster when individual occupies too many social positions (Goode, 1960). Nevertheless, Marks (1977) argued that the role of scarcity in biological resources may be less significant compared to role function and unsupportive role partners.

Work-family conflict is a subset of role conflict, which stemmed from the incompatibility between work and family demands (Kreiner, 2006). The process of fulfilling demands in one domain can make it difficult to meet demands of another (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work-family conflict refers to incompatibility between work and family roles as they compete for individual's finite time and energy. Work-family conflict can lead to psychological preoccupation, which occurs when individuals are too fixated on one domain that consequently impedes behavior and engagement in other roles (Carlson and Frone, 2003).

2.2.1. The bidirectional nature of work-family conflict

Rice, Frone, and McFarlin (1992) conceptualized work-family conflict as a unidirectional construct. However, researchers started to examine work-family conflict as bidirectional construct in late 1990s (e.g. Frone and Yardley, 1997; Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian, 1996) and as a multidimensional construct in year 2000 (e.g. Carlson, Kacmar and Williams, 2000). The direction of work-family conflict is subject to social pressure and expectations of a more prominent domain (Greenhaus and Powell, 2003). According to Goode (1960), individual tend to prioritize role that offer better rewards. For instance, those who are more committed to work activities experience role blurring more often due to work-to-family interference (Scheiman, Milkie and Glavin, 2009). Previous studies reported that the occurrence of work-family interface were mostly influence by role pressure, role salience, and role support (Greenhaus and Powell, 2003). This study measures work-family conflict as bidirectional construct consists of work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC).

2.2.2. *Work-to-family conflict (WFC)*

Work-to-family conflict (WFC) in this study refers to the difficulty to participate actively in nonwork activities because of work-related task (Netemeyer et al., 1996). According to Geurts, Beckers, Taris, Kampier, and Smulders (2009), the occurrence of work-to-family conflict (WFC) is due to time and energy devotion to work which prohibit the fulfillment of family responsibilities or non-work activities. Simultaneous pressure from work and family were mostly happened during off days, indicating that family domain is less salient and more permeable compared to work domain (Damaske, Smyth and Zawadzki, 2014).

2.2.3. *Family-to-work conflict (FWC)*

Family-to-work conflict (FWC) occurs when family demands interfere with work performance (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Family domain often competes with family domain for individual's finite time and energy. Family demands can extract energy to meet work expectation and consequently affect work performance (Haun, Steinmetz and Dormann, 2011). Unlike the family role, work tasks makes one dependent on other, people, position, and formal social stratification (Scheiman et al., 2009). Therefore, it may lessen the possibility of family interfering with work activities. On the other hand, fewer negative sanctions from family domain increase the likelihood of work-to-family interference (Fox, Fonseca and Bao, 2011).

A study by Hill, Yong, Hawkins and Ferris (2004) among IBM employees from 48 countries reported that work-to-family conflict (WFC) occurred more frequent than family-to-work conflict (FWC). Family domain was assumed more accommodating compared to work domain (Keeney, Boyd, Sinha, Westring and Ryan, 2013; Demerouti, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2005). Work-family conflict issue was common among women compared to men despite of inconsistent finding in previous research (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Fox et al., 2011).

2.3. *Personality and work-family conflict*

Different reactivity is one of the mechanisms that explain why individuals respond differently in similar circumstances. Some individuals tend to be vulnerable and experience more symptoms of strain compared to another. Allen, Johnson, Saboe, Choe, Dumani and Evan (2012) deemed differential reactivity as a dispositional variable that determined whether work-family interference was depleting or enriching. Work and family responsibilities carry different weightage among individuals, which in turn can determine their level of work-family conflict.

Jackson and Carter (2007) believed the discrepancy of a physical concept between work and family domain is a product of personal differences rather than norms created by the society. Individuals are often occupied with multiple social roles. When multiple roles contradict one another, it is necessary for individuals to consider the importance of each role separately.

