The Moderating Influence of Procedural Fairness on the Relationship Between Work–Life Conflict and Organizational Commitment

Phyllis A. Siegel
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Joel Brockner and Ariel Y. Fishman
Columbia University

Corinne Post
Pace University

Charlee Garden
Garden Consulting

To help employees better manage work–life conflict, organizations have introduced various initiatives, which have met with mixed results. The present studies examined the utility of a procedurally based approach to understanding employees’ reactions to work–life conflict. The authors examined whether the fairness of procedures used by organizational authorities to plan and implement decisions moderates the (inverse) relationship between work–life conflict and employees’ organizational commitment. Three studies using different methodologies showed support for the moderating role played by procedural fairness. That is, the tendency for greater work–life conflict to lead to lower commitment was significantly less pronounced when procedural fairness was high rather than low. Theoretical contributions to the work–life conflict and organizational justice literatures are discussed, as are practical implications.

In the new millennium, contemporary organizations are benefiting from a global, diverse, technologically savvy, and highly productive workforce (Hitt, 2000). It is ironic that these very same demographic shifts, economic trends, technological advances, and competitive forces also have contributed to a workforce that is increasingly experiencing work–life conflict (Friedman, Christopher, & DeGroot, 1998). Work–life conflict refers to competing role pressures brought on by activities that are related versus unrelated to work, such that fulfilling one’s work responsibilities makes it difficult to attend to activities outside the work domain, and vice versa (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Grounded in role theory (e.g., Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), “work–life conflict is a particular type of inter-role conflict in which pressures from the work role are incompatible with the pressures from the [life outside of work] role” (Thomas & Ganster, 1995, p. 7). In the present research, we use the term work–life conflict, as opposed to work–family conflict, to reflect the fact that the extra-work demands in people’s lives include, but are not necessarily limited to, the family.

The construct of work–life conflict is deserving of scholars’ attention for at least two important reasons. First, work–life conflict has been found to influence a variety of attitudes and behaviors of both personal and organizational relevance. For example, work–life conflict is predictive of emotional exhaustion, depression, cardiovascular illness, alcoholism, and lowered job and life satisfaction (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991; Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988; Burden & Googins, 1987; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Haynes, Eaker, & Feinleib, 1984; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). On the organization front, work–life conflict has been associated with absenteeism, turnover, reduced performance, and lower organizational commitment (Boles, Johnson, & Hair, 1997; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

One possible explanation of the negative effects of work–life conflict on people’s work attitudes and behaviors is provided by exchange theory (Homans, 1961). Built on the principle of reciprocity, exchange theory posits that individuals will “give back” commensurately what they perceive to have received (or fail to have received) from the other party in the relationship. Thus, the greater the work–life conflict, the more apt are employees to conclude that the organization is not treating them well (by contributing to their experience of work–life conflict). As a result, individuals may reciprocate by becoming less committed to their employers. The reduction of commitment may be manifested in various ways, for example, in increased absenteeism and turnover and reduced effort and performance (e.g., Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

A second reason attesting to the importance of work–life conflict research is the increasing prevalence of the phenomenon. Work–life conflict has been growing for the past 20 years and is probably at an all-time high. Worldwide, employees are working a greater number of hours today than ever before, with the greatest number of hours worked by Americans (Ellin, 2003; Moulson, 1999). Moreover, over 30% of the American workforce is currently using some form of alternative work arrangement (AWA), such as flex time or telecommuting (Strope, 2003). In short,
managing work–life conflict is a highly salient and important concern for individuals and employers alike (Galinsky, 2001), and it may be one of the most significant human resource challenges in the 21st century.

Given the significant consequences and growing prevalence of work–life conflict, it is both practically and theoretically important to delineate factors that may help reduce its harmful effects. To date, researchers and practitioners have largely focused on the effects of particular programs (e.g., flexible work schedules, on-site day-care centers) that are designed to lessen work–life conflict, its harmful effects, or both. We refer to these programs as content-based initiatives, because they consist of tangible, formal arrangements made by the organization to help its employees manage work–life conflict. However, exclusive reliance on such content-based initiatives may be problematic, for two reasons. First, such programs have yielded mixed results. Whereas some researchers have found that firms’ work–life programs are positively related to productivity (Konrad & Mangel, 2000), organizational citizenship behavior (Lambert, 2000), and retention (Grover & Crooker, 1995), other scholars have found that such interventions either had no effect on employees’ attitudes or behaviors (Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Thompson et al., 1999) or actually increased employees’ experience of work–life conflict (Dunham, Pierce, & Castaneda, 1987).

Second, the development and implementation of such content-based initiatives (e.g., day-care centers) often are financially costly to the organization, which makes the initiatives particularly problematic when they do not have positive effects on employees’ attitudes and behaviors. In light of these two potential limitations of content-based initiatives, it behooves scholars to search for and identify additional factors that may influence (and, we hope, reduce) the extent to which individuals are negatively affected by work–life conflict.

Organizing Framework

One notion that may help delineate additional determinants of employees’ reactions to work–life conflict is that people’s work attitudes and behaviors depend not only on what happens (e.g., outcome favorability) but also on how things happen (e.g., procedural fairness). (For some current reviews of the organizational-justice literature, see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001, Greenberg & Colquitt, in press, and Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001.) Specifically, employees have been shown to respond more positively (e.g., their organizational commitment is higher) to the degree that outcomes are perceived to be favorable (Homans, 1961) and to the extent that the procedures associated with the outcomes are viewed as fair (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Of particular relevance to the present studies is that outcome favorability and procedural fairness have been shown to combine interactively to influence a variety of significant employee attitudes and behaviors, including (but not limited to) organizational commitment (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). One way to describe this interaction effect is as follows: The tendency for outcome favorability to be positively related to organizational commitment is much less pronounced when procedural fairness is high rather than low.

