



Shedding Light on the Adverse Spillover Effects of Work-Family Conflict on Unethical Sales Behaviors at Work: A Daily Diary Study

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Abstract

Despite the antecedents of unethical sales behavior (USB) have been well studied, these literatures primarily focus on the work domain and neglect the spillover effects of the home domain. Drawing on ego depletion theory as an overarching theoretical framework, this research investigates why and how salespersons' work-family conflict (WFC) at home triggers next day's USB at work. This study used daily diary data collected from 99 salespeople in two weeks to test the proposed hypotheses. The multilevel path analysis indicates that evening's WFC positively affects next afternoon's USB via increased next morning's ego depletion (ED). Furthermore, service climate was found to moderate this indirect relationship, such that the indirect relationship becomes weaker under high service climate. To the best of my knowledge, this study is one of the first to reveal that salespersons' daily WFC may serve as a role conflict event and lead to next day's USB at work, which provides a fine-grained understanding of spillover effects of daily WFC through a daily diary study.

Keywords Work-family conflict · Ego depletion · Service climate · Unethical sales behavior · Daily diary study

Introduction

Unethical sales behavior (USB) refers to the behavior of salespeople intentionally or unintentionally concealing or omitting information related to customers (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). USB among salespeople has been rampant due to the high level of competitive intensity of sales jobs (Cheng et al., 2014). Thus, salespeople would have likely resorted to unethical sales behavior to close a deal quickly (Wotruba, 1990). USB is typically considered to negatively and severely impair customers' perceptions of a firm's reputation and firm-directed behaviors (Lian et al., 2022), which is a common and serious concern for organizations. Existing literature on the antecedents of unethical behavior concentrates on individual moral traits, leader's behaviors, and organizational culture/climate (e.g., Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Lian et al., 2022). Nonetheless, do behaviors or events in the home domain exert an impact on employee unethical behavior? This gap in prior literature is important to address because my knowledge of

how and why employees engage in USB due to family factors is incomplete.

Work-family conflict (WFC) is defined as the inter-role conflict caused by the incompatibility of role pressures in the two fields of work and family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Given the boundary-spanning and stressful nature of sales job, salespeople are more vulnerable to experience work-family conflict than other employees due to volatile schedule and frequent overtime (Bande et al., 2019; Miao & Wang, 2017). Furthermore, employees have to bring their work to home or even work from home because of COVID-19 pandemic (Shao et al., 2021), and the boundary between work and family becomes blurred or even disappeared. Thus, how to inhibit the negative effects of WFC during COVID-19 pandemic is a particularly serious problem (Antino et al., 2022). Spillover effect indicates that employees' behaviors at work and at home would influence each other. If an individual is disappointed with one system, he/she will take actions in the other system to make up for it, thus resulting in negative contagion between the work domain and the home domain (Cho & Kim, 2022; Karapinar et al., 2020). Therefore, WFC not only affects the employees' home domain (e.g., spouse's discontent, Krannitz et al., 2015), but also further spills over into the work domain. For instance, literature indicates that WFC

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negatively affects employee's in-role behavior, extra-role behavior, and unethical behavior (Lan et al., 2021; Miao & Wang, 2017). Accordingly, the research issues of this paper are: after a night's sleep, *whether and how* WFC can still affect next day's USB? If so, *how* to inhibit this negative effect (i.e., intervention mechanism)?

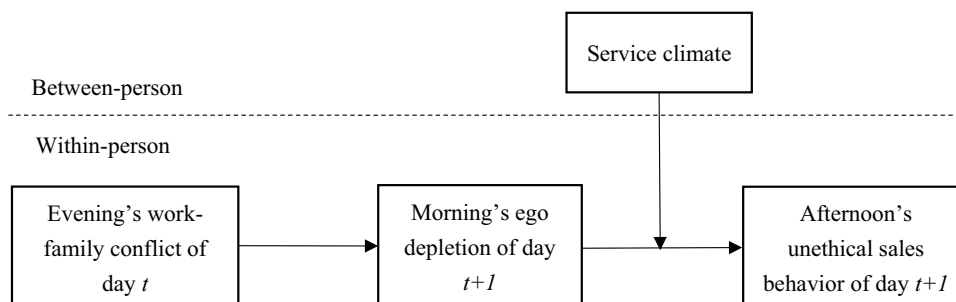
To address the above questions, the present study draws upon ego depletion theory (EDT) to investigate whether and how WFC predicts USB of the next day, and ego depletion is adopted as the underlying mechanism. Ego depletion (ED) refers to the depleted state of individual's self-control ability after conducting some activities that require the investment of self-control resources (Hagger et al., 2010). Meanwhile, WFC, as a role conflict event, requires employees to invest a lot of self-control resources in the process of WFC. Ethical behavior requires a certain amount of self-control resources to comply with, and unethical behavior is likely to occur when people's self-control resources are at a low level (Lusier et al., 2021; Yam, 2018). In a similar vein, salespeople who have experienced WFC are more likely to fall into the state of ego depletion, and their self-interested motivation will be activated because of the decreased self-control ability, so as to achieve sales performance through conducting unethical behaviors. Thus, the present study predicted that salesperson's WFC would induce USB the next day through increased ED.

