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# The Intertwining of Workplace Conflict and Home Life: An Interpretive Multicase Study

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The Intertwining of Workplace Conflict and Home Life: An Interpretive Multicase Study

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION,  
LEADERSHIP AND COUNSELING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

By

Arthur C. Howard III

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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UNIVERSITY OF ST THOMAS

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

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John Conbere, EdD, Committee Chair

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James Brown, PhD, Committee Member

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Date

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Kate, and my two beautiful precious girls, Ava and Sienna. Their presence and love have given me the courage to continue to drive towards and reach this goal. They are the source of my joy in life and the reason I will forever strive to be a better person. Specifically to my wife Kate, I could not have done this without your support and countless hours of advising and pulling double parenting duties. You deserve all the recognition that comes with this success. Without your encouragement and support I would not have reached this goal. Thank you and I love you!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“A journey I must complete” has been a recurring phrase in my mind for as long as I can remember. Throughout my life it has meant many of things for me, but the one consistent has been the goal to move beyond what I grew up accustomed to. The drive to further myself came by challenging myself to reach my full potential. I feel humbled and honored to have accomplished today what so many told me I could not. Yet with all those who said I lacked intelligence, drive, and ambition, there were a handful that said I could do anything I put my mind to. Although this is an individual accomplishment, I could not have done it without the support of those who believed in me. First and foremost, my mother Rita Ann Flores, thank you for your sacrifice, thank you for hiding so well the true despair we were in during my childhood; your sacrifices allowed me to dream. Your ability to be positive in the absence of fortune and to be strong when you wanted to retreat—it is these qualities that I have strived to mirror my whole life. You are an amazing person.

To my committee chair, Dr. Conbere, thank you for your support and guidance. But most of all thank you for believing in me when you accepted me into University of St. Thomas Doctoral Program. In addition, thank you Dr. Heorhiadi for helping me see the world through a different lens. Both you and Dr. Conbere taught me so much about the field of organization development, but you also helped me find self and become a more authentic person. Thank you for the challenge and guidance, but most of all for believing in me. To my other dissertation committee member, Dr. Brown, thank you for your time, support, and insight.

### **Abstract**

How do negative workplace conflicts and home life intertwine? What happens when negative workplace conflict affects an employee's home life? This was an interpretive multicase study seeking to understand how negative workplace conflict experienced by workers intertwines with their home lives. Study participants experienced negative impacts to their home lives that affected their well-being and the well-being of their families. Participants were individually interviewed and asked to discuss a negative workplace conflict that they experienced within the last year. We then discussed the impacts of that negative workplace conflict on them and on their home lives. To gain further insight into the effects of the negative workplace conflict, the spouse/significant other of each main participant was also interviewed. In total, the study consisted of five single cases made up of two people, the main participant and spouse/significant other, resulting in a total of 10 interviews. Each of the five cases revealed interesting insight to the personal experience of each participant in the phenomenon of negative workplace conflict. Analysis was conducted on the effects of negative workplace conflict on the participant and the effect the participants experience had on family (effect on family). Analysis across cases revealed four major effects and four major themes. The major effects on participant were stress, anxiety, change in behavior, and loss of self-esteem. The effects on family due to the participant's negative workplace conflict were identified as major themes. The four major themes were loneliness, communication breakdown, resentment, and relationship disappointment. With a great deal of literature and research surrounding workplace conflict, this study examined the experiences of the individuals who experience workplace conflict and how it intertwines with their home lives.

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## Chapter 1

### Background

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable; it happens in every organization and at every level. No one is immune to workplace conflict, it affects each individually differently and each individual handles it differently. The simple answer to why conflict is so prevalent within the workplace is that organizations are made up of humans with different ideas, perceptions, and experiences; in short, we are diverse beings. Over the last few decades the organizational workforce makeup has drastically changed, with the shift in ideology being that those who embrace and promote a diverse workplace have more solid footing in the market place. In a survey collected by *Forbes* in 2011, of companies with at least \$500 million in annual revenue, *Forbes* found that 85% of organizational leaders surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that a diverse workforce is crucial to fostering innovation in the workplace (Center for American Progress, 2014). The leaders agreed that a diverse workforce combining workers from different backgrounds, varying socioeconomic statuses, qualifications, education, races, gender, marital statuses, and experiences breeds a more creative, innovative, effective problem solving, and productive workforce.

Charging employees with the task of working together to achieve an organization's goals and mission often produces areas of disagreement that have the potential to turn into workplace conflict. These workplace conflicts either present positively or negatively. A positive workplace conflict can present opportunities for organizations through the dialogue that emerges often producing creative problem solving through challenging workers to expand their thinking and dig beyond obvious

solutions. Negative workplace conflicts can become a distraction to employees, causing them to focus on the conflict rather than the work they are hired to do. Workplace conflict tends to occur most frequently when employees' individual or collective needs are not met or when their interests, ideas, concerns, opinions, and values are challenged. In my role as a director of an equal employment opportunity program in an organization of 4000 employees, I regularly served employees, who experiencing workplace conflict. In many cases, these individuals expressed the effects of workplace conflict both in the workplace and at home. Over the years, I have heard comments like, "I did not get anything done today because my coworker will not talk to me," or "I cannot stand to work with my coworker because all they do is complain," or "The conflict at work is so bad that when I go home I cannot talk to my daughter," or "My husband gets mad at me whenever I talk about my troubles at work," or "I stay up at night dreading having to come back to work, because I cannot work with my coworker." After hearing these statements, and many similar, I became intrigued by the connection between workplace conflict and home life.

### **Problem Overview**

Generally speaking, conflict is neither good nor bad. It is a natural reaction when one is challenged, pressured, or threatened. Again, there is healthy and unhealthy (negative) conflict in the workplace. Healthy conflict in the workplace is identified as task conflict. Task conflict involves differing ideas about how to perform a work-related task or make a work-related decision. An example of task conflict is a debate between two employees over the appropriate strategy for managing a project or varying views about allocating resources. Healthy conflict produces creative problem solving through

challenging workers to work together to expand their thinking and dig beyond obvious solutions. This is the key reason why, when companies with at least \$500 million in annual revenue were interviewed by *Forbes*, 85% of organizational leaders agreed or strongly agreed that diversity is crucial to fostering innovation in the workplace (Center for American Progress, 2014).

Unhealthy conflict in the workplace is often referred to as relationship conflict. Relationship conflict involves interpersonal differences and the social and emotional connections that accompany them. This type of conflict often creates strong negative feelings such as frustration, anger, and even hatred. If, during a task conflict, individuals are disrespectful or dismissive of others' ideas, relationship conflict often results. If these conflicts are ignored or not properly managed, workplace conflict has the ability to affect workers negatively in a variety of ways. In the workplace, employees sometimes plot against one another, gossip, and intentionally or unintentionally sabotage workplace achievement (Bell, 2002). These behaviors can lead to an inability to concentrate on work, lack of commitment, high absenteeism, and turnover. Workplace productivity is ultimately jeopardized.

In 2008, Management Consulting Firms CPP Inc. and OPP, Ltd. conducted a study in nine countries, including the U.S., to shed light on the nature of workplace conflict. Among their findings were that, on average, workers around the world spent 2.1 hours per week dealing with conflict (forward by Jeff Hayes, 2008, p. 3). Within the United States, this figure rose to 2.8 hours, where roughly 1 in 3 employees (33%) said that conflict led to personal injury or attacks, while 1 in 5 employees (22%) reported that it led to illness or absence from work (Hayes, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, 10% of workers

reported project failure as a direct result of conflict. The study of U.S. conflict estimated a loss of \$359 billion in paid hours in 2008. A study conducted by the human resource department in the Michael F. Price College of Business at University of Oklahoma in 2011 estimated that managers spent at least 25% of their time resolving workplace conflict, which resulted in lower office performance (“Employee Resources, Conflict Resolution,” 2013).

It is clear how unhealthy conflict negatively affects organizational effectiveness. Further, it can lead to stress and emotional exhaustion that employees transfer to their personal/home lives. Workplace conflicts that carry over into employees’ home lives can also weaken individuals’ well-being. At home, employees may experience depression, burnout, and somatic complaints (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2004). Employees get caught up in a cycle of conflict that exacerbates workplace conflicts or lowers the employees’ ability to manage the workplace conflict they are experiencing. Their lack of physical and emotional health and/or lack of relationship health can also obstruct their abilities to effectively recharge during their time off (Ilies et al., 2007; Song et al., 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Negative workplace conflict is as unhealthy for the organization as it is for the employee experiencing the workplace conflict. The impact of negative workplace conflict on the organization is billions of lost dollars in paid hours annually. The impact on a person’s emotional state is just as astronomical, as workers experience depression, anxiety coming to work, and exhaustion due to job dissatisfaction. In my experience, the impacts are evident in comments that I have heard while interacting with workers in my current role: “I stay up at night dreading having to come back to work, because of

conflict”; “My husband is mad at me because all I do is talk about the conflict I have with my coworker”; or “The conflict is even effecting me at home, I’m always angry, frustrated, and just want to be left alone.” For these employees the damage of workplace conflict extends outside of the walls of the organization to self and family.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deep understanding of how negative workplace conflict experienced by workers intertwines with their home lives.

### **Research Question**

How do negative workplace conflicts and home life intertwine? In answering this question, I hoped to better understand how the two worlds intertwine and any negative results that derive from workplace conflict and home life intertwining.

### **Significance of the Study**

Organizations have become more diverse and their employees are being tasked to work together to achieve organization goals. A byproduct of having workforces made up of individuals with different backgrounds, socioeconomic status, qualifications, education, races, gender, marital status, and experiences is workplace conflict.

Workplace conflict costs organizations billions of dollars in paid hours. In the United States of America, managers and supervisor spent on average 2.8 hours a week dealing with workplace conflict (Hayes, 2008); time taken away from their abilities to focus on the organizations’ missions, goals, or strategic plans. Over the last 2 decades thousands of articles have been written about workplace conflict and its effect on organizations; however, there has not been much attention to understanding what happens to workplace conflict that starts at work, but makes its way into the homes of affected workers. I

believe that better understanding this phenomenon can contribute to organizations' recouping some of the billions they are losing each year and workers' experiencing a more positive work–home–life balance.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Over the years, conflict theorists have proposed several definitions of *conflict*. For the purpose of my study, conflict was defined as a disagreement in which parties involving individuals or groups perceive that their needs, interests, concerns, or ideas are threatened. More specifically, *workplace conflict* was defined as a disagreement in the workplace where individuals perceive that their needs, interests, concerns, or ideas are threatened. *Negative workplace conflict* was defined as workplace conflict that creates strong negative feelings such as frustration, anger, and hatred. Also for purposes of this study, *family member* was defined as an individual, who currently lives with the participant on a daily basis, such as a spouse or significant other. *Participant* was defined as the individual whom experienced the negative workplace conflict.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this literature review was to set a theoretical framework for my research by providing a background of the relevant scholar research and writings pertaining to workplace conflict in organizations. I also aimed to create a sound base for why I decided to conduct this particular study. While conducting the literature review I used a number of key databases: Business Source Premier, Academic Source Premier, Expanded Academic ASAP, Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. This topic dealt with workplace conflict and the relationships between workplace conflict and families; seminal and recent research findings in the area of conflict, workplace conflict and impacts on home life, and conflict management will be presented. The review is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, the focus will be on the findings as they relate to individuals within the workplace. Once the research outlined in this study was completed, an additional literature review was examined around my findings and included in the final report.

### **Conflict**

Over the years conflict theorists proposed several definitions of conflict. Conflict has been defined as a social struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources (Coser, 1956). Deutsch (1973) believed that conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur when one party is interfering, disrupting, obstructing, or in some other way making the other party's actions less effective. Wall (1985) described conflict as a process where two or more parties attempt to frustrate the other's goal attainment, usually underlined by interdependence or differences in goals

and perceptions. Pruitt and Rubin (1986) believed conflict to be a perceived divergence of interest or a belief that parties' aspirations cannot be mutually met. Conflict has also been defined as communicative interactions among people who are interdependent and who perceive that their interests are incompatible, inconsistent, or in tension (Conrad, 1991), while Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1997) defined conflict as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) defined conflict as a "process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them" (p. 6).

Although the study of workplace conflict is an interdisciplinary pursuit, for the most part, scholars generally agree on three major conclusions (Deutsch, 1973):

- Conflict is a pervasive element of social life in the workplace environment.
- Most workplace conflict involves mixed motives; there is a presence of both cooperative and competitive interests.
- Conflict can be constructive if managed well, but destructive if managed poorly or ignored.

Workplace conflict literature is plentiful, and there are various theories on how people handle conflict. The level of conflict experienced by people is not only external reality, but also a result of how individuals approach the existing problem (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996), as the disposition of a person tends to influence the way he or she perceives or deals with social situations (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000). Bergamann and Volkema's study (as cited in Gleason, 1997) explored the sources



of interpersonal conflict at work. They found that 61% of conflict between coworkers was due to personalities, different work ethics, belittling coworkers, goal conflict, and coworkers not carrying their workload. Other causes of workplace conflict are

- Conflicting needs—competing for scarce resources, recognition, and power in the company's “pecking order.”
- Conflicting styles—people differ in the way they approach others and problems.
- Conflicting perceptions—people view the same incident in dramatically different ways.
- Conflicting goals—can occur when people have different viewpoints about an incident, plan, or goal. Within a workplace it may be when associates are responsible for different duties in achieving the same goal.
- Conflicting pressures—can occur when two or more associates or departments are responsible for separate actions with the same deadline.
- Conflicting of roles—occur when an individual is asked to perform a function that is outside his job requirements or expertise, or another associate is assigned to perform the same job (Bell, 2002).

Workplace conflict also results from conduct and performance issues, as well as

- all forms of discrimination, including unlawful discrimination;
- workplace bullying;
- terms and conditions of employment;
- communication and/or management style;
- perceived or actual unfair treatment;
- differing perceptions about how work can be done;

- how work is distributed;
- how the workplace is organized and the environment of the workplace; and
- how organization change is managed (Devine, 2008, p. 2).

Workplace conflict is a constant in every organization, and in recent years it is being examined and addressed more proactively.

### **Workplace Conflict**

Workplace conflicts are a widespread phenomenon in organizational life.

Empirical research has shown that employees, who experience workplace conflict, suffer from strain symptoms such as depression, burnout, and somatic complaints, and thus, workplace conflict may constitute a serious threat to employees' well-being (De Dreu, 2004). The two types of conflict that exist in the workplace are *task conflict* and *relationship conflict*. Task conflicts (also known as *cognitive conflicts*) refer to disagreements between two or more people about a task that is to be performed (Sonnentag, Unger, & Nagel, 2013). These disagreements often include "differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions" (Jehn, 1995, p. 258). Disagreements about the "distribution of resources, procedures and policies, and judgments and interpretation of facts" also fall in the category of task conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003, p. 741). Relationship conflicts tend "to be more interpersonal and emotional" (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003, p. 747) and imply a greater threat to one's personal identity and self-esteem (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2004). Because negative job-related experiences that are linked to one's self-esteem have detrimental outcomes (Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, & Elfering, 2010), relationship conflicts are associated with more negative affective responses and imply a greater risk to one's well-being.

Workplace conflicts are job stressors that produce reactions at the physiological and psychological levels; physiological—increased heart rate, and psychological—anger and fatigue (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008; as cited by Sonnentag et al., 2013). This is pragmatic because cognitive stress theories such as the transactional stress model “stressors impact on the individual not only while the stressors are physically present in the situation, but as long as they are mentally represented” (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008; as cited by Sonnentag et al., 2013, p. 168). However, stressors do not lead to negative effects in all situations. For instance, the way an employee deals with the specific stressors influences possible consequences. As they relate to workplace conflicts, Sonnentag et al.’s (2013) assumptions suggested that just thinking about a conflict in some people can cause strain reactions. The effects of such conflict in the workplace are

- plotting against one another,
- gossiping,
- protecting turf,
- retaliating,
- recruiting people to one side or the other,
- planning defenses,
- navigating drama,
- intentional or unintentional aggressive or passive-aggressive (sabotage) behavior
- resentment, and
- power struggles (Bell, 2002).

Bell (2002) referenced in his study that such behaviors contribute to the findings of CPP Inc. (publishers of the Myers-Briggs Assessment and the Thomas-Kilmann

Conflict Mode Instrument) in their commissioned study that identified an annual accumulation of approximately 359 billion dollars of paid hours to employees in United States companies. The study also revealed that 25% of employees avoid conflict by calling in sick to miss work, 10% reported that workplace conflict led to project failure, and more than one-third said that conflict resulted in someone leaving the company, either through firing or quitting (Bell, 2002, para. 11).

### **Workplace Conflict and Home Life**

An assertion in current research in the field of workplace conflict is that both work and non-work domains influence attitudes toward the workplace due to the inability to separate work from home lives. Boles, Johnston, and Hair (1997) conducted a study of the interrelationships of role conflict, role ambiguity, work–family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction. Their study specifically examined roles within the sales industry; however, they suggested that the results would be similar in any industry. Their findings were in line with other recent studies, which “found that work related role stress (role conflict and role ambiguity) is interrelated with conflict between work and family responsibilities” (Boles et al., 1997). In addition, work-related role stressors that effect family members in turn affect the attitudes employees have toward their jobs. These work-related and family-related stressors have in more recent years become a major issue for employees in the United States, resulting in an increased focus of study on the contributing reasons of workplace conflict on family (Boles et al., 1997). The top reasons are as follows:

- Changing demands on organizations and their workforces.

- Changing compositions of U.S. households (increased number of single-parenting families and dual-working parents).
- Over 60% of married women in the workplace have a child under the age of 16.

Research suggested that there is considerable conflict between work and family responsibilities, with experiences at work spilling over into the family role and vice versa (Boles et al., 2007). Members of healthy families shared more emotional information with each other and were more likely to share troubles at work and find solutions. Members of dysfunctional families were found to withhold work issues (conflict) from one another. This made it more difficult for workers to switch roles, deal with, or process workplace conflict (Whitton, Waldinger, Schulz, Allen, Crowell, & Hauser, 2008).

In similar context, the inability to separate workplace conflict with home life was identified as *work interference with family* (Bryon, 2005). The effects of work interference with family are job satisfaction, burnout, and absenteeism. Inattention to spillover of workplace conflict into home is the production of “psychological detachment,” a term coined by Etzion, Eden, and Lapidot (1998). Their definition of psychological detachment was detaching mentally from work during nonwork time and not engaging in work activities, as well as refraining from job-related thoughts. They believed the ability to detach from work while at home is an important prerequisite for recovering from strain experiences that originated from work, including workplace conflicts. Other researchers such as Ilies et al. (2007), authors of *When Can Employees Have Family*, also concluded that employees do not have the ability to leave their workplace issues and work experiences at work, but rather allowed job-related matters to encroach their home lives and hurt their abilities to effectively recharge. “Additional

studies have provided increasing evidence that psychological detachment from work during non-work time is associated with positive aspects of well-being, whereas a lack of detachment is associated with strain symptoms such as emotional exhaustion and health complaints” (Moreno-Jimenez, Mayo, Sanz-Vergel, Geurts, Rodriguez-Munoz, & Garrosa, 2008, p. 428). The association between workplace conflicts and poor well-being will be weaker when employees mentally disengage from work during nonwork time (Sonnentag et al., 2013). However, when employees do not detach from work during nonwork time, conflicts experienced at work can be more detrimental to their well-being. This concept coincides nicely with Bole et al.’s (1997) assertion that juggling work roles and family roles and not being able to separate the two causes stressors that, over time, affect an employee’s attitudes towards work and a greater likelihood of loss of productivity.

### **Summary**

Workplace conflict is an inevitability in organizations; research shows that its impact on an organization are costly. A byproduct of workplace conflict is the spillover of conflict that starts in the workplace and spills over into home life, then reenters the workplace in the forms of loss of productivity due to inability to concentrate on work, lack of commitment, high absenteeism, and lack of motivation amongst employees.

Many organization leaders have realized the cost of these behaviors and attitudes and have taken measures in establishing conflict management systems within their organizations to aid in resolving workplace conflict. Because workplace conflict exists at all levels of an organization, understanding how to recognize and deal with it is as vital to employees as it is to management.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

To have a better understanding of how negative workplace conflicts experienced by workers intertwine with their home lives, I employed a multicase study methodology based on interpretive epistemology. My experience as an equal employment opportunity director led to my interest in better understanding this phenomenon. People view the world through a different lens and their journeys in life are their unique experiences. Therefore, every case has its own levels of complexities (Stake, 1995). The case study design presents an individual the opportunity to tell their individual story (Stake, 1995). By utilizing a case study of individuals, the components of one person's story may be uncovered in unencumbered depth. For my research I elected to conduct multiple individual case studies with the intent to seek commonalities or differences between each individual's stories.