The interactive relationship between outcome favorability and procedural fairness is relevant to work–life conflict in that work–life conflict is likely to influence employees’ perceptions of the favorability of their outcomes in the workplace. For example, employees who perceive high work–life conflict are likely to experience more dysfunctional forms of stress, leading to the set of harmful personal consequences noted above (e.g., emotional strain, alcoholism, etc.). Relatedly, high work–life conflict may cause people to be less able to concentrate on their work-related responsibilities, leading to lowered job performance and satisfaction (Bond et al., 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Not only are reductions in job performance and satisfaction inherently unfavorable, but also they may set the stage for the receipt of additional unfavorable outcomes. Thus, when employees’ job performance suffers, they may experience negative feedback from coworkers or managers, unfavorable performance evaluations, and reduced recognition and rewards, to name a few. In short, work–life conflict may be considered to be a form of (or at least a proxy for) outcome favorability in the workplace: The higher the degree of perceived work–life conflict, the more likely are employees to experience the outcomes associated with their work situation as unfavorable. If work–life conflict represents outcome favorability, it stands to reason that work–life conflict will interact with procedural fairness to influence employees’ organizational commitment.

Two well-supported frameworks in the justice literature (that have been shown to account for the interactive effects of outcome favorability and procedural fairness in a wide variety of settings) may help explain why work–life conflict is expected to interact with procedural fairness to influence employees’ organizational commitment. These frameworks are presented next.

Role of Trust

Research has shown that individuals rely on their perceptions of procedural fairness to make inferences about their relationship with the other party, including how much to trust the other party (Lind & Tyler, 1988). The greater individuals’ perceptions of procedural fairness, the more likely they are to trust the other party (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). Furthermore, trust in the other party has been shown to interact with outcome favorability such that high levels of trust reduce the influence of outcome favorability on a variety of work attitudes and behaviors, such as organizational commitment (Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Tyler, & Martin, 1997). In short, because high procedural fairness serves as a signal to employees that their employer is trustworthy, high procedural fairness reduces employees’ tendencies to respond negatively to unfavorable outcomes.

How might this trust-based explanation account for the predicted findings in the present context, pertaining to work–life conflict? If employees perceive the procedures within an organization to be fair, then they may infer that they can trust the relevant organizational authorities. For example, they may trust organizational authorities to help them manage the high level of work–life conflict that they may be experiencing. Alternatively, they may trust organizational authorities to not be excessively heavy handed (e.g., not to punish them too harshly) if their high level of work–life conflict causes them to underperform, at least temporarily. If employees make either or both of these trust-related inferences, they are likely to maintain relatively high levels of organizational commitment in the face of high work–life conflict, relative to their counterparts who experience similarly high levels of work–life conflict but who, because of perceptions of low procedural fairness, are less trusting of organizational authorities.
Role of Accountability

Research has also shown that individuals rely on procedural-fairness information to make inferences about how much they should hold another party responsible or accountable for the outcomes that they receive (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Prevailing ethical standards and norms mandate that exchange partners should behave in procedurally fair ways. Thus, behavior that violates such norms tends to be attributed to something about the actor (Jones & Davis, 1965). People will view the other party as more responsible for his or her behavior—and, by extension, more responsible for the outcomes of the exchange—when the other party exhibits lower procedural fairness. Furthermore, it is when individuals receive unfavorable outcomes that they are particularly motivated to make judgments of accountability, that is, to understand why those outcomes occurred (Wong & Weiner, 1981). Consequently, when their outcomes are unfavorable, people may be especially likely to hold the other party accountable when procedures are perceived to be unfair. Lower procedural fairness (accompanying unfavorable outcomes) may be judged to be indicative of the alleged blameworthiness of the other party. This reasoning suggests that outcome favorability is more likely to influence people’s attitudes toward the other party when procedural fairness is low and, as a result, the other party’s accountability is high (Folger, 1986; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998).

This accountability-based explanation also may be applied to the present context. Earlier, we suggested that exchange theory’s principle of reciprocity may account for the main effect of work–life conflict on organizational commitment. The accountability framework suggests that work–life conflict will be more strongly (inversely) related to employees’ organizational commitment when procedural fairness is relatively low. When individuals experience the unfavorable outcomes associated with high work–life conflict, the extent to which they will respond negatively (i.e., show reduced organizational commitment) may depend on how much they hold the organizational authorities accountable for their outcomes. When procedural fairness is low, individuals may hold the organization more accountable for their experience of high work–life conflict, thereby leading to lower levels of commitment than would be the case if the same level of work–life conflict were accompanied by high procedural fairness. Stated differently, if employees view procedures as fair, then they should be less likely to blame organizational authorities for high levels of work–life conflict (i.e., unfavorable outcomes) that they may be experiencing, and therefore they will be less likely to reduce their level of organizational commitment.

It is beyond the scope of the present research to differentiate between the trust- and accountability-based explanations set forth above. However, either (or both) give rise to the primary hypothesis of the present studies: Work–life conflict will interact with procedural fairness to influence employees’ organizational commitment, and the tendency for work–life conflict to be inversely related to organizational commitment will be significantly less pronounced when procedural fairness is high rather than low.

We selected organizational commitment as the dependent variable for several reasons. First, organizational commitment is associated with many important work attitudes and behaviors, such as work satisfaction and job performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gelatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989; Mowday et al., 1982). Second, given that work–life conflict already has been found to be inversely related to organizational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999), it seemed worthwhile to identify moderators of the relationship between work–life conflict and organizational commitment. Finally, in studies conducted in the organizational-justice literature, organizational commitment has been found to be positively related to procedural fairness (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988). Thus, because organizational commitment has been studied as a dependent variable in the respective literatures on work–life conflict and organizational justice, testing the interactive effect of work–life conflict and procedural fairness on organizational commitment allows us to integrate two literatures that have heretofore been viewed as relatively disconnected.