Furthermore, this study contends that service climate may be a crucial moderator. Service climate functions as important information cues, which informs employees about what will be rewarded, supported, and expected of them in delivering customer service (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Lam et al., 2010). This study theorizes that service climate would weaken the positive relationship between ED and USB. Specifically, when in a team with a positive service climate, the code of conduct requires salespeople to protect the interests of customers. At the same time, the organization with a high service climate will provide signals of supportive and compensatory resources for the salespeople,

such as assistance in removing obstacles to service delivery, material or motivational rewards, and work empowerment. Thus, even in a depleted state, they are less likely to actively engage in unethical sales behavior because of sales quota pressure. The conceptual model is depicted in Fig. 1.

The current work makes threefold contributions. First, this study linked WFC to USB through a daily diary study, and deepened the understanding of the lagged effects of daily WFC. Furthermore, extant literature on the antecedents of USB mainly concentrates on workplace factors, such as leader's behaviors and traits, work pressure, organizational culture/climate (see a review, Kish-Gephart et al., 2010), whereas factors in family domain are relatively scarce. To the best of my knowledge, the present study is one of the first to reveal that salespersons' WFC may serve as a role conflict event and positively relate to next day's USB at work, which provides a fine-grained understanding of spillover effects of WFC through a daily diary study. Second, this study investigates the underlying mechanism of daily WFC on next day's USB through the perspective of ED, which enriches the literature on ED. More recently, some scholars have called for exploring the antecedents of ED from family factors, such as lack of sleep, smartphone use, and unhealthy eating (Chen & Hou, 2021; Lanaj et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). In fact, the effect of WFC on ED is more critical and direct than these factor, yet less academic attention. Investigating the adverse spillover effects of daily WFC on ED not only echoes Miao and Wang's (2017) notion, but also provides stronger causal support for the findings of Lan et al. (2021). Finally, this paper contributes to the literature on EDT and climate research by identifying service climate as a cross-level moderator. The literature on ED calls for attention to the positive organizational factors that can weaken the effect of ED, such as job autonomy, material or motivational rewards (Bell & DeWall, 2019; Muraven et al., 2007). The present study echoes literature on EDT and enriches the intervention mechanism of ED effect in the context of sales management.

Fig. 1 Conceptual model



Theory and Hypotheses

Daily Work-family Conflict and Daily Ego Depletion

As a specific form of inter-role conflict, WFC occurs when individuals' work role requirements interfere with their ability to satisfy family role requirements. Studies indicated that the competing demands of two separate but personally important areas of life—work and family—are likely to lead to a variety of negative consequences, such as increased work stress, dissatisfaction and subsequent withdrawal, and decreased organizational commitment and performance (Allen et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2021). In addition, WFC is also considered to be one of the most crucial factors leading to spouses' depression, low marital well-being, and high divorce rates among salesperson (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Krannitz et al., 2015). More recently, some scholars have found that family factors have spillover effects on employees' work state and performance (Cho & Kim, 2022). Likewise, Wang et al. (2021) found that WFC causes employees' emotional exhaustion, which in turn harms job performance.

Ego depletion is defined as the state in which the self-control resource is depleted when the individual needs self-control resources to perform volitional activities in a certain period of time (Hagger et al., 2010). Self-control relies strongly on self-control resources; the more such resources are available, the more likely it is to succeed in self-control execution (Baumeister et al., 2007; Hagger et al., 2010). Extant literatures primarily explore the antecedents of employee ego depletion from the perspective of individual and organizational, such as sleep amount, work pressure, emotional labor, and abusive supervision (e.g., Barnes et al., 2015; Lanaj et al., 2014; Lyddy et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2020). More recently, Lan et al. (2021) found that work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict have direct and positive effects on HSR drivers' ego depletion and indirect effects on both safety compliance and safety participation via ego depletion.