#### **Interpretive Case Study**

Interpretive research is based on the assumption that reality is created through social constructions such as language, consciousness, or shared meanings. The philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Boland, 1985). An interpretive study is conducted to understand a phenomenon through the meanings of the people who have experienced them. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but rather focuses on the complexity of human sense making as the phenomenon emerges (Myers, 1997).

The term *case study* has multiple meanings. It is often used to describe a unit of analysis; for example, a case study of Target Corporation. Case study can also be used to describe a research method. Originally, I considered two approaches to guide my case

study methodology; one proposed by Robert Stake (1995) and the second by Robert Yin (1989). Both seek to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored, and that the quintessence of the phenomenon is revealed, but the methods that they employ are quite different.

Robert Stake (1995) pointed out that the most important element of a case study is the object of study is a case: “As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used (p. 237).” Stake’s (1995) emphases are on a more naturalistic approach and less on the method of investigation. Stake (1995) defined case study as the “study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). The number and the type of case studies depend on the purpose of the inquiry. An interpretive case study emphasizes observing the workings of a chosen case and recording objectively what the experiences of those within are having with the phenomenon—the aim being to thoroughly understand.

Stake (1995) described three types of case study: an *instrumental*, an *intrinsic*, and a *collective case study*. An intrinsic case study happens when the researcher is curious about a particular phenomenon and is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem. Rather, because the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case and all of its particularities and ordinariness, the study is undertaken. In contrast, the instrumental case study attempts to provide insight into an issue or refinement of a theory. The instrumental case study is done when the case study is secondary and instrumental to accomplishing something



other than simply understanding the particular case (Stake, 1995). A collective case study is the study of a number of cases in order to inquire into a particular phenomenon.

Robert Yin (1989) categorized case studies as *explanatory*, *exploratory*, or *descriptive*. He also differentiated between *single*, *holistic case studies*, and *multiple case studies*. Yin explained that explanatory case study is used when the researcher is seeking to answer a question that is sought to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for survey or experimental strategies. An exploratory case study is conducted when the researcher desires to exam a situation in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes. A descriptive case study using Yin's approach is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context it occurred in.

Yin's distinction between single, holistic, and multiple case studies is that a single case would allow a researcher to study a phenomenon in an isolated context. An example of a single case study is a study on the decision making of one male or a single group of 30-year-old males facing artificial limb fittings post amputation upon returning from war. A multiple-case study enables the researchers to explore differences within and between cases. The goal is to replicate findings across cases. Cases should be chosen carefully so that the researcher can predict similar results across cases or predict contrasting results based on theory. According to Yin, a holistic case study allows the researcher to understand unique/extreme/critical cases.

Both Robert Stake and Robert Yin's approaches seek to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored, and that the quintessence of the phenomenon is revealed, but the methods that they employ are quite different. Stakes's (1995) approach is of an

interpretive nature, conducted to understand a phenomenon through the meanings of the people who have experienced them. Yin's approach (1989) is a positivistic one, as he describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Yin recommended the use of hypotheses and/or propositions, and that a good case study design is vital and should consist of five components:

1. a study's questions;
2. its propositions, if any;
3. its unit(s) of analysis;
4. the logic linking the data to the propositions; and
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings.

Both Yin (1989) and Stake (1995) have questions and units of analysis. The difference between the two methodologies is that the unit of analysis for Yin is the item being measured, which is a positivistic approach to research; while for Stake (1995), the unit of analysis is the case itself.

As my aim was to thoroughly understand the phenomenon of workplace conflict through an interpretive approach, and less through the method of investigation (Stake, 1995), I elected to use Stake's case study method of approach.

### **The Cases**

My research question was, "How do workplace conflicts and home life intertwine?" Specifically, I was interested in the experiences of individuals who have had negative workplace conflict. My case focused on an analysis of individuals'

experiences with negative workplace conflict and how they intertwined with their home lives. Each case was made up of two people:

1. Main participant—the individual who experienced the negative workplace conflict.
2. His or her spouse or significant other.

It was my hope that interviewing participants, who had gone through negative workplace conflicts, would give me insights into their unique experiences, while interviewing their spouse or significant other would give me insight in how that negative workplace conflict intertwined with the participants' home lives. Because my study consisted of five cases to examine a particular phenomenon, I conducted a multiple case study.

### **Boundaries**

To ensure that this study remained reasonable in scope, the study had the following boundaries: the only workplace conflicts analyzed were negative workplace conflicts, and the experiences surrounding those conflicts in the workplace and how they intertwined with home lives.

### **Participants**

The primary form of data collection in an interpretive case study is interviewing people who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, in this case negative workplace conflict. For my study, I sought participants from my immediate network of associates, who were open to talking and had a spouse/significant other, who was also open to talking. Drawing from my immediate network allowed me to reach a pool of participants who were easily accessible.

**Criteria.** The criteria were as follows:

- To help assure that people were familiar with their environment and the people they work with, participants were required to have been within their current position for at least 1 years.
- To help ensure that the conflict was fresh in memory, the participants had to have experienced the negative workplace conflict within the last year.
- In an effort to reach those who are more emotionally developed as well as personally reflective, participants had to be at least 30 years of age.
- To ensure that I was able to interview a spouse or significant other, the participants had to be in relationships and their spouses or significant others must be willing to talk with the researcher.

**Selection.** I selected study participants through a voluntary process. I e-mailed an invitation to participate in my study to those within my network, whom I knew were at least 30 years of age, working, and were married or had a significant others. The e-mail described the nature of the study, criteria for participation, and expectations of participants (see Appendix A). Those interested in participating were asked to contact me via e-mail. Along with the main participants, I followed the snowball process by interviewing one additional individual for each of the main participants.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, I collected data through one-on-one interviews and used a set of unstructured, neutral interview questions paired with follow-up and probing questions that allowed participants to openly talk about their experiences with workplace conflict. I collected data until saturation. The main question for the main participants was: “Tell me

about your experience dealing with a negative workplace conflict within the last year?” I asked the following probing questions to seek a deeper understanding of their individual experiences:

- Has the way you dealt with that negative workplace conflict in the past affected your home life? If so, please tell me how.
- How did you feel about your workplace when dealing with the negative workplace conflict?

The questions for the rest of the interviewees (spouse/significant other) were as follows..

Main question: Do you know when \_\_\_\_\_ (spouse/significant other) experiences a negative conflict at his/her workplace? How do you know?

Probing questions:

- Tell me what happens?
- How does it affect you?
- What impacts do you think the negative workplace conflict has on \_\_\_\_\_ (spouse/significant other or coworker)’s attitude about work or the organization they work for?

I understood the interviewees had to have an element of comfort with me to let me into this often-private area of their world. Because participants were from a pool of people, who knew me or knew someone who trusts me, participants were more likely to be open and comfortable talking with me. In an effort to aid in their comfort, I conducted interviews in mutually agreed upon places that allowed participants to be comfortable and at ease. I hoped that by doing this, participants would openly share their experiences,

feelings, opinions, vulnerability, and actions at length and in depth. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes in length and were tape recorded. Notes were also taken throughout the interviewing stage, and adjustment to questions and follow-up questions occurred as needed.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis is a critical part of the case study process, as it is essentially taking our impressions and observations, pulling them apart, and putting them back together to gain more meaning (Stake, 1995). Stake's approach (1995) suggested that the researcher (a) focus the analysis built on themes linked to purpose and unit of analysis, and (b) analyze findings based on the purpose, rationale, and research question. Stake (1995) described two case study analyses: (a) categorical aggregation, which means analyzing until something can be said about the unit as a whole; and (b) direct interpretation of individual instances as types of analysis. He suggested that a case study relies on both of these methods. To do this, I used Stake's constant comparison method (1995), in which all participants interviewed were compared with each other to look for similarities and differences. I then identified themes from the data linked to negative workplace conflict and home life. I then looked for linkages between the cases.

As my primary task was to make sure I understood each case, I ensured validity in what I recorded in interviews with participants. To do this, I sent each interviewee a copy of my transcribed interview with them for their review and to sign off that I captured what they reported in the interview. Once the study was completed, I had the participants review my findings to validate my interpretations. As another measure of validation, I used the triangulation method. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested

triangulation as a process used to address questions of validity. Denzin (1978) identified three basic qualitative forms of triangulation: *data triangulation*, *investigation triangulation*, and *theory triangulation*.

According to Denzin (1978), investigator triangulation is defined as the use of several different evaluators. In this case study, the research participants reviewed their transcripts for accuracy and reviewed my findings to validate my interpretations. As a second measure to ensure validity, I worked with two of my University of St. Thomas organization development (OD) doctoral candidates and my dissertation chair, who independently reviewed my work to see what emergent themes they observed. My approach follows Stakes's (1995) recommendation that other researchers be invited to look at the same scene. Once I completed my analysis, I compared the data to existing literature on workplace conflict.

### **Ethical Issues**

No ethical issues arose in this study. My intent was to examine how negative workplace conflict and home life intertwine through the experiences of those whom have been affected by negative workplace conflict. Before the study commenced, all participants received information on the way the data was to be gathered and how it was to be used. Participants were also assured of confidentiality through and after the study. To ensure participant information was kept confidential, the list of all participants, who expressed interest in participating in this study, was stored on my personal computer and was password protected. Printed copies of these data collected were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. I was the only one who had access to the computer, its password, and the file cabinet.

The actual names of the participants were not used in this study; pseudonym names were given. Participants were required to sign a consent form prior to being interviewed in compliance with the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

**Delimitations.** This study was delimited to working adults in the upper Midwest. This may have limited the diversity of participants and/or their experiences. To counter this, I sought to interview as diverse a participant pool as possible, including gender, age, and race. Additionally, this study was limited to individuals who experienced conflict within the last year. I chose to limit the study in this way in hope that the memory of the experience was more clear.

**Limitations.** One limitation of this study was that this study relied on people's ability to self-reflect and describe, with enough insight into how workplace conflict has affected them. Another limitation was the methodology used for this study, as the study was only conducted with participants in the Midwest and within my network. For more on limitations, see chapter 5.



## Chapter 4: Research Findings

My interest in learning about how negative workplace conflict intertwines with workers' home lives started when I began to hear, in my role as a Equal Employment Opportunity director, comments like, "The conflict at work is so bad that when I go home I cannot talk to my daughter"; or "My husband gets mad at me whenever I talk about my troubles at work"; or "I stay up at night dreading having to come back to work, because I cannot work with my coworker" from employees. Hearing these types of comments made me wonder what impact negative workplace conflict has on home lives.

### Interview Process

I conducted a total of 10 interviews, five with individuals who experienced negative workplace conflict and five with each of their spouses/significant others. Six of these interviews were conducted in person and four were conducted via phone conference. All interviews were audio recorded with the approval of the participants. Many of the participants had up-front questions about what I hoped to accomplish from this study and how I became interested in workplace conflict and how it affects the home life. Some expressed concern that they did not have a very good story to tell, as they felt their situations were silly. In those instances, and for all participants for that matter, I assured them that I was interested in their individual stories and understanding their specific experiences. I informed them that I had a few questions, but the interview would take on "a life of its own." Table 1, *Profile of Study Participants*, provides participants pseudonym, career, role, and case title.

Table 1

*Profiles of Study Participants*

Pseudonym	Career	Role	Title of case study
Heather	Medical planner	Main participant	Forest family
Paul	Information technology	Spouse	Forest family
Amber	Medical support assistant	Main participant	Sky family
Brad	Restaurant general manager	Significant other	Sky family
Jackie	Clinical specialist	Main participant	Grass family
Jeff	Program director	Spouse	Grass family
Ed	State social worker supervisor	Main participant	Wind family
Kelly	Social worker	Spouse	Wind family
Dewey	State trooper inspector	Main participant	Star family
Ashlee	Dental hygienist	Spouse	Star family

**Data Analysis**

The data collected were secured and analyzed after the completion of all the interviews. I listened to the audio recording of each interview and took notes. I listened to each interview a second time and outlined the interviewee's answers to each question, which I then matched with the notes I took during the interview. I then had the audio-interviews professionally transcribed. With the word-for-word transcription, I highlighted quotes in various colors that were in relation to negative impacts/feeling to workplace conflict. I chose yellow for participants who experienced the workplace conflict, and green for the spouse or significant other. I chose to underline with a black marker when the participant and spouse/significant other reported the same effects on the

home life. I circled in orange when the participant reported something the spouse/significant other did not and circled in purple when the spouse/significant other reported something the participant did not. Finally, I constructed a final outline of the individual interview, including four main areas and two subareas:

- workplace conflict;
- effect of workplace conflict on participant and home life;
- effect of the workplace conflict on home life from spouse's/significant other's experience; and
- summary:
  - effect on participant, and
  - effect on family.

The high points were descriptions of the negative impacts workplace conflict had on the participants and family members. An interpretive multicase study is designed for each individual case to stand on its own merit, in addition to a cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the results of the data analysis are comprised of two parts. The first part is the individual case studies themselves, five in total. This was done in two steps. First, I identified the impacts the negative workplace conflict had on the participant at home. Secondly, I identified the impacts the negative workplace conflict had on the family member. Next I performed a cross-case analysis of all five cases as a whole. As part of the cross-case analysis process, I identified similarly reported effects/issues experienced among all five participants for whom the negative workplace conflict was centered around. For the issue to be identified as a major effect, three participants had to report the same effect. As my study focus was on how negative workplace conflict

intertwined with the home life, major themes were only identified through analysis of negative effects family members experienced. For the effect to be identified as a major theme, three participants had to report the same effect. During the cross-case analysis of the effects on Family 4, major themes emerged. The five major themes were loneliness, resentment, communication breakdown, and relationship disappointment. These major themes were supported by three to five subthemes for each.

Each case is described below with an overview including direct quotes from the interviewee, my observations, followed by three to five high points stemming from the case in the summary of each. The second part reveals the results of the five cross-case analyses broken up into two parts: effects on participant categorized as major effects and effects on family categorized major themes.

### **Individual Case Analysis**

**Case # 1—Forest family.** Heather was a well-educated 42-year-old medical planner who specialized in health-care architecture and held an advanced degree in architecture design. She and her family lived in St. Paul, Minnesota. For the past 4 years Heather worked for a firm of about 140 people. She liked her job and relocated from Chicago to take it in 2010 after being laid off in 2008. She described herself as a person who was “laid back and enjoys a good challenge.” She also described herself as “a driven detailed-oriented person with high expectations, who feels she is always open to ideas.” She loved spending time with her family and valued one-on-one time with her husband. She thought of herself as “a well-organized person who takes pride in keeping an organized home.” She and her husband Paul have been married for 10 years and have two kids, a 9-year-old boy and 7-year-old girl. Paul was a well-spoken 43-year-old who

worked in the information technology field. He held an advanced degree in computer science.

Paul described himself as a supportive person and his wife as a happy-go-lucky person who is very personable and extremely pleasant to be around. She is normally present for him and the kids: “She’s a great mum and spouse.” He believed her to be very good at her work, and that she enjoyed what she did and where she worked. He identified her as goal orientated, very personable, and always thinking about her client. They both described their marriage as very happy and both identified the other as their best friend, the main reason they believe they are successful as a couple. Paul stated, “We simply enjoy each other’s company and ability to communicate.”

Paul mentioned that the current demands of work, being dual-working parents, and not enough time in the day for them to accomplish all that they have to do has been an added stress. He described the working environment in the United States as much different than what he is accustomed to. Specifically, that in his home country the idea around work is more commonly “you work to live,” meaning that the desire is to have more time to do other things than work; that it is not one’s identity. Here in the States, however, it seems to be more of “you live to work,” and for many it’s their identity. From his experience, the harder or busier people say they are the more important they feel, as if the company would not be as great if they did not work as hard or as long. This, in his mind, allows companies to put more demands on employees to work harder, by requiring them to meet very short project deadlines while working mega hours to meet them. He noted that this has been something both he and his wife have noticed and

discussed at length, as well as equally struggled with. However, both felt they typically managed “quite good.”

*Workplace conflict.* About 6 months ago, Heather had the opportunity to work on a sizable project that consisted of a team of six people and a project manager from a different department. Heather had never worked with the assigned project manager Sue before; however, the two had been friends for 3 years. They often socialized outside of work by going out for lunch and organizing play dates with their children. They were friends on Facebook and had substantial conversations, often sharing very personal matters. Heather knew Sue was very well respected in the firm, with an impeccable track record, and someone who had often been described by her coworkers as being very good at what she did. Therefore, Heather was very excited to be working with her in this capacity, as the medical planner, and Sue as the project manager, which meant Heather would report directly to Sue for the project assigned. As the project commenced, Heather began to quickly realize that Sue’s management style was a lot different than what she expected. Sue was “very micromanaging and seemed to like to be in control, she was very detailed orientated, and somewhat anal.” Heather described herself as having similar qualities as well, but felt that she was a little more open to ideas from everyone, while Sue did not like to be challenged. It was her way or the highway. Heather felt that the conflict stemmed from Sue being micromanaging, controlling, and closed off to others’ ideas that were not her own. In Heather’s mind there was a clear difference in expectations and understanding of the priorities involved.

Part of the project meant that she would have to document developments during what they called “user-group meetings” or “client meetings”; documentation that was

very difficult to synthesize and time intensive. Sue did not like the way that Heather documented a certain process, and asked her to do it in a different way that was even more complex. Heather complied with Sue's request, which added hours upon hours of additional work related to this project. Despite Sue stressing the importance in the way these documents were being completed, these documents were never published. This made Heather think, "Wait a second, why am I wasting my time and all these resources and the client's money producing something that is never going to be published, that's never going to get to the users?"

Along with Sue requiring her to change the way she documented the user-group meetings, Sue also picked apart everything Heather did as part of her deliverable to the project. Heather felt that nothing was ever good enough. Shortly after beginning to feel this way, Heather decided that next time Sue brought it up, she was going to challenge her on it, as Heather felt it was a waste of her time and the clients' money if the work was not going to be published. Heather also felt that Sue knew that in addition to this project she was very busy with other project commitments and that this additional requirement was adding stress to the job. The next opportunity to talk about it came a few days after Heather had decided to confront Sue. There was an incident where Sue wanted the development documents reviewed and revised with only a 2-day turnaround notice, and Heather flatly said no. Heather said,

I'm not going to do this. I don't understand why you want me to compose these meeting minutes in a particular way and take the time, spend the client's money, spend all of our office resources in compiling this, on something that's never going to get published. I don't see where that makes sense.

Sue answered, "The onus was on you to review these documents and publish them and you dropped the ball." Heather replied, "Why did you—you asked me to complete

these assignments, and I did, I gave you plenty of time, I turned them around earlier than when you expected, and here you are just letting them fall to the wayside.” Sue’s response was, “Well, I’ve had to pull 14-hour days so something has to give” and then walked away.

Heather claimed that as Sue walked away she thought to herself, “Well what the heck? Why are you telling me to do something that’s never going anywhere and spend time and resources to get something done that you were going to eventually not do anything with?” Afterward this conversation, Heather reported that she could feel the tension between them, it was very obvious. She sensed that their friendship had been slowly dissolving since they started working together; despite both being seasoned professionals and adults that understand projects do not go perfectly. Nonetheless, there was still resentment. In fact, the tension got so bad that Heather almost went and had a heart-to-heart with Sue’s boss, the project principal, to tell what was happening, but did not. Sue stopped giving her assignments with large responsibility. Heather completed her portion of the project and phased out. The project ended 3 months later.

***Effect of workplace conflict on participant and home life.*** Heather used to enjoy the 3-year friendship she had with Sue. She confided in her about home-life struggles, shared a lot of personal details, and often sought advice. Their lunches used to help break up the monotony of the day and their weekend play dates with the kids were always very enjoyable. Through the conflict her self-esteem suffered as she questioned herself, “Is it just me, am I doing something wrong? Am I dropping the ball? Am I not working hard enough?” This made Heather question her work ethic.



Through the conflict she talked about what she was experiencing with her mentor, who supported her and told her that she was very capable and that it sounded like she and Sue had different working management styles. Heather felt that Sue was giving her assignments with ridiculous instructions to assert control over her. All of these feelings and the fact that she had to work very long hours with this person when she no longer communicated on a personal basis made her feel stressed. She felt a great deal of sadness because she lost a friend of 3 years with whom she really enjoyed to spend time with and whose kids were friends with hers; all of which she felt was washed down the drain with the workplace conflict they experienced. Heather brought this stress home with her, she would often talk to her husband about it and lost quite a bit of sleep because of it, while lying in bed thinking if she did something wrong or forgot to do something. She would think, “God, I don’t want to go to work tomorrow and work with this person.”