Personality traits and negative work-family spillover are interrelated through specific behavioral patterns observable upon responding to domain demands (e.g., coping strategies and resources acquisition) and upon interrogating one's perceptions regarding or his/her experience with multiple-role engagement (Michel, Clark and Jaramillo, 2011). Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002) found that dispositional factors could influence level of strain and work-family conflict. Some individuals prioritize work over family and vice versa. The decision to comply with demands of any role relies on personal characteristics and preference. Personal judgement and placing high value on one role may reduce or intensify the interference between roles in multiple domains (Keeney et al., 2013). In the same vein, Perry-Jenkins, Repetti and Crouter (2000) note that short-term stress transfers was influenced by individual personality and emotional functioning. They point out that those with higher level of negative affect for instance, tended to show exaggerated emotional responses towards daily work stressors.

A meta-analytic review of 86 studies on dispositional variables and work-family conflict revealed significant associations between the big-five personality model, locus of control, positive/negative affect and self-efficacy, and work-to-family (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC) (Allen et al., 2012). Neuroticism was found to be strongly related to work-family conflict (Blanch and Aluja, 2009; Boyar and Mosley Jr, 2007; Bruck and Allen, 2003; Wayne, Musisca and Fleeson, 2004), whereas conscientiousness was found to predict both positive and negative work-family spillover (Michel et al., 2011; Wayne et al., 2004). Extraversion is believed to have a significant negative influence on work-family conflict (Michel et al., 2011). However, Bruck and Allen (2003) found no significant relationship between extraversion and work-family conflict. The inconsistent results in previous reports warrant further studies to better elucidate the influence of personality and work-family conflict.

2.3.1. Personality

According to McCrea and Costa Jr (2011), personality is an enduring pattern of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that characterized an individual. It involves the psychological process behind one's characteristics (McShane and Von Glinow, 2010). Five-Factor Model (FFM) is one of the most widely used instruments to quantitatively assess individual personality with cross-situational consistency (McCrea and Costa Jr, 2011).

Despite argument whether FFM can be considered as personality theory among scholars, the principle of FFM adopts the basic tenet of trait theory (McCrea and John, 1992). The five factors refer to extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience and neuroticism.

FFM captured a broad level of abstraction and the shared characteristics between most of the existing system of personality traits, thus, provided an integrative descriptive model for research (John and Srivastava, 1999). Having investigated the correlation between the Five-Factor model (FFM) and work-nonwork related conflict, Michel et al. (2011) found strong relationship between extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism and work-family conflict. Conversely, Wayne et al. (2004) only noted significant bidirectional association between conscientiousness and neuroticism and work-family conflict. Therefore, this study only emphasized on extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.

2.3.2. Extraversion

Extraversion refers to the ability to regulate positive mood and emotions about oneself and the world. Highly extrovert individual exhibits personality traits such as outgoingness, talkativeness, sociability, and assertiveness (John and Srivastava, 1999). Extrovert is generally cheerful, energetic, and optimistic, whereas introvert tends to be reserved, independent, and quite (Costa Jr and McCrea, 1992). Highly extrovert individuals are expected to experience less work-family conflict because they are more optimistic and proactive in problem solving (Michel et al., 2011). Some argue that positive emotions, rather than sociable make the core of extraversion, which is unorthodox corrective view of interpreting extraversion (McCrea and John, 1992).

2.3.3. Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is shared by individuals who are careful, dependable and self-disciplined (McShane and Von Glinow, 2010). Conscientious individuals are thorough, well organized, diligent, and goal-oriented in nature (McCrea and Costa, 1992). By virtue of these qualities, those who score high on conscientiousness are generally more capable of efficient planning and resourceful which consequently can reduce work-family conflict (Michel et al., 2011). Conscientious individuals are less prone to work-family conflict because of their ability to complete tasks on time (Wayne et al., 2004). Despite being efficient, they tend to suffer more inter-role conflicts (McCrea and Costa, 1992). It was reported that conscientiousness have greater effect on family-to-work conflict (FWC) compared to work-to-family conflict (WFC) especially of time-based conflict and strain-based conflict (Allen et al., 2012).