EDT posits that when individuals need to alter their own responses, such as controlling emotional display, obeying rules, and suppressing immediate desires, their self-control resources are rapidly consumed (Baumeister et al., 2007). Therefore, the present study reasonably argues that if employees experience a high level of work-family conflict at home, they will have a hard time recovering from ego depletion the next day. First, WFC requires individuals to spend a lot of resources to control themselves after busy work, which will further aggravate the ego depletion level of salespeople. Thus, when individuals experience high WFC, stress may impair their ability to engage effectively in work behaviors because they have fewer resources at

their disposal in the work domain. In addition, after experiencing high WFC, salespeople may not be able to fully replenish self-control resources through a night's sleep, despite studies showing that sleep can effectively supplement self-control resources (Barnes et al., 2015). On the other side, WFC also affects family members and disrupts family interaction patterns (Miao & Wang, 2017), leading to their negative emotions. Such negative emotions could carry over to the next day's work, impairing the next day's self-control behavior. In sum, the present study proposes that WFC positively influences ego depletion by increasing the consumption of self-control resources and inducing negative emotions.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) Daily WFC in the evening is positively associated with next morning's ED.

Daily Ego Depletion as a Mediator

According to EDT, individuals have limited resources to regulate and control their own behaviors, and the depletion of resources often makes individuals unable to concentrate their willpower, thus leading to negative behaviors (Hagger et al., 2010). Inzlicht et al. (2006) proposed that individuals value reward and satisfaction-related cues when in the state of ego depletion. That is, the initial act of control leads people to engage less in further self-control and more motivated to perform those activities that are self-interested or energy-free. Furthermore, extant studies have shown that ego depletion leads to a range of negative outcomes, such as disruptive voice behaviors, unsafe behaviors, and unethical behaviors (Lussier et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2020). For instance, Liu and Yu (2021) indicated that morning's ego depletion could impair the focus and effort needed for the day's work, thus employees who experience depletion in the morning should experience less job dedication during the workday.

EDT states that all self-control activities depend on the same resources (Hagger et al., 2010), thus the self-control resources consumed by WFC will harm subsequent self-control behaviors (e.g., ethical sales behaviors). Ethical sales behaviors are the embodiment of moral standards, especially deplete self-control resource, and require great effort to control (Lussier et al., 2021). As a result, depleted individuals are less willing to invest extra effort to behave ethically, may even reduce effort, in order to maintain the few self-control resources (Lin et al., 2016). Furthermore, literature in behavioral ethics has shown that there is a positive correlation between ED and unethical decision-making (e.g., Kouchaki & Smith, 2014; Lussier et al., 2021). When salesperson's self-control resources are depleted (a state called "ego depletion"), they will succumb to temptations and pursue self-serving goals (Baumeister et al., 1998; Gino

et al., 2011). This is because compliance with ethical norms requires self-control, and ignoring these norms provides a shortcut to higher profits or productivity (Lin et al., 2021). Likewise, Mantel (2005) showed that salespeople in positive states are twice as likely to make ethical choices as those in neutral states. Therefore, this study theorizes that depleted salespeople may inflict harm to customers (e.g., lying to customers) in order to achieve desired results (e.g., meeting sales quota), which is a dysfunctional behavior of conserving resources in a depleted state. That is, salespeople under a state of ED may hold that these unethical behaviors, including dishonesty, manipulation, and deception, are likely to produce short-term rewards or immediate pleasure (Wang et al., 2017). Taken together, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 (H2) Daily ED in the morning is positively associated with daily USB in the afternoon.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) Salespeople's daily WFC in the evening has a positive indirect effect on daily USB at work the next day via daily ED in the next morning.

The Moderating Role of Service Climate

Climate is the ambience around employees that provides cues, norms, and expectations, which rationalizes their work behavior (Lam et al., 2010). This means that climate plays a crucial role in promoting appropriate work behavior even when employees are emotionally exhausted, and it also has the power to suppress signals of external interference (Naveh & Katz-Navon, 2015; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). On this basis, service climate is defined as “employees’ shared sense of the service quality—focused policies, practices and procedures they experience and the service quality emphasis they observe in behaviors that are rewarded, supported, and expected” (Bowen & Schneider, 2014, p.5). Employees follow the display rules expected by the service climate in order to obtain organization-specific rewards or avoid punishment (Schneider et al., 2013). In an organization with a strong service climate, employees are more likely to identify with the values of the organization, treat customers in accordance with the requirements of the organization, and feel the support of the organization in service contact. A positive and strong service climate can lead to better service performance (Walumbwa et al., 2019), organizational citizenship behavior and organizational commitment (Hong et al., 2013), work engagement (Kang & Busser, 2018), business performance (Jiang et al., 2016), and more positive emotions (Lam et al., 2010) and less negative emotions towards customers (Jerger & Wirtz, 2017). In addition, service climate is also found to exist a positive impact on customer experiences, such as

service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty (see a review, Bowen & Schneider, 2014).