The focal hypothesis was tested in three studies, two consisting of field surveys and one consisting of a vignette-based experiment. These divergent methods were purposely chosen to complement one another. Whereas the field surveys allowed us to evaluate whether the results may be found in real world settings, they lacked internal validity. In contrast, whereas the vignette study was of questionable external generalizability, it had high internal validity, in that participants were randomly assigned to different conditions.

Another noteworthy difference among the three studies consisted of the context in which procedural fairness was enacted. In Study 1, employees reported the extent to which organizational authorities were generally fair in their procedures. Thus, procedural fairness in Study 1 did not limit itself to the domain of events that may affect employees’ experience of work–life conflict. In Study 2, employees reported the extent to which a specific organizational change (an acquisition) was planned and implemented in a procedurally fair way. In Study 3, the experimental manipulation of procedural fairness was directly tied to events that influenced people’s level of work–life conflict.1

In spite of the differences among the three studies, we expected to find an interactive effect of work–life conflict and procedural fairness on organizational commitment, such that the tendency for work–life conflict to be (inversely) related to organizational commitment would be reduced when procedural fairness was relatively

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1 The procedural fairness that moderates the effect of work–life conflict on employees’ commitment may, but need not, be directly tied to events that influence their experience of work–life conflict. A key principle of fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001) is that people may transfer their perceptions of fairness from one decision-making domain to another, especially when information about procedural fairness in the latter domain is not provided. For example, in reacting to work–life conflict, employees may evaluate and be affected by the fairness of the procedures associated with the level of work–life conflict that they are experiencing. However, if this procedural information is lacking (e.g., they do not understand how they came to experience high work–life conflict), then they may rely on the fairness of other (unrelated) organizational procedures to help them draw inferences in this particular situation (e.g., their thought process may go as follows: “I don’t know how I ended up experiencing such pressures, but in general, it seems like this organization makes and implements decisions in a fair, consistent, nonbiased, etc., way, so I guess they used a fair process this time, too”). Thus, it is entirely plausible for employees to transfer procedural-fairness perceptions that arise in one organizational context to another. In the present context, employees who do not have access to specific procedural information related to their experience of work–life conflict may nevertheless make such inferences on the basis of procedures that have been enacted by organizational authorities in other contexts that may be less directly related to work–life conflict.
high. Indeed, to the extent that similar results emerge across studies differing in the ways described above, we gain increased confidence in both the validity and generality of the findings.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants were 132 MBA students who were employed full time and simultaneously enrolled in a part-time evening graduate business program at a large university in the northeastern United States. A wide variety of industries (e.g., pharmaceutical, telecommunications, financial services, computers, public utilities) and job titles (e.g., engineer, accountant, project manager, analyst, sales, consultant) were represented in the sample. A majority of the participants were male (61%), almost half were married (45%), and 20% had children. Their median age was 28, and the mean number of hours worked per week was 45.

Procedure

Students enrolled in an organizational-behavior course were asked to complete a survey that served as the basis for class discussion on the topic of work–life conflict. Participation was voluntary (fully 99% of them took part), and individuals were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. All human subjects procedures were followed in the conduct of this study. The survey included measures of participants’ perceptions of work–life conflict, procedural fairness, organizational commitment, and demographic information.

Dependent Variable

To assess the extent of employees’ commitment to their respective employers, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with four items taken from previously used measures of organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). These included statements about an employee’s pride in being part of the organization and willingness to encourage others to work for the company. The endpoints of a 7-point Likert-type scale were labeled strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). Responses to the items were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .89.

Independent Variables

Work–life conflict. We measured work–life conflict using five items pertaining to individuals’ perceptions of their ability to meet their dual responsibilities in both work and nonwork domains. Based on previous research (e.g., Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurian, 1996; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), sample items included “How much does your current work schedule allow sufficient flexibility for you to meet your personal needs?” (scale endpoints for this item were not at all [1] and very much [7]), and “How would you rate your current work–life balance?” (scale endpoints for this item were not at all balanced [1] and very balanced [7]). For all items, participants’ responses were coded such that higher scores were more positive, reflecting lower work–life conflict and therefore greater outcome favorability. Responses to the five measures of work–life conflict were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .74.

Procedural fairness. We measured procedural fairness with four items pertaining to individuals’ assessment of both structural and interactional aspects of procedural fairness as exhibited by their managers (e.g., Bies, 1987; Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). The questions pertaining to the structural aspects of procedural fairness focused on the extent to which employees felt that consistent standards were used to make project allocation decisions and whether they were accorded voice in the process (e.g., one question asked the employee to rate the manager’s consideration of people’s views when making decisions). Scale endpoints were strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). With respect to the interactional aspect of fairness, individuals were asked to indicate how they felt they were treated by their manager (e.g., one question asked the employee to rate whether the manager treats employees with respect and dignity). Endpoints were strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). Responses to these four items of procedural fairness were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .89.

Control Variables

Because prior research has found that women, married individuals, and employees with children are more likely to experience greater levels of work–life conflict than are men, unmarried individuals, and employees without children (Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Kossek, 1990; Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999), we included control variables for gender, marital status, and whether the respondents had children.

We also included a control measure that assessed whether the individual used AWAs that were made available by his or her employer. Our assumptions here were twofold. First, employees’ use of AWAs may have influenced their organizational commitment indirectly by reducing their perceived work–life conflict. Stated differently, employees who used AWAs may have experienced less work–life conflict relative to their counterparts who did not use AWAs that had been made available to them by their employer.