2.3.4. Neuroticism

Neuroticism refers to a tendency to perceive oneself and the world around in a negative manner. It involves individuals who exhibit personality traits such as anxiety, hostility, depression, and high self-consciousness (John and Srivastava, 1999). Highly neurotic individuals are often associated with chronic negative affect and a variety of psychiatric disorders (Costa Jr. and McCrae, 1992; Frone et al., 1994). In contrast, those who score low on neuroticism tend to be calm, relaxed, and unflappable (Costa, Jr. and McCrae, 1992). They are able to handle stressful situations with ease and are less likely to experience strain resulting from controlling their impulses (Costa and McCrae, 1992). A study by Allen et al. (2011) found significant intermediate influence of neuroticism on both WFC and FWC. Sensitivity towards negative events inflates the likelihood of neurotic individuals' experiencing negative work-family spillover (Cho, Tay, Allen and Stark, 2013). Individual who score high in neuroticism have a tendency to seek fewer solutions when dealing with multiple roles that influence their emotional reaction to strains (Michel et al., 2011). Negative emotional reactions have been associated with dysfunction, manifesting in a form depression, psychosomatic complaint and poor coping strategies (Allen et al., 2012).

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants and procedure

This research adopted a quantitative approach that allowed the generalization of findings based on previous literature. Purposive sampling was employed as method of selecting sample. Samples reside in five major cities in Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Klang, Shah Alam, Kota Kinabalu, and Kuching. Respondents were required to satisfy three criteria of inclusion: (a) a full-time employee, (2) working in service industry, and (3) working not less than 30 hours a week. According to Malaysia's Labour Force survey (2013), those who work less than 30 hours on average in a week can be considered underemployed due to the insufficient working hours.

The sample of this study consists of 531 employees from 11 different service industries in Malaysia. Of these, 196 were men (31.8 percent) and 362 were women (35.2 percent) with age ranging between 18 to 64 years. The majority was unmarried (64.8 percent) and the rest were married. Only 28.4 percent of the respondents have children in their household. In addition, 352 of the respondents work in private sector, while the remainders (179) were public sector employees.

Online and paper-and-pencil survey was conducted to gather data with structural protocol. Person in charge was contacted from a list of service-related companies for permission and discussion on the process of data collection. In Kota Kinabalu, questionnaires were distributed to service-related companies such as major banks, schools, public and private health care providers. Online questionnaires reached respondents who reside in Sarawak and peninsular of Malaysia through email and social medias. The collection of data varies in personal attribution such as sociodemographic backgrounds and personality traits.

3.2 Measures

In this study, personality was measured with a scale developed by John and Srivastava (2001). Out of 44 adjectives, only 25 adjectives were employed which respondents are to indicate agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale. Extraversion and neuroticism were measured with 8 adjectives each, whereas conscientiousness was measured with 9 adjectives. An 18-item instrument by Carlson et al. (2000) was employed to symmetrically describe two directions of influence: work-to-family and family-to-work conflict. Each direction was measured with 9 items that covered time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict with 5-point scale ranges from 1 (never) to 5 (all of the time).

3.3 Analysis

The measures were subject to validity assessment and potential collinearity issue among indicators involved. Multicollinearity issue among formative indicators can influence weight estimation and statistical significance of any research (Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2014). A tolerance value of 0.2 or lower and a VIF value of 5 or higher is an indication of potential collinearity issues (Hair et al., 2014). The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 was employed for multicollinearity diagnostics of measurement construct involved. Table 1 presents the results of collinearity test with minimal tolerance level of 0.382 and VIF value ranges from 1.051 to 2.615. Therefore, there is no indication of critical collinearity issue existed among measurement indicators in this study.

Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to examine the relationship between personality and work-family conflict. PLS algorithm allows a considerable increase in model complexity and, hence, a noticeable reduction in the distance between subjects matter analysis and statistical technique in domains with continuous access to reliable data (Hanseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics, 2009). High level statistical power can be achieved with PLS-SEM even when the sample size is small, while large sample sizes increase the precision of PLS estimation (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 1 Collinearity diagnostic for measurement indicators

Variable	Indicators	Tolerance level	VIF
Extraversion	d1	.686	1.457
	d4	.782	1.278
	d7	.766	1.305
	d10	.778	1.285
	d13	.657	1.523
	d16	.951	1.051
	d19	.820	1.219
	d22	.678	1.475
Conscientiousness	d2	.724	1.382
	d5	.825	1.212
	d8	.763	1.310
	d11	.732	1.367
	d14	.728	1.374
	d17	.781	1.281
	d20	.714	1.400
	d23	.788	1.269
Neuroticism	d3	.760	1.316
	d6	.747	1.339
	d9	.720	1.388
	d12	.725	1.380
	d15	.786	1.273
	d18	.718	1.392
	d21	.792	1.262
	d24	.666	1.501
Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC)	a1	.621	1.609
	a2	.635	1.574
	a3	.561	1.783
	a4	.552	1.810
	a5	.542	1.844
	a6	.659	1.517
	a7	.697	1.436
	a8	.712	1.404
	a9	.553	1.809
Family-to-Work Conflict (FWC)	a10	.542	1.844
	a11	.585	1.709
	a12	.528	1.893
	a13	.554	1.805
	a14	.406	2.466
	a15	.382	2.615
	a16	.539	1.855
	a17	.568	1.761
a18	.582	1.720	

4 Results

Means and standard deviation values for extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, work-to-family conflict (WFC), and family-to-work conflict (FWC) are presented in Table 2. Extraversion levels are slightly higher than average, with the mean being 3.24 (SD = 0.525), and slightly below average for neuroticism with mean being 2.78 (SD = 0.624). The level of conscientiousness among respondents are quite high as the mean equaled 3.61 (SD = 0.568). Overall, respondents of this study occasionally experiencing work-to-family conflict (Mean = 2.84, SD = 0.638) and their families rarely interfere with their work (Mean = 2.33, SD = 0.710).

Table 2 Descriptive statistic

Construct	Number of items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Extraversion	9	3.24	0.525
Conscientiousness	8	3.61	0.568
Neuroticism	8	2.78	0.624
Work-to-family conflict (WFC)	9	2.84	0.638
Family-to-work conflict (FWC)	9	2.33	0.710

Table 3 presents bootstrap results with coefficient estimations and t-values for the hypothesized relationship between extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC). There is a significant relationship between extraversion and work-to-family conflict (WFC) with coefficient estimation of - 0.1567. The result implies higher level of extraversion reduce work-to-family conflict (WFC). However, there is no significant relationship between extraversion and family-to-work conflict (FWC). Conscientiousness and family-to-work conflict (FWC) has significant negative relationship with coefficient estimation of - 0.1915, but no significant relationship was found with work-to-family conflict (WFC). In line with previous researches, neuroticism has significant positive association with work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC) with coefficient estimation of 0.3808 and 0.2214, respectively.

Table 3 Path coefficient estimations and t-values of the relationship between personality and work-family conflict (WFC and FWC).

Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	Significance level
Extraversion -> WFC	-0.1567	2.0459	**
Extraversion -> FWC	-0.1291	1.5272	NS
Conscientiousness -> WFC	-0.0018	0.0233	NS
Conscientiousness -> FWC	-0.1915	2.1294	**
Neuroticism -> WFC	0.3808	5.5069	***
Neuroticism -> FWC	0.2214	2.0205	**

t-values > 1.96* ($\rho < 0.05$); t-values > 2.58** ($\rho < 0.01$)

5 Discussion

In general, respondents of this study were equipped with a balanced set of personality traits. They scored higher than average on extraversion and conscientiousness. Both personality dimensions are important attributes of good interpersonal skill for better support and managing multiple social roles effectively. Moreover, a low level of neuroticism among respondents projected emotional stability that ensure impartial and free of emotional influence in their decision making process. It is also reported that respondents of this study sometimes experience WFC and their family demands seldom interfered with their work (FWC). The findings indicate that employees in service industry in Malaysia cope quite well with the pressure of managing multiple roles. A plausible explanation of the findings is organizations are thought to be less forgiving compared to family members. Therefore, weaker punishments render family boundaries permeable and susceptible to intrusion from work demands.