As a social context, service climate not only restrains salesperson's negative work behavior through code of conduct, but also provides them with a signal of availability of supportive and compensatory resources (Lam et al., 2010), thus weakening the negative consequences of ego depletion. This research therefore asserts that service climate weakens the positive relationship between ED and USB. From an internal perspective, organizations with a positive service climate will empower salespeople to enhance their work autonomy and motivation (Qiu et al., 2021), thus strengthening their willpower to resist the negative consequences of ED. In addition, the organization will also provide material or motivational rewards to compensate their consumed resources and motivate them to provide superior service to their customers. From an external perspective, service climate, as a behavioral signal, requires salespeople to perform in accordance with organizational goals and behavioral norms (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Lin et al., 2021). Accordingly, a positive service climate can help employees internalize service quality norms (Liao et al., 2009) and create a strong moral constraint. Salespeople, even when suffering from ED, still strive to adhere to the service-centered orientation and avoid the behavior that harms the interests of customers. In addition, by identifying and internalizing a shared perception of providing quality service, employees generate an internal motivational force (Grandey et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009) to overcome their feelings of depletion. To conclude, hypothesis 4 was therefore proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4) Service climate moderates the positive relationship between daily ED and daily USB, such that the relationship is weaker when service climate is high.

Combining H3-4, this research proposes a moderated mediation model that service climate alleviates the negative spillover effect of WFC on USB of next day through morning ED. Specifically, a positive service climate can motivate salespeople to internalize a service-oriented organizational norm (Liao et al., 2009), thus allowing them to overcome their sense of ego depletion. In other words, a positive service climate is more likely to buffer the relationship between WFC and USB through increased ED. In contrast, in a less positive service climate, salespeople lack clear organizational goals, norms, and motivational force (Bowen & Schneider, 2014) to promote and guide their sales behavior. As a result, salespeople who experience high WFC produce high ED, which in turn is more likely to engage in short-sighted and unethical behavior.

Hypothesis 5 (H5) Service climate moderates the indirect relationship between daily WFC and daily USB via daily

ego depletion, such that the indirect relationship becomes weaker when service climate is high.

Method

Sample and Design

This study employed a daily diary study to observe in real time whether the increase of evening's WFC in Day t will cause changes in the levels of ED and USB of Day $t + 1$. Daily diary study is also a commonly used measurement approach in ED literature (e.g., Wehrt et al., 2020), which can reduce the evaluation bias and investigate the intra-individual variation for more accurate longitudinal study (Dimotakis et al., 2011; Li et al., 2021).

Prior to the data collection, the authors recruited 135 salespeople through the research platform *credamo* to participate in this study. The *credamo* is a large online crowd-sourcing platform that ensures high-quality data through selecting participants based on demographics and excluding those who have provided low-quality responses in the past (Zhou et al., 2022). This research method through the online crowd-sourcing platform can invite salespeople from different industries and firms to attend this study, thus helping to increase the external validity of findings (Chen et al., 2021).

Considering the work nature of salespeople, this survey was conducted in the online questionnaire system, which was divided into two phases. All participants completed a survey on demographics and perceived service climate in the first phase, and the second phase questionnaire was distributed in the second week. The second phase of the survey lasted 2 weeks (10 working days), which included morning, afternoon, and evening questionnaires. Specifically, this study distributed questionnaires to the 135 participants to complete the questionnaire through WeChat (the largest social app in China). Following daily diary study and ED literature (e.g., Cho & Kim, 2022), the morning survey (7:00–10:00 a.m.) assessed their ED, the early afternoon survey (1:00–3:00 p.m.) assessed their USB that day, and WFC was assessed as a predictor in evening survey (6:00–10:00 p.m.). As a financial incentive to participate in the study, salesperson who completed each day's surveys received 20 CNY (Chinese Yuan), equal to 3.1 USD (United States Dollar). Salesperson who completed full 10-day surveys received 200 CNY, equal to 31 USD. During the second phase, a total of 808 valid daily surveys (i.e., surveys containing complete data from all three assessment points) out of a potential 1350 reporting days (135 participants \times 10 days; 59.9%) were received.

After matching available data from Day t (i.e., Monday through Thursday within each week) and Day $t + 1$ (i.e., Tuesday through Friday within each week), this study

obtained 561 complete 2-day observations from 99 salespeople out of possible 792 observations (99 participants \times 8-day lags observations after restructuring data; 70.8%). In this final sample ($N = 99$, 61.6% = female), 52.6% are between 26 and 35 years old, 56.6% obtained bachelor or higher degree, their annual income mainly range from 50,000 to 200,000 CNY (76.8%), 72.8% of them have beyond 3 years of job tenure, and 56.6% of them work in an organization with 100–500 employees.

