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Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict: A Metasynthesis of Qualitative Studies Among Academics

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Beigi, M, Shirmohammadi, M and Stewart, J (2018) Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict: A Metasynthesis of Qualitative Studies Among Academics. Human Resource Development Review, 17 (3). pp. 314-336. ISSN 1534-4843

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3 Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict: A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative
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5 Studies among Academics

6
7 **Abstract**
8

9 Quantitative research has reported variable and inconsistent findings regarding the
10 relationship between flexible work arrangements (FWA) and work-family conflict (WFC). In
11 this paper, we address this inconsistency through the lens of qualitative research. We
12 synthesise the findings of 45 qualitative studies from a variety of disciplines that have
13 explored work-family interface (WFI) among academics whose profession offers high levels
14 of FWA by nature. Analyzing the findings of these qualitative studies, we developed six
15 themes, of which five could be translated to moderators of the relationship between FWA and
16 WFC. These moderator variables are boundary management preferences, time management
17 skills and approach, career/family stage, nature of an academic job, and workplace culture.
18 Our findings have theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for work-family and
19 HRD scholars and practitioners motivated to improve the quality of employees' work-life
20 through initiation of FWA interventions.
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35 **Keywords**
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37 Work-family; Flexible work arrangements; Flextime; Flexplace; Academics
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3 Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict: A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative
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5 Studies among Academics

6
7 **Introduction**

8
9 “It’s a real privilege that higher education has for all of us, in general. No matter what you
10 choose to do with your time as parents, you can work at night after the children go to bed, at
11 the computer, or like I do on the weekends. It’s a privilege..... [But] it’s not a privilege to
12 work the long hours that we do and to have the stress that we do, so it’s push-pull.” (Quoted in
13 Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004: 244)

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16 Flexible work arrangements (FWA) have gained prominence as interventions,
17
18 preferred or prescribed, to alleviate work-family conflict (WFC) of employees (e.g., Kelly &
19 Moen, 2007; Kirkwook & Tootell, 2008; Madsen, 2003; Secret & Swanberg, 2008). More
20
21 and more companies are moving towards adopting one or multiple forms of FWA. The World
22
23 at Work (2015) reported that almost 80% of organizations internationally offer some kind of
24
25 FWA with the most prevalent programs being telework, flextime, and part-time schedules.
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27 However, the question of how FWA might reduce employees’ WFC remains unanswered
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29 (e.g., Kelly et al., 2008), which might affect employers’ decisions on continuing to provide
30
31 such interventions.
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35 We begin by defining the concept of WFC and flexible work arrangements. WFC,
36
37 defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from work and family
38
39 domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77),
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41 relies on the theoretical assumption that multiple roles generate strain and incompatibility
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43 (Goode, 1960; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). WFC can occur in two
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45 directions often referred to as work-to-family interference and family-to-work conflict
46
47 interference (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Initially, the concept of FWA was used without a
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49 unified definition; overlapping terms referred to different forms of FWA such as flexible
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51 work hours and teleworking (Hill et al., 2008). More recently, FWA is used as an overarching
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53 term to encompass ‘work options that permit flexibility in terms of “where” work is
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3 completed (often referred to as telecommuting or flexplace) and/or “when” work is
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5 completed (often referred to as flextime or scheduling flexibility)’ (Allen et al., 2013, p. 345).
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7 Empirical research has reported variable and inconsistent findings regarding the
8
9 relationship between FWA and WFC (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Five meta-
10
11 analyses have reported varied magnitudes of effects ranging from medium to non- significant
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13 (Allen et al., 2013; Byron, 2005; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Mesmer-Magnus
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15 & Viswesvaran, 2006; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). Variability in the
16
17 degree of connections was fueled by differences in how FWA was conceptualized (Allen &
18
19 Shockly, 2009) and unexplored moderators of the relationship between reports of FWA and
20
21 WFC (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006).
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24 The meta-analyses that have examined the relationships of FWA and WFC offer
25
26 limited insight into moderators of the relationship between FWA and WFC. The moderators
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28 tested in quantitative reviews primarily comprised demographic variables (i.e., gender,
29
30 parental status, and marital status) (Allen et al., 2013; Byron, 2005; Gajendran & Harrison,
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32 2007; Michel et al., 2011). As information about other potential moderators is often not
33
34 included in the sample or FWA description of the reviewed quantitative studies, authors were
35
36 limited to testing few moderation mechanisms (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Mesmer-
37
38 Magnus and Viswesvaran (2006) invited future studies to investigate other moderators of the
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40 relationship between perceptions of an FWA and reports of WFC to provide a clearer picture
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42 of the true potential of these FWA programs to assist workers who are struggling with
43
44 balancing work and family lives.
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47 In this paper, we address the inconsistent findings of meta-analyses on FWA and
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49 WFC and the call for exploring variables that moderate the relationship between FWA and
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51 WFC through the lens of qualitative research. Therefore, we generate qualitative findings
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53 comparable with the results of meta-analyses that examined the relationship between FWA
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3 and WFC. To that aim, we adopt qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, which has been
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5 developed to equate to meta-analyses for qualitative research (Sandelowski & Barroso,
6
7 2007). Qualitative research is common among HRD researchers; however, HRD's
8
9 neighboring scholarly fields such as management and organization studies have recently
10
11 started to realize the distinctive contribution that reviews of qualitative studies can make to
12
13 our understanding of certain topics (see Bryman, 2004; Liao, Wayne, & Rousseau 2016).
14
15 Qualitative meta-synthesis method emerged in response to an increasing use of meta-analyses
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17 and exclusion of qualitative findings from major quantitative reviews (Sandelowski &
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19 Barroso, 2007; Zimmer, 2006). This method has been widely used and advanced by health
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21 and medical disciplines (see Walsh & Downe, 2005 for a review), but HRD scholars have yet
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23 to put the potential of this approach into practice.
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27 We argue that findings of qualitative studies can contribute to the debate on the
28
29 relationship between FWA and WFC. In line with this argument, Kossek and Lautsch (2017)
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31 identified exclusion of 'non-quantitative studies' as a major shortcoming of prior reviews
32
33 concerning effects of FWA. Qualitative researchers strive to understand how people interpret
34
35 their experiences and what meaning they attribute to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The
36
37 emphasis on meaning of a phenomenon enables qualitative studies to "provide insights that
38
39 are difficult to produce with quantitative research" (Gephart, 2004: 455). In addition to
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41 generating theory, producing new constructs, and inducing researchable propositions from
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43 data (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999), qualitative research can elaborate on or test
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45 relationships that have been subject to prior theorizing (Lee et al., 1999). A study of trends of
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47 theoretical contribution in management field revealed that qualitative research has
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49 contributed to theory building in part by introducing new mediators or moderators of existing
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51 relationships or processes (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007), which is aligned with what we
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53 present in the current study.
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3 To match the inclusion criteria of the meta-analysis studies that reported on
4 connections between FWA and WFC, we focus on a group of qualitative studies that describe
5 WFC among employees of one profession who could be considered as a representative
6 example of the FWA experience, namely faculty members. Therefore, our review synthesises
7 findings of qualitative studies that have explored WFC among academics whose work offers
8 a high level of FWA in terms of where and when to complete work.
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15 Despite the differences between academic job descriptions in different institutions in
16 various countries, they include the common responsibilities of teaching, research, and service
17 (Austin, 2003; Finkelstein, 1984). Different higher education institutions might put various
18 levels of emphasis on each of these responsibilities, but in almost all cases, the job
19 descriptions allow for multiple levels of FWA, especially in terms of ‘where’ and ‘when’
20 work is completed. Academics can fulfill part of their professional responsibilities at home or
21 anywhere off campus (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir, 2010). For example, academics have discretion
22 in deciding when (and where) to conduct their research, prepare for their classes, mark
23 student assignments, and meet their students. Due to this flexibility, scholars across multiple
24 disciplines have shown interest in how academic staff combine their personal and
25 professional lives (e.g., academic medicine (Brown, Fluit, Lent, & Herbert, 2011); family
26 studies (Baker, 2010); higher education (Bentley & Kyvik, 2012); and management (Santos
27 & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008)).
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44 We seek to answer the following questions in this review: (i) What do we know about
45 the WFC experiences of academics, whose profession offers a high level of FWA by nature?;
46 and (ii) What are the theoretical implications of the reviewed studies for the association
47 between FWA and WFC and for the HRD field? Our review uncovers five moderator
48 variables that are specifically important in our understanding of the relationship between
49 FWA and WFC (see Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). We rationalize our focus on a single
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3 occupation by following the argument that occupational characteristics play an important role
4 in how workers benefit from FWA (e.g., Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999;
5 Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2009; Kossek & Lautsch, 2017). Also, it seems that work-family
6 scholars in different disciplines, due to their common access to academics for data collection,
7 have generated an adequate number of articles on this population to enable a qualitative meta-
8 synthesis.
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16 Conducting this review is significant for HRD research and scholarship because one of
17 the main purposes of the field has been to identify factors that help develop and unleash
18 human expertise for improved performance of employees and organizations (Morris, 2012;
19 Swanson & Holton, 2001). Although more and more individuals and organizations grapple
20 with issues of WFC, it appears that HRD's involvement in WFC reduction and the provision
21 of FWA has remained modest (Kahnweiler, 2008). Initiation of flexible work options and
22 reduction of work-family conflict can be two possible venues to achieve such goals (Madsen,
23 2003; Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz-Costa, & MacDermid, 2007; Rogier, & Padgett, 2004). We hope
24 that by examining the link between WFC and FWAs, this review paves the way for future
25 HRD scholars and practitioners who want to contribute to reducing employees' WFC and
26 improve the effectiveness of FWA.
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39 **Method**