This study found that highly extrovert individuals experienced less work-to-family conflict (WFC). Highly extrovert individuals tend to voice out their struggles in managing work and family responsibilities. Therefore, they are able to gain social supports from family members, peers, and organizations due to their sociable and positively engaged nature. Support from family and work is crucial to lower conflict and attains better work-family balance. Those with supportive work and family relationships are more satisfied with life in general compared to those who are socially inhibited (Ferguson, Carlson, Zivnuska and Whitten, 2012).

Highly conscientious individuals have better control on their impulse, well organized, and decisive than those who are not as conscientious (John and Srivastava, 2001). They are goal-achievement oriented, hardworking, and responsible (McShane, 2013). Based on this study, those who scored higher on conscientiousness were better able to reduce the impact of family-to-work conflict (FWC). Diligent and self-disciplined individuals that are highly conscientious are most likely to ensure family responsibilities do not crossover to the work domain. Nevertheless, in this study, conscientiousness had no significant influence on work-to-family conflict (WFC).

In agreement with previous studies (Blanch and Aluja, 2009; Boyar and Mosley Jr., 2007; Michel et al., 2011; Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno and Tillemann, 2011), neuroticism was found to be strongly associated with work-family conflict (WFC and FWC). Individuals who scored higher on neuroticism experienced more work-to-family conflict (WFC) compared to family-to-work conflict (FWC). Those who scored higher on neuroticism tend to experience more conflict due to high level of anxiety, hostility, and self-conscientiousness (McCrea and John, 1992). Carrying on multiple roles with limited time and energy can be cumbersome, especially for those who have a propensity to experience abrupt mood swings and negative emotions. Despite the level of neuroticism in the population sample of the study was minor, but it appeared to have a greater impact on WFC and FWC. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that low neuroticism is not an indication of high positive mental health. Therefore, lower level of neuroticism does not necessarily imply lower work-family conflict or better work-family balance. The cognitive process and behavioral style that follows neuroticism are conditioned by individual differences, which often associated with irrational thinking, low self-esteem, poor impulse control, and ineffective coping strategies (McCrea and Costa, 1994).

5.1. *Limitations*

The study involved employees in the service industry residing in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor (Klang and Shah Alam), Kota Kinabalu and Kuching. The rationale of recruiting service industry employees from the selected cities in Malaysia was that such employees had hefty workloads, hectic life styles and displayed a high level of emotional containment. Hence, by design, the findings were limited to the subjects recruited and the abovementioned scope of study. The cross-sectional approach used in this study may also limit the generalization of its findings. Data was collected simultaneously at one point of time to reduce the probability of data manipulation. This allowed the comparison of multiple variables at the same time. The respondents were required to provide feedback on the survey that contained items of five variables. Although cross-sectional approach is widely used in social science studies, it limits the ability to detect causal effects of individual differences on work-family spillover over a prolonged period of time.

5.2. *Implication of study*

The results of the present work indicate that people differ in their preferences in terms of managing multiple social roles. Some prefer to integrate their personal and professional life. Others opt for complete separation depending on their personality traits. Therefore, providing more options and tailored benefits to cater different needs create sense of flexibility and boosts individual morale, which consequently enhance work and life satisfaction. A cafeteria plan for instance, enables employees to choose benefits that are best suited for them to prevent wastage of certain benefits (Snell and Bohlander, 2010).

5.3. *Future research*

Considering that the current study adopted a cross-sectional approach whereby data was collected from employees in the service industry at one specific time point, employees' experiences with work-family conflict were only captured at the time the questionnaires were distributed. Hence, more longitudinal research should be conducted to observe changes and developments occurring in terms of work-family conflict among Malaysian workers. Longitudinal studies may allow for a better understanding regarding the effects of personality and work-family conflict. In order to generate useful information on work-family conflict and crossover effects, a study of the sort should involve the subjects' family members, such as spouses/partners and children. Dual-earner couples, for example, may experience varying levels of work-family spillover due to variations in their personal and professional backgrounds. A longitudinal study in couples has been conducted in the US by Altobelli and Moen (2007); however, such longitudinal research has not been attempted as of yet in Malaysian dual-earner couples.

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