Measures

All measures in this study were employed from previous studies. Following Brislin's (1986) translation/retranslation procedures, this study set up a team including two professors, a doctoral student and two master students in business school to translate the scale into Chinese to ensure the accuracy of the content. Constructs were assessed using seven-point Likert scale (see Appendix; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Work-Family Conflict (Evening)

Salespeople reported their level of work-family conflict in evening survey using a 5-item scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). A sample item is "The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life".

Ego Depletion (Next Morning)

Ego depletion was measured in the morning survey. A five-item scale developed by Twenge et al. (2004) and applied by Johnson et al. (2014) and Lanaj et al. (2014), was adopted to measure ego depletion. Sample items include "My mind feels unfocused right now" and "Right now, it would take a lot of effort for me to concentrate on something".

Unethical Sales Behavior (Next Afternoon)

Salespeople evaluate their unethical sales behavior that day in early afternoon survey using a 5-item scale developed by Román (2003). A sample item includes "In today's work, I often lie about availability in order to make a sale".

Service Climate (Between-Person Measure)

This study used a seven-item developed by Bowen and Schneider (2014) to measure participants' perceived service climate in their organization. Sample items include "How would you rate the job knowledge and skills of employees in your business to deliver superior quality service?" and

"How would you rate the recognition and rewards employees receive for the delivery of superior service?"

Control Variables

Salespersons' gender, age, education level, annual income, job tenure, and firm size were controlled.

Analytic Strategy

This study employed multilevel path analyses for the data had a nested structure (multiple days nested within salespeople). In addition to data reconstruction (i.e., matching Day t 's WFC with Day $t+1$'s ED and USB), this study group-mean centered the within-person (Level 1) predictors (i.e., WFC and ED) on each person's average score to eliminate between-person variance, thus ensuring that the within-person results were not confused by individual differences (Ilies et al., 2007). The between-person moderator (i.e., service climate) and demographic variables were centered on the grand mean and modeled as a person-level variable, thereby cross-level moderation estimates will strictly represent between-person differences (Cho & Kim, 2022). In the analysis, this study specified the level 1 fixed effect of the previous night's WFC on the mediator (i.e., next morning's ego depletion) and the random effect of the mediator on the outcome variable (i.e., next afternoon's USB). The analysis constructed a multilevel path model that includes both within- and between-level variables to estimate all the path coefficients simultaneously with a Bayesian estimation method. The Bayesian method is superior to conventional testing as it enables more direct interpretation of results based on observed data and accurately estimates more complex models (Hu et al., 2020; Zyphur & Oswald, 2015).

Variance partitioning results showed that the intraclass correlation coefficients, ICC (1), of daily WFC, ED, and

USB were 0.807, 0.704, and 0.803, respectively. These results indicated that intra-individual fluctuations explain a significant amount of the variances in the variables and lend support to the need for multilevel modeling (Scott & Barnes, 2011). Therefore, the multilevel-modeling approach was appropriate to test the proposed hypotheses via Monte Carlo bootstrapping simulation procedures using an open-source software RStudio. The RStudio's MplusAutomation package leverages the flexibility of the R language to automate latent variable model estimation and interpretation using Mplus, so many scholars use software RStudio to analyze data (e.g., Cho & Kim, 2022; Loi et al., 2022).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

To assess the fit of the measurement model, a series of multi-level confirmation factor analyses (MCFA) were performed. Results showed that this four-factor MCFA model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 395.396$, $df = 101$, $CFI = 0.951$, $TLI = 0.939$, $RMSEA = 0.072$, $SRMR_{within} = 0.052$, $SRMR_{between} = 0.028$). Consequently, the results provided construct validity evidence of the four latent constructs in this study. Moreover, Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, inter-correlations, and reliabilities of all variables. The results indicate that there is acceptable discriminative validity among these variables.

Test of Hypotheses

This study presents the multilevel path analysis results in Fig. 2. As predicted, daily WFC was positively associated with their next morning's ED ($\gamma = 0.294$, $p < 0.01$) and daily ED positively related to afternoon's USB ($\gamma = 0.286$,

Table 1 Means, Standard deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD_B	SD_W	Omega	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. Service climate ^a	5.58	0.91		0.916	0.58	(0.914)			
2. Daily Work-family conflict ^b	3.49	1.36	0.59	0.934	0.74	-0.19	(0.934)	0.14**	0.11**
3. Daily Ego depletion ^b	2.52	1.08	0.57	0.903	0.65	-0.59**	0.45**	(0.902)	0.08*
4. Daily Unethical sales behavior ^b	2.95	1.22	0.52	0.839	0.52	-0.23*	0.36**	0.41**	(0.834)

Correlations below the diagonal are Between-person correlations (N=99). Correlations above the diagonal are Within-person correlations (N=561). Reliability coefficients are presented in parentheses

Omega values are within-person level reliability estimates (Geldhof et al., 2014)