Second, we theorized that the use of an AWA might be directly associated with higher levels of organizational commitment. Our rationale was that, relative to those who did not use AWAs, employees who used AWAs offered by their employer may have been more likely to perceive their organization as helping them manage their work–life conflict. Having taken advantage of the benefit of an AWA from their employer, these employees may experience less work–life conflict; be more appreciative of the flexibility demonstrated by their employer; and, based on the exchange theory principle of reciprocity, show greater commitment to their organization (Dessler, 1999; Eaton, 2003).

Results

Summary statistics for, and correlations between, all of the continuous-level variables are reported in Table 1.

We tested the focal hypothesis using hierarchical multiple regression. In the first step, we entered the four control variables. In the second step, work–life conflict (coded such that lower work–life conflict reflected higher levels of outcome favorability) and procedural fairness were entered as main effects. In the final step, we entered the interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Work–life conflict</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(outcome favorability)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Procedural fairness</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Higher scores reflect greater outcome favorability (lower work–life conflict). Coefficient alphas are in parentheses. *p < .01.
Of greatest importance was the significant interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness ($p < .035$), reported in Table 2. To illustrate the nature of the interaction effect, we followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), in which we examined the relationship between work–life conflict and employees’ organizational commitment at a high level of procedural fairness (one standard deviation above the mean) and at a low level of procedural fairness (one standard deviation below the mean). As can be seen in Figure 1, when procedural fairness was low (but not when procedural fairness was high), higher levels of work–life conflict led to lower organizational commitment. In fact, the results of simple slope analyses suggested by Aiken and West revealed that work–life conflict and organizational commitment were significantly (inversely) related to one another when procedural fairness was low ($p < .01$) and that work–life conflict and organizational commitment were unrelated when procedural fairness was high ($p > .48$).²

Study 2

The results of Study 1 provided initial evidence that procedural fairness moderated the relationship between work–life conflict and employees’ organizational commitment. The findings showed that higher levels of work–life conflict need not lead to reduced organizational commitment. As long as employees perceived the organization’s decision-making procedures to be relatively fair, greater work–life conflict did not have any (detrimental) effect on their organizational commitment.

In Study 2 we attempted to replicate the results of Study 1 in a somewhat different context. Whereas the participants in Study 1 consisted of employees from many different organizations, all participants in Study 2 were drawn from the same organization. Whereas all participants in Study 1 were enrolled in a part-time MBA program and completed the survey instrument as part of a classroom exercise, all participants in Study 2 were employees who completed the survey while at work. Finally, procedural fairness in Study 1 referred to employees’ perceptions of how decisions were generally enacted in their workplace, but in Study 2 procedural fairness referred to employees’ perceptions of how management had handled a specific, significant change (i.e., being acquired) that had recently taken place in the organization. In spite of these differences, we expected to find the same interactive effect of procedural fairness and work–life conflict on employees’ organizational commitment that we found in Study 1.

Method

Participants

Participants were 121 individuals who were employed in a financial services institution in the midwestern United States that had been recently acquired by one of the major U.S. banks. Approximately half of the employees were male (51%), and 22% held a management position. The median salary of the sample was between $35,000 and $50,000, and 46% had completed some level of college education. The demographics of the sample were representative of the profile of the larger organization.

Procedure

Two hundred employees received an e-mail letter from a senior vice president of the bank, requesting their voluntary participation in a study conducted by researchers from a university in the northeastern United States. The stated purpose of the study was to determine how employees respond to significant organizational events and, more specifically, to the acquisition of their organization, which had taken place approximately 8 months prior. The e-mail was linked to a secure intranet Web site to which employees were directed to complete a questionnaire. Employees were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. All human subjects

Table 2
Regression Results, Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>$t^*$</th>
<th>$p &lt;$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control variables (entered in Step 1)b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>18.94</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements used</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−0.39</td>
<td>−1.55</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effects (entered in Step 2)c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work–life conflict</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural fairness</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction term (entered in Step 3)</td>
<td>−0.16</td>
<td>−2.13</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Before asking participants whether they used the AWAs made available to them by their employer, we also asked them to indicate whether their employer made AWAs available to its employees. Participants could either respond “yes” or “no.” A total of 62 respondents answered “no,” that is, that their employer did not make AWAs available. The results presented above did not include these participants. We then reran the hierarchical regression analysis including these 62 participants. In this reanalysis, the control variable concerning AWA was treated as a categorical factor consisting of three levels: (a) the company did not provide AWA; (b) the company provided AWA, and the participant used the AWA; and (c) the company provided AWA, and the participant did not use the AWA. Of greatest importance is that the key interaction effect between work–life conflict and procedural fairness remained significant at the .03 level.
procedures were followed in the conduct of this study. Of those contacted, 60% (121 individuals) agreed to take part in the study.

Dependent Variable
To assess the extent of employees’ organizational commitment, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight items that were taken from previous measures of organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). These items asked respondents to consider their responses in light of the recent acquisition that had taken place. For example, “Since the acquisition, I am now proud to tell others that I am part of this company.” The endpoints of the 11-point Likert-type scale were labeled strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (11). Responses to the items were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .91.

Independent Variables
Work–life conflict. We measured work–life conflict using two items related to participants’ perceptions of the acquisition’s impact on their ability to manage their professional and personal demands. Based on items used in previous research (e.g., Thomas & Ganster, 1995), participants rated their level of work–life conflict. For example: “Since the acquisition, my work–life balance has been: ____.” Responses could range from very negative (1) to very positive (11) on an 11-point Likert-type scale. Responses to the two items were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .85.