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42 We adopted a qualitative meta-synthesis approach to conduct our review (Sandelowski
43 & Barroso, 2007). Qualitative meta-synthesis begins with "a systematic and comprehensive retrieval
44 of all of the relevant reports of completed qualitative studies in a target domain of empirical inquiry"
45 (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p22). This step is similar to the search process of a systematic
46 literature review (e.g. Higgins & Green, 2008) and integrative literature review (Callahan, 2010 and
47 2014), but solely focuses on short-listing and including qualitative studies (see Sandelowski &
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1 Barroso, 2007 for the full comparison with different types of reviews). The second step in
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3 conducting a qualitative meta-synthesis involves a process of comparing and contrasting
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5 findings across qualitative studies and generating a new integrative interpretation of the
6
7 phenomenon (Saini and Shlonsky. 2012).
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9 We started with conducting a broad multidisciplinary search in the fields of education
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11 (including human resource development (HRD)), psychology, sociology, and management.
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13 The databases we used included ERIC (via EBSCO), PsychInfo, Academic Search Premier
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15 (via EBSCO), Sociological Abstracts (via CSA), and Business Search Complete (via
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17 EBSCO). The following keywords were used independently and combined to generate as
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19 many publications as possible: work-family/life combined with conflict, interface, balance,
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21 integration, enrichment, spillover, boundary, stress, relationship, and responsibility combined
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23 with faculty, professor, university teacher, academician, academia, and academic. Despite our
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25 focus on WFC, we decided to include several work-family conceptualizations, mainly due to the
26
27 qualitative nature of the studies we included in the review. In other words, qualitative scholars
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29 explored the interface of work and family from multiple perspectives and did not feel a need
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31 to confine themselves to using the term WFC. The search, which was completed in April
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33 2017, generated 375 publications. After screening the search results to make sure they report a
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35 qualitative study, include discussion of WFC, work-family imbalance or issues, and have
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37 participants selected from four-year university faculty members (not college or highschool), a
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39 total of 45 publications met all the criteria to be included in the review.
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44 To compare and contrast findings across studies and to generate a new integrative
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46 interpretation of the phenomenon (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012), we read all the short-listed 45
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48 papers and extracted the findings that focused on academics' WFC with regard to FWA
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50 (flexibility in terms of where and when to complete work). Then, we used thematic analysis
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52 to synthesize the qualitative findings; this method enables finding emergent themes and
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3 categories across studies (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012). We read findings of each article line by
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5 line and coded concepts; afterwards we compared, contrasted, and translated concepts into
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7 themes across studies. Themes include common elements and content in the findings across
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9 studies. Our analysis progressed until the point of redundancy in emerging themes has been
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11 reached. A sample of the 45 papers was cross-checked for consistency of interpretation by at
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13 least two researchers. This process led to the identification of six themes, described below.