Average variance extracted (AVE) values are within-person level convergent validity estimates

SD_B , between-person standard deviation; SD_W , within-person standard deviation

^aBetween-person level variables

^bWithin-person level variables

*indicates $p < .05$, **indicates $p < .01$

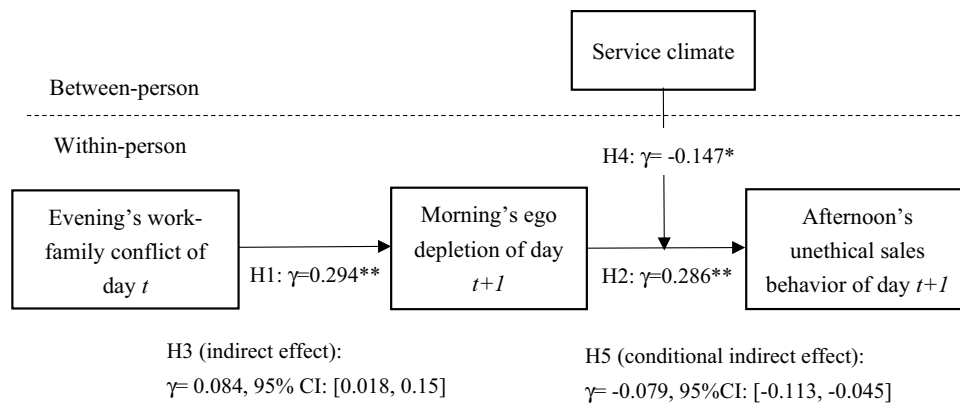


Fig. 2 Results of multilevel model estimation. *Notes.* The paths from the control variables to the focal variables are not included, for visual clarity, control variables contain gender, age, education level, annual income, job tenure, and firm size. Moreover, the within-level effects

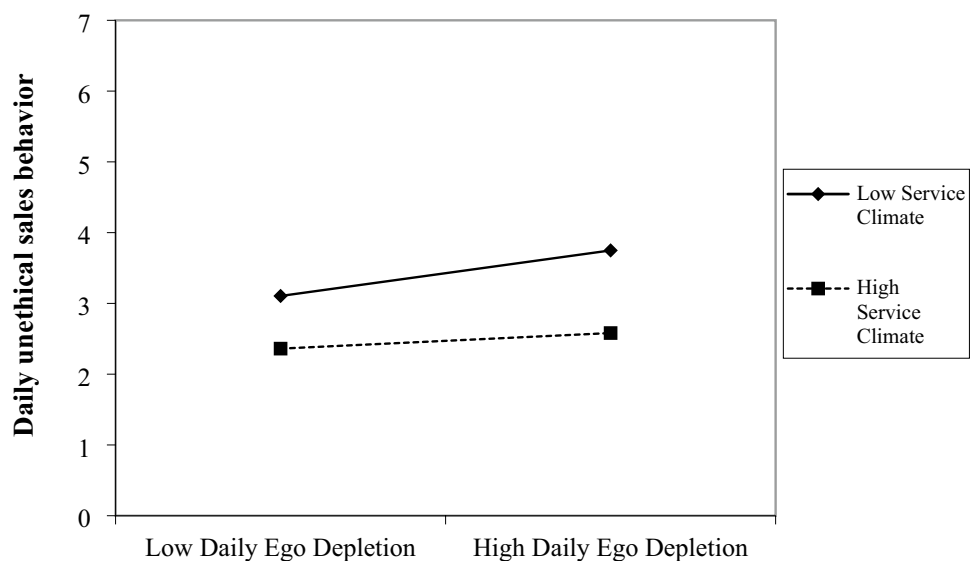
remain unchanged even though this study specifies the within and between parts through constructing two path models, namely, within-level mediation model and cross-level moderated mediation model (e.g., Hu et al., 2020), separately. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

$p < 0.01$), while the main effect of daily WFC on USB was non-significant ($\gamma = 0.129, p > 0.05$). Therefore, the results provided empirical support for H1 and H2. Monte Carlo simulation procedure indicated that the indirect effect of daily WFC and next day's USB via next morning's ED was significant ($\gamma = 0.084, S.E. = 0.034, 95\% CI: [0.018, 0.15]$), supporting H3.

H4 predicted that service climate moderates the relationship between daily ED and USB ($\gamma = -0.147, p < 0.05$). The study plotted this moderating effect at the conditional values of service climate (1SD above and below the mean) in Fig. 3. As expected, the relationship between ED and USB was weaker when service climate was high ($\gamma = 0.152, p > 0.05$) than low service climate ($\gamma = 0.42, p < 0.01$).