Procedural fairness. We measured procedural fairness with eight items adapted from items used previously in the literature (e.g., Brockner et al., 1997; Greenberg, 1987; Leventhal et al., 1980) pertaining to participants’ assessment of the methods used by management to implement the acquisition. These questions included both structural and interactional elements of procedural fairness. For example, items about the implementation of the acquisition assessed whether employees felt that they were able to express their views to management (structural element) and that management had treated employees with respect and dignity (interactional element). Scale endpoints were strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). Responses to the measures of procedural fairness were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .87.

Control Variables
Because employees’ current (i.e., postacquisition) level of organizational commitment may be influenced by their preacquisition level of commitment, we included a control measure that assessed participants’ organizational commitment prior to the acquisition event. Following the analytical approach recommended by Edwards (1994), we treated pre- and postacquisition organizational commitment as two separate variables, rather than calculating a change score based on the difference between these two commitment measures. These items were the same as those included in the dependent measure, except that participants were asked to consider their responses prior to the acquisition. For example: “Before the acquisition, I was proud to tell others that I am part of this company.” The endpoints of the 11-point Likert-type scale were labeled strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (11). Responses to the items were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .91.

Given that women have been found to experience greater levels of work–life conflict than men (e.g., Glass & Camarigg, 1992), we included gender as an additional control variable in Study 2.

Results and Discussion
Summary statistics for, and correlations between, all of the continuous-level variables are reported in Table 3.

As in Study 1, we tested the focal hypothesis using hierarchical multiple regression. In the first step, we entered the two control variables. In the second step, work–life conflict (coded such that lower work–life conflict reflected higher levels of outcome favorability) and procedural fairness were entered as main effects. In the final step, we entered the interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness (see Table 4).

Of greatest importance was the significant interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness (p < .02). To illustrate the nature of the interaction effect, we examined the relationship between work–life conflict and employees’ organizational commitment at a high level of procedural fairness (one standard deviation above the mean) and at a low level of procedural fairness (one standard deviation below the mean; Aiken & West, 1991). As can be seen in Figure 2, when procedural fairness was low (but not when procedural fairness was high), higher levels of work–life conflict led to lower organizational commitment. Indeed, the results of simple slope analyses suggested by Aiken and West (1991) revealed that work–life conflict and organizational commitment were significantly (inversely) related to one another when procedural fairness was low (p < .01) and that work–life conflict and organizational commitment were unrelated when procedural fairness was high (p > .59).

It is worth noting that individuals in Study 2 completed the survey 8 months after the acquisition. Given the length of time between the occurrence of the acquisition and employees’ completion of the survey, it is possible that participants’ responses to the measures in Study 2 (e.g., their perceived level of organizational commitment prior to the acquisition, their perceptions of the procedural fairness with which the acquisition was handled, or both) may have not been entirely accurate. If anything, this potential source of bias could have made the test of our focal interaction hypothesis more conservative. Furthermore, this methodological

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Work–life conflict (outcome favorability)</td>
<td>1–11</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Procedural fairness</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational commitment</td>
<td>1–11</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.62*</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prior organizational commitment (control measure)</td>
<td>1–11</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Higher scores reflect greater outcome favorability (lower work–life conflict). Coefficient alphas are in parentheses. * p < .01.
shortcoming was not present in either Study 1 (in which the predicted interaction between procedural fairness and work–life conflict emerged) or in Study 3.

In summary, the results of two rather different field survey studies showed that higher levels of procedural fairness eliminated the inverse relationship between work–life conflict and employees’ organizational commitment, relative to when procedural fairness was low. However, because Studies 1 and 2 were based on cross-sectional data, it is difficult to evaluate the causal impact on employees’ organizational commitment of the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and work–life conflict.3

Study 3

We designed Study 3 with two objectives in mind. First, in Studies 1 and 2, procedural fairness did not pertain specifically to decisions or events that were directly related to work–life conflict. In Study 1, procedural fairness referred to employees’ perceptions of the way decisions or events that were generally enacted in organizations, whereas in Study 2 procedural fairness referred to employees’ perceptions of how management had handled the process of the company being acquired. In contrast, in Study 3 we examined the influence of procedural fairness in the implementation of decision making that was more directly associated with individuals’ experience of work–life conflict. Second, and of greater importance, we wanted to test for the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and work–life conflict in the context of a research design with greater internal validity than the one used in Studies 1 and 2.

Method

Participants

Participants were 42 full-time employees who were enrolled part time in an evening MBA program in the northeastern United States. A majority of the participants were male (56.9%), and a little less than half (45.1%) had children. Their median age was 31, and the mean number of hours worked per week was 42. All participants in this study were married. We deliberately chose married individuals because we expected this group to find work–life concerns to be more salient than their unmarried counterparts. The salience of work–life issues was especially important in Study 3, because we used a vignette-based methodology. Vignette-based studies run the risk of being somewhat uninvolving to participants. One way to reduce this risk is by trying to ensure that the participants assign importance to the issue being addressed in the vignette. We believed that married individuals would assign greater importance to work–life conflict issues than would single individuals, in light of previous research showing work–life issues to be more of a salient consideration for the former group than for the latter (e.g., Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977).

Experimental Design

We conducted a between-subjects study in which participants were asked to imagine that they were the focal person in the vignette. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions created by a 2 (work–life conflict: high vs. low) × 2 (procedural fairness: high vs. low) factorial design. One group of participants was told that they were experiencing high levels of work–life conflict (high work–life conflict condition), whereas the other group was told that they were experiencing low levels of work–life conflict (low work–life conflict condition). Cross-cutting the manipulation of work–life conflict, we told one group of participants that the procedures used to implement the decision affecting their level of work–life conflict were fair (high procedural fairness), and we told the other group that the decision-making procedures were unfair (low procedural fairness). As in Study 1, the dependent variable was organizational commitment.