Heather recognized during this conflict, which lasted roughly 3 months, that she was not the happy-go-lucky person she usually was. She was withdrawn, wanted to spend the time she had at home by herself, was quiet, and spent less time with her family. She reported, “I just needed to go home and decompress and I didn’t want to deal with anybody because I had this thing on my brain,” which produced a lot of sadness and guilt because she knew she was neglecting her family and home responsibilities. Heather reported often saying to herself, “Screw it, I don’t want to wash dishes or I’m not going to vacuum. Meanwhile it’s like the best opportunity to do this.” . . . “I let things slide where I shouldn’t have.” The guilt turned into resentment because she brought the conflict home and because she was letting this person occupy headspace. “

Why am I wasting my time stressing if I did everything this person wanted me to do when I could be playing with the kids or doing laundry or dishes instead of just shutting myself off in my room and not dealing with anybody.

She reported that she did her best and did not recall it affecting her husband in any way other than him having to step up at home with the kids and housework. She also felt that the kids being very busy with activities helped with the fact that she was not as present during that time.

*Effect the workplace conflict had on home life from spouses'/experience.* Paul reported knowing that his wife is experiencing workplace conflict when she has a mood swing as “she is usually a very happy person.” When she is upset about something at work or experiencing conflict with someone, she is more worried, withdrawn, and snappy: “Her mood completely changes.” When she was experiencing the workplace conflict with Sue, Heather often came home stressed and quiet. He recalled when he asked her shortly after the project started, “How is it working with Sue?”, her response was, “Oh, I actually like her a little bit less now; I hope I never work with her again.” After a few weeks of the project began it became very noticeable to Paul that Heather was not happy with the way things were going at work. Heather began to withdraw from the family when she came home, spending more time alone “kind of moping around.” During this time she was also snappy or short with the kids and him.

The kids then began to “withdraw from interaction with their Mum and interact more with me.” He also made efforts to stay out of her way or not to ask her any questions. They did this by complying really quickly with any of her requests because they knew she was less patient. Paul reported that during this time he could tell that Heather not being around hurt the kid’s feelings; as they would often say, “Where is

Mum?” or “Can Mum play with us?” To which he made up reasons: “Oh she has to work late”; or “She had to go into work early”; or “She is busy with work right now, I know she wishes she could play.” During this time Paul took a more active role and spent more time playing with the kids and getting them fed and ready for bed, which he noted was draining, because he also had work.

Besides Heather’s withdrawing at home, Paul noticed that there was a lot of loss of sleep due to working essentially 16-hour days, as she would go in early in the morning and come home really late, often missing dinner, to just get a few hours of sleep and do it all over again. This worried him for two reasons: one because she needed more sleep than just a few hours, and two because he questioned the security at the building she was working at so late into the night.

The time that was lost with family made Paul feel resentment towards Sue and he did not want her around as a friend any longer. Paul reported that the way he dealt with his wife’s workplace conflict at home was for him just to become less visible. “I try not to bother her and give her space” so that he could avoid upsetting her. During this 3-month span, Paul reported feeling lonely and under a lot of pressure taking on the brunt of the housework and responsibility of the kids. The resentfulness did for a short amount of time shift to his wife and not just her coworker and workplace. Paul stated, “I began to feel like her issues were consuming our lives.” As a consequence, he felt himself becoming less supportive of Heather. As the conflict went on, they spent less time talking about what was going on with her at work. Part was due to Heather’s long working hours. The other part was because Paul no longer wanted to talk about it, as the negative energy was bringing him down. He no longer agreed how his wife was coping

with the conflict with Sue but did not know how to approach her or help her deal with the conflict. Things eventually got better when Heather phased out of the project. However, getting reconnected with one another as best friends and back in sync as a family, took a few weeks. Paul noted that it was a very challenging time.

**Summary.** The length of the negative workplace conflict Heather experienced was 3 months. During the case analysis it became evident that both participant and family were impacted by the negative workplace conflict Heather experienced at work. Heather was unaware of the effects the negative workplace conflict she experienced had on her family.

**Effect on participant.** At the onset of the negative workplace conflict, Heather became stressed and anxious about going to work.

- She lost sleep, stating, “I often lay in bed thinking if I did something wrong or forgot to do it exactly the way Sue wanted.”
- Her self-esteem began to suffer. She stated that she asked herself, “Is it just me, am I doing something wrong? Am I dropping the ball? Am I not working hard enough?”
- Heather reported going from a happy-go-lucky person to a very stressed person, which caused her to change her behavior at home. She stated, “I did not want to deal with anyone.” She further reported “I just needed to go home and decompress, I didn’t want to deal with anybody because I had this thing on my brain.”

- This behavior change affected her responsibilities at home. Heather reported often saying to herself, “‘Screw it, I don’t want to wash dishes or I’m not going to vacuum.’ Meanwhile it’s like the best opportunity to do this.”
- However, despite reporting feeling withdrawn and failing to complete home responsibilities, she did not think that her husband or kids were affected in any other way than Paul having to do more housework and the kids having to do their homework with their dad.

***Effect on family.*** Paul felt differently about the impact on family, reporting that “the 3 months Heather worked with Sue were extremely difficult to get through.”

- “Heather was blind to the impact her absence and behavior had on me and the kids, she never said sorry or asked how we were doing; it was all about her.”
- He added that during that time his wife went from “loving to be around her family to someone who seemed to always be worried, depressed, stressed, withdrawn, angry, and snappy; who spent a lot of time alone, kind of moping around.” When the family tried to interact with her they got nowhere, and usually heard, “Can you just give me some time alone?” or short snappy remarks like, “Ask your dad,” “Can’t you get it yourself?” or “I don’t have time.”
- Paul and the kids dealt with Heather’s moodiness by avoidance: “Staying out of her way or not to ask her any questions.” Both kids missed Heather being present. The kids would often ask, “Where is Mom?” or “Can Mom play with us?”
- Paul reported, “I felt lonely and stressed about parenting alone.” The loneliness turned into resentment and then anger towards Heather. “I began to shut down

and no longer wanted to talk to Heather about work, as I was tired of the negative energy consuming my life.”

- There was communication breakdown, as Paul reported, “I no longer agreed with how my wife was coping with the conflict with Sue, but did not know how to approach her to help her deal with the conflict.”
- Because of Heather’s behavior change, stress, anxiety, and withdrawal, Paul reported, “I became tired, resentful, and angry myself I didn’t want to talk to her about work or the issues she was having. Even when the conflict ended, it took weeks for the family to get back in sync with each other.”

**Case # 2—Sky family.** Amber was a 30-year-old female, who held a bachelor’s degree in biology. She and her significant other Brad lived in St. Paul, Minnesota. She worked at a large hospital as a medical support assistant and had been there for just a little over a year. Amber’s job entailed scheduling physical therapy appointments, processing provider’s orders, and calling patients. She liked the organization she worked for, but referenced her current job as being a very entry-level position that she believed she was overqualified for and would not do for much longer.

Amber felt that within her position as a medical support assistant there was a lot of drama with the workers, which she felt was largely due to the group being full of individuals who were just there for a paycheck and not really motivated to do anything else—never going above and beyond. Amber’s witnessed many of the other workers complaining about the type of work they did and putting more effort into trying to get out of work rather than just managing their loads, all of which was very different for her. Despite thinking that the medical support position was a means to an end, a stepping

position, as Amber's long-term goal was to go back to school and become a physician assistant, she reported being intrinsically connected to the mission of the hospital and really wanted to help patients in any way she could.

Amber believed herself to be a very easygoing person who did not like conflict. In fact, she stated that she "feels very uncomfortable in conflict of any sort and would avoid it at all cost." Amber loved spending time with her son, who was 8-years-old, her significant other, and her family who all lived close to her. Amber's significant other, Brad, was a 30-year-old male who worked as general manager of restaurant and held a bachelor's degree in communications. Amber and Brad had been together for 5 years and lived together for 4 years; they met in college while studying in Wisconsin. Both stated that they loved spending time with each other: fishing, watching football, cooking, and reading together. They identified their relationship as a good one, which they credited to their ability to communicate with each. Brad went on to state that he "always hears her true feelings about what is going on or what she is upset about" and stated that, "She is an expressive person," which was counter to how he identified himself "I'm not the most open person or the type to talk about my feelings." Brad loved that Amber was so expressive; however, the fact that she only vented to him put a lot of stress on him, at times, when he was used as a sounding board. He often thought, "Why don't you just tell the person what you think rather than holding everything in?"

Brad identified Amber as "a happy-go-lucky, bubbly person, who does not stress easy," whose norm was "very laid back." He also noted that it was his opinion that "the conflict Amber experienced at work was not very serious, and usually just between a coworker and were disagreements on policy or how things should be done; it's usually

pretty petty.” Brad believed that these experiences and her current position impacted her thought on where she wanted to go in the organization stating, “She’d like to move up and out of this entry position and into a higher position at work. This was her original goal, but the petty conflicts at work, drama, have made her want to do it faster.”

***Workplace conflict.*** Amber worked in a very small office with one other medical support assistant, who had been working there for nearly 5 years. She was an older woman in her 50s who did not get along with management. She had been disciplined several times for sleeping at her desk, shopping online, and being on Facebook instead of working. Amber’s supervisor, a female who was close to Amber’s age, worked on another floor and rarely made it into the office where her subordinates worked, to check in on them. Shortly after starting her position, Amber was asked by her supervisor to report when her coworker was doing bad things, like sleeping at her desk or surfing on the Web. She wanted her to report each incident via a computer instant messenger so that she could come up when it happened to address the issues. Although Amber felt uncomfortable with being asked by her supervisor to do this, as she felt it was not her responsibility, she agreed, for fear of what would happen if she did not. Also running through Amber’s mind was, “If this is all I have to do, report via a computer messenger forum, my coworker wouldn’t even know it was me.”

After reporting a couple of incidents that her supervisor never came up to address, Amber received an e-mail from her supervisor asking her to write up a report to put in her coworker’s file. This made Amber feel very uncomfortable, as she was not willing to be attached to her coworker’s file in that way. Amber became worried that her coworker would find out it was her and confront her about it. Amber stated, “I would feel bad if



she got suspended, or worse, fired. I know she is a single mom.” Amber reported the whole situation was stressful and that she did not know how to deal with it; consequently, Amber chose not to reply to her supervisor’s e-mail.

*Effect of workplace conflict on participant and home life.* Amber worried that her supervisor would think badly about her or that she was not willing to help her because she had not responded to her e-mail. This made her stressed about telling her supervisor “no,” as she “was willing to tell her when these incidents happened via messenger, but did not know that I was going to be officially attached to reporting it.” Amber reported that this request “made her feel like she was between a rock and a hard place; risk her coworker finding out that she tattled on her or going against what her supervisor wanted her to do.” She stated feeling “disappointed in my supervisor for trying to make me do this.” She added, “I felt that she could have gone about monitoring her subordinates a different way, like periodically come in and check on them.” Amber felt that the “whole thing was petty, awkward, and very poorly managed, and that it was not my fault that my coworker, despite getting e-mails about her behavior in the past, has not changed her behavior.” Despite this, she was extremely nervous during this time that she would be confronted by her coworker and had to deal with what she identified as “drama.”

Other than being a bit stressed for a week about not replying to her supervisor’s e-mail and fearing her coworker would find out who told on her, Amber reported that it did not affect her home life other than the time it took talking about it. She talked to her significant other and her sisters the day she received the e-mail from her supervisor, all of whom, she stated, “could not believe my supervisor was asking me to tell on my coworker, especially as we are the only two people working in the office and that it was

not my responsibility to manage this employee.” This made her feel better because she had wondered if she was being too sensitive about the issue.

Despite the confirmation of her family saying that her supervisor’s request was wrong; the conflict brought discomfort in the way that she thought a lot about how to respond to it and hoped not run into her supervisor the next day. Amber also reported spending a lot of time wondering if her supervisor was frustrated with her for not replying and if she would become her supervisor’s new target, all of which produced some anxiety, as she stated, “I became very anxious during that time, in fact I think I even missed dinner due to not being able to eat, just because my stomach felt all twisty.”

While at work she stared at the e-mail and read it over and over, “estimating that the time spent in a week staring at the e-mail probably added up to an hour of loss of work.” She felt frustrated that she was in this predicament. When she finally ran into her supervisor, Amber reported, “it was very awkward, as both her and I knew I had not responded to her request. After about a week, her supervisor revoked the request by sending an e-mail that said, “Actually I’m going to have it dealt with at a different level.” Things quickly went back to normal and they have not talked about it since, nor has her supervisor made any similar request or treated her differently for not getting back to her. Her coworker still sleeps at her desk and spends a lot of time on Facebook and shopping online. Amber reported that after being there for a while that she realized that her supervisor was scared of her coworker and was using her as a pawn, which affected how much she respected her supervisor.

*Effect of workplace conflict on home life from significant other's experience.*

Brad reported knowing that his significant other experienced workplace conflict when she came home and vented about her frustrations with work. Brad stated,

It's usually just with coworkers where there is a disagreement on policy or how things should be done. They're not very serious, it's just sometimes more petty, just kind of workplace disagreements. Her behavior does not change; she doesn't have a very challenging or stressful job. She just comes home and vents for 20 minutes and it's done, or maybe I will hear her later talking to one of her family members about it. It never affects our home life; she never takes anything out on the kid or me.

Brad felt Amber was a very expressive person with people she knew very well, which boiled down to him, family, and a couple of friends. "With us she has no problem voicing her frustrations." Brad added that being her sounding board was sometimes difficult as there were times he thought, "Just say no, or why don't you just tell the person what they are doing is not ok. The conflict she experiences can easily be resolved if she just had the courage to speak up."

When asked if he recalled any recent conflict Amber had gone through, Brad stated that he "recalled a conflict she experienced with her supervisor and reporting one of her coworkers." He recalled Amber coming home very frustrated and stressed out and that the situation was basically her supervisor telling her to report a coworker for sleeping and surfing on the Internet when she should be working. Brad recalled responding to Amber, "I'd be upset if my supervisor asked me to do that and would say no." He recalled her being relieved that he thought that way. Brad figured she just wanted to get it off her chest. He recalled them identifying why they thought it was wrong; such as, it was not her responsibility as a subordinate to watch everything her coworker was doing and being in such a small office, the supervisor should have thought about in what type of

predicament she was putting a relatively new employee. After an hour of conversation they stopped talking about the conflict; however, he recalled her talking to her mom for an hour, then one of her sisters for an hour and a half. He also recalled her missing dinner and him having to do a little more with her son that evening, as far as getting him fed and ready for bed. That night before bed he also recalled her telling him something along the lines that she was “tired of the job and couldn’t wait until she could get another position.” Brad did not remember them talking about the conflict again; in fact, he did not recall what ever came of the situation, as he stated, “That was it. It was not a big deal, I think she told her supervisor ‘no’ the next day.”

**Summary.** The length of the negative workplace conflict Amber experienced was 1 week. During the case analysis it became evident that only she was impacted at home due to the negative workplace conflict experienced at work.

**Effect on participant.** At the onset of the negative workplace conflict, Amber reported feeling stressed about being asked to do something she did not want to do. “I was stressed about how my supervisor would view me for not responding to my supervisor’s request to write up an incident of her coworker sleeping.” She was frustrated and disappointed that her supervisor would ask her, as a new employee, to tell on a coworker. Amber also had some anxiety about her supervisor holding it against her if she said no. Her lingering anxiety of not responding to her supervisor caused her to miss dinner the first night of the conflict due to her stomach feeling “twisty.” The next morning she was nervous and anxious about going into work, stating that “I was so nervous about going into work I nearly called in sick.”

*Effect on family.* Brad believed that much of Amber's conflict was not very serious and could easily be resolved if Amber merely had the courage to speak up. Brad never communicated with Amber that he felt she was a conflict avoider, nor how at times he was frustrated. Brad reported that he knew Amber was frustrated and under a little stress about her supervisor asking her to tell on her coworker. But was unaware of the other impacts Amber associated with the conflict, such as her feeling nervous, anxious, and uncomfortable. He was also unaware of how Amber eventually dealt with the conflict, which was simply to not just respond.

**Case #3—Grass family.** Jackie was a 36-year-old female who held a doctorate degree in pharmacy. For the past 2 years Jackie worked as a clinical specialist for a large hospital system in the Twin Cities. Jackie loved being a pharmacist and was intrinsically motivated to do the type of work she did. Overall, she reported deriving great satisfaction from helping people feel better and figuring out complex cases stating, "I feel my job is very important in the management of people's health." Jackie described herself as a family person who loved spending time with her kids and husband while not working. She liked being outdoors boating or gardening. Outside of work she identified herself as an easy-going laid-back person who went with the flow. At work she felt that she was a very driven, conscious, collaborative, and a good communicator. Jackie also described herself as a very caring person who wanted to get along with everyone. She and her husband Jeff had been married for 6 years and together for 9, however, they knew each other for most of their lives, as both were from the same town and went to the same high school. They had two kids together, a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old.

Jeff was a 36-year-old male who held a master of business administration degree and worked for a health care company as program director in the analytical area of clinical operations. Jeff described Jackie as a very compassionate person who was a very loving mother and wife. He went on to state that “she is extremely intelligent and good at what she does” and that “she is a very self-driven person, who does not like to be wrong. She is a take charge person both at home and at work.” Jeff described their relationship as great and one of equal partnership. He noted that they both

work really hard and we want to set a good example for our kids by working very hard. We both have, I think, the right goals in life in terms of work and raising our kids, and have the same morals.

Jeff believed that their strengths as a couple were that they had a lot in common: “We like to do a lot of common things together. We both love our children so much that . . . I think just general love is definitely one of our strengths.”

One of the areas Jeff talked about always trying to improve was the general balance of their lives. With both of them being in professional roles they have very demanding schedules and the requirement of having to bring work home or respond to crisis; however, each respected the other’s career and understood the demands of their positions. Jeff stated that they put a lot of work into communicating and being organized. He stated,

We plan our days out and are on each other’s calendars, we also talk several times a day, so when we get home we know each other’s responsibilities; such as, if we have to dial in or prepare a presentation.

**Workplace conflict.** A few months ago Jackie experienced a conflict with a coworker named Rita, when Rita disregarded Jackie’s clinical opinion and patient medicating plan by changing what medication the patient was taking, without consulting

Jackie first. The conflict occurred when the hospital Jackie worked for admitted a patient, who was on a medication called TPN for nutrition purposes. After the patient was admitted, the floor pharmacist from that area contacted Jackie to obtain her assistance in handling what was identified as a complex patient who looked very sick. Jackie began to get all the background information she could. She had spoken to the patient to find out what she took on the outside, she contacted Mayo Clinic and talked to the providers who were caring for the patient, and together they decided it was best to stop giving the patient the TPN for at least a day and then take it day-by-day until they restarted it. Jackie was confident with this plan.

Based on the background information and the fact that it was collaborative decision with the patient's outside care, Jackie "explained to the floor pharmacist currently working that they're going to hold the TPN medication and the reasons why." Jackie then left for the day. A couple hours after Jackie leaving, there was a shift change and Rita assumed the role of floor pharmacist for the night. At each change in shift, staff went over what happened during the previous shift and what medications were needed, had been changed or added, as well as being given a brief on complex cases being managed. Upon Rita stepping into the charge role, Rita went to the charge physician stating that she "didn't agree with the decision made by the last pharmacist and demanded that they restart the TPN medication immediately." Jackie stated,

Everyone is afraid of this employee, she is very intimidating and speaks very confidently so people just usually go along with what she is saying and because a lot of times there is no one right answer in health care management, she is not every completely wrong, plus she is an intelligent person. The TPN was re-administered into the patient's medication regime.

Jackie reported finding out what had happened when she checked her e-mail when she got home. The e-mail she received was from Rita and simply read, “Hey, we restarted the patient on TPN.” Jackie immediate response to the e-mail was, “It looks like this person is very sick, this is a poor decision.” A couple hours later Jackie sent another e-mail to Rita explaining why she had to come up with the idea to stop administering the patient the TPN medication. She wrote, “As follow-up to my last e-mail we decided not to do this because by giving this medication you’re actually infusing the patient gastro, it’s going to make sepsis worse.” Jackie added that in the e-mail she also wrote something along the lines of, “I’m not mad at all, this is an explanation but maybe tomorrow we can touch base so that we’re on the same page as to why this decision was made.” Jackie never received a response back. The next day Jackie found out that,

Rita got upset with me and thought that I only made the decision because I didn’t like her—that’s what happened, and I just did it to disagree with her. And so then, I kind of felt a little blind-sided by that because my job as a clinical coordinator is to educate because I’m kind of in education. I’m always the liaison when pharmacists don’t have the time to look up difficult patients, I get them, and then I work with the physician groups and we come up different protocols based on things that happen. So this is kind of my thing. Now this pharmacist has had lots of problems with our management in the past as far as similar things like this, so this was really my first experience with her and I had heard from other people about this person.