H5 predicted that service climate moderates the indirect relationship between daily WFC in the evening and next day's USB at work via daily ED in the next morning. The index of moderated mediation was $-0.079, 95\% CI: [-0.113, -0.045]$. Specifically, when service climate was low, the indirect effect was significant ($\gamma = 0.123, S.E. = 0.041, 95\% CI = [0.043, 0.204]$), whereas that was not significant when service climate was high ($\gamma = 0.045, S.E. = 0.026, 95\% CI = [-0.006, 0.096]$). Overall, results provided empirical support for H5.

Fig. 3 Cross-Level Moderation Effect of Service Climate on the Relationship Between Daily Ego Depletion and Daily Unethical Sales Behavior



General Discussion

Drawing upon EDT, the current study investigated the spillover effect of daily evening's WFC on next afternoon's USB via increased next morning's ED. Specifically, salespeople's daily WFC positively associated with next morning's ED, which in turn positively influences afternoon's USB, and service climate moderates the relationship between daily ED and daily USB. Below, this paper further discusses the theoretical contributions, practical implications of this study and the future research direction.

Theoretical Contributions

The present study offers several theoretical contributions for the current pool of knowledge. First, this study linked WFC to USB through a daily diary study, and deepened the understanding of the lagged effects of WFC. The existing WFC literature primarily concentrates on the antecedents, yet relatively lack of attention to the consequences, such as job dissatisfaction, withdrawal behaviors, and decreased organizational commitment and performance (Allen et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2021). Nonetheless, to my knowledge, little scholars have investigated the relationship between WFC and USB (Miao & Wang, 2017). Notably, in the context of sales management, USB should not be ignored and will do indelible damage to the organization's reputation and reduce opportunities for new and repeat business (Lian et al., 2022).

In addition, previous literature on the antecedents of USB primarily focuses on workplace factors, such as leader's behaviors and traits, work pressure, organizational culture/climate (e.g., Kish-Gephart et al., 2010), whereas family factors are relatively scarce. More recently, some scholars have begun to explore the relationship between family factors and workplace behaviors, such as unhealthy eating (Cho & Kim, 2022) and work-family conflict (Lan et al., 2021). To the best of my knowledge, this study is one of the first to reveal that salespersons' WFC at home may serve as a potential non-work stressor and relate to next day's increased USB at work. Thus, the present study makes a unique contribution to the WFC and USB literature by providing a fine-grained understanding of WFC-USB link through a daily diary study.

Second, this study investigates the underlying mechanism of daily WFC on next day's USB through the perspective of ED, which enriches the literature on ED. Extant literature on ED antecedents mainly concentrate on work or organizational factors, such as workplace temptation, emotional labor, and abusive supervision (Gino et al., 2011; Lyddy et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2020). More recently, some scholars have called for exploring the antecedents of ED from family factors, such as lack of sleep, smartphone use, unhealthy eating, and availability norms during non-work hours (Chen

& Hou, 2021; Lanaj et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). In fact, the effect of WFC on ED is more critical and direct than these factors, yet less academic attention. Until recently, Lan et al. (2021) used a cross-sectional data and found that WFC has a direct and positive effect on high-speed railway (HSR) drivers' ED, thus impairing safety performance. Through a daily diary study to capture the dynamic change of the critical variables, this research reconfirms and provides stronger causal support for the findings of Lan et al. (2021) in the context of sales management. Moreover, Miao and Wang (2017) explained the relationship between salespeople's WFC and unethical behavior through work stress, and they encouraged future studies to explore other possible mediators to explain the relationship between WFC and unethical behavior. This research also echoes Miao and Wang's (2017) notion and enriches the underlying mechanism of the relationship between WFC and USB.

Finally, the present study contributes to EDT and climate research by identifying service climate as a moderator. The extant literature of ED-USB link mainly explores boundary conditions from leadership and individual traits (Mackey et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017; Yuan et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the situational factor of organizational climate (e.g., service climate) has been neglected in these literatures (Rahaman et al., 2022). The literature on ED calls for attention to the positive factors at the organizational level that can weaken the effect of ED, such as job autonomy, material or motivational rewards (Bell & DeWall, 2019; Muraven et al., 2007). For instance, rewards can improve the motivation level of depleted individuals, thus strengthening their willpower to resist depletion and actively mobilize more remaining resource to complete tasks (Jimura et al., 2013). Accordingly, this research proposed and provided empirical evidence that service climate mitigates the negative consequences of ED effects by strengthening work motivation and codes of conduct. Taken together, this paper echoes literature on EDT and enriches the intervention mechanism of ED effect in the context of sales management.