Procedure

Students enrolled in a management course were asked to participate in a study that served as the basis for a class discussion. Participation was

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Table 4

 Regression Results, Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>t*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control variables (entered in Step 1)b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−0.57</td>
<td>−1.71</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior level of commitment</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effects (entered in Step 2)c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work–life conflict</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural fairness</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction term (entered in Step 3)</td>
<td>−0.13</td>
<td>−2.41</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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a df = 1, for all except constant.
b Overall F(2, 118) = 21.16, p < .01; total $R^2 = .26$.
c Overall F(4, 116) = 42.12, p < .01; total $R^2 = .59$; total $R^2$ change (from previous step) = .33; F change = 46.49, p < .01.
d Overall F(5, 115) = 36.25, p < .01; total $R^2 = .61$; total $R^2$ change (from previous step) = .02; F change = 5.81, p < .02.

3 The results of Studies 1 and 2 were quite similar in that in both studies there was an interactive effect of procedural fairness and work–life conflict on organizational commitment, and simple slope analyses showed that the relationship between work–life conflict and organizational commitment was significant (and negative) when procedural fairness was low and that work–life conflict and organizational commitment were unrelated when procedural fairness was high. However, Figures 1 and 2 show that whereas the results of the two studies were quite similar, they were not identical. This was due to the fact that the main effect of work–life conflict was significant in Study 2 but not in Study 1. It is not entirely certain why this inconsistency emerged. Thus, another purpose of Study 3 was to provide an additional test of the nature of the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and work–life conflict.
voluntary, and individuals were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. All human subjects procedures were followed in the conduct of this experiment.

First, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the following situation: “You are an employee at ABC Company. Recently, a number of important projects have landed on your boss’s desk. This morning, in a meeting with your boss, he assigned one of these projects to you.”

This was followed by the manipulation of the independent variables, work–life conflict and procedural fairness. Participants assigned to the high or low work–life conflict conditions, respectively, read the following (the manipulated information is in italics):

Although the project entails various responsibilities, in looking over the projects you are currently working on, you realize that this additional project will require you to spend more time at work! Will you require you to spend much more time at work? Therefore, you will have less time /about the same amount of time to spend on activities in your personal life that are very important to you.

This was followed by the manipulation of procedural fairness. Participants assigned to the high or low procedural-fairness conditions, respectively, read the following (manipulated information is in italics):

In informing you about the project, your manager handled the process quite well/poorly. He gavé/do not give you ample advance notice regarding the subject’s deadline. He explained/did not explain which criteria were used in making this assignment to you. And finally, he allowed/did not allow ample time for your questions, concerns, and input relating to the nature of the project.

**Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment**

After participants read the vignette, they were asked four questions about whether and how their level of organizational commitment may have changed in response to the new assignment. For example one question asked “In light of this new assignment, how has your commitment to ABC Company changed? (1 = decreased, 7 = increased).” Responses to these four items were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .84.

**Control Variables**

Because participants’ own needs and expectations regarding work–life balance and their personal beliefs about their ability to manage their work and nonwork domains might independently influence their reactions to the vignette, we attempted to control for these factors. Specifically, we designed these measures to assess participants’ beliefs about the importance of work–life balance, their beliefs about their ability to achieve work–life balance, and their expectations regarding their employer’s sensitivity to their need for work–life balance. For example, it could be that participants who assigned higher levels of importance to work–life balance may have responded with greater organizational commitment, especially in the low work–life conflict condition. The following items, rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, were included as covariates: “How important is it for you to have work–life balance? (1 = not at all important, 7 = very important),” “Do you expect that you can currently achieve work–life balance? (1 = not at all, 7 = very much),” and “How much do you expect that your organization will be sensitive to your need for work–life balance? (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).”

**Manipulation Checks**

As a check on the work–life conflict manipulation, participants were asked the following in reference to their situation in the vignette that they had read: “How would you rate your work–life balance at this point?” Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from not at all balanced (1) to very balanced (7).

To check on the procedural-fairness manipulation, we asked participants “How fair was the process by which your manager informed you of your new assignment?” Responses could range from not at all fair (1) to very fair (7).

**Results**

**Manipulation Checks**

**Work–life conflict.** A 2 × 2 factorial analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), in which the independent variables were work–life conflict and procedural fairness, yielded only a main effect of work–life conflict. Participants were more likely to view themselves as having greater work–life balance (i.e., lower work–life conflict) in the low work–life conflict (WLC) condition than in the high work–life conflict condition (M_{HighWLC} = 2.70 vs. M_{LowWLC} = 5.61), F(1, 35) = 48.48, p < .001, η^2 = .57.

**Procedural fairness.** A 2 × 2 factorial ANCOVA, in which the independent variables were work–life conflict and procedural fairness, yielded a main effect of procedural fairness. Participants viewed the process by which their manager informed them of their assignment as more fair in the high procedural fairness (PF) condition than in the low procedural fairness condition (M_{HighPF} = 5.14 vs. M_{LowPF} = 2.33), F(1, 35) = 43.50, p < .001, η^2 = .55. In addition, a smaller but still significant main effect of work–life conflict emerged on the procedural-fairness manipulation check item, indicating that participants in the low work–life conflict condition were more likely to rate procedural fairness as high, relative to their counterparts in the high work–life conflict condition (M_{LowWLC} = 4.35 vs. M_{HighWLC} = 3.10), F(1, 35) = 6.98, p < .05, η^2 = .15. The interaction between procedural fairness and work–life conflict was not significant, however (p > .44). In summary, both manipulations were successful.