14 15 16 **Synthesis of Qualitative Findings**

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18 Our review comprises accounts of academics from a wide range of disciplines—
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20 including HRD and higher education, management, medicine, family studies, and
21
22 engineering—published in 33 journals, encompassing 13 different countries. The first 11
23
24 studies in our dataset of 45 publications were published from 1991 to 2008, and had solely
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26 female research participants. It might be that the issues female academics struggled with
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28 during the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century outnumbered those of their male
29
30 counterparts. However, six of the more recent studies in the dataset—published from 2012 to
31
32 2014—had male-only participants, which might demonstrate that currently both genders have
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34 issues balancing work and family. The qualitative studies were conducted in the United states
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36 (31 studies), Canada (10 studies), Australia and New Zealand (3 studies), and Finland (1
37
38 study).
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42 Below, we present our findings associated with FWA with regards to academics'
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44 WFC. Five of the six themes we present can be translated to moderators that might affect
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46 how FWA is associated with WFC (see Figure 1).
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48 -----
49 Insert Figure 1
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53 As illustrated in the six themes discussed below, the first theme is concerned with our
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55 general focus regarding FWA and WFC. The next three themes are mainly relevant to
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3 individual differences and how FWA and WFC might be different based on
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5 individual-level differences. The two final themes were associated with the nature of the job
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7 and organizational culture, which were typically beyond individual differences.
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9
10 ***Valuing FWA while Experiencing WFC.***

11
12 Regardless of their field of study, academics found it challenging to make decisions
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14 about the interface of professional and personal lives and found this process to be cyclical
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16 and dynamic (Brown et al., 2011). It seems as if the greedy nature of work and family
17
18 (Takahashi et al., 2014) and the unique characteristics of the academic profession lead to this
19
20 ongoing challenge. Therefore, academics needed to make trade-offs to managed the interface
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22 of the two domains; some perceived “balacne” to be a “myth” and suggested sustainability
23
24 to be a more accurate term (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012).
25

26
27 Almost all academics valued the flexible nature of their jobs (e.g., Rafnsdóttir &
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29 Heijstra, 2013; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wilton & Ross, 2017; Wolf-Wendel & Ward,
30
31 2015) and were not willing to give up the autonomy and flexibility provided by the academic
32
33 environment to switch to nine-to-five work hours (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010). Many
34
35 respondents mentioned that they entered academia due to its flexible nature (e.g., Eddy &
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37 Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Penney et al., 2015; Sallee & Pascale, 2012; Trepal & Stinchfield,
38
39 2012).
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42 Academics also believed that flexibility played a positive role in how they managed
43
44 their WFC (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013; Santos & Cabral-
45
46 Cardoso, 2008; Wilton & Ross, 2017). Many studies showed that the flexible nature of the
47
48 academic job was advantageous to family life and to parenting (e.g., Nikunen, 2012;
49
50 Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). This flexibility allowed academics to spend time with their children
51
52 (e.g., Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Sallee & Pascale, 2012), to take their children to school
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54 and support their activities (e.g., Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Raiden & Räisänen, 2013), and
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3 to attend to their sick children (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013;
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5 Sallee & Pascale, 2012; Weigt & Solomon, 2008).

6
7 Despite all the above-mentioned benefits of flexible work hours, there were also
8
9 disadvantages. These included an overlap of work and hobbies (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir,
10
11 2010), feelings of working all the time (e.g., O'Meara & Campbell, 2011), and difficulty in
12
13 distinguishing between work life and family life (Penney et al., 2015; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra,
14
15 2013). In addition, although studies showed that academics put a high value on flexibility and
16
17 believed that it had helped them manage their WFC, almost all studies included in this study
18
19 confirmed that participants experienced high levels of WFC (e.g., Cherkowski & Bosetti,
20
21 2014; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005; Reddick, Rochlen,
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23 Grasso, Reilly, & Spikes, 2012; Skachkova, 2007; Thanacoody, Bartram, Barker, & Jacobs,
24
25 2006). The conflict was reported by both genders, but it was more evident in women's and
26
27 mothers' accounts (e.g., Baker, 2010; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Santos & Cabral-Cardoso,
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29 2008).

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31
32 Among the manifestations of the academics' WFC were: unusually long and late-
33
34 night work hours—including weekends and holidays (e.g., Hall, Anderson, & Willingham,
35
36 2004; Raiden & Räisänen, 2013; Solomon, 2011; Takahashi, Lourenço, Sander, & Souza,
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38 2014); a lack of sleep (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006); the inability to disengage from work
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40 when they wished to do so (e.g., Santos, 2014); feeling guilty about failing to fulfill both
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42 personal and professional responsibilities (e.g., Sallee, Ward, & Wolf-Wendel, 2016); and
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44 mental absence when at home (e.g., Reddick et al., 2012; Takahashi et al., 2014). Such
45
46 conflict could be partially attributed to the demanding nature of the academic job that will be
47
48 discussed later in the findings. In other words, academics argued that flexibility by itself did
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50 not address all their WFC issues and they needed other types of support to help them
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52 maintain a sustainable WFC (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010).
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Moderator One: Boundary Management Preferences

Academics had different preferences for managing boundaries between their work and family, and that affected how they perceived their WFC. One group preferred to draw a sharp line between their work and family and avoided working at home or leaving work to take care of family responsibilities (e.g., Hall et al., 2004; Poronsky, Doering, Mkandawire-Valhmu, & Rice, 2012); this group is referred to as separators (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). The other group preferred permeable work-family boundaries, brought work home and tried to fit work and family together (e.g., Sallee & Hart, 2015), which has been conceptualized as integrators (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). The degree to which one prefers to separate or integrate work and family roles represents their boundary management preferences (Allen, 2012). The two work-family boundary management preferences among academics are evident in the following quotations:

“I try to avoid everything work-related when I’m at home. I try to work as efficiently as I can while I’m at work. But I have to protect that time.” (Brown et al., 2011, p. 1290)

“I like waking up early on Saturdays and Sundays, then the kids want to watch TV. So maybe I will just take my computer and sit with them for 2 or 3 hours. I get a lot of work done and they are just ... watching television.” (Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013, p. 290)

Individuals who adopted each of the two strategies had justifications that made sense with regard to their preferences or work/family stage. In some cases, findings suggested that men preferred, and successfully managed, to separate work and family lives (e.g., Damaske, Ecklund, Lincoln, & White, 2014; Reddick et al., 2012), while women, specifically those who had young children, preferred or had to cross work-family boundaries (Heijstra &

1
2
3 Rafnsdóttir, 2010). However, this was not true in all studies (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012), and
4
5 both men and women reported adopting both strategies (e.g., Hall et al., 2004; Solomon,
6
7 2011; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013).