Managerial Implications

These findings also provide important new insights into the managerial practices of sales departments. First of all, this paper suggests that organizations should fully understand the negative spillover effects of daily WFC. The findings indicate that salespeople's WFC at home of *Day t* positively influences next morning's ED, which in turn positively related to afternoon's USB. Organizations need to value work-family management for salespeople, such as providing guidance on managing work-family boundaries and helping salespeople balance work and family to achieve work-family enhancement. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, employees are more likely to experience work-family

conflict due to sudden and significant changes in work and family roles (Vaziri et al., 2020). Therefore, organizations can also provide some other measures to weaken morning's ED, such as flextime and nap (Allen et al., 2013), which can enable employees to obtain more adequate rest.

Additionally, the findings underscore the importance of creating a strong and positive service climate for the sales force while pursuing sales performance. Service climate plays an unavoidable and profound role in individual cognition and behavior in the service industry (Lin et al., 2021). The findings indicated the motivational forces induced by a positive climate seem to enable employees to remain resilient to the potentially adverse impacts of WFC and ED. This study encourages organizations to establish a customer-centric service climate so that salespeople do not behave unethically towards customers because of the increased ED. In the short term, such unethical behavior helps to achieve sales quotas, but is devastating to corporate reputation in the long term (Lussier et al., 2021). Furthermore, the organizations could encourage ethical behavior, create an implicit ethics institutionalization (Tseng, 2019), and teach salespeople to recognize "good ethics pays" and "bad ethics costs" (Lynn, 2021). For example, organizations could consider reporting ethical employees and their stories to set examples while imposing severe penalties for unethical behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this research merit discussion, which could provide fruitful avenues for future research. First of all, this paper measured all constructs at multiple time points to obtain data with high ecological validity via a daily diary study (Dimotakis et al., 2011; Li et al., 2021). Nevertheless, all studied variables were completed by salespeople, which may not be objective enough. This research encourages future research to use the multi-source data to provide more robust support for the hypothesized relationships between variables, such as USB rated by sales managers or customers (Lussier et al., 2021; Miao & Wang, 2017). Moreover, employing different response methods can reduce the common method bias to a certain extent (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Secondly, this study proposes and provides empirical support for the mediating role of ego depletion between salesperson's daily WFC and unethical behavior. However, there may be alternative underlying mechanisms, such as work stress (Miao & Wang, 2017), negative emotion (Shi et al., 2021), moral disengagement (Jin et al., 2022), and work alienation (Fedi et al., 2016). For example, Jin et al. (2022) found that employees with high work-family conflict would have a higher tendency to engage in counterproductive work behavior due to higher moral disengagement. Thus, future research could consider to test alternative mediators from other potential theoretical perspectives.

Finally, this work does not assess if people believe unethical sales behavior is instrumental, and also not their specific motivation to control themselves regarding this. For instance, Zhang et al. (2022) revealed that the negative outcomes of ED would be stronger for employees who believed that willpower was a limited resource. These limitations are worth further consideration. Moreover, studies have indicated that organizational institutions, leadership, salesperson's traits and motivation may also affect ED-USB link (Lussier et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2020; Tseng, 2019). Therefore, future research can consider looking for potential moderating factors from the level of organization, sales manager, and salespeople to mitigate salespeople's responses to the perception of being depleted.

Appendix

Measurement of the Key Variables in the Study.

Service climate (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; 1 = very poor, 7 = outstanding).

1. How would you rate the job knowledge and skills of employees in your business to deliver superior quality service?
2. How would you rate efforts to measure and track the quality of service in your business?
3. How would you rate the recognition and rewards employees receive for the delivery of superior service?
4. How would you rate the overall quality of service provided by your business?
5. How would you rate the leadership shown by management in your business in supporting the service quality effort?
6. How would you rate the effectiveness of our communications efforts to both employees and customers?
7. How would you rate the tools, technology, and other resources provided to employees to support the delivery of superior quality service?

Daily work-family conflict (Netemeyer et al., 1996; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

1. The demands of my today's work interfere with my home and family life.
2. Today, the amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities.
3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my today's job puts on me.
4. Today, my job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill family duties.
5. Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my today's plans for family activities.

Daily ego depletion (Twenge et al., 2004; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

1. Now, I feel drained.
2. My mind feels unfocused right now.
3. Right now, it would take a lot of effort for me to concentrate on something.
4. Now, my mental energy is running low.
5. Now, I feel like my willpower is gone.

Daily unethical sales behavior (Román, 2003; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

1. In today's work, I usually lie about availability in order to make a sale.
2. In today's work, I usually lie about competition in order to make a sale.
3. In today's work, I give answers when I don't really know the answers.
4. In today's work, I apply sales pressure, even though I know that the product is not right for the customer.
5. In today's work, I paint rosy pictures of the products to make them sound as good as possible.

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Data Availability The datasets are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This article contains a study with human participants. All of the procedures involving human participants were in accordance with the APA ethical standards.

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