**Test of hypothesis.** We tested the focal hypothesis using a 2 × 2 factorial ANCOVA on the dependent measure of organizational commitment. The main effect of work–life conflict was highly significant, F(1, 35) = 15.98, p < .001, η^2 = .31, such that organizational commitment was higher when work–life conflict was relatively low, and the main effect of procedural fairness was marginally significant, F(1, 35) = 3.35, p < .10, η^2 = .09, such that organizational commitment was somewhat higher when procedural fairness was relatively high. Of greater importance was the significant interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness on organizational commitment, F(1, 35) = 4.30, p < .05, η^2 = .11. Examination of the means (covariate-adjusted) revealed that the tendency for higher levels of work–life conflict to lead to lower organizational commitment was more pronounced when procedural fairness was low (M_{HighWLC} = 2.63 vs. M_{LowWLC} = 4.56) than when procedural fairness was high (M_{HighPF} = 3.86 vs. M_{LowWLC} = 4.46). Indeed, the simple effect of outcome favorability was highly significant when procedural fairness was low, F(1, 35) = 20.56, p < .001, η^2 = .36, but was not significant when procedural fairness was high, F(1, 35) = 1.99, ns, η^2 = .06. The pattern of the interaction effect is quite consistent with the findings reported in Studies 1 and 2.

**General Discussion**

Taken together, the results of all three studies showed that procedural fairness moderated the relationship between work–life conflict and organizational commitment. The tendency for greater
work–life conflict to be associated with lower organizational commitment was less pronounced when procedural fairness was high rather than low. The methods of the three studies were quite diverse. Studies 1 and 2 examined participants’ actual reactions to the level of work–life conflict that they experienced, albeit with a design low in internal validity. Study 3 required participants to indicate how they would react to varying degrees of work–life conflict and procedural fairness but did so with a design high in internal validity. Thus, some of the methodological shortcomings of the studies were redressed by another study. The fact that highly consistent results emerged across such methodologically diverse studies bodes well for the reliability of the findings.

Theoretical Implications

Contributions to the Literature

Work–life conflict. The present studies contribute to the work–life conflict literature in several important ways. First, we introduce a theoretical construct that has not previously been considered by work–life conflict researchers: procedural fairness. Although researchers have examined the role of procedural justice in a wide variety of human resource contexts (e.g., Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, & Reed, 1990; Schaubroeck, May, & Brown, 1994), prior justice-related theory and research in the work–life conflict arena has examined the role of distributive justice (e.g., Grandey, 2001; Grover, 1991). In contrast, the present studies investigated how procedural fairness affects individuals’ reactions to their experience of work–life conflict.

Second, it is instructive to compare the present studies with previous research that has examined the effect of supervisory social support on employees’ reactions to work–life conflict. Supervisory social support refers to managers’ specific sensitivity to employees’ efforts to meet both work and home demands (e.g., Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). In contrast, procedural fairness, which consists of both structural and interactional aspects, is much broader in scope than supervisory social support. In fact, the procedural fairness we examined in Studies 1 and 2 referred to elements that were unrelated to employees’ experience of work–life conflict. For example, in Study 1, procedural fairness referred to the decision-making methods of organizational authorities in general. Thus, consistent with fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001), even procedural fairness that does not specifically relate to work–life conflict may help to reduce the negative consequences resulting from the experience of work–life conflict.

Third, the current research identifies an important boundary condition to the previously demonstrated negative effects of work–life conflict. Although work–life conflict has been associated with numerous detrimental consequences for individuals and organizations alike, we showed that these tendencies may not be inevitable. If employees perceive high levels of procedural fairness, they are less likely to respond negatively to high levels of work–life conflict. Thus, the current work diverges from and extends prior research by identifying the moderating influence of procedural fairness on employees’ reactions to their experience of work–life conflict.

Finally, whereas previous research has attempted to delineate the policies that may help reduce employees’ work–life conflict, the results of Study 3 in particular demonstrate that employees’ work attitudes and behaviors may be positively influenced without necessarily reducing or eliminating work–life conflict. Recall that procedural fairness had no significant effect on the manipulation check measure of work–life conflict. However, as in Studies 1 and 2, procedural fairness interacted with work–life conflict such that high procedural fairness reduced the relationship between employees’ work–life conflict and their organizational commitment. In short, even (or especially) when work–life conflict is present, high procedural fairness may help to minimize its negative consequences.

Organizational justice. The present research also contributes to the organizational-justice literature in several respects. First, the interactive effect of outcome favorability and procedural fairness on employees’ work attitudes and behaviors has been demonstrated in both laboratory settings (e.g., Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983) and in a variety of organizational and human resource contexts, including pay cuts (Greenberg, 1993), pay freezes (Schaubroeck et al., 1994), and layoffs (Brockner et al., 1990), to name a few. This is the first study, however, to examine the interactive relationship between outcome favorability and procedural justice in the context of work–life conflict. Hence, the present research extends the reach of the interactive relationship between outcome favorability and procedural fairness.

Moreover, previous research on the interactive relationship has predominantly operationalized outcome favorability on the basis of work-related outcomes, such as perceived favorability of performance appraisals (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992), layoff severity (Mellor, 1992), and the economic hardship associated with a pay freeze (Schaubroeck et al., 1994). The present findings suggest that procedural fairness also moderates the influence of outcome favorability on employees’ organizational commitment when the outcomes stem from the interface of employees’ experiences in their work and nonwork domains.

Limitations

Although similar results were obtained across all three studies, the present research nevertheless has at least three limitations. First, whereas the interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness was statistically significant in all three studies, the amount of variance explained by the interaction effect was rather modest in Studies 1 and 2 (3% and 2%, respectively). The size of the interaction effect was considerably larger in Study 3 ($\eta^2 = .11$), perhaps because Study 3 consisted of a more tightly controlled design. Alternatively, it may be that the effect size was greater because procedural fairness was more directly related to people’s experience of work–life conflict in Study 3 than in Studies 1 and 2.