8
9 It is noteworthy that some individuals switched from having no boundaries to having
10
11 a clear boundary or vice versa depending on their career or family stage (Brown et al., 2011).
12
13 Some participants believed that the only way they could handle work and family
14
15 responsibilities, especially after their children were born, was by spending fewer hours at
16
17 work and working at home instead, including late-night or weekend work (O'Meara &
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19 Campbell, 2011). Others believed that working at home reduces quality time with their
20
21 family and children, so they made the most of their time at work (Solomon, 2011).
22

23
24 Based on the narratives shared by academics, we speculate that boundary
25
26 management preferences moderate the relationship between FWA and WFC. Integrators are
27
28 more prone to find FWA helpful in alleviating WFC, while separators might perceive that
29
30 FWA contributes to their WFC. One justification can be that FWA generate psychological
31
32 perceptions of autonomy and control over when and where work can be completed (Kossek et
33
34 al., 2006). A person preferring a rigid boundary between work and family domains might not
35
36 enjoy the extensive autonomy associated with FWA and may perceive that the permeable
37
38 boundary increases her WFC. On the other hand, for those with a low preference for
39
40 separating work and family domains, FWA may solve many of the problems associated with
41
42 fixed work hours, enable them to take care of family-related and work-related tasks
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44 simultaneously, and perceive reduced work-to-family and/or family-to-work conflict.
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48 *Proposition 1: Individual boundary management preferences moderate the relation of*
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50 *FWA and WFC such that the higher the preference for integrating work and family,*
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52 *the stronger the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*
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54
55 ***Moderator Two: Time Management Skills***
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3 FWA provided academics with discretion over managing their time. Other than the
4 fixed time devoted to teaching and administrative meetings, other responsibilities could be
5 performed at times preferred by the individuals. It was evident that some participants
6 interviewed in the studies had a high level of control over managing their time (e.g., Kalet,
7 Fletcher, Ferdman, & Bickell, 2006; Sallee & Hart, 2015), while others thought they were
8 working all the time (e.g., Solomon, 2011). In addition, some academics asserted that they
9 preferred to do one thing at a time—also referred to as *monochronicity* (Kaufman–
10 Scarborough, 2003), while others felt comfortable with doing multiple tasks simultaneously—
11 also referred to as *polychronicity* (Kaufman–Scarborough, 2003)).

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22 Having time management skills was perceived as an important contributor to
23 managing WFC (e.g., Kalet et al., 2006). Among the time management strategies that
24 academics adopted were avoiding long commutes (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012), saying no to
25 unnecessary or unwanted projects (Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013; Reddick et al., 2012),
26 creating space (Ylijoki, 2013), limit-setting (e.g., Kalet et al., 2006), and carefully planning
27 childbirth with regard to career stage (e.g., Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

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The other aspect of this theme had to do with individuals' responses to time demands
of their jobs—whether they followed what was expected of them or decided to let go some of
the benefits associated with certain activities. For instance, one participant mentioned that
“there are those who distance themselves from this ideal and the image of a proper academic
associated with it, perceiving these as some trap into which it is easy to fall, but which must
be resisted” (Ylijoki, 2013, p. 251). In the same vein, some participants believed that their
family came first in any situation, and made sure their family demands were the major factor
in all their life decisions (Santos, 2015).

Informed by qualitative accounts of academics, we argue that time management skills
moderate the relationship between FWA and WFC. FWA gives individuals autonomy and

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3 freedom in using their time and deciding when to accomplish their work responsibilities.
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5 According to self-determination theory, the need for autonomy—control over the course of
6
7 one’s life—is an underlying motivation for individuals seeking freedom, a larger choice set,
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9 and optional functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, research based on this theory has
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11 shown that too many options often lead to choice overload that subsequently makes choices
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13 less attractive (Allen & Shockly, 2009; Clark, 2000). We believe that individuals who have
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15 multiple options for using their time might or might not make effective use of it, which
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17 affects how they experience WFC.
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20 Effective management of WFC is increasingly becoming a self-management
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22 competency (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). Time
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24 management skills are categorized under self-management (Claessens, Van Eerde, Rutte, &
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26 Roe, 2007) and include setting goals and priorities, using mechanics of time management to
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28 schedule and plan activities, and having a preference for organization (Fenner & Renn, 2010).
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30 Therefore, those who are competent in using their time develop plans for making the best of
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32 the time options provided by FWA, while those less competent in time management might
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34 struggle with prioritizing and planning for such options. Success or failure in managing time
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36 might contribute most to time-based conflict, which is one of the three forms of WFC
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38 suggested by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Time-based conflict denotes that the time
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40 requirements of one role limits the time available for fulfilling the requirements of the other
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42 role. Having FWAs requires the individual to decide when to devote time to work-related or
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44 family-related tasks, and a lack of time-management competencies might make it difficult to
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46 make such decisions.
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50 *Proposition 2: Individual time management skills moderate the relation of FWA and*
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52 *WFC such that the more skillful the individual in managing the time allocated to work*
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54 *and family demands, the stronger the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*
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Moderator Three: Career or Family Stage

Perceptions of academics' WFC were not the same throughout their different career or family stages. Marriage (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011; Schlehofer, 2012), childbirth, and having young children (e.g., Armenti, 2004; Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010; Strong et al., 2013; Toren, 1991) were highlighted as WFC antecedents among faculty members. Some participants clearly mentioned that their WFC increased after childbirth (e.g., Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009) or parenting (Darcy et al., 2012). Family stage, especially parenting age, make a significant difference in the experience of WFC (Darcy et al., 2012). Family-to-work conflict has been found to be higher for parents with pre-school children and lower among groups with older children (Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003); WFC then declines at later family stages (Moen & Yu, 2000).

