

Work-Family Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Balancing work and family responsibilities have become challenging for majority employees, and it is a known fact now that incompatibility between the two domains have adverse effects on employee health and wellbeing (Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006). Work-family conflict affects not only individuals suffering from it, but their families and their employers too. Hence it has become important for organizations to look for mechanisms which help employees in reduction of their work family conflict.

The concept of work-family conflict has received considerable attention because of its impact on various individual outcomes. Various authors have studied the negative consequences for the individual (e.g. loss of sleep and stress), as well as these conflicts having negative outcomes for the organization, such as lower employee satisfaction and performance, increased stress levels and, consequently, higher health-care costs (Carlson, Michele Kacmar & Stepina, 1995).

Thus, the above data suggests that when it comes to work-family conflict there are studies which are either related to how an organization contributes to reducing negative impact of work-family conflict by providing various work-life initiatives or how work domain and family domain spillover impact employees specially women. Limited research is available on work-family conflict theories. Thus one of the most important areas of research in the field of human resource management includes understanding the base of work-family conflict.

Keywords: *Work Family Conflict, Theories WFC*

WORK FAMILY CONFLICT DEFINITIONS

Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964 defines Work-family conflict as “a form of interrole conflict that occurs, when engaging in one role makes it more difficult to engage in another role”. As a form of interrole conflict a large amount of the early research on work family conflict appears from the work on organizational stress by Kahn, et al. (1964).

Work-to-family conflict happens when involvements at work interfere with family life, like extensive work overload, inflexibility in working hours and other forms of job stress, extensive travel, and interpersonal conflict at work, career transitions, unsupportive organization or supervisor. For example, working till late night for a presentation to be presented to client next morning may prevent a parent from being with his/her child when he is sick. Family-to-work conflict transpires when involvements in the family work interfere with work life like taking care of elder, having young children, key responsibility for children, interpersonal conflict within the family unit, unsupportive family members (Frone et al. 1992; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Changes in workforce demographics have resulted in increased research on work family issues i.e. Dual career couples and single parent household's numbers have risen and there is reduction in traditional, single-earner families leading to responsibilities for work, housework, and childcare not confined to traditional gender roles (Byron, 2005). Hence there is augment in work family conflict studies.

Studies have established the relationship between demographic variables like marital status, number of children and age of children and work-family conflict. Being married, having more children, having younger children were found to be related to high levels of work-family conflict (Bedian, Burke and Moffette, 1988; Voydonaff, 1988).

TYPES OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have identified three types of work-family: time based, strain based, and behavior based:

1. Time-based - competing time requirements across work and family roles
2. Strain-based - pressures in one role impair performance in the second role
3. Behavior-based - incompatibility of behaviors necessary for the two roles

1. Time based

In Work and family domains roots of conflict are derived from scarcity theory, in which personal means like attention, time and energy are deemed to be limited, and that application of more resources in work domain certainly leads to lesser means left for the family domain results in reducing the amount of resources left for the other domain (i.e. family) ” ” (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Challenging requirements for time act as constraint between both work and family domain as stated by Staines and O'Connor (1980). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), in line with the findings of Staines and O'Connor (1980), described two different forms in which time-based conflicts are exhibited: (1) “when it is physically not possible to fulfill time demands of single role due to time pressures coming from another role;” (2) “when someone is mentally indulge with one domain in spite of physically being present and trying to meet the demands of another.”

Time-based conflict takes place when responsibilities from both domains are competing each other for the time available. (e.g., working overtime forces employees to miss a school performance.) Time-related circumstances such as increased work hours, rigid schedules, working in shift, and overtime duties are every time related to Work Family Conflict (Byron, 2005).