All of this made Jackie feel very uncomfortable about what happened. After a couple of days Jackie decided to send Rita an e-mail stating, “I’m sorry you felt that I made the decision to stop a medication because I do not like you, by no means was that it.” Rita never responded to the e-mail. About a week later Jackie found out that Rita

ended up going to our clinical manager and the director, my boss, about this and said that I was really upset that we didn’t stop giving a medication to a patient, which wasn’t the case. I thought it was the wrong call and was upset that a



collaborated decision to hold a medication was ignored solely because she [Rita] wanted to continue the medication. All of which made me feel like I did not do a good job communicating why the TPN should be held for this patient, in the first place.

Subsequently, both Jackie and Rita were directed by management to meet and discuss the issue further amongst themselves. Jackie recalled thinking that this was all blown out of proportion because “I didn’t have the problem with her, she had the problem with me.” Nonetheless, Jackie stayed late one day to meet with Rita. Jackie recalled Rita looking pretty nervous as she came up to her.

After talking for a little while Rita started crying and she opened up a little bit to me about all that she has going on at home. She has two sick parents at home, so I think she brings that and then she got into how her time at work is her time off. She shared a lot of personal things with me and said she felt like I never liked her.

At the end of the conversation they left it with Jackie saying,

I want you to know how highly I think of you both as a person, especially now knowing what you are going through, and clinically you are a very competent clinician, so much that I want you to be more involved with the residency program. The residents think you’re one of the strongest preceptors we have. It seemed she really liked hearing that and said she wanted to be more involved.

Although it was a nice conversation that opened the doors to a better relationship between the two of them, Jackie reported that she never figured out how there conversation was related to the situation they were experiencing as coworkers at work. According to Jackie, Rita “is not an easy person to have a relationship with, so maybe this is the best we’ll get, but that’s OK.” For them this was the point that the conflict ended and it basically boiled down to having to pay attention to “cues and reading each other and how we’re going to work together to try to make sure that she doesn’t feel like that ever again with me.” Nonetheless, Jackie felt that she took blame for her portion, in that she could have communicated better and expected Rita to also take blame, but she

never did. Because of this, Jackie felt that it would be very difficult to fully trust or feel comfortable working with her in the future.

*Effect of workplace conflict on participant and home life.* The night that Jackie found out that her coworker went against her medicating plan, she immediately felt frustrated, annoyed, and offended; she thought, “Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me.” Jackie reported that it took several hours to think about and draft responding e-mails that evening as she had to filter many of her initial thoughts:

“How the hell could you do this? Why would you think this? Who the heck do you think you are? You are completely wrong. You shouldn’t go against someone’s clinical decision without talking to them first.” That’s my first thought. And then I have to sit on it a little bit and go, “Ok, well none of that is politically correct, I would never say that, I would never want someone to tell me that because I totally get how quickly we can be made to feel stupid in health care because there is so much we need to know, no one knows everything and that’s why everyone is so specialized. And even with pharmacists, because we kind of are generalists—especially at the U. At the U I was not a generalist, at the U I was a specialist—I was critical care. But now that I’m at South, we expect those pharmacists to know way more than almost what the U does because they work so many more places that they are more generalist—so they’re OK at a lot of things rather than being great at one niche thing.” So that’s what I thought through; I’m like, “Ok, it not their fault because they don’t know as much about this as I know about this, so it was my job to educate.”

Jackie also felt like she was being bullied and intimidated. She questioned how she could work with Rita in the future. Jackie reported the time it took to think about this situation and all of the reflecting and thinking through e-mails was aggravating “because it was during the time that I would normally be spending time with my kids and doing dinner—lighter things. The things I look forward to each and every day as a working mom,” all of which made this situation worse in her mind, “like, I can’t believe this is happening, for a reason like this.” She recalled talking to her husband about it. However, she stated,

I doubt he will remember the details of it. With us, I feel like it's more him to me than me to him. A lot of what my—a lot of things that come up for me are very specific, drug-related things, not so much relationships—sometimes it's if there is anything with work going on and I tell him about it, he understands the dynamics of the relationships or the communication or those kind of things. But, I don't know, sometimes we don't talk—there's not a lot of time so when we are at home, it's more about the kids. So maybe what it is, it's more, "Hey, I got something going on for work, will you just watch the kids for a bit." And then he'll say, "Is everything OK?" And I'll say, "Yeah."

For this specific situation, when the e-mail was done and sent, Jackie reported moving on with the rest of her night, with her family. However, she reported there being some lingering effects of the conflict; that morning, while getting ready for work, she claimed to feel "some anxiety about going in to work, frustrations, and feelings of embarrassment that a clinical person would find reason to go against one of her decision." There was also anger in that Rita did not even apologize or respond to any of Jackie's e-mails the night before. There were no "I'm sorry" or rationale for readministering the TPN to the patient's regime."

The conflict with Rita resurfaced when they were instructed by management to meet and resolve their issues. During the meeting Jackie could tell that Rita "did not have a clue to how she was wrong for changing the medication plan without discussing it with her first," and reported that "I just smiled and kept listening to all of her problems."

Despite having felt disrespected because Rita took no accountability, Jackie reported

knowing better than to point fingers and, at the end, did not want Rita to feel bad or stupid for her decision because she had worked with very, very smart people who made her feel very stupid and she vowed she never wanted to do that to anyone else.

That evening driving home, Jackie took the long way home, all the while feeling like she had been walked all over. She reported thinking about how often this happened to her,

Working with highly-trained pharmacists and physicians who have high egos and working with VPs [vice presidents] that don't really know how to communicate. I often find myself taking blame, by saying "OK, you're right, this didn't work, we should have done this" or "I should have done this" or be like, "Oh, I'm sorry I did that, you should not feel that way by something that I said." Despite being confident and sure about my thinking and decisions.

As in the case with her coworker Rita, Jackie stated,

I felt very confident about holding the medication, and strongly about Rita being wrong. In fact, peers and caring physicians later recognized that the collective decision with the patient's outside providers to hold the medication was the right one, as it turned out the patient had an adverse effect to staying on the medication. Still, no one said, "Sorry Jackie, you were right."

Nonetheless, during that drive home, Jackie felt sad, hurt, and beaten, which translated into needing a glass of wine that night. She was distracted most of the night, and kind of down and distant from everyone, all of which made her feel even worse, like she was missing an opportunity to hang with her family. She knew, however, that she needed time to herself to recharge while feeling disappointment in herself that she let Rita continue to be as disruptive in the workplace without sticking up for herself.

*Effect of workplace conflict on home life from spouse/significant other's experience.* Jeff felt that it was not very often that Jackie experienced a lot of conflict at work. In general, he thought that she was very happy at work, that she knew she did a good job and that she was proud of her accomplishments. He thought that she liked her role and the people she worked with. Jeff reported only knowing if Jackie experienced a workplace conflict she talked to him about it. He stated, "She is very good at turning it on and off, or leaving work at work, of course, unless she got a call with a question about a medication. Otherwise she does not bring conflict home." When she did talk about issues at work, he played the role of an outlet, a friend who was there to listen and validate her point of view. There were never any negative moods towards him or the kids

related to any work-related conflict. The way Jeff usually found out about a conflict at work was in the form of, “Can you believe this?” He said, “Again, I just play the role of listener and try to understand where she’s coming from and that’s about it. I know she is just using me as a sounding board.”

When asked if Jeff recalled a conflict his wife experienced recently that really weighed on her, he responded that he recalled that Jackie had an issue recently with a coworker about holding or giving a medication to a sick patient. Specifically, “She gave instructions on a medication to Rita, and somebody went sort of above her head and decided to use her own prescription.” He felt that it played out at home in the form of her talking to him about it in disbelief. He recalled her being

a little upset that somebody would actually do that. And so, basically, she kind of explained it to me and I kind of laughed it off and tried to make a joke about it and tried to talk through it with her and try to kind of take both sides because I didn’t really understand the situation, and I thought, “Well, maybe is there a chance that the prescription that this other person had was the better option.” She adamantly said no, and ultimately she had to follow up with me later that evening before bed to let me know that she had made the right decision, by showing me in a book she had. She always has to prove that she is right. But it wasn’t—there weren’t any sort of, I don’t think, negative feelings. I didn’t feel like she was taking anything out on me or the kids in that situation. It was more—it was just work-related issue that she wanted to get off her chest. I recall her taking herself out of the family element to go draft an e-mail, and later talking to a coworker on the phone about how she couldn’t believe that their coworker would do that, and kind of bashing the other girl. I don’t recall there being anything else that ever came of it; we never talked about it again.

Jeff felt that it was all kind of funny and that he recalled kind of laughing it off and thinking that it was kind of entertaining that Jackie was in this situation because she is not in these types of situation very often. Commenting, “She usually knows her stuff, so it’s very rare when something like this happens.”

Outside of this situation he could not recall any other examples of her bringing workplace conflict home; it was “more just general frustrations working with particular people that may be unionized and not wanting to sort of go above and beyond what would, I guess, be in the scope of their work.” Yet it was definitely venting; he claimed that his wife was very talkative and expressive.

Jeff felt that if there was conflict brought home from work, it did not affect the kids. He felt that,

by far, just the nature of having young kids and having them wake up in the middle of the night and not getting much sleep and having to work hard all day has a much farther impact. At the end of the night, when we pick up our kids and we get them dinner and we settle down and we’re kind of exhausted, I think that has more of an impact than any short of workplace conflict.

**Summary.** The negative workplace conflict Jackie experienced lasted 3 weeks in a unresolved dormant state. The major effects of the negative workplace conflict Jackie experienced occurred on 2 separate days. Day 1 was day of the conflict and day 2 occurred weeks later after a scheduled meeting with Rita the co-worker she had conflict with. During the case analysis it became evident that aside from Jackie spending less time with the family during the 2 evenings she experienced effects of the negative workplace conflict while at home; the larger impact was on the individual rather than on family.

**Effect on participant.** Jackie reported that during the conflict she was stressed about having to explain her rationale “because a lot of times there is no one right answer in health-care management.”

- This frustrated, annoyed, and angered her as she had to take time to respond to the coworker at home “because it was during the time that I would normally be

spending time with my kids and doing dinner—lighter things. The things I look forward to each and every day as a working mom.”

- Jackie also felt bullied, intimidated, and offended, yet she still questioned if she was at fault by asking herself, “Did I do a good job providing the rationale to keep the patient on the TPN medication; was it the right call?”
- This caused Jackie to experience anxiety about going into work the next day, “The next morning, while getting ready for work, I felt some anxiety and embarrassment that a clinical person would find reason to go against one of my decisions.”
- She questioned how she could work with Rita in the future.
- When the two finally sat down to talk, Rita took no accountability, leaving Jackie feeling disrespected. The lack of accountability also caused the resurfacing of old issues from totally different experiences with different people who treated her the same way. Assigning blame, pointing fingers and taking no accountability, the resurfacing of these accounts left Jackie feeling as if she had been walked all over again. She did not share her feelings with her husband.

***Effect on family.*** There were no direct effects reported as impacting the family.

In fact, Jeff reported, other than having to “get the kids fed and bathed, something we usually do together, there was no impact at all.”

- However, although no direct impact on family, it was evident that there were communication gaps when it related to conflict at work and Jackie’s desire to be right. Jeff was oblivious to the fact that his wife often opted not to talk to him about work issues, as she felt he would not understand them. This was evident in

his reporting that, “I know when my wife has experienced something negative at work because she always tells me about it.”

- Jeff also misunderstood Jackie’s desire of wanting to be right. Early in my interview with Jeff, he described Jackie as a person who did not like to be wrong and always had to be right, so much that he found it humorous. While Jackie reported,

There is a lot of stress of getting things right within my job correct, because there are severe consequences to getting it wrong. With big egos in health care, the pressure is intensified because I am always on the spot and someone is always trying to insert their input. Therefore, you really have to know your stuff and be concise with your decision making.

- Jeff seemed to be unaware of her true feelings and insecurities surrounding the pressures of work, all of which led me as a researcher to question how deeply work issues were discussed at home. It was my perception, after interviewing both Jackie and Jeff, that work issues are only superficially discussed. For instance, one example of reported dialogue was, ““Hey, I got something going on for work, will you just watch the kids for a bit’; and then he’ll say, ‘Is everything OK?’ And I’ll say, ‘Yeah.’”

**Case #4—Wind family.** Ed was a 44-year-old male who held a degree in social work. Ed worked as a social worker supervisor for the state of Iowa. He supervised eight social workers who worked in child protection. Half of the social workers were tasked with going out and doing initial assessments, while the other half took ongoing cases. Ed’s role as their supervisor was to review their work, approve work, provide supervision, discussion around cases, and deal with any personnel issues that came up, as well as implement any new policies and procedures that came from the state. Ed reported



liking the type of work he did and the mission of being a social worker. He reported having “a very strong internal commitment to the profession of social work”; however, that “he was not happy performing in the role he did for Iowa.” Ed identified himself as a pretty laid-back person who did not stress out about many things and considered himself the rock of his family. He reported that he loved being home spending time with his wife and their four children. The one-on-one time that he had with each child was something he cherished daily. Ed and his wife Kelly had been married for 2 years, marrying shortly after relocating to Iowa from Wisconsin so that Kelly could take a job with a local university. Shortly after relocating, Ed found a job with the state. Ed was a stepfather to Kelly’s four kids from a previous marriage; all four kids lived with Kelly and Ed full-time. The kids were 7, 10, 13, and 15.

Kelly was a 43-year-old female who worked at a university in Iowa running the social work program for the institution. She held a master’s in social work and was equally as passionate as Ed about working in the social work field. Kelly identified Ed as a “really mellow person with a really mellow temperament and a go-with-the-flow person.” She also identified Ed as a very present husband and stepfather, and felt that the greatest thing about their relationship was their ability to relate, communicate, and support each other. She loved his kindness, drive to live and enjoy life, and his quality of being the life of the party. Kelly believed that all of her kids loved Ed dearly and that he had a special relationship with each one of them. Kelly felt he was a source of comfort for them. She also identified Ed as being a reflective and conscious leader.

***Workplace conflict.*** Shortly after beginning to work for the state of Iowa as a supervisor of eight social workers, Ed realized there were personnel issues with a few of

his staff and slowly began to deal with the issues. He was instructed by Jodi, Agency Director, to begin addressing issues that had previously gone unaddressed that were occurring amongst his staff. For all but one the fixes were easy and consisted of counseling and informing them of his expectations. However, for one particular employee, the infractions continued to happen and were severe. Being a new supervisor, Ed got an earful from other staff and community partners about this particular employee, who was a very good social worker but did not always fulfill all of his responsibilities to the community. Ed decided to come up with an action plan on how to deal with this particular employee's behavior and present it to the agency director. After doing a lot of upfront research and coming up with a plan of action basing his decision-making process on how to deal with this very difficult employee on different supervisory books that he had used in the past, Ed presented the plan that he felt was a decent and fair way to deal with the situation to Jodi, Agency Director. During the meeting, Ed gave his assessment on the employee's strengths and weaknesses and what he wanted to do to get this employee back on track. Ed's assessed that the employee has been given the room without consequence to go against policy and best practices in their field. The employee was often late or disappeared throughout the day. He also spent a lot of time socializing at work and rarely attended the community meetings he was committed to, but rather just called in on a conference line, which was not what was considered the best practice, as face-to-face interactions were key to building and sustaining community partnerships.

During the meeting, Jodi became defensive, disagreed with suggestions, and did not seem to consider all of the work he had done to come up with his recommendation. She discredited Ed's opinion and he was abruptly told that his assessment was wrong and

that she would figure out what to do with the employee. Ed voiced his disappointment about her instructing him to address personnel issues that had previously gone unaddressed and then dismissing his plan without inquiry into his rationale as a supervisor. Jodi quickly dismissed him and has blamed Ed for challenging her ever since. Their relationship quickly turned toxic. Jodi began to pick apart and questioned everything Ed did. Ed said, “Nothing I did was good enough.”

Shortly after Jodi and Ed’s initial meeting, Ed learned from another social work supervisor that the subordinate whose behavior he was trying to correct was one of Jodi’s favorite employees, and the main reason the employee’s behavior had not been dealt with in the past by Ed’s predecessor. After a few more months of working with the state, Ed began to recognize that many people harbored negative feelings about how some employees were allowed to get away with anything and did not seem to have to follow the same policy. The workers resented that “at this particular agency, people’s performance was based on whom you knew and who liked you, rather than how good you were at your job. Even in this very policy-laden agency.” These experiences caused an ongoing conflict for Ed at work. During our interview, Ed reported that, in general, he

had a pretty negative viewpoint of the work environment within the agency. I worked for, not necessarily with the people I supervise, but how politics of this agency, how people are treated within this agency. I had a pretty negative viewpoint of it—the viewpoint is pretty much “people can’t do their job” and then we need to come down heavy-handed anytime anybody does anything even minimally wrong or outside of procedure, even though it may be to the benefit of an individual or clients that we’re dealing with, but going outside the policy or procedure is just not tolerated in any way, shape or form. And then seeing how people get treated differently, as well for maybe the same type of infraction.

*Effect of workplace conflict on participant and home life.* Ed reported that after the conflict with his supervisor, he began to worry about making the littlest mistakes. He reported,

I try to make sure that everything, in essence, is perfect; I spend a great deal more time trying to make sure everything is done, and everything is complete to her standard. So I am usually at work between an hour and an hour half extra every day, just trying to keep things stable and off her radar, I constantly feel stress and anxiety.

Ed felt that the largest impact on his family was the time he missed with them, as staying late every night impacted when he got home, adding time to his hour and 20 minute commute. He noted,

I'm carrying a lot of work stuff home; in fact I would say, because of the impact on the family life, the work experience has been more impactful and probably make up 60% of my negative viewpoint of the organization I work for. And despite having an hour and 20 minute drive home, I don't feel I am able to decompress or leave work at work. In fact, the long drive home is counterproductive because I have too much time to think about it, and where I might have de-stressed a bit but by the time I get home I'm often right back to the state of frustration as when I left work. Adding to the frustration is the fact that most nights I am home at 7 pm and everybody has already had supper, the littlest one is getting close to bedtime, and everyone else is winding down. So there isn't a whole lot of time to spend with family. Even when I get home at a reasonable time I'm often really preoccupied with work and will usually spend time with my wife, talking about my frustrations just trying to de-stress from the day which, again, takes time away from doing more fun things as a group. Then there are the days, which seem to happen most frequently, that I get home and I'm so mentally exhausted that I really don't have the energy to do a lot of things or don't feel like doing a lot of things because my brain is just fried from the stress of work. Causing conflict in my relationship with my wife because the impacts are either I'm a bit more quiet or isolated, or sometimes even a little bit snippy.

Ed added,

I also just get really tired of always having to come back and talk about it. It just gets old after a while, having to always come back and try to de-stress from work with your wife. So, sometimes I just don't and those days I'm a just bit more quiet and coming home where I'm not as happy or jovial as normal. My wife has seen me really deteriorate quite a bit emotionally over the timeframe; I've been here going from being a happy-go-lucky guy to being pretty much down a good

portion of the time. This really saddens me and I feel that ultimately I am letting her down. I feel myself giving up, which is something I have never done in the past.

Ed believed that the personal impacts he experienced were that he became a negative person; cranky and snippy. He lost sleep thinking whether he did anything that would cause his boss to fire him, which at times affected his ability to concentrate early in the morning driving to work or while at work. He became stressed and had anxiety about going into work, stating, “When Sunday rolled around I could feel my anxiety start to kick in about having to go into work on Monday. This for me was in the form of nervousness and worry.” He believed the stress, he experienced, had affected his health, as he has had to deal with elements that had been recently diagnosed and, if left untreated, could hold severe consequences.

*Effect of workplace conflict on home life from spouse other experience.* Kelly believed that the conflict, Ed experienced at work, had little to do with his clients, the essence of social work, but with the environment, and it not respecting the humans working in it. Rather, humans were treated and viewed as human capital:

That it’s a hierarchy, it’s highly, highly influenced by power and authority. It’s power structure; it’s direct, not at all looking at how the function within the system impacts individuals if there are problems. It’s almost a persecutory finding out who is at fault and there must be somebody to blame. That is the response. It’s not, “Hey, how are we functioning? Let’s see how this can be done, how can we improve?” It’s almost that there is this core belief that people are incompetent, they aren’t doing their job, and if they’re not then we’re going to punish them. That’s really—it sounds like I’m being dramatic but, honestly, that’s the reality there.