Among different career stages, promotion for early-career academics (e.g., Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004) mainly those with young children (e.g., Acker, Webber, & Smyth, 2016; Armenti, 2004) contributed most to academics' WFC. In the early stages of their careers, individuals are more pressured to sacrifice personal/family lives in the interest of career advancement (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1995; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). As individuals grow older (in mid-career and maturity stages) they place a greater emphasis on balance between their work and family lives when assessing their careers (Cohen, 1991).

Proposition 3: Individual's career/family stage moderates the relation of FWA and WFC such that during career/family stages with high demands, higher positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC can be expected.

Moderator Four: Nature of the Job

Findings from our analysis revealed the unique nature of academic work, creatively described as 'silver linings and dark clouds' by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004). On the positive side, academic staff enjoy academia, appreciate the flexibility and autonomy of their

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3 occupation, and have a sense of personal growth in their profession (e.g., Fox, Fonseca, &
4 Bao, 2011; Weigt & Solomon, 2008). On the negative side, they seem to struggle with
5 meeting multiple expectations, the burden of juggling teaching, research, service and
6 mentoring, and the need to keep an eye on the clock (e.g., for tenure), as well to produce
7 tangible results (i.e., publications). As a result, most academics extended work hours and
8 non-standard work days, as revealed by almost all the studies we reviewed (e.g., Kachchaf,
9 Ko, Hodari, & Ong, 2015).

10
11 Academics asserted that there is no typical day in academia (e.g., Rafnsdóttir &
12 Heijstra, 2013), no end to the academic job tasks (e.g., Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012), and
13 “there is always a manuscript to be written, an article to be read, a funding application to
14 work on” (Birmingham & Wasburn, 2008, p. 257). Due to ongoing grants and to publications
15 in the pipeline, academics could not take complete advantage of their breaks (e.g., paternity
16 leave), and many kept on working while they were on leave (e.g., Craft & Maseberg-
17 Tomlinson, 2015; Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009).

18
19 Another important aspect of the academic job involved changes brought about by
20 information technology. In many cases, the prevalence of the internet and use of email added
21 to academic staff workloads (e.g., Reddick et al., 2012). Academics praised wide access to
22 the Internet and email and the possibility of working anywhere and anytime; however, these
23 advantages sometimes made disengagement from work difficult, caused expectations of
24 having an around-the-clock work schedule (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010), and were
25 perceived to accelerate the pace of work (e.g., Ylijoki, 2013).

26
27 Job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) partially explains the impact of
28 the nature of the job on how individuals experiences FWA. Research suggests that high-status
29 workers such as managers, and professionals—who often possess high levels of autonomy
30 over their work schedules—are less positively affected by flexible work options (Baltes et al.,
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3 1999) because of the high job demands they face (Kelly & Moen, 2007). Also, professionals
4 whose jobs' heavy reliance on portable devices such as pagers, cell phones, and laptops,
5 reflects an on-call work nature, experienced higher flexibility in terms of coordinating
6 schedules and saving time, but greater stress (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Chesley, Moen, &
7 Shore, 2003). These paradoxical occupational characteristics (autonomous but high demand,
8 and mobile but constantly connected) increase the probability of working during
9 personal/family time (Kossek, 2016), which may be reflected in the individuals' accounts of
10 WFC.
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20 *Proposition 5: Nature of the job moderates the relation of FWA and WFC such that*
21 *individuals in jobs that allow for around-the-clock work schedules would benefit less*
22 *from the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*
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26 ***Moderator Five: Family-Friendly Organizational Culture***

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28 Several participants highlighted the key role of the organizational culture when telling
29 their stories regarding the applications of FWA in managing their WFC. This theme was
30 more evident in the narratives shared by women; however, the recent studies described how
31 male academics perceived the role of organizational culture in their WFC. The most
32 emphasized aspects of the culture were supportive structures, leaders, colleagues, and work
33 environments in general (e.g., Baker, 2010; Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009; Lester, 2013; Sallee,
34 2013). Participants expected to be understood by their employers when having child care or
35 family care responsibilities or issues (e.g., Hall et al., 2004). Academics also expected their
36 families to understand their work pressures (e.g., Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013), but this was
37 less frequent than their demands for employer support.
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50 One early-career academic asserted: "I have a female dean who is a mother and was a
51 professor while her children were at home. So she knows exactly what I'm going through
52 right now . . . and she is very quick to protect my family." (Hall et al., 2004: 49). Another
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3 senior male academic said “It's not that [universities are] gender blind it's that they're family
4 blind. The two go together of course, but I'm really quite struck and often quite shocked by
5 how invisible family is in a work setting.” (Baker, 2010). In cases where the individuals’
6 work-family needs were supported by their workplaces, they expressed more satisfaction with
7 combining their work and family spheres (e.g., Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012).
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14 *Proposition 6: Organizational culture moderates the relation of FWA and WFC such*
15 *that the more family-friendly organizational culture, the stronger the positive effects*
16 *of the FWA on lowering WFC.*
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19 20 **Discussion**

21 This review contributes to the scholarship concerning the relationship between FWA and WFC
22 by synthesizing the findings of qualitative inquiries exploring WFC among academics,
23 whose occupational nature offers high levels of FWA regarding where and when to complete
24 work. Analyzing these findings, we developed six themes, five of which could be moderators
25 in the relationship between FWA and WFC. Below, we will discuss the theoretical
26 contributions of our findings. We acknowledge that work-family scholars have already
27 discussed many of the themes that emerged from our review. However, we clarify that our
28 findings target the literature involving the relationship between FWA and WFC. We address
29 the gaps reported in meta-analytic reviews that in part examined the effects of FWA on WFC,
30 and we propose that future quantitative researchers consider the recommended moderators.
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Almost all studies included in the review revealed that although academics valued the
flexible nature of their job and that flexibility helped them manage their work-family
demands, they still experienced high levels of WFC, which is consistent with the findings of
quantitative studies confirming that faculty members’ WFC is relatively high (e.g., 3.43 on a
5-point Likert scale; Grandey & Cropanzano 1999). This demonstrates that, based on the
accounts shared by academics who participated in the qualitative studies, FWA help reduce