Second, the dependent measure of organizational commitment in Study 3 was somewhat indirect. As part of the vignette-based methodology in Study 3, we instructed individuals to envision themselves in a particular role that was assigned to them; they were subsequently asked to predict how they would respond (i.e., by indicating their level of organizational commitment) to the specific condition to which they were assigned. Hence, we measured individuals’ projected commitment (Greenberg & Eskew, 1993) rather than their actual responses. Despite this limitation, it is likely that the results are not an artifact of the vignette-based methodology, because the results were consistent with those of Studies 1 and 2, which measured individuals’ actual commitment.
Third, because the same methodology was used to operationalize the independent and dependent variables in Studies 1 and 2, the results of those two studies may have been biased because of common-methods variance. Although this possibility cannot be ruled out entirely, we believe that this potential limitation poses less of a concern in the present research because the main finding was an interaction effect (between work–life conflict and procedural fairness); that is, the common-methods explanation does not easily account for the fact that the relationship between work–life conflict and organizational commitment was significantly different when procedural fairness was high rather than low. Moreover, the design of Study 3 was not based on common methods, and yet the predicted findings emerged there as well.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

At the outset, we suggested that research in the work–life conflict literature has evaluated the effect of various content-based initiatives (e.g., day-care centers, family-friendly policies) on employees’ work attitudes and behaviors. The present studies, in which we examined the influence of procedural fairness on employees’ reactions to work–life conflict, took a different approach. Future research may examine the joint effects of content-based initiatives and procedural fairness on employees’ reactions. For example, it may be that the presence of high procedural fairness in organizations enhances the effectiveness of certain alternative work arrangements or work–life policies, such as flexible work schedules or telecommuting. In any event, research conducted to date has shown that content-based initiatives have had mixed effects on employees’ work attitudes and behaviors (Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Dunham et al., 1987). Therefore, it may be beneficial to investigate whether the level of procedural fairness associated with the implementation of content-based initiatives influences the effect of those content-based initiatives on employees’ work attitudes and behaviors (Thompson et al., 1999).

Additionally, whereas the present research identified two underlying frameworks that may account for the interaction between work–life conflict and procedural fairness (trust and accountability), future theory and research need to evaluate the relative influence of these two frameworks in accounting for the present findings. One way to do so is by examining the effects of factors known to influence trust and accountability; that is, if trust accounted for the present findings, then other factors (besides procedural fairness) that influence employees’ trust in management should similarly interact with work–life conflict to influence organizational commitment. For example, the relationship between work–life conflict and organizational commitment may be less pronounced among employees who are more (rather than less) dispositionally inclined to be trusting of others. If accountability explained the present findings, then other factors (besides procedural fairness) that affect employees’ tendency to hold others accountable should similarly interact with work–life conflict to influence organizational commitment. For example, if employees believed that high work–life conflict were not limited to their particular organization (i.e., if high work–life conflict were a fact of life for employees at all or most organizations in their industry), then the relationship between work–life conflict and organizational commitment should be attenuated.

In a related vein, it would be important to identify other factors that might serve as qualifiers of the interaction effect found in the present studies (e.g., Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). For example, the interaction effect may be particularly pronounced among individuals who place a premium on achieving work–life balance. Moreover, it may be that the interaction effect is particularly salient to employees who occupy a lower rung in the organizational hierarchy. Indeed, Chen, Brockner, and Greenberg (2003) recently found that the form of the interaction effect observed in the present research was more likely to be found when people perceived themselves to be of lower status than the other party in an exchange relationship.

**Practical Implications**

Earlier, we suggested that content-based initiatives designed to redress work–life conflict have not consistently elicited more favorable employee attitudes and behaviors and may be financially costly. The present studies offer yet another way for organizations to counteract the harmful consequences of high work–life conflict (that is not mutually exclusive of content-based initiatives). Despite experiencing work–life conflict, employees may maintain relatively high levels of organizational commitment provided that they perceive that the procedures used to plan and implement organizational decisions are fair. Indeed, the present findings lend considerable generality to the assertion that high procedural fairness may reduce the negative consequences of work–life conflict. The procedures (in which high fairness should be manifested) may refer to decisions that influence employees’ level of work–life conflict (as in Study 3), but they need not be. For example, procedural fairness in Study 1 referred to employees’ perceptions of how their managers generally enacted decisions. Moreover, procedural fairness in all three studies consisted of both the structural and interpersonal elements, suggesting that organizational authorities may have an assortment of ways in which to exhibit high procedural fairness. For example, if employees feel that their managers involve them in decisions concerning their workload, provide adequate explanations concerning decisions that affect their work–life balance, and listen respectfully to their concerns about managing work demands, then their organizational commitment may not suffer even in the face of high work–life conflict.

What is particularly noteworthy about the present findings is that the financial costs associated with implementing decisions in procedurally fair ways (e.g., giving people voice, treating them with dignity and respect) are low, certainly in relation to the financial costs associated with implementing many content-based initiatives. Although organizations may either be unable to rid employees of their work–life conflict (i.e., the single parent who must work to financially support her children) or unwilling to reduce their employees’ experience of conflict (i.e., by scaling back work demands), it is within employers’ interests and capabilities to maintain high levels of procedural fairness when dealing with their employees.

As employees continue to clock more hours at work, work–life conflict is unlikely to decrease. However, to the extent that organizations and their members practice fair procedures, they will be in a better position to retain (the commitment of) valuable talent. **Content-based initiatives** refers to what organizations do to help employees manage their work–life conflict. Complementing these content-based approaches, the present findings suggest that the ability of organizations to minimize the harmful consequences of
high work–life conflict may very well hinge not only on what organizational authorities do but also on how they do it.

References


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