Kelly knew when Ed experienced something negative at work by his facial expression; it was something she could see right when he came through the door, as normally

he's a really a mellow person, with a really mellow temperament and go-with-the-flow. However, I can tell because he has a look of sadness. It's not about him coming in angry and agitated, not that he doesn't get irritable, but really, to me, the most telling is that look of sadness and I can see it in his eyes. And that's probably because I'm closest to him and know him, it's just sadness. That's my perception of it.

Ed was also often very preoccupied—in his head, and not connecting with the family—not engaged, which Kelly felt was particularly hard to understand because

he has an hour and 20 minute commute home, so there could be the assumption that, oh good, there's this hour and 20 minutes of driving to really process and reflect. However this does not seem to be the case. I've thought many times that he should be at a better place when he gets home. When I inquired to why the hour and 20 minutes is not enough for him to let things go, he responded that when he begins to think about the conflict he is experiencing at work, he has an hour and 20 minutes to get boiled about it.

Kelly felt that conflict in the workplace was not new to either of them, they both experienced it in the past in their line of work, they understand it, they have learned to sit and process it together, yet it seemed to be so significant in his current work situation, that they are both perplexed by it as it has taken over much of their world.

It has gotten to the point where it really is carrying over to home and it's creating a lot of disconnect, I think, for us, because of the preoccupation, mostly because he is an internal kind of processor so he kind of turns inward with it. Rather than choosing to exchange and discuss about things with me, he'll go into his head with it and reflects, he is very reflective. This doesn't always create conflict between us, but there are times that I feel I am his spouse and I have experienced similar situations so could have some really good input and maybe we could derive at or look for solutions together, as we are both intellectually capable. But instead, I feel like he does not want to hear my opinions, just wants me to listen, as he does not think I get the dynamics and therefore any potential solutions I suggest are not fitting. Rather he just wants me to listen. This is difficult for me and I often tell him I have more value than just listening. Which I think that is

probably difficult for him to hear sometimes because for him, I think, the conflict feels like a perpetual problem that stems from something he can't control, and no matter how he tries to respond to it, according to how a textbook would say or how I might say, "Here's how you could rationally deal with this and resolve it." Yet, because of the system and the type of setting, it just doesn't seem to work.

Healthy ways that we learn of dealing with conflict seem to only create more problems in that environment, so my jump to try to offer perspective or solution based on what I know or what I've experienced or have studied or whatnot, I think, for him, sometimes is received as—not a judgment but it's kind of like, "OK, I know that, I've tried that, and I don't need to keep hearing about that." And that, sometimes, can kind of perpetuate, I think, for him, "Maybe I'm just not going to talk about it because this just starts to feel like another fight." I don't want to say he is hopeless, but it really does, at times, feel like there's no resolution, and to come home and even talk about it and talk about ways to try to deal with it just perpetuates that feeling. I'm feeling like, OK, something needs to happen here—"try this, try this, what about this." And I think it just adds pressure to him and therefore he might turn inward a little bit more, which I think leads to feeling disconnected."

These feelings resulted in mixed emotions for Kelly about Ed's navigation through his workplace conflict that he had brought home. Kelly stated that the most difficult part for her was the disconnect she felt with her spouse, as they used to talk about everything, finding many solutions together, yet in the example of discussion he would turn inward and not share. Kelly reported that after a few weeks she began to notice a change in him and how it

impacted just his overall happiness because, . . . and I identify with it. We both are people that do what we do, we have a very strong internal commitment to the profession we chose, we do it for reasons that have a lot to do with who we are, our values, what we believe about people, and so I identify with it and I think that's a hard thing. So then I start to feel similar frustration and things that he's feeling, kind of that hopelessness and I'm also— so I'm sad for him, I'm frustrated at how it's impacting our relationship and the joy and enjoyment we've experienced as a couple in the past with our work situations. Not that our work situation is completely influenced, but our work is such a big part of what we do and who we are that we can't—people say, "You need to compartmentalize." But it's like we do what we do; part of what we do is who we are and that's not easy to do, especially when the environment is such that it just—it's kind of oppressive. So I go through different emotions of sometimes feeling sad for what I'm watching in him, sad for how it's impacting our relationship because one of

the key assets of our relationship has been our connection, so to feel like that has been impacted feels like a lot and it's very, very sad at times and it's not deliberate and it has nothing to do with our love for each other, it's just, from what I understand, is that that stress has become all-consuming and how do we break free from that so that work doesn't impact us to that degree—or him.”

Another change Kelly noticed in Ed was that

he has always had kind of a very authentic and genuine warmth and desire to connect with people. In the work environment there is just so many things that interfere with his opportunity to do that which just perpetuates this whole disconnect for himself within himself because that's such a big part of who he is and how he's been in his work is engaging with people and connecting with people and because of the work environment he's in, there have actually been overt, directives prohibiting him from doing what comes natural to him, who he is, and how he engages people in his work and in his life. So it's almost as though he's almost feeling like a loss of self in this, that he can't be who he is in his work so it's just painful—I think. This has created a huge, I think, internal conflict. He seems a little shut down at times, he's been pre-occupied and just sad, to be honest.

Kelly believed that the affects from the preoccupation, disconnect, disengagement, and stress, anxiety, and sadness probably affected her more than the kids because she did not believe they noticed the way he was acting,

as he maintained a very similar kind of interaction with them in terms of our daily routine. Maybe it would be different if they were his biological children, I don't know—that they would be more in tune to it.

However, Kelly did noticed that at times, if he and she were talking, or if she was asking questions about his experience that day, the kids might have noticed the discussion. “One of my kids might come in and say, ‘Stop it’ if it seems emotional—not even like a fight, but just anything that seems like people are irritable or anything like that.”

Ed did a pretty good job of continuing to interact with the kids in the way he normally would.

In fact, sometimes I think it was a helpful piece for him, you know, reading Bjorn his bedtime story because they love to read together or, it's funny how sometimes Ethan, who has autism, will come in and say, “Tickle me please.” Maybe this



took his mind off work issues. Yet there were those times when he would say “Ahh, in 5 minutes, Ethan, come back,” which turned into 2 hours.

This made Kelly sad, because she knew Ethan just wanted to play, but she understood the place Ed was in, so Kelly would intervene in the way of, “Come on Ethan, I can do that ‘whatever he wanted to do’ paint, draw, or play a game.”

**Summary.** The length of the negative workplace conflict Ed experienced was 4 months. During the case analysis it became evident that both individual and family were impacted by the negative workplace conflict Ed experienced at work. Ed was aware of the impacts the negative workplace conflict he experienced had on his family.

**Effect on participant.** From Ed’s perspective, the conflict he experienced quickly turned into ongoing conflict that he could not defuse, which spiraled out of control. The conflict began to intertwine with his home life by affecting his behavior and state of mind outside of work.

- Ed became self-conscious about making the smallest mistakes, which caused him to stay an hour or hour-and-a-half late after work. “I felt an extreme amount of stress and anxiety about work.” “I was unable to decompress during my long drives home.”
- Further personal impacts were that he became a negative person, cranky, and he lost sleep, his health suffered, which affected his ability to concentrate. He was short with his wife, would tell her the bare minimum, and would routinely tell the kids he was too tired to play.
- Despite knowing the impacts his behavior had on his family and his health, Ed did not know how to address it or prevent feeling the way he did. His self-awareness seemed to be crippling for him; it amplified his discomfort with his situation, and

captivated a person who was usually very open, friendly, warm, communicative, full of energy, and the life of the party into a spiral of uneasiness, irritability, isolation, preoccupation, sadness, loss of control, and hopelessness (negative outlook).

***Effect on family.*** Kelly watched Ed go from a very happy-go-lucky person who loved being with her and the kids to someone who seemed to always be worried, depressed, stressed, withdrawn, angry, and snappy, and who spent a lot of time alone.

- Working late kept him away from his family: “Many nights he’d come home at 7-7:30 pm and we already had already eaten dinner and were getting ready for bed; we missed him.” When he was home, his aggressions, disappointments, and frustrations were evident to Kelly and the kids, as he would either go off by himself or say, “Give me a second and I will join you”; or “Maybe tomorrow,” which never happened.
- His behavior change affected the way they all engaged to include the kids; there were also broken promises and the kids were “disappointed that he would not play with them.”
- Ed’s disconnection and preoccupation affected his and Kelly’s relationship; there was communication breakdown. This resulted in Kelly feeling lonely, reporting “I missed my husband.” They stopped talking about the conflict he was experiencing at work. When they did talk, Ed only wanted Kelly to listen. Kelly began to think that Ed did not value her. “I have more value than just listening.”

- They began to argue about little things such as regular household duties, which lead to disunity and disappointment. Kelly became frustrated and sad with the way that Ed was handling his workplace conflict.
- This all affected Kelly's ability to sleep, reporting that, "I lost sleep at night thinking about how I could help or connect with him." In her mind he lost himself, was not being the authentic, warm, courageous person she knew him to be. Instead she was witnessing a very sad person who no longer lived in the present, rather was always preoccupied.
- This made Kelly feel stressed and feeling ill equipped to deal with it or break free from how his work impacted their home life.

**Case #5—Star family.** Dewey was a 30-year-old, who held an associate's degree in criminal justice. He and his family lived in Hudson, Wisconsin. For the past 2 years, Dewey worked for the Wisconsin State Patrol as an inspector at the Hudson Weight Station, near Roberts, Wisconsin. Dewey's job consisted of weighing trucks to make sure they were not overweight and safe to travel on the interstate; this included checking their equipment for any violations—lighting, tires, and reviewing their log books to make sure they were taking required breaks from driving. Dewey was also responsible for writing speeding tickets and all the traffic laws that Wisconsin has for nontruck drivers. Dewey summed up his job as "basically a trooper that also works commercial vehicles." For him being a state trooper was a dream come true.

For most of my life I've wanted to be a police officer. Becoming a state trooper became a goal of mine when I was introduced to troopers in high school as part of career day. They kind of stood out as more of a sharp agency, of all the ones that came and talked to us. So, I kind of looked up to them and what they did.

Getting into the state patrol academy, however, was very competitive and difficult. Dewey applied right out of college but did not get in. Needing a job and still wanting to be in law enforcement, he applied to the police academy and was accepted. After graduating near the top of his class in the police academy, Dewey took a job as a police officer for the Darlington, Wisconsin police department; however, he never gave up on his dream of becoming a Wisconsin state trooper. He applied for the state patrol academy three more times, finally getting in on his fourth try. It took a total of 4 years to get the opportunity to become a Wisconsin state trooper. Excited about finally getting the opportunity to make his childhood dream come true, Dewey quit his job as a police officer with the Darlington Police Department and left home to attend the 8-month-long program while his wife moved back home with her parents. While at the state patrol academy, Dewey excelled and graduated third in his class, giving him an opportunity to choose where he wanted to go amongst all the locations in Wisconsin with openings. Dewey chose Hudson, Wisconsin.

We were so happy to get Hudson, Wisconsin, as it was exactly where we wanted to be so that we could be closer to my wife's sisters, all of which were beginning to have kids. So within 10 months I quit my job, went to the academy, my wife quit her job, we sold our house and moved 5 hours away from where we both grew up.

Dewey described himself as a very positive person, who thinks that everything will work out no matter what. He described himself as loving a challenge and having a passion to help people. He thought of himself as a family man; a guy who loves more than anything hanging out with his wife and baby boy. Dewey described himself as a guy who worked to live, and that the most important thing to him is when he is off duty, he is off duty and totally present at home. Dewey identified that as being a perk of his

job, that he is able to leave work at work. Dewey loved most being present for his wife and commented, “My wife is my best friend and the most important person in my life aside from our son.” He and his wife Ashlee were high-school sweethearts who dated through college, have been together for 15 years, and married for 6 years.

Ashlee was a 30-year-old who held an associate’s degree in dental hygiene. She worked at a dental office in Hudson, Wisconsin. Ashlee described herself as a very supportive person and her husband’s biggest fan. She stated, “The most important things in the world to me are he and our 8-month-old baby boy.” She believed her husband to be very good at his work and that he enjoyed what he did. “It was always his dream to help people, to keep people safe, and he worked very hard at reaching his goal—I admire that about him.” Ashlee talked about Dewey as a person who loved life, who was always happy, very positive, and did not stress very easily. She said he was family man who lived to be around family and was always joking and playing around with her: “I love that about him.”

***Workplace conflict.*** For Dewey, the most recent conflict was when he first began working as a Wisconsin state trooper. As a requirement for the state of Wisconsin for patrol officers, each new trooper is required to go through 90 days of field training, in which the person is assigned a field-training officer who grades the performances. During this time, troopers can easily be terminated. During this first 90 days on the job, Dewey was assigned a field officer who, in his mind, seemed to despise Dewey. They were never on the same page and she made his life very difficult. They were in constant conflict.

Dewey believed that the conflict he experienced with his field officer stemmed from her “loving authority and making me feel little by belittling me at work.” Despite always trying to be really respectful and professional to her and all the drivers that he worked with, his field officer was the complete opposite. She did not show him any respect, nor to the drivers. She was especially bad to the drivers, as “her ‘motto’ to the drivers was, I am the law, shut up and listen.” “Completely opposite of me, as I showed kindness and respect to everyone.” Dewey felt that being a slow learner was also impactful on their relationship, as he felt that “although I may be a slower learner, I work really hard and I just felt that she was never satisfied with my work,” all of which weighed on Dewey daily.

The most impactful element of their conflict was when she would continually point out the things that he was doing wrong, little infractions such as, “You missed a minor check,” or “You didn’t ticket for a crack in the lower left corner of the mirror.” These small things were often at the discretion of the officer, but were within the policy. Instead of pointing these small infractions out and making it a learning experience, she would “take out our policy manual and slap it down in front of me and tell me to, ‘read this’.” After experiencing the same type of behavior over and over, Dewey reported feeling very frustrated and agitated by his field officer; so much that he began hating her and hating going to work.

So one day after she did that to me I decided that I would go ahead and point out to her one of the policies that she always broke. I pointed out that she was not allowed to wear bracelets on her arms while she was at work due to the personal appearance for the Wisconsin State Patrol. She became so upset that she said, “Who do you think you are? You, you don’t tell me what to do you little, sh--.” She later told my supervisors what I had done and the supervisor spoke with me in private about the incident and said I probably shouldn’t have pointed that infraction out, as she is a senior officer. When I tried to tell him that she

constantly does that to him, he had no response and just said, “Just show her some respect, she has been a trooper for 20-plus years.” I was then instructed to apologize to her, which I couldn’t believe because I didn’t do anything wrong, it was her infraction based on regulation, yet I was instructed to apologize. As difficult as it was, I did and I felt like crap, and lost a lot of respect for her and the training supervisor.

The field-training officer continued to be disrespectful and “they kept me on a real short leash, didn’t trust me, and treated me like a 6-year-old throughout the rest of the field training requirement.”

I wasn’t used to the type of treatment they were giving me. I had a lot of hard feelings towards my field officer and my supervisor, both of who were very close to each other. Despite me knowing I was good enough to do the job I was doing, the two just made me feel like I wasn’t. This became my biggest concern because I was on probation and could easily lose my job—that fact became a big stress for me and I began to have a lot of anxiety.

Dewey reported that the anxiety stayed with him on and off the job,

I was worried every day about screwing up. The stress, I admit, made me make mistakes I normally wouldn’t because I began to second-guess myself, which is dangerous in law enforcement. I was so stressed out I asked my supervisor if I should be looking for another job. His response was, “You should work with your field officer.”

***Effect of workplace conflict on participant and home life.*** The job became even more stressful to Dewey, as the lack of visible support made him feel they wanted him to fail. Dewey worried constantly about being the sole breadwinner at the time, because his wife had quit her job to move to Hudson, Wisconsin and was still unemployed. Dewey reported losing sleep because he would lie in bed dreading going to work the next day and thinking about what he would do if he were not a state trooper anymore.

It became very hard to decompress, something that I had been very good at doing in the past as a police officer. I found myself driving around a bit longer after work rather than just going home. There were times I even just stopped in a parking lot to try to think through my day.

Dewey stated, “There were just so many times that I felt I could not do anything right for them, so I would play what happened during the day over and over in my head—questioning everything I did.” There were other times that he would come home and just grab a beer, but reported, “I try not to drink when I am upset as it seems like the worst time to do it.” Dewey reported

At first talking to my wife helped, but she became more stressed about the situation I was going through. The conflict lasted pretty heavy for me for 3 months; I eventually stopped sharing with my wife, for her protection, after about a month. Usually just saying things are fine. Having a husband as an officer is worrying enough; I hated my wife worrying about the security of my job after making such big choice of relocating for me to live out my dream. She also worried that I was not happy with my choice.

Dewey began to question if he had made the right decision in becoming a state trooper.

Despite me always wanting to be a state trooper, the unit I was in was so much different than what imagined being part of. Instead of being a squared away group whom was professional, they were officers with the mindset of being very controlling and rude, rather than helpful and kind.

This made Dewey feel that he did “not to want to be part of this organization that was simply rude and more about assertion of power than anything else.” Dewey further reported that

although disheartening, the only way I could tolerate being there was by prescribing to the mindset that I can only be myself and maybe I could make a difference by showing my positive attitude and politeness towards drivers, and people will follow my example over time, and maybe get the department headed in more of a direction that I think it should be in, and that I know some officers think it should be in.

***Effect of workplace conflict on home life from spouse/significant other experience.*** Ashlee reported knowing exactly when Dewey experienced some sort of conflict at work because he acted completely counter to his normal self.



Normally he comes home and he's really happy and wants to plan our evening and make dinner together and usually do an activity outside and is very talkative. A lot of conversation and planning, and he asks me about myself and how my day went and isn't drawn inward—he's usually an open book.

When asked to describe her husband's personality, Ashlee responded that he was very social, very bubbly, talkative, optimistic, positive, very family focused, and loved learning. She further described Dewey as a go-getter, not easily angered, and never going to bed grumpy. Ashlee reported loving the fact that she knew her husband so well and attributed her deep knowledge of her husband's person to the fact that they grew up together.

We met when we were in high school, we have so many of the same experiences, we know each other's values. I know his family as well as he knows mine, so if we ever do disagree on something he can often see where I'm coming from because he knows how I was raised and grew up and I can see vice versa with him.

When asked if she could recall the most recent significant workplace conflict her husband experienced, she quickly identified a conflict he had with his field officer that lasted nearly 3 months where his field officer constantly gave him a hard time. “This time was very difficult for me because we had so much weighing on this job and he was at the time the sole breadwinner.” Ashlee recalled that during this particular conflict Dewey did not want to talk about what he was going through very much and that he often came home very quiet and irritated. She reported that often she would say,

“Hey, did you have a good day?” or “What went on today.” And during this time he'd often say, “I don't want to talk about it,” but still acted as if he was irritated the whole night. The times I couldn't take it I'd ask him to just please tell me about it. When he did talk about what was bugging him. . . I think it helped him to get it all off his chest.

However, after hearing about the issues Dewey was having, Ashlee felt irritated and mad at his field officer. “It irritated that someone would treat him the way they

treated him at work.” Ashlee felt the times he did not talk about it or when what was bugging him seemed to linger, his behavior would change drastically. She would notice that not only was it grumpiness, quietness, and moping like he was depressed, but he would also pop open a beer right when he got home and drink more than a few, which was not normal for him. He would go out to the garage and do something alone. This left Ashlee feeling annoyed because she felt,

Hey, I've just worked today and I may have had problems too but, he won't ask me about my day because of what happened to him. So it also makes me feel kind of alone. I would say that's mainly it, I'm used to having a partner that talks and is friendly and wants to do things together and is very happy.

During the time Dewey was in conflict with this field officer, Ashlee became concerned with his drinking and that he was withdrawn, quiet, short, agitated, snippy, and that he would hide out in the garage a lot. Mostly because she felt he was drinking because he was stressed. She stated,

He would get annoyed when I would tell him that I'm worried about his drinking and if I accused him of being an alcoholic he got more irritated about that. But in my mind that is usually . . . I mean, he's adult, it's his own decision. So I give him my opinion and I get annoyed and upset, but he ultimately will do what he wants and I try to leave it at that. After I state that I'm not happy, I'm annoyed, you're drinking too much then at least he knows my opinion and I leave him to do what he wants. But from my perspective his unhappiness and what he was dealing with at work was connected to his drinking, which was confusing to me because he has this thing that only drink to be happier and not drink to make yourself happy. Yet during that time he was definitely drinking to try to make himself happier—so going against his motto.