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3 WFC, but their effects might be contingent on some moderating variables. As recommended
4 by statisticians, when a study seeks to determine the degree of effects between two variables,
5 it is proper to investigate the impact of moderators (Hayes, 2013). We propose that the
6 themes identified in this review and discussed below, represent five potential moderator
7 variables in the FWA-WFC relationship.
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13 From quantitative reviews, we know that demographic characteristics—e.g., gender
14 and parental status—moderate the impact of FWA on WFC. For example, female workers,
15 and participants with children benefit more from flexible work schedules than men or
16 participants without children (Byron, 2005). In this review, we propose three individual-level
17 moderators. First, boundary management preferences moderate the relationship between
18 FWA and WFC. Specifically, given different preferences for separating or integrating work
19 and family domains, integrators may feel less conflicted if they have highly flexible work
20 arrangements. Second, given that FWA provide individuals with discretion in managing their
21 time, better time management skills may increase the chance of benefiting from FWA in
22 alleviating WFC. Third, career and family stages affect the amount of time and energy
23 employees have to invest in career or family activities. Thus, employees parenting young
24 children and those in early career stages are more likely to benefit from FWA to decrease
25 their WFC.
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41 Our findings regarding individual-level moderators (i.e., boundary management
42 preferences, time management skills, and career/family stage) contribute to the debate about
43 the role of individual differences in managing WFC. Work-family scholarship has paid less
44 attention to individual differences than to employer-centered and workplace solutions for
45 employees' WFC (Allen, 2012). It seems that work-family scholars have avoided looking
46 into the role of individual differences as it would look like “blaming the victim” (Allen, 2012,
47 p. 1185). As a result, most of the recommendations for managing WFC target organizations
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3 and governmental policies. Accounting for individual differences has been called the
4 “missing link” in FWA discourse (Shockley & Allen, 2010, p. 131). Our findings draw
5 attention to three individual difference variables essential to the study of the effects of FWA
6 on individual’s experiences of work-family conflict. We invite future quantitative research to
7 measure the degree to which individual differences regarding boundary management
8 preference, time management skills, and family/career stage moderate the impact of FWA on
9 employee WFC.
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18 The individual-level moderator variables also contribute to the debate about FWA
19 availability and its actual use (Allen et al., 2013). A person with a strong preference for
20 integrating work and family roles or excellent time management skills may be more likely to
21 use FWA to avoid letting work overtake family roles. Parent workers with young children
22 may also be more likely to use and benefit from FWA.
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29 An insufficient number of quantitative studies have included descriptions of
30 participants’ job characteristics or the examined flexible work interventions to enable
31 meta-analyses to test the moderation effects of variables other than individual demographic
32 differences (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). The only non-demographic moderator
33 examined in FWA meta-analyses has been telecommuting intensity. That study showed FWA
34 was more beneficial to high-intensity commuters (i.e., 2.5 or more days per week working
35 remotely) than to low-intensity commuters (i.e., less than 2.5 days) (Gajendran & Harrison,
36 2007). In our review, we propose that the nature of the job and family-friendly organizational
37 culture are moderators that explain effects beyond individual differences. First, the nature of
38 the job—specifically, a job that allows for an around-the-clock work schedule—may
39 diminish the positive effects of FWA on lowering WFC. Second, given that a family-friendly
40 organizational culture supports workers’ work-family needs, such a culture improves the
41 chance of alleviating WFC through FWA.
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3 Our proposition regarding the nature of the job supports work-family scholars
4 advocating for an occupational perspective (see Kossek & Lautsch, 2017 for a review).
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6 Proponents of this view urge work-family researchers to explore the range of work-family
7 experiences specific to particular occupations (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). In this
8 review, we found that the occupational characteristics of academic jobs partially account for
9 how individuals interpret the effects of FWA on their WFC. An academic job has a relatively
10 unique characteristic of not only being accountable to the immediate employing organization
11 of the individual, but also the wider academic community (Baruch & Hall, 2004; Harley,
12 Muller-Camen, & Collin, 2004). Therefore, there might be no end to the number of scholarly
13 publications and contributions that an individual could produce (Neumann, 2009). The heavy
14 burden of never-ending requirements to publish more might not have been viable had the
15 nature of the job not been flexible. That the majority of participants in the qualitative studies
16 valued the flexible nature of their jobs—and some had even selected their job because of its
17 flexible nature— might be valuable in this respect as well. Thus, the nature of the job
18 moderator raises the question of whether the flexible work arrangements induce excessively
19 high levels of work (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014; Kelly & Moen, 2015). It calls attention to the
20 possibility that in jobs with high demands, especially those with around-the-clock
21 characteristics, where workers are able to work whenever and wherever, the effects of FWA
22 may not reduce WFC, but may actually increase it (Thomas, 2014).
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44 We reviewed the FWA-WFC relationship among academics where the nature of the
45 job allows a significant amount of work to be performed at different hours, around-the-clock,
46 and even away from the office. The nature of the job moderator can apply to occupations
47 with similar characteristics such as an on-call medical doctor, in which sustaining boundaries
48 between work and family spheres is difficult because individuals have little control over the
49 placement and transcendence of family boundaries (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Other
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3 occupations might have additional specific characteristics that modify how individuals
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5 interpret the impact of FWA on their WFC.

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7 The broad literature on family-friendly benefits suggests that despite the availability
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9 of work-family policies including FWA in many organizations, workers who can
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11 significantly benefit from it avoid using it (Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011; Sweet, Pitt-
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13 Catsouphe, & Boonn, 2016). Using FWA is not a standard way of working in many
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15 workplaces, and many employees still believe that using FWA signals to their supervisor or
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17 manager that they are not committed to the organization (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017;
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19 Kelly & Moen, 2007; Rogier & Padgett, 2004). Our findings emphasize the importance of an
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21 organizational culture that supports flexible workers and their family-related issues. We
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23 suggest that future research on the relationship between FWA and WFC should examine the
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25 extent of the moderation effect of an organizational culture that supports workers' family-
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27 related responsibilities.
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31 It is important to highlight that this review only included qualitative papers that focused
specificities would have added to the depth of our findings. Our findings rely on the reported
accounts of the qualitative data included in the studies, and we could not access the actual
datasets due to privacy and ethical considerations. Finally, we only included the qualitative
papers that studies academics and published their papers in the English language. Adding
languages other than English could have enriched our findings.