Ashlee became exhausted with trying to encourage him, as she felt herself became less and less optimistic about the situation. A feeling that translated into disappointment because

I had left my job so he could have this job, which he was not happy with. This also frustrated me because he never said it may not work out, he never told me

about the possibility of him ever losing his job after just a few months. This brought on a lot of stress. This conflict consumed our life for 3 months; we spent a lot of energy and time talking about our options. For a time, I was concerned about him leaving his job and that concerned me because, like I said before, I had left mine. Also, I don't handle too much change at once very well and that would have meant everything would have changed—where we lived, jobs, house, and that's too much for me to handle. I generally encouraged him to make it through his conflict at work so we could have some consistency in life. I think he was very serious about possibly finding another option, a job. I tried not to talk about that, tried not to talk about him leaving his job because I really didn't want that to happen. I encouraged him to make it through it.

Ashlee reported eventually having to seek support and advice from other family members to try to encourage him because she felt like she could not do it herself, stating that “

it was definitely bigger than me. Normally I can help him work through an issue pretty quickly, but when it happens every day and it's ongoing, I felt like I needed to call in other recruits. Many other family members helped me encourage my husband. Which helped a lot. We also got lucky, I think, as his field officer abruptly retired before his 90 days was up. So that was the way that conflict eventually ended. It was a huge relief, as I would hate to see what that it would have been like if the retirement never came, it may have led to a different job change possibly.

**Summary.** The length of the negative workplace conflict Dewey experienced was 3 months. During the case analysis it became evident that both individual and family were impacted by the negative workplace conflict Dewey experienced at work. Aside from the excessive drinking Dewey was aware of the impact the negative workplace conflict had on him individually. However, Dewey was unaware of the effects the negative workplace conflict he experienced had on his family. Dewey was also unaware of how his drinking impacted his family.

**Effect on participant.** The conflict affected his self-esteem; “I questioned if I was good enough for the job.”

- Shortly after his self-esteem began to suffer, he started bringing the worry home. “I began to experience a lot of anxiety about being terminated before my probation period time was over because at the time I was the sole income earner for my family.”
- Because of the anxiety at work he constantly questioned himself, which resulted in him making additional mistakes.
- At home, the stress caused him lose sleep worrying about his job. “My wife and I began to discuss the possibly of me losing my job, which was very difficult for me, because I hated worrying her.”
- During this time his behavior began to change; instead of driving right home when he got off work, he drove around so that he could try to decompress. It never worked.
- When he did get home, he would do was grab a beer to drink, then another, and another, often getting intoxicated.

*Effect on family.* At first Dewey’s behavior really saddened Ashlee; she reported babying him by asking him if he needed anything when he got home or if he wanted to talk. She also went out of her way to cook his favorite meals and made sure his favorite beer was in the refrigerator.

- However, after a while Dewey’s moodiness began to annoy her because she also had work issues going on, but could not talk to him about it because his consumed their life. Ashlee felt that she had to take the backseat, stating that she often said to herself, “Hey, I’ve just worked today and I may have had problems too but he

won't ask me about my day because of what happened to him. So it also makes me feel kind of alone.”

- Dewey’s isolation and excessive drinking worried Ashlee; so much that she would ask family for advice, something she would normally not do. She also stopped buying his favorite beer.
- There was communication breakdown. Ashlee stopped sharing her opinion and her feelings about what Dewey was experiencing.
- Dewey was unaware of the effects his behavior had on Ashlee. As Ashlee stated, “I didn’t want to tell him that I was annoyed or sad because I didn’t want him feeling worse. I didn’t want him to worry about me or make any rash decisions, like quit his job or drink more”
- However, she became exhausted with trying to encourage Dewey and felt herself becoming less and less optimistic about the situation.
- Ashlee felt disappointed and missed her husband, stating,

I missed him not begging present mentally or choosing to be in the garage. I missed the loving fun guy I married who liked being around me, I was sad and anger at the same time. I actually felt, hey-this was not what I signed up for, when we rutted up our family to follow your dream.

### **Outline of Themes**

The case analysis included breaking the case down into two sections. The first section was the effects the negative workplace conflict had on the participants within their home lives. The second section was the effects the family experienced due to what affects the participant experienced. Using a series of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, I listed common categories in each individual case across the top of the sheet with the five individuals’ case identifiers along the left margin (see Table 2). From these spreadsheets

I consolidated the categories and responses into 4 major effects. The 4 major effects included stress, anxiety, behavior change, and loss of self-esteem. Table 2, *Example of Case Analysis- Effects on Participant*, illustrates the major effects across the five cases and summarizes notions of participant's responses.

Table 2

*Example of Case Analysis-Effects on Participant*

Case/ participants name	Length of workplace conflict	Behavior change	Stress	Anxiety	Loss of self- esteem
Forest family- Heather	3 months	When I got home I did not want to deal with anyone, because I had this thing on my brain.	Why am I wasting my time my time stressing if I did everything this person wanted me to do, when I could be playing with my kids or doing laundry or disses instead of just shutting myself off in my room not dealing with anybody.	Lost sleep lying in bed dreading going to work the next day-worrying if I had done something wrong or forgot to do something altogether.	
Sky family- Amber	1 week		I was stressed about telling my supervisor "no" I was between a rock and a hard place.	I became very anxious during that time; in fact I think I even missed dinner due to not being able to eat because my stomach felt all twisty.	Is it just me, am I doing something wrong. Am I making a bigger deal out of this then what it is.
Grass family- Jackie	2 separate days (day of conflict and day of meeting instructed by management, that brought back old feeling)			Some anxiety about going into work, frustrations, and feelings of embarrassment that a clinical person would find reason to go against one of my decisions	I wondered if I was being too sensitive.
Wind family- Ed	4 months	I know I have become a negative person, cranky, and snippy.  I am down most of the time. This saddens me	Then there are the days, which seems to happen most frequently that I get home and I'm so mentally exhausted that I really don't have the energy to do a lot of things or don't feel like doing a lot of things because my brain is just fried from the stress of work.	When Sunday rolls around I can feel the anxiety start to kick in about having to go to work on Monday.	That evening I drove the long way home feeling like I had been walked all over and I felt sad, hurt, and beaten
Star Family/Dewey	3 months	He would come home grumpy or quit, mopping like he was depressed and would pop open a beer and drink more than a few.	The stress I was feeling I admit made me make mistakes I normally wouldn't, because I began to second guess myself, which is dangerous in law enforcement	Because I was on probation and could easily lose my job, I began to have a lot of anxiety about work. I worried everyday about screwing up.	

I also created a list of the reported symptoms associated with each major effect. There were between three to eight associated symptoms for each effect. Stress that presented in the form of constant worry, lashing out (snippy), insomnia (loss of sleep), excessive drinking, difficulty relaxing, avoiding family, procrastinating and avoiding responsibilities. Anxiety that presented in the form of constantly tense, worried, and on edge; feelings of apprehension, trouble concentrating, anticipating the worst (being terminated), and irritability. Behavior change that presented in the form of becoming snippy, yelling, agitation, shortness with family, isolation, moped around became negative, stopped sharing experience with spouse (communication breakdown). Loss of self-esteem that presented in the form of loss of confidence (question abilities), questioned if good enough, and feeling stupid.

### **Analysis of Effects on Participants**

**Effect I: Stress. Participants who experienced negative workplace conflict reported feeling stressed at home.** Through the analysis of data across the various cases it was evident that those who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced stress at home. Five out of 5 of the main participants experienced stress as the first symptom of the negative workplace conflict intertwining with the home life in all five cases. Participants reported having similar effects of stress, such as constant worry (thinking about the conflict on their way home), insomnia (lying in bed thinking about the conflict), and analyzing if any mistakes were made on their part.

In each of the five cases, the first approach the participants took to deal with the stress was to talk to their spouse or significant other about what they were experiencing. During my research I found that the longer the conflict lasted the more severe the



symptoms of stress became. For 3 out of 5, the stress resulted in difficulty relaxing, avoiding family, excessive drinking, procrastinating, and avoiding responsibilities. Specifically, Heather described withdrawing from her family and neglecting or procrastinating completing her household duties due to stress. Dewey began excessively drinking due to stress. He also began to make mistakes he normally would not, because he began to second-guess himself. He was in constant worry about losing his job, while Ed attributed the constant worry and staying late at work to being stressed and wanting to make sure he did not give his supervisor a reason to fire him. He also attributed being tired from working so many hours to avoiding family because he was simply too mentally exhausted from stress about work.

**Effect II: Anxiety. Participants who experienced negative workplace conflict reported feeling forms of anxiety at home.** Through the analysis of data across the various cases it became evident that those who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced anxiety at home. Five out of 5 of the main participants reported experiencing anxiety. All five participants reported anxiety as a by-product of the stress they felt due to the negative workplace conflict. Participants reported that the symptoms of anxiety were tenseness, constant worry, and feelings of apprehension, trouble concentrating, and anticipating the worst. Amber became tense at work and was in constant worry that her supervisor would think different of her for not answering the e-mail request of writing up a statement that her coworker was sleeping on the job. During the first couple of days she intentionally avoided going places she know her supervisor would be. She missed a meal the day of the conflict because her stomach was to upset.

Jackie reported feelings of apprehension about going into work the next day after the onset of the conflict she experienced with a coworker. She felt embarrassed that a clinical person would find reason to go against one of her decisions. She became worried about what people would think about her. Ed was in constant worry about getting things right at work and became very apprehensive about his situation, making it difficult for him to relax and enjoy his family.

Dewey went from being a very optimistic person, knowing that he was good enough to do the job he dreamed of doing since high school, being a state trooper, to a person who became very apprehensive and had trouble concentrating at work, causing him to make mistakes he normally would not have because of second guessing his abilities and knowledge. "I was worried every day about screwing up." Dewey also began to think, worse-case scenario that he would lose his job, and worried about what else he would be qualified to do to support his family.

Three out of 5 reported feeling irritable. Specifically, Heather's irritability affected both her kids and husband. Her kids began to withdraw from her by going to their dad for any needs, and her husband intentionally tried to stay out of her way to attempt not to bug her. Ed became so irritable he would snap at his wife and kids, behavior identified by his wife as out of character. Dewey presented as irritable in the form of shortness and lack of patience directed at his wife. According to Ashlee, Dewey "would get annoyed when I would tell him that I'm worried about his drinking, and if I accused him of being an alcoholic he got more irritated about it and seemed to drink more."

**Effect III: Change of behavior. Participants who experienced negative workplace conflict for longer than 1 (up to 4) months reported experiencing a change in normal behavior.** While each main participant told a unique story of how the workplace conflict they experienced intertwined with their home lives, it became evident that those who experienced a behavioral change reported experiencing the same sorts of behavior shift. Three out of 5 participants went from being happy-go-lucky people who were normally very positive, life-of-the-party, open, communicative people who loved spending time with their spouses/significant others and kids to feeling, withdrawn, isolated, distracted, preoccupied, tired, and negative. It was also evident that the 3 out of 5 who experienced negative workplace conflict were aware of their behavior changes and how the conflicts intertwined with their home lives. However, through the analysis of data across the various cases for this specific category, two groups emerged: 1 of 3 was aware of changed behavior and aware of the impacts it had on family members, and 2 of 3 were aware of their behavior changes but unaware of the impact the changes had on their family members.

Specifically, Ed knew he was struggling emotionally and reported that his wife Kelly had seen him “deteriorate emotionally over the timeframe I was going through conflict at work,” recalling that he went from being “a happy-go-lucky guy to being pretty much down a good portion of the time.” Most nights he came home mentally exhausted, recognizing that him coming home that way and not having energy or feeling like doing fun things at home caused “conflict in my relationship with my wife because its impacts are either I’m a bit more quiet or isolated or sometimes even a little bit snippy.” For him, the self-awareness, the knowledge of the place he ended up being

depressed and withdrawing from family, and the feeling of hopelessness were crippling to him. Yet, despite the awareness and self-reflection, he did not know how to change.

The two participants who were aware of their behavior changes but unaware of the impacts they had on their family were Heather and Dewey. Heather did not believe her husband Paul or her two kids were affected by her change in behavior, despite knowingly isolating herself from her family and intentionally not fulfilling her home responsibilities, such as parenting duties—helping with homework, dishes, vacuuming, and playing with the kids. In fact, when asked if she felt her behavior change impacted her husband or the kids, her response was, “No, the kids were too busy to notice, as they had many school and sport activities during that time,” and “Paul only needed to do a little extra work around the house and help a bit more with the homework.”

Paul, meanwhile, reported suffering and drowning in the additional duties he had to do during the time Heather was disconnected. He found himself covering for Heather when the kids would ask where their mom was, or made statements like, “Can Mom play with us?” Paul witnessed his wife go from a very happy-go-lucky person who loved being with her family to someone who seemed to always be worried, depressed, stressed, withdrawn, angry, and snappy, who wanted to spend her time at home alone. For what Paul identified as survival, he and the kids stayed out of her way. In fact, the kids began to “withdraw from interaction with their mom and interacted more with me, I also made efforts to stay out of her way and not ask her any questions.”

Similarly blind to the impacts of his behavior change, Dewey was unaware of how Ashlee felt about him isolating himself by spending a lot of time in the garage, moping around and being preoccupied, rather than the normal social, very bubbly,

talkative, optimistic, positive, family-focused person she signed up to be with when she married him. In Dewey's mind, not talking to Ashlee about his experiences was for her protection, as he did not want her to worry or stress about it.

One of the most profound behavior changes amongst all participants who experienced the workplace conflict for longer than a month was communication breakdown. All the participants who experienced behavior changes also experienced communication breakdown. This occurred for two reasons, either they did not want their spouse to worry about it anymore or they got tired of talking about their issues; they got tired of being negative and felt there was no way to change it. Also interesting was that those who experienced behavior changes also had spouses/significant others who felt disappointment resentment, anger, and loneliness.

**Effect IV: Self-esteem. Participants who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced diminished self-esteem.** Four of 5 participants at some point through their experience of negative workplace conflict questioned their abilities, questioned if they were good enough, or had feelings of being stupid. Specifically, Heather questioned if she was the reason for the negative relationship she was experiencing with her project lead. She also questioned and examined if she was doing something wrong, saying, "Am I dropping the ball?" or "Am I not working hard enough?" all of which caused her to begin to question her work ethic.

After a required sit-down with the individual Jackie had a conflict with, as instructed by their boss, Jackie left that meeting feeling like she had been walked all over, and felt sad, hurt, and beaten. The feelings brought back past experiences she had with having to take on the brunt of the responsibility when something went wrong despite not

being the responsible party. That evening she felt really down and drove the long way home, and when she arrived home isolated herself from family and drank a glass of wine.

Ed suffered in the way that he felt he lost himself in the conflict that he was experiencing. He was down and sad most of the time, completely counter to who he knew he was. The effects on his self-esteem were that he lost confidence in himself and began to question his abilities, resulting in him rechecking and rechecking his work, as well as staying after work. Dewey experienced very similar effects, where he began to question his abilities and actually began to make mistakes as he started to second-guess himself. For Dewey, the most impacting contributor to his self-esteem was the constant riding of his field officer that left him feeling bullied, belittled, and intimidated.

After analyzing each case separately, I conducted a cross-case analysis of all five cases looking for emerging themes amongst family members. I used the same method that was used to conduct the effect on participant cross-case analysis. Using a series of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, I listed out reported family effect for each of the five cases, after which I looked for reported similarities and reasons for effects. For example, similarities noted were “We were sad he was not around, we missed him,” and “I was lonely.” These were categorized as family experienced loneliness; participant behavior change was the cause of the effect. As the themes emerged from this section, I identified the major themes and noted responses aligned to support the findings. Table 3, *Example of Cross-Case Analysis Effect on Family*, illustrates the major themes across the five cases and summarized notions of family member’s responses.

Table 3

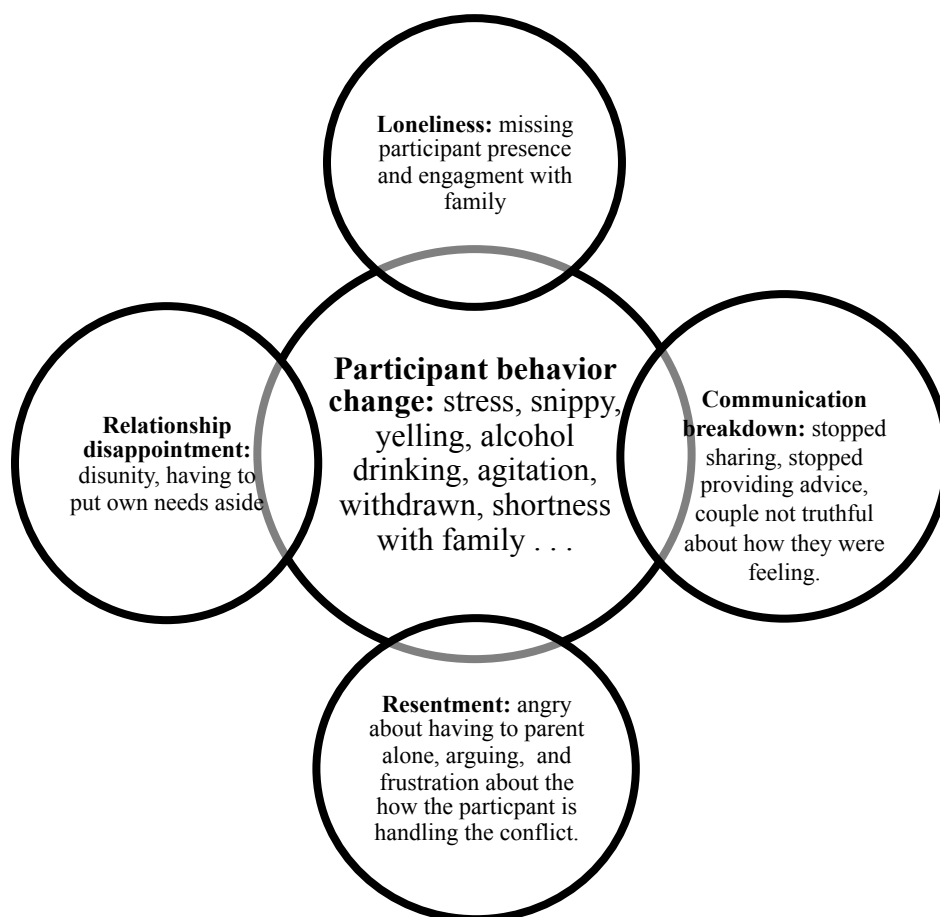
*Example of Cross-Case Analysis-Effect on Family*

Case	Length of workplace conflict	Loneliness-due to behavior change	Resentment-due to behavior change and the way conflict was dealt with	Communication breakdown due to behavior change	Relationship disappointment
Forest family	3 months	I felt lonely and stressed about parenting alone.	I resented her from the way she was dealing with the conflict and being unaware of how it affected us.	I became tired, resentful, and angry myself I didn't want to talk to her about work or the issues she was having. Even when the conflict ended, it took weeks for the family to get back in sync with each other.	I began to feel like her issues were consuming our lives. As a consequence I felt myself becoming less supportive of Heather. As the conflict went on we spent less time talking about it.
Sky family	1 week				She uses me as a sounding board which is tough at times because I think- Why don't you just tell the person what you think rather than just hold everything in?
Grass family	3 weeks unresolved-dormant			Unaware of any conflicts spouse has at work.	
Wind family	4 months	Many nights he'd come home at 7-7:30 pm and we already had already eaten dinner and were getting ready for bed, we missed him.	I became frustrated, angry, and sad with the way that Ed was handling his workplace conflict. All of which affected Kelly's ability to sleep, reporting that "I lost sleep at night thinking about how I could help or connect with him."	They stopped talking about the conflict he was experiencing at work. When they did talk Ed only wanted Kelly to listen. Kelly began to think that Ed did not value her. "I have more value than just listening	It's gotten to the point that his conflict is really effecting him at home and creating a disconnect between us because of the pre-occupation. I am frustrated with how its impacting our relationship.  We began to argue about little things such as regular household duties, which lead to disunity and disappointment.
Star Family	3 months	I missed him not begging present, mentally or choosing to be in the garage. I missed the loving fun guy I married who liked being around me.	Hey, I've just worked today and I may have had problems too but, he won't ask me about my day because of what happened to him. So it also makes me feel kind of alone.	Ashlee stopped sharing her opinion and her feelings about what Dewey was experiencing. "I didn't want to tell him that I was annoyed or sad because I didn't want him feeling worse, I didn't want him to worry about me or make any rash decisions, like quit his job or drink more"	I became concerned with is drinking and that he was withdrawn, quite, short, agitated, and snippy. He would hide in the garage. I became exhausted with trying to encourage him as I felt myself feeling less and less optimistic about the situation. I was disappointed

**Analysis of Major Themes—Effects on family**

Through the analysis of the negative impact of workplace conflict on family, it became evident that the causes of the negative effects family experienced (major themes) were due to the behavior change of the participant. Three of 5 participants at some point through their experience of negative workplace conflict changed their normal behavior, which affected the way they engaged with family members. Family members experienced the participant becoming stressed, snippy, yelling, drinking alcohol, agitated, being short with family, withdrawn, moping around, being negative, hopeless, and less-talkative about how they were doing, which resulted in communication breakdown. This shift in behavior affected the well-being of 3 out of 5 families as illustrated in Figure 1.