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Methodological Implications

In this paper, we demonstrated that qualitative research can not only contribute to
building theories (Lee et al., 1999) that can be tested and extended by quantitative research
(Bansal & Corley, 2012), but also can be useful in contributing to understanding some of the
inconsistencies in quantitative findings. Rather than speculating about the reasons for the

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3 inconsistencies, we might conduct qualitative inquiries or synthesize the findings of
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5 qualitative studies that target those inconsistencies. We argue that the narratives shared by the
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7 participants of qualitative research provide researchers with thick descriptions that have the
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9 potential to work hand-in-hand with quantitative scholars' endeavors in extending theories.
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11 We demonstrated that combining the findings of qualitative studies can be more commonly
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13 used to bring qualitative research into the mainstream of inquiry, and further legitimize the
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15 use of qualitative approaches (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Synthesizing qualitative
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17 research findings using a meta-synthesis approach will create an opportunity to use the
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19 available research evidence without methodological prejudice (Sandelowski & Barroso,
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21 2007). Since qualitative research is common in the field of HRD, we encourage future HRD
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23 scholars to conduct qualitative meta-synthesis to make theoretical contributions to our
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25 understanding of topics dominantly studied through qualitative methods. We hope our review
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27 sets an example of the benefits of using this approach in the field of HRD.
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30 31 **Practical Implications**

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33 Our findings have practical implications for HRD practitioners who need to design,
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35 determine or evaluate the provision of flexible work options. We demonstrated that
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37 employees' boundary preferences, time management skills, family and/or career stage, nature
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39 of the job, and family-friendly organizational culture might be considered before investing in
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41 one-size-fits-all FWA initiatives. To be satisfied with the introduction of their FWA (if their
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43 outcome criterion is WFC), organizations need to consider individual differences between
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45 employees. Specifically, in the case of costly interventions, we advise HRD practitioners to
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47 consider the variables suggested in this review in their decisions about the type and length of
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49 flexible work interventions. For example, costly FWA may be offered during the high-
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51 pressure early career or early parenting stages of individual workers. In addition, HRD
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3 practitioners could usefully take account of our findings in their wider work on designing
4 career development interventions, and in providing career support advice to individuals.
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7 HRD practitioners may take a case-by-case approach instead of a generic one-size-
8 fits-all approach towards offering flexibility solutions to alleviate WFC. As discussed in this
9 paper, integrators (employees who prefer to combine work and family) may welcome/use
10 FWA more and benefit from it more than separators (employees who prefer to maintain a
11 boundary between work and family). HRD practitioners might offer relevant workshops, for
12 example work-home time management skills, to the integrators to facilitate the ultimate goal
13 of FWA, which is to improve work-life balance.
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22 This review provided support that specific job and occupational characteristics can
23 determine how much FWA can influence WFC. When designing FWA solutions for different
24 groups of professionals, the specific characteristics of their jobs and occupations need to be
25 taken into consideration. For example, additional components, such as productivity training
26 (Nippert-Eng, 2008), may be needed to ensure the effectiveness of flexibility in reducing
27 WFC. In cases of jobs that are heavily dependent on technology, FWA may be more effective
28 if accompanied by strategies such as forced quiet hours (Perlow, 2012) that require
29 employees to be disconnected from the digital devices for certain hours of the day.
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40 Organizational HRD units offering FWA as a work–family benefit, may find that their
41 employees experience greater reductions in WFC through a supportive culture for family
42 concerns. This culture could be enhanced through cultural change initiatives such as “Results
43 Only Work Environment” to encourage the notion that increased flexibility is beneficial
44 (Kelly & Moen, 2007, p. 496), and/or initiatives that communicate mindfulness about work–
45 family conflicts such as “no meeting Mondays” (Kelly et al., 2008, p. 310). HRD
46 interventions on leadership and management development can also focus on relevant
47 supportive leadership skills, as well as on building appropriate organizational cultures.
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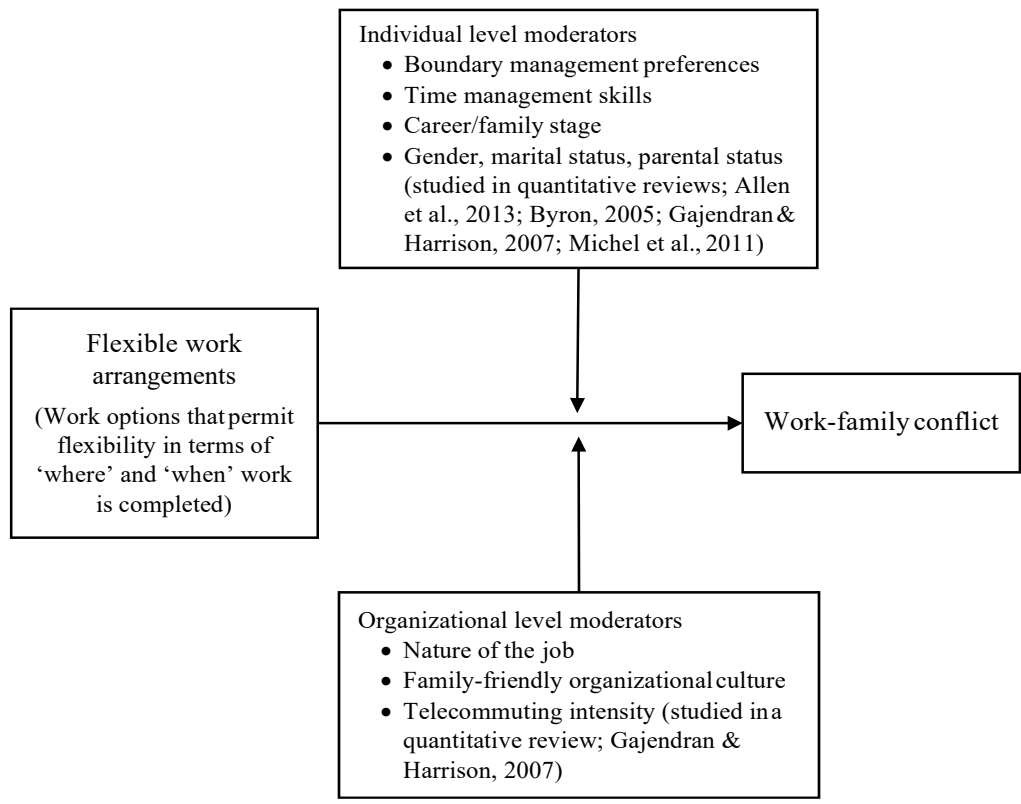
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Figure 1. Moderators of the relationship between FWA and the WFC



Thank you for considering our paper for review and publication in *HRDR*. We are very thankful for the helpful comments we received from the two reviewers and the associate editor.