*Figure 1*, Cycle graph illustrates the negative impact the participant's behavior change had on family.

**Theme I: Loneliness. Family members of participants who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced loneliness due to participant behavior change.** Heather's withdrawal from family and late work hours caused Paul to feel lonely and stressed about parenting alone. Kelly hated when Ed worked late often not coming home until 7:30, after the family had already eaten dinner and the kids were ready for bed. She noted not only missing him physically, but also emotionally, as he was often depressed, snippy, or isolated. Ashlee missed Dewey being present mentally; he was often distracted, moped around, or chose to be in the garage. She stated,

I missed him not being present mentally or choosing to be in the garage. I missed the loving fun guy I married who liked being around me. I was sad and angry at the same time. I actually felt, hey-this was not what I signed up for, when we ruttled up our family to follow your dream.

**Theme II: Communication breakdown. Family members of participants who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced communication breakdown due to behavior change.** For Paul the communication breakdown occurred when he no longer agreed with how Heather was coping with the conflict with Sue. Because of Heather's behavior change, stress, anxiety, and withdrawal, Paul became resentful and angry with her and did not want to talk to her about work or the issues she was having. As the conflict went on, they communicated less and less with each other until it was just about the kids and what they needed, pickups and drop offs to different sporting events they were in. Once the conflict ended, it took weeks for the family to get back in sync with each other.

Ed's disconnection and preoccupation affected how he and Kelly communicated. Once Ed became tired of talking about the negative workplace conflict, Kelly, in turn, quite inquired about. When they did talk about the negative conflict at work, they both talked in tones that caused their kids to ask them to stop arguing. At times Kelly felt that Ed did not value her opinion; rather, he just expected her to listen to him complain so that he could decompress. During this time, the way Ed and Kelly were communicating was completely counter to their norm and the main reason, based on Ed's testimony, that he began to hold as much back as he could. However, him doing so caused Kelly to worry more about him, and she began to feel hopeless herself.

When Dewey stopped communicating with Ashlee about his conflict at work, he reported doing so to protect her. When Ashlee stopped sharing her opinion and her

feelings about what Dewey was experiencing, her reasoning was, “I didn’t want to tell him that I was annoyed or sad because I didn’t want him feeling worse, I didn’t want him to worry about me or make any rash decisions, like quit his job or drink more.” For the Star family, the communication breakdown they experienced caused Ashlee to feel sad and disconnected. She also felt that she could not help him and asked family to talk to him as she worried about his drinking and isolation. The lack of communication was reported to be counter to their norm. Both stated that their ability to talk to each other and relate is the base of their relationship.

**Theme III: Resentment. Family members of participants who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced resentment due to behavior change.** For Paul the loneliness he felt for Heather turned into resentment. He struggled with how she was handling the situation and her absence in their family life, which included her presence and help around the house made him angry. He struggled with being left to bear the brunt of the parenting responsibilities. His resentment led him to disengage with Heather by no longer talking to her about her issues at work and by staying out of her way. Kelly built up resentment towards Ed when she began to think feel that he did not value her input. She became frustrated with how he engaged with the family at home. They began to argue about little things such as regular household duties, which lead to disunity, resentment, and disappointment. Dewey’s moodiness began to annoy Ashlee because she also had work issues going on, but could not talk to him about it, because his consumed their life. Ashlee felt that she had to take the backseat stating that she often said to herself, “Hey, I’ve just worked today and I may have had problems too but, he won’t ask me about my day because of what happened to him. So it also makes me feel

kind of alone.” Ashlee became exhausted with trying to encourage Dewey and felt herself becoming less and less optimistic about the situation.

**Theme IV: Relationship disappointment. Family members of participants who experienced negative workplace conflict experienced relationship**

**disappointment.** Through my interviewing, 4 of 5 spouses/significant others reported feeling resentment, fear, disunity, anger, and irritation toward their partner who was being affected by the workplace conflict. These feelings began to occur after the breakdown of communication.

For Paul, the reason was that Heather’s issues began to consume their lives and he no longer agreed with how she was handling it. He felt lonely and angry that she was putting him and the kids through the turmoil he felt. For Brad, it was disappointment because he did not see why his significant other did not just say no and stand up for herself, but rather held everything in. For Kelly, it was feeling disconnected with her husband and his constant preoccupation. Kelly became frustrated and sad with the way that Ed was handling his workplace conflict, all of which affected Kelly’s ability to sleep. She reported, “I lost sleep at night thinking about how I could help or connect with him.” In her mind he lost himself, was not being the authentic, warm, courageous person she knew him to be. Instead she was witnessing a very sad person who no longer lived in the present, rather was always preoccupied. This made Kelly feel stressed and feeling ill equipped to deal with it or break free from how his work impacted their home life.

Ashlee became angry that Dewey began to drink to mask his troubles at work rather than talk to her about them. She was disappointed that he seemed to run from his problems rather than face them. Also, during the time of conflict he ignored her needs,

despite her always trying to be there for him. She became fearful that he would lose his job and was irritated with his moping around.

Interestingly, aside from Ashlee bring up Dewey's drinking, none of the other spouses disclosed to their partners how they were being affected. In fact, all four stated that they intentionally did not disclose their true feelings, as they did not want to add to their partners' troubles. Therefore, they either did not talk about it at all or talked to their individual family members about how they felt. Three spouses reported, however, they became very short with their partners just giving them space.

Through further analysis of themes it also became evident that 3 out of 5 of the spouses/significant others also experienced stress due to the workplace conflict their spouse or significant other experienced. For Paul, the stress presented in the form of feeling overwhelmed because of having to fulfill a greater role of parenting. He felt he was constantly running in emergency mood, as not only did he have a larger responsibility at home, he also had to deal with a spouse who he felt disconnected to, as well as his own issues at work.

For Kelly, stress presented itself in the form of it becoming difficult for her to relax with Ed. She was also in constant worry about Ed's mental state and physical health, while Ashlee was in constant worry about Dewey's excessive drinking and isolation. She lost sleep over worrying about him. Ashlee also went from being optimistic about the situation to being worried about their future, as Dewey was the sole income earner. In all three of these cases there was eventually a breakdown of communication and the couples stopped talking about what they were experiencing.

Three out of 5 of the spouses/significant others reported feeling anxiety related to the negative workplace conflict their partners were experiencing. For example, Paul, Kelly, and Ashlee all described feeling worried and anticipating the worst. Paul became tense and on the edge due to increased parenting responsibilities. Kelly had feelings of apprehension that translated into fear for Ed, due to his mental state and behaving so out of character—counter to the guy she was drawn to and respected—as she watched him lose his authenticity and self in a spiral of hopelessness that eventually began to affect his health. Ashlee felt constantly on edge about her and Dewey’s ability to continue the life they became accustomed to, as she worried he would either quit his job or get fired.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

When negative workplace conflict intertwines within our home lives, it leaves a trail of destruction that severely impacts those involved. In the early stages, it affects those by adding stress and anxiety. If the negative workplace conflict last for a longer period of time, the byproducts of the stress and anxiety are behavior changes, self-esteem loss, and relationship disappointment within the home lives of those experiencing the phenomenon. Working within a role that is responsible for addressing workplace conflict, I know first-hand the effect workplace conflict has on an organization and employees' abilities to perform their jobs to their fullest potential. Over the years I have worked with hundreds of people who have reported the stressors that come with having negative conflict in the workplace and how they are impacted, resulting in lack of motivation, feeling isolated, worried, inability to complete work due to lack of communication, name calling, violence, and sabotage. The purpose of my study was to gain a deeper understanding into what happens to workplace conflict that starts in the workplace but intertwines with the employee's home life.

My research question was: How do negative workplace conflicts and home lives intertwine? To answer this question, I conducted an interpretive multiple-case study by interviewing five people who were at least 30 years of age, had been in their jobs for a least 1 year, and had experienced a negative workplace conflict in the past year. In addition, I also interviewed each of the five spouses or significant others.

This final chapter includes discussion of the major findings, limitations in the research, suggestions for further research, implications for the practice of organization development, and personal reflections about the study. At the conclusion of this study, I

gained a deeper insight into the phenomenon of negative workplace conflict that intertwines with the home life. Not only did I answer the question I posed, I also gained additional insights about how the conflict affects spouses and significant others.

### **Overview of Major Findings**

For this study the major findings are broken up into two sections effect on participant, which were labeled major effects and secondly major themes, which were derived from the effects the family experienced due to the negative workplace conflict intertwining with the home life.

**Major effects.** Four major effects emerged after the cross-case analysis of the five individual case studies. The major effects on the home life of the participant whom experienced the negative workplace conflict were

- Stress that presented in the form of constant worry, lashing out (snippy), insomnia (loss of sleep), excessive drinking, difficulty relaxing, avoiding family, procrastinating and avoiding responsibilities.
- Anxiety that presented in the form of constant tenseness, worry, and being on edge, feelings of apprehension, trouble concentrating, anticipating the worst (being terminated), and irritability.
- Change in behavior that presented in the form of becoming snippy at home (yelling, agitation, and shortness with family members), isolating oneself from family members (withdrawn), moping around, being negative, discontinuing sharing experience with spouse (communication breakdown), giving up hope, and driving around after work.



- Loss of self-esteem that presented in the form of loss of confidence (questioning ability), questioning if good enough, and feelings of stupidity.

**Major themes.** Four, major themes emerged after the cross-case analysis of the five individual case studies. The major themes were effects that family members experienced due to the effect the participant whom experienced due to the negative workplace conflict. Through cross-case analysis it became evident that the effects on family were due behavior change of participant. The effects on family were

- Loneliness—family members missed their loved ones due to long hours of working, withdrawal and isolation.
- Communication breakdown—as the participant stopped sharing their experiences family members stopped inquiring about or providing advice. The breakdown of communication caused the spouse/significant others not to share how they were feeling. Couples began to argue about things they normally would not such as household responsibilities.
- Resentment—family members became angry about having to parent alone, they became frustrated with how the participant was handling their conflict. Leaving feelings of disunity. and
- Relationship disappointment from spouse/significant other—presented in the form of resentment, fear, disunity, anger, irritation, breakdown of communication, loneliness, and shutting down.

During my study two major groups emerged, as shown on Table 4.

Table 4

*Two Major Groups*

Group	Participant(s)	Length	Severity
1a	Amber	1 week	Minor
1b	Jackie	3 weeks in which the conflict went unresolved/dormant and surfaced on 2 separate days (day of conflict and day of meeting instructed by management, that brought back old feeling).	Day of conflict—Minor but brought up unresolved feelings weeks later when participant was required to meet with her coworker.
2	Heather	3 months	Serious—change of behavior that affected family and significant other.  Two of 3 were unaware of the impact on their families.
	Ed	4 months	
	Dewey	3 months	

Each participant who experienced negative workplace conflict reported feeling stress and anxiety. Group 1 consisted of participants who experienced a negative workplace conflict for up to 1 week. The effects on their home lives were minimal, and they only reported being stressed and anxious (anxiety) during the onset of the conflict. Specifically, this group reported losing sleep (insomnia), loss of appetite, and were worried about going into work the next day.

The second group consisted of participants who experienced a negative workplace conflict that lasted longer than 1 week up and to 4 months. These participants reported more severe effects. Along with experiencing stress and anxiety, and loss of sleep (insomnia), the stress and anxiety for this group manifested in the following ways:

- lashing out (snippy),
- excessive drinking,
- difficulty relaxing,
- preoccupation,
- procrastinating and avoiding responsibilities,
- constant tenseness,
- feelings of apprehension,
- trouble concentrating,
- anticipating the worst (being terminated), and
- irritability.

In addition to feeling a great deal of stress and anxiety, this group also experienced behavior change and loss of self-esteem, manifesting in the form of

- isolating oneself from family members (withdrawn),
- moping around,
- being negative,
- discontinuing sharing experience with spouse (communication breakdown),
- loss of confidence (questioning ability),
- questioning if good enough, and
- feelings of stupidity.

Additionally, Group 2's conflict affected their spouses/significant others to the magnitude that they also reported feeling stress and anxiety, which over time affected their opinions of their spouses, causing loneliness, communication breakdown, resentment and relationship disappointment (major themes) all of which caused feelings of

- fear,
- disunity,
- anger, and
- irritation.

For this group, these feeling occurred when there was a breakdown of communication. Eventually, their spouses stopped talking to them but continued to exhibit negative behavior changes.

After analyzing my findings, I searched for current literature to compare and contrast with my findings. During my search, I found that literature was plentiful on general topics of conflict: workplace conflict, task conflict, relationship conflict, workplace aggression, workplace bullying, and resolving workplace conflict. Literature that could be more directly compared to the phenomenon of my study, workplace conflict and how it intertwines with the home life, was scarce. However, after honing my search to impacts of workplace conflict on home life I was able to find scholarly articles, although few, that investigated the two worlds intertwining.

The literature I found was largely one-sided, where the longer topic of investigation of intertwining came from the direction of family conflict to work. Authors interested in family life conflict with work investigated the impacts of psychological

strains, anxiety (Westman, Etzion, & Horovitz, 2004), burnout (e.g., Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000), distress (Barnett, Raudenbush, Brennan, Pleck, & Marshall, 1995), depression (Howe, Levy, & Caplan, 2004), work–life balance, and marital dissatisfaction (Westman, Vinokur, Hamilton, & Roziner, 2004). The two major writings I found within the literature of the two worlds intertwining were scholarly articles around two theories that were applicable to my study: (a) *work–family conflict* (WFC), referring to a situation in which role pressures at work hamper functioning at home (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985); and (b) *family–work conflict*, referring to role pressures at home interfering with functioning at work (Sanz-Vergel, Munoz-Rodriguez, & Nielsen, 2014). Since my study focused on the impact of work conflict on family, I restricted my point to discussing research on WFC. First I will write to the general effects of workplace conflict related to my findings, then about the impacts the presented symptoms had on the home lives of participants.

In my findings I found that participants who experienced workplace conflict suffered strained symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, burnout, and somatic complaints (De Dreu, 2004). My participants also reported feeling unhappy, tired, and anxious. These effects became more severe as the conflict persisted (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2014). For 3 of the 5 participants, symptoms caused relationship conflict with their spouses/significant others, health issues, and abuse of alcohol, all of which implied a greater risk to one’s well-being (Semmer et al., 2010). In each case, the effects of the conflict caused participants to question their abilities; however, only 3 of 5 suffered loss of self-esteem (Semmer et al., 2010). Specifically, Heather, Jackie, and Ed questioned their abilities. Ed lost confidence in himself and began to check and recheck his work,

adding hours onto his daily work. Dewey experienced very similar effects, where he began to question his abilities and actually began to make mistakes as he started to second-guess himself, while Jackie felt anxiety about going to work due to embarrassment and fear of what people would think of her clinical judgment being challenged.

During my study it became evident that in all five cases, those who experienced the negative workplace conflict were unable to “psychologically detach” (Etzion et al., 1998). During the duration of the conflicts, if the participants were unable to refrain from job-related thoughts during nonwork time, it affected their abilities to recharge. Recharging is an important prerequisite for recovering from strain experiences that originated from work, including workplace conflicts (Etzion et al., 1998).

My finding was that the difference between the experiences of the two groups was how long the spillover occurred. In the case of spillover, stress experienced in one domain of life, work, resulted in stress in the other domain of life for participants, their home lives (Westman, 2001). For those for whom the spillover only lasted for a short period of time, the effects were minimal and short lived; however, the participants who continued to experience the negative workplace-conflict spillover suffered from the inability to psychologically detach. They were stuck in what Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) called a cycle WFC:

a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role. (p. 77)

This was specifically true for the three participants who experienced spillover for a long duration time. Unable to detach from work while off work due to continued conflict

within their workplace, their home lives were affected in a circular nature, through stress, anxiety, behavior change, and loss of self-esteem. The negative experiences began at work, carried over into their homes, and translated into negative experiences at home, only to have to start the cycle over again the next day. For this group, dealing with the conflicts became ongoing battles that occupied their whole selves as they became consumed by their negative experiences, causing them to work overtime and to become more frustrated and dissatisfied with the organizations they worked for (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013).

This group's family member's well-being was affected, which I identified as major themes loneliness, communication breakdown (family members shut down), resentment, and relationship disappointment causing family members to feel fear, disunity, anger, and irritation. Crossover is a normal occurrence described in Bakker and Demerouti's spillover–crossover model (2013) is where, first, experiences at work are transmitted to the home domain and, second, emotions and behaviors in the home domain are transmitted to significant others. Once experiences built up at work spilled over to the family domain, they influence the partner. Research suggested this is the point of crossover in the interpersonal process that occurs when job stress or psychological strain experienced by one person affects the level of strain of another person in the same social environment (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989). For example, an employee who experiences a negative workplace conflict with a coworker goes home upset and frustrated (negative strain), and takes that frustration out on his or her partner in the form of an argument, being snappy, withdrawn, or passive aggressive. Crossover

occurs when the partner begins to feel negative emotions (his/her well-being is affected) due to the employee's behavior at home.

During my study, I found that crossover occurred when the participants and their spouses/significant others discussed the negative workplace conflict. In each case, at the onset of their negative workplace conflict, the participants shared everything with their spouses/significant others to get support and advice. At some point the participants stopped talking about their experiences with their spouses (communication breakdown). However, it was not until the behavior change of the participant did the family member experience negative impacts due to the negative workplace conflict. Although my study did not identify exactly when the behavior change occurred, participants experienced behavior change also reported being

- agitated,
- snippy,
- withdrawn,
- isolated,
- short with family, and
- stopped sharing experiences

for reasons of

- believing that their spouse could not help them,
- not wanting to worry their partner,
- becoming tired of always talking about the negative,
- finding other ways to cope with the conflict (i.e., drinking), and
- wanting to withdraw from family and needing and seeking more time alone.



Prior to behavior change which included communication breakdown, spouses/significant others were very empathetic and supportive. They reported giving such advice as coping strategies, solutions and attempted to cheer their love one through their conflict (Westman, 2006). However, once behavior change occurred the partners stopped sharing and there was a crossover of negative feelings. The spouses/significant others began to experience loneliness, resentment, communication breakdown, relationship disappointment and feelings of stress, anxiety, fear, and loneliness. They also became angry, irritated, and shut-down themselves, all of which resulted in further disunity.

### **Other Insights to the Study**

There were other insights gained from this study that I will highlight here. It appears that those who experienced negative workplace conflict that intertwined with their home life were in disbelief that it was happening to them. Several participants stated, "I couldn't believe this was happening to me." It appeared that all participants had been very good workers and excelled at their respective jobs. Three out of 5 whose conflict lasted for up to 4 months reported that at the onset of their conflict they merely felt annoyed and described it as a nuisance. However, as their experience continued, the effects intensified.

My direct insight was that at some point, which was unidentified in my study, the participants became unable to decompress despite making efforts to do so by taking the long way home or having a long commute, talking with their partners, mentors, and with family members. When the participants failed to decompress, they began to behave counter to their norm (Etzion et al., 1998), which began to affect how they engaged and

communicated with their family members, including discussing the conflict with their spouse, causing negative feeling from the spouse that translated into the loss of support.

Additionally, as I listened to participants, it seemed that the more reflective participants were, the more impactful the conflicts were on them, as they seemed to be consumed by the mere fact of being in conflict. They felt shame and guilt that the workplace conflicts were affecting them in the way they did.

The length of conflict had no impact on the symptoms the participant experienced. Two out of 5 fell in this category; for one, the conflict lasted only 1 day, for the other it lasted 3 months, yet for the participant that the conflict only lasted 1 day, negative feelings resurfaced weeks later, resulting in the participant reliving the account, as well as recalling similar accounts in the years past. All of these feelings made the participant cry on the way home and feel sad the night of the resurfaced thoughts about past experiences. The similarity between the two participants was that their personality characteristic, namely neuroticism, boosted the spillover of interpersonal conflicts from the work to the home domain (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2014).

Other insights were that in each case, the common denominator was that the effects of the workplace conflict on home life ended once the conflict ended. For some that was relatively quickly, for others it lingered and caused more damage to their well-being and the well-being of their family members, either consciously or subconsciously. Interestingly, for each case there was no solution or resolution of the actual conflict. In addition, although not specifically investigated in this study, each participant reported talking to someone at work about their issues; however, no one reported it going further than discussing it with a coworker, supervisor, or mentor. Aside from Jackie being

instructed by her supervisor to meet with her coworker, participants reported that their organization did not attempt to assist in the resolution of their conflict. Participants also reported that they were unaware of any type of conflict-management programs their organizations offered. Also interesting, but not a focus of my study, was that during interviews participants reported that the workplace conflict resulted in personal attacks, avoiding coworkers with whom they were in conflict, calling in sick, and searching for a new job.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations that should be considered with this study. In an interpretive multi-case study, the findings cannot be generalized to a large population (Stake, 1995). The participants were asked to self-report on their experience of negative workplace conflict and its impacts on their home life. A limitation of self-reporting in this study is that the participants can mask their actual feelings about the impact of their experience on their home life either consciously or subconsciously, without an accurate way to triangulate the data.

People, who were more reflective, seemed to have more insight on the impacts associated with the conflict they experienced at home. During my interviews, I had to rely on only the words being said, mannerisms, and physical reaction of the participants themselves. In such a process, there is room for human error and interpretation. As a researcher, throughout the interviews I made sure that I was repeating back the responses the participants gave, as well as seeking confirmation that my interpretation was correct, by asking, "Am I interpreting this correctly?" However, despite all efforts as a researcher studying a phenomenon through self-reporting, I could only take in account as much as

they were willing to share. As the participants were volunteers out of 50 e-mails that went out to my network, they may have come to the interview with a particular story or perspective they wanted to share.

Six participants resided within 20 miles of Minneapolis and lived and worked in the Twin Cities. Two participants lived in Wisconsin and two lived in Iowa. All participants, with the exception of one, worked in what most would consider professional, white-collar type positions in health care and corporate America. The data were supplied by Midwestern people who would be considered by most to be of the middle class to upper middle class socioeconomic statuses. All participants were also well educated, obtaining degrees or specialized training to perform the jobs within their professions. This could have accounted for the similar reporting of effects of negative workplace conflict. As a researcher, I wondered if I had interviewed participants of different socioeconomic status, would I have gotten different results.

### **Implications for OD**

Effectively managing workplace conflict in the workplace, regardless of industry, can be complex, and no organization or employee is exempt from experiencing negative workplace conflict. In fact, roughly 1 in 3 employees (33%) in the United States said that conflict has led to personal injury or attacks, while 1 in 5 employees (22%) report that it has led to illness or absence from work (Hayes, 2008). Additionally, 10% of workers report project failure as a direct result of conflict. Organizations often try to deal with the impacts of negative workplace conflict by approaching it from the avenues of team building or from the angle of “how do you get people to get along?” rather than “how do we appropriately deal with conflict when it arises?”

The focus of my study was on the impacts of negative workplace conflict on the home life; that is, how the two intertwine. My study not only gave insights to those impacts but it provided a glimpse into how those impacts can effect organizations. For example, once the conflict escalated, participants were unable to decompress and began to experience workplace conflict spillover into their home lives. This caused them to use sick hours when not sick and avoid the colleague they had the conflict with. For many, avoidance included going to someone else for help who was not as knowledgeable as the person they were avoiding, due to conflict. The impact on the organization was loss of intellectual knowledge. In addition, participants reported that as the conflict progressed or intensified, they began to have negative thoughts about the organization as a whole and they lost their motivation to work or be innovative, assigning blame to the organizational culture.

Lastly, two of my participants sought and obtained new jobs 2 months after my study ended; they directly related leaving their positions to the conflict they experienced and the lack of support from the organization, as well as the effects the conflict had on their family life. The cost to the organization was having to fill a vacant position, recruitment, training the new hire, paying other employees involved in the hiring and training process, and the lost investment made when the employees left, not to mention the loss of intellectual knowledge. It is estimated that replacing midlevel employees making \$30,000 costs an organization \$70,000 (Lawler, 2010). To put the loss to organizations in context in 2008, workplace conflict contributed to organizations within the United States losing \$359 billion in paid hours (Hayes, 2008, p. 3). Through

examples like these, one can easily interpret that symptoms of negative workplace conflict interrupt the natural state of the organization and its workers' home lives.

My study showed that when negative workplace conflict entered the home life of the experiencer (spillover), the participants, at the minimum, experienced stress and anxiety. If the conflict lasted longer than 1 week, and up to 4 months, participants experienced increased stress and anxiety that led to behavior change, and loss of self-esteem all of which affected how the participant engaged with their organization. The organizations had no systems in place to help staff deal with negative conflict in the workplace. This lack of support resulted in the participants feeling negative about the organizational culture and tolerance, which perpetrated the problem within the participant's mind. They lacked trust in management, which impeded their abilities to form healthy, safe relationships with management. The literature (e.g., Carlson & Perrewe, 1999) confirms the premise that supportive environments help reduce an employee's stress and strain. Madsen, John, and Miller (2005), authors of *Work-Family Conflict and Health*, conducted a study, with findings that lower levels of WFC are related to perceptions of good management/leadership relationship and strong social relationship, which is also supported by past literature (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). This provides support for my argument that when employees feel they have a healthy and open relationship with their management, their WFC levels could decrease.

The findings of my study have implications for leaders in organization and OD consultants. After conducting my study, I believe it is realistic to think a reason the conflicts went on for at most 3 months was in part the lack of an intervention within the

organization to attempt to aid in the resolution of the negative workplace conflict. The other part was the inability for the participants to put their experiences in context; they were unable to identify the why and how to fix, as they spent most of their time in survival mode and coping. Participants also expressed thoughts that they were anomaly. They lacked the means to resolve.

At the core of OD is the dedication to expand the knowledge and effectiveness of people to accomplish more successful organizational change and performance. As OD practitioners, the field of practice is to develop and enhance an organization's performance, as well as performance of its employees, in accomplishing its goals. Better understanding the effects of workplace conflict when it enters the home of organizations workers can help OD practitioners and leaders understand the importance of resolving workplace conflict within the workplace, not only because of the effects on its business operation, but also in care of its human capital well-being.

Assisting organizations in developing procedures for addressing conflict has the potential to positively impact an organizations culture. Addressing workplace conflict and the problems associated with it can often resolve the issues; thus avoiding frustration, hostility, high turnover, low productivity, and even litigation. Understanding the specific phenomenon of workplace conflict and home life can aid OD practitioners in identify, developing, and implementing solutions for resolving the conflict either before or after spillover occurs by provide education. For example, train both organization leaders and employees on the impacts of negative workplace conflict intertwining with the home life (spillover/crossover) on both the organization and the employee, then teach both how to recognize (symptoms) spillover and how to deal with it when it occurs. I consider this

opportunity to assist the experiencer in navigating what is inevitable to happen within organizations: negative workplace conflict. Helping people understand and deal with conflict on their own can also aid them in addressing it in a healthy manner when it occurs.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This interpretive, multiple-case study was designed to investigate the phenomenon of negative workplace conflict and how it intertwines with the home life. It is clear from the Literature Review that the majority of the studies around workplace conflict have focused on negative effects of workplace conflict on organizations. However, as I noted in my study, there is a body of literature on negative spillover-crossover of negative workplace conflict on the home life. Further research in the area of how negative workplace conflict impacts the home life will aid in adding to the body of literature of WFC. Moreover, future studies can further examine what the impact on the organization is once the conflict does intertwine with a workers home life.

My study revealed that there appears to be a correlation between length of negative conflict and the severity of impact on the home life. In light of this, future researchers should attempt to analyze cases where participants have experienced negative workplace conflict that has lasted over a month. In addition, a larger and broader population would need to be studied and could include blue-collar workers, groups from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and with different educational backgrounds. Including such a broad population could give future researchers more definitive results. In addition, interviewing the children to hear about their experiences could aid in capturing a more accurate picture of the impacts on the family, since my study relied on



the observation of the participant and spouse/significant other to assess whether or not the negative workplace conflict affected children. Also, the study should be conducted in other parts of the country or employ a cross-section of individuals from different states.

Lastly, in an attempt to obtain the true impact on the workplace, future researchers might investigate if negative workplace conflict that intertwines with home life is more impactful on the organization than the negative workplace conflict that does not intertwine with the home life. For example, is there a higher turnover rate, more sick-leave usage, or a higher loss of productivity when the conflict intertwines with the home life as opposed to not?

Also what are the impacts, if any, on the organizations outside of effecting profit when negative workplace conflict makes its way into the employee's home life? For example, are there any connections of between experiences and violence in the workplace?" Over the years there has been the increasing reality of violence in the workplace, where former employees or current employee have entered their organizations killing large numbers of people. Although speculative, it is not farfetched to connect the occurrences of violence in the workplace to what might have started as a negative workplace conflict that went unresolved. Research shows there are severe symptoms associated with unresolved conflict and spillover into the home.

### **Researcher's Bias**

My profession and interest in workplace conflict provided a potential bias as I constantly work with people who experience conflict. In many cases, these individuals have expressed to me the impacts of workplace conflict in their workplace and at home. While my experiences may have provided me with some insight into workplace conflict

and its effect on workers, they also served as an obstruction to me being open to how research participants expressed their experiences. It was challenging for me not to jump to conclusions or attempt to guide, lead, or probe interviewees until I heard similarities between what they were telling me and what I have heard in my work context to validate my own experience with this topic.

To aid me in setting aside preconceived notions and assumptions, I wrote down what I know about my topic and what I thought the issues were. I kept a journal throughout the research process noting immediate insights and immediate thoughts or connections I was drawing, as well as any themes. My advisor and dissertation committee were included in the process to provide feedback that allowed me to check that my understanding of the data was seen and traced to the data. I also verified my interpretation of the data with participants as I was interviewing them to ensure that I was accurately capturing their meaning.

### **Personal Reflections**

I found this research to be very satisfying and validating on a personal level. It was challenging but very rewarding as I began to see themes come forward and make sense of the data. Over the years I have heard employees make comments such as, “The conflict at work is so bad that when I go home I cannot talk to my daughter”; or “My husband gets mad at me whenever I talk about my troubles at work”; or “I stay up at night dreading having to come back to work, because I cannot work with my coworker.” These comments sparked my interest on what happens when negative workplace conflict intertwines with the home life. It was this curiosity that kept me going, while other life elements through this dissertation process made me want to throw in the towel. I believe

that uncovering the true effects of negative workplace conflict and the normalcy of it can aid in influencing organizations to pay more attention to setting up environments and systems that promote the resolution of negative workplace conflict as quickly as it surfaces. I aspire to help identify barriers, educate and develop systems, and promote resolutions as it relates to conflict management in my current organization and all that I do in my career.

Writing this dissertation and going through the OD doctorate program have equipped me with the knowledge, skill set, and ability to approach the phenomenon of conflict with the goal to facilitate change. While the results of this current study were fascinating to me, I will strive to build on this study with the goal to one day generalize. I learned so much from each interview, information that was not included in this dissertation that brought clarity to intricacy of negative workplace conflict, such as the desire to be liked contributing to someone being more tolerant about engaging with people who overlook their interests and attacked their character. Participants downplayed their experience or questioned if it was just them or if they were making a big deal out of nothing. Two responded to the question, “How did that make you feel?” by responding, “I wasn’t even aware I felt that way until now.” My hope is that the time I spent with the participants investigating the phenomenon of negative workplace conflict and the impacts on home life helped them bring normalcy to what they were going through and find comfort that they are not alone.

### **Conclusion**

Negative workplace conflict does intertwine with our home lives; however, the magnitude of its impact may differ. At minimum, my participants experienced stress and

anxiety that presented in forms of loss of sleep, nervousness, or worry about facing the person they were experiencing the conflict with the next day. At the extreme, if the conflict lasted for long periods of time, the negative effects increased to include the minimal effects above to the addition of the stress and anxiety-producing behaviors of lashing out, excessive drinking, preoccupation, and feelings of apprehension, irritability, withdrawal, and loss of confidence. If unattended, the negative experience/symptoms the participant experiences can impact the well-being of family members. The effects experienced by family members can be loneliness, communication breakdown, resentment, and relationship disappointment often leaving them feeling anger, disunity, frustrated and irritated about how their spouse or significant other handle the workplace conflict. While conducting this study, I learned that the more severe effects occurred for participants when communication with their spouses/significant others stopped. For the spouse/significant other it was when the participants began to behavior counter to their norm.

It is understood that the content of the subject of negative workplace conflict is difficult to continue to have, yet it is also understood that there is normalcy in the phenomenon. As workers, we typically spend more time at work than we do at home with our families; therefore, the likelihood of experiencing negative workplace conflict is inevitable and, therefore, each one of us is likely to experience some form of spillover/crossover. This is true from the top person of an organization to the lowest one on the ladder. When negative workplace conflict does effects our home lives, the results can be painful and at the extreme cause harm to our well-being and the well-being of one's family members. To combat the above from happening, self-reflection and

continuing to talk about it with family members is important. Dissecting and understanding the conflict and its impacts on oneself is a must, as the ability to move forward, resolve, and learn from it lies only in the self.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide

Process will include the following:

- Thank the participants for being a part of the study
- Review the focus of the study: Their experience as it related to workplace conflict and bring the conflict home.
- Provide definition of workplace conflict.
- Review the consent form, ask for signatures and questions.
- Check recording device
- Conduct Interview
- Ask participant if there is anything additional they wish to add.
- Remind participant they can withdraw from the study at any time.
- Double check recording of interview was performed.

#### Interview Questions Main Participant

- Where do you currently live and how long have you lived there?
- If your spouse/significant other were asked the question please describe you. How do you think your spouse/significant other would respond?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship?

Probe: How long have you been together?

Probe: Do you the two of you communicate well?

Probe: What would you say is strength in your relationship?

- Can you tell me a little bit about what you do for work?

Probe: And how long have you been doing it.

Probe: Are you happy with your job.

- Tell me about your experience dealing with a negative workplace conflict within the last year.

Probe: Has the way you dealt with that negative workplace conflict in the past affected your home life, if so please tell me how?

Probe: How did you feel about your workplace when dealing with the negative workplace conflict?

Probe: How has the conflict affected you at home?

Probe: Tell me about any effects the workplace conflict has on your relationship with your spouse/significant other.

- Anything that you would like to add that you felt has occurred because of the workplace conflict you described that maybe I haven't asked a question about or that you feel would add value to this interview.

#### Interview Questions for Spouse/significant other

- How long have you and your spouse/significant other been together?
- Do you have any kids?
- How would you describe your spouse/significant other?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship?

Probe: Do you the two of you communicate well?

Probe: What would you say is strength in your relationship?

- How do you now when your (spouse/significant other) experiences a negative conflict at his/her workplace?

Probe: Tell me what happens.

Probe: How does it affect you?

- What impacts do you think the negative workplace conflict has on your (spouse/significant other or co-worker) attitude about work or the organization they work for?

## Appendix B

## Email Recruitment Letter to Potential Participants

IRB#596051-1

Dear,

My name is Arthur (Art) Howard and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of St. Thomas. Research for my dissertation has begun, and I would like to invite you to participate in my study, entitled *An Interpretive Case Study of the Intertwining of Workplace Conflict and Home Life*. This study will explore the experience of those who have experienced workplace conflict.

If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute interview. Participants in this study will also have to agree to allow me to interview a spouse or significant other. Participation in the study is completely voluntary. There are no financial benefits. I would sincerely appreciate your consideration to participate.

The identity of all participants will be kept confidential; information that is collected as a part of the study will be confidential and will be used in a manner that protects your privacy and identity. In my dissertation and in any follow-up reports that I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.

If you have experienced workplace conflict in the last six months and you have a spouse or significant other who would also be willing to talk to me, please consider participating in this study. The next step is to simply contact me at [howa1338@stthomas.edu](mailto:howa1338@stthomas.edu). If you elect to participate in an interview, we will talk further by email or telephone about consent forms and setting up convenient times to meet (in- person, by phone, or Skype).

Thank you for considering this request.

Regards,

Arthur (Art) Howard  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of St. Thomas  
[Howa1338@stthomas.edu](mailto:Howa1338@stthomas.edu)  
Tel: (612) 272-1346

## Appendix C

## Informed Consent Form

## UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

AN INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY OF THE INTERTWINING OF WORKPLACE  
CONFLICT AND HOME LIFE

IRB#596051-1

Dear Participant: You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore the intertwining of workplace conflict and home life.

You are eligible to participate in this study because you have experienced workplace conflict within the last year, currently employed, and are married or have a significant other who is also willing to talk to me. You can decide not to participate.

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. If you have questions please do not hesitate to ask. Arthur (Art) Howard, Doctoral Candidate of Organization Development, University of St. Thomas, is conducting the study. My research advisor is Dr. John Conbere, Professor in the College of Applied Professional Studies, University of St. Thomas.

**Project:** An Interpretive Case Study of the Intertwining of Workplace Conflict and Home Life

**Purpose of the Project:** This study will explore how workplace conflict and home life intertwine.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to do the following: (a) Participate in an interview or focus group of 60-90 minutes. (b) Allow the interview to be audio recorded. (c) Allow the researcher to take written notes during the interview.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:** The study does have some potential risks. Such as, minor discomfort related to discussion of work conflicts. As well as, possible discomfort from information being gathered about you from your spouse/significant other and co-worker as it relates to how you deal with workplace conflict. The researcher does not anticipate any long-term risk of participating in the current study. All responses will be kept confidential and you will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. All data will be kept confidential and secure in locked file cabinets or a password protected data file. In the event that a transcriber is employed, they will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. I will not share the information that I collect with you, nor anyone else. In any sort of report or article that I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Audiotapes or printed copies of transcriptions will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. Voice recordings will be erased and/or destroyed within one month of the end of my study when my dissertation is approved for publication, which is anticipated to be September 2014. Electronic copies of the transcription will be saved on a password-protected personal computer. Your identity will be protected by use of a code known only to myself. All materials will be destroyed following the completion of my successful doctoral dissertation.

**Compensation:** There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:** You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during the study. Or you may call Arthur (Art) Howard at any time, (612) 272-1346 or email howa1338@stthomas.edu or Dr. John Conbere at (651) 962-4457 or jconbere@stthomas.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board.

**Freedom to Withdraw:** You are free to decide not to enroll in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their or your relationship with the investigator or with the University of St. Thomas. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent:** If you wish to participate in this study, you will be interviewed. You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate and are giving consent to be audio recorded and that you possess the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study. It also certifies that you have read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I hereby give consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Appendix D

## Informed Consent Form

## UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

AN INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY OF THE INTERTWINING OF WORKPLACE  
CONFLICT AND HOME LIFE

IRB#596051-1

Dear Participant: You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore the intertwining of workplace conflict and home life.

You are eligible to participate in this study because you have a spouse/significant other who has experienced workplace conflict within the last year and is currently employed. You can decide not to participate.

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. If you have questions please do not hesitate to ask. Arthur (Art) Howard, Doctoral Candidate of Organization Development, University of St. Thomas, is conducting the study. My research advisor is Dr. John Conbere, Professor in the College of Applied Professional Studies, University of St. Thomas.

**Project:** An Interpretive Case Study of the Intertwining of Workplace Conflict and Home Life

**Purpose of the Project:** This study will explore how workplace conflict and home life intertwine.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to do the following: (a) Participate in an interview or focus group of 60-90 minutes. (b) Allow the interview to be audio recorded. (c) Allow the researcher to take written notes during the interview.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:** The study does have some potential risks. The risks are minor discomfort related to discussion of work conflicts. As well as, possible discomfort providing information about your spouse/significant other as it relates to how they deal with workplace conflict. The researcher does not anticipate any long-term risk of participating in the current study. All responses will be kept confidential and you will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. All data will be kept confidential and secure in locked file cabinets or a password protected data file. In the event that a transcriber is employed, they will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. I will not share the information that I collect with you, nor anyone else. In any sort of report or article that I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Audiotapes or printed copies of transcriptions will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. Voice recordings will be erased and/or destroyed within one month of the end of my study when my dissertation is approved for publication, which is anticipated to be September 2014. Electronic copies of the transcription will be saved on a password-protected personal computer. Your identity will be protected by use of a code known only to myself. All materials will be destroyed following the completion of my successful doctoral dissertation.

**Compensation:** There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:** You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during the study. Or you may call Arthur (Art) Howard at any time, (612) 272-1346 or email howa1338@stthomas.edu or Dr. John Conbere at (651) 962-4457 or jconbere@stthomas.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board.

**Freedom to Withdraw:** You are free to decide not to enroll in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their or your relationship with the investigator or with the University of St. Thomas. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent:** If you wish to participate in this study, you will be interviewed. You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate and are giving consent to be audio recorded and that you possess the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study. It also certifies that you have read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I hereby give consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date