We have highlighted the changes to our manuscript within the document by using colored text. Below, we have responded to the reviewers' and the associate editor's comments point-by-point.

Once again, thank you for the helpful and constructive feedback, and we look forward to hearing from you.

#	Reviewer	Comment	Response
1.	AE	1. Explain what makes "qualitative meta-synthesis methodology" (p. 4) uniquely different from a generic qualitative literature review methods such as integrative literature review or systematic literature review method. Comparing and contrasting traditional qualitative literature review methods used in HRD with yours might be useful to help readers appreciate the uniqueness of the method you used in this research.	Thank you for your helpful comment. On pages 6-7 we added a definition of the qualitative meta-synthesis approach. We also briefly compared this approach with integrative and systematic literature reviews and provided reference to sources where full comparison of qualitative meta-synthesis methodology can be found for future HRD scholars.
2.	AE	2. Clarify the data set you mentioned on page 8. Did you classify the selected publications according to different timelines? If so, how did you do that?	The dataset on page 8 refers to the total of 45 publications that met our inclusion criteria; on page 8 we clarified this. We didn't classify the selected articles based on a certain timeline. We have only described a pattern that emerged when examining the participants of the reviewed studies.
3.	AE	3. Reword the first theme because the current one seems to include two themes.	To address this comment we re-labeled our first theme to: Valuing FWA while Experiencing WFC
4.	AE	4. You may move the last paragraph to the front of the synthesis section to make it clear.	As recommended, we moved the concluding paragraph from the end of the synthesis to page 8-9 before the first theme.
5.	AE	5. End the manuscript with Limitations does not seem to be the best idea, as a reviewer indicated. Why don't you add a conclusion section to allow for a better read?	To avoid being repetitive, instead of writing a conclusion, we moved the limitations paragraph to the end of our discussion section.
6.	AE	6. Correct your writing in APA because there are minor mistakes, particularly in the References section.	As recommended, we edited the references and corrected them to follow APA formatting.
7.	AE	7. On a technical note, there are a few minor mistakes such as (a) change Eric to ERIC; and (b) check the last citation on page 21.	As recommended we changed change Eric to ERIC. The citation on page 21 was removed to address another comment.
8.	R1	1) I have gone research in this area through	As recommended, we replaced two

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		the years, and we are now careful about using the word "balance" as it doesn't give the impression needed. Although you were careful not to use that too much, I would ask that you go back and carefully think about that use. It might be worth adding a line about it and putting "balance" in quotes or something the first time. It is something that is discussed in the literature. You use it a lot on p. 8.	of the "balance" terms on page 8 with "interface". We used "" for the remaining "balance" terms.
9.	R1	2) P. 4, line 29--I think "preventing" is too strong a word here.	On page 4, we replaced the phrase "effectiveness of FWA in preventing WFC" with "relationship between FWA and WFC" to eliminate the word "preventing".
10.	R1	3) WFC is such a complex thing (with many causes), so be careful inferring it is all the FWA because these same people would most likely have even more WFC if they didn't have FWA. There are lots of reasons as you explain--but just read through your paper again and catch anything that might infer that it is a simple connection. Seems like there were 1-2. Page 10 ("compartmentalization" is what some of the literature call when people want to divide work and family).	We appreciate this careful observation. To avoid inferring causal or predictive associations, we replaced "effectiveness of FWA in preventing WFC" with "relationship between FWA and WFC" (Pages 1, 3, 4, 5, and 18). To be consistent in our findings and discussion, we have used the term "separators" which is also a common terminology in work-family literature.
11.	R1	4) p. 11, line 21--"...had to violate work-family boundaries"--word violate really is harsh here. Seems like there are assumptions here that may not be according to the literature.	We replaced the word "violate" with "cross".
12.	R1	5), p. 21--most professional jobs now days have the same struggles. It is wide spread and flexibility continues to come up with the latest studies on what millennials and women need to take care of family commitments. Nearly all positions (even sales) are not 9 to 5 jobs so most positions struggle with the same issues now.	We revised the last sentence of the first paragraph on page 21 to reflect this comment.
13.	R1	6) p. 22, line 18-29; old references with a current topic. There are just a few of those throughout. If you are inferring that it is the case today--then 10 year old references are not great on this changing topic.	We added the following recent reference to this page to address this comment. De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017
14.	R1	7) I don't love limitations at the end, but I'll defer to the editors.	To avoid being repetitive, instead of writing a conclusion, we moved the limitations paragraph to the end of our discussion section.
15.	R2	My concern is over the FWA-WFC relationship. I have done extensive work in this area, and I believe you were liberal in	We appreciate this careful observation of reviewer 2. We addressed this comment by

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		<p>your treatment of FWA as a predictor. You cite Allen, et al., (2013) as the basis for effectiveness in FWA in preventing WFC. Allen's meta-analysis was correlational, not predictive. They speak of FWA reducing conflict, but not actually predicting it. Additionally, the findings were "small in magnitude" (p. 360), and indicated that the type of flexibility matters. The findings by Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2006) are similar. There is a small negative correlation between FWA and global(i.e., bi-directional) conflict, and essentially none between FWA and WFC or FWC. I recommend one of two things - frame this as a correlational, not predictive relationship or do a more thorough job in providing evidence that the predictive relationship exists. Honestly, I believe the former would be easier to achieve.</p>	<p>replacing the phrase "effectiveness of FWA in preventing WFC" with "relationship between FWA and WFC" (Pages 1, 3, 4, 5, and18).</p>
16.	R2	<p>On page 21, you likened the nature of academic work to on-call physicians or stockbrokers. Physicians I understand, but stockbrokers? That is not a connection I believe most people would make. I would ask that you explain why they are similar, or remove it.</p>	<p>As recommended, we removed the example of stockbrokers in this section.</p>