2. Strain Based

Various researchers are of the opinion that growing demands in one role creates strain for a person in the form of tension, dissatisfaction, fatigue and anxiety which in turn affects the performance in another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Edwards and Rothbard (2000) in their explanation regarding strain-based conflict have highlighted that “emphasize the depletion of personal resources as a result of physical and psychological strain, which in turn is needed for role performance.” Hence, strain-based conflict is not competitive demands in itself, rather it’s a state in which involvement in one domain will result in either psychological or physical stress that hampers role performance in another domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Same author conducted research on it and identified that persons invested greater amounts of time in painful/dissatisfying role domains to overcome unpleasant experiences (Rothbard & Edwards, 2006). Moreover, the studies pointed out that a negative psychological strain will result in extensive time involvement in one domain reducing the amount of time available for role performance in the other potentially satisfying domain resulting in conflict. Therefore, competing time demands will lead to both strain-based as well as time-based conflict. “Despite being conceptually distinct, both time-based and strain-based conflicts are found to share a number of sources within the work and family domains” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

3. Behavior-based

This conflict transpires when specific behaviors required in one role are mismatched with behavioral expectations in another role (e.g. violent behavior and extreme introversion required for managerial positions are incompatible with the need for harmony and openness).

Effect of work-family conflict can be decreased by providing family-friendly policies in the organization. These initiatives can include employees having flexibility to work from home, and schedule flexibility policies where employees have control over their schedules. Effect of family-work conflict can also be decreased by providing workplace family-friendly policies. Examples of these policies can be different types of leaves like maternity, paternity, parental, and sick, providing child care crèches at workplace or providing

other child care options. For proper implementation of these policies organizations need to ensure that employed managers and supervisors are supportive and allowing the employees to use these policies.

WORK FAMILY CONFLICT THEORIES

Work family conflict literature consist of few dominant theories in which many researchers have followed the fundamental principle of one dominant theory in this field i.e. Role theory. Role theory was the output of Michigan Study on Organizational Stress (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). If there is a conflict in personal and professional expectations it will have a huge impact on wellbeing. This logic also goes along with another model which is stressor-strain model. This model considers work family conflict as stressor. (Cohen & Wills, 1985)

Another major theory which plays prominent role is spillover theory (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). This theory works on the belief that behavior, time and strain spillover from one area to other.

1. Role Theory

Principles of this theory are influenced by principles of classical school of thought like principle of unity of command and principle of chain of command. Basic rationale behind this theory is that if an individual receives instruction from more than one supervisor for the same role this may lead to confusion. This conflicting experience within one role leads to intra-role conflict which is a form of role conflict. Inter role conflict leads to work family conflict.

Role theory also states that different roles results in stress like role overload, role conflict, role ambiguity which subsequently leads to strain (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Psychological and physical strain can occur due to expectations related with work and family roles. Such different expectations within a role can lead to intra-role conflict. When pressure in one role supersede the pressure in other role it can result into inter role conflict. All these expectations from different roles can increase the feeling of overload in both roles (Hall & Hall, 1982).

Various critics of role theory are

- a) Many studies found that undertaking multiple roles at a time are helpful in promoting physical well-being (Thoits, 1983; Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Kirchmeyer, 1992). Such studies endorse the expansion model and does not support the scarcity model.
- b) Role theory concentrates more on work domain as compare to family domain (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).
- c) Moderating Variable are not given more importance by role theory, but even these variables may play an important role in buffering relation between work and family stressors and its outcome (Jackson & Schuler, 1985).

2. Spillover Theory

Spillover theory states that both domains have influence on each other in negative as well as positive ways: tasks, time, emotions, stress, behavior, attitude (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

This spillover goes in two possible directions 1) work to family conflict i.e. where stress at work interferes with family commitments 2) Family to work conflict i.e. where family commitments interferes with responsibilities at work (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Greenhauss & Beutell, 1985; Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). Various scholars have considered both the constructs as two different constructs (Duxbury, Higgins & Lee, 1992; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; O'Driscoll, Ilgen & Hildreth, 1992).

Unlike role theory which considers conflict as the main possibility. This theory proposes clear distinction between work to family and family to work conflict. The theory highlights on crossover effects discussed by various studies (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1989; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1989; Westman & Etzion, 1995; Hammer, Allen & Grigsby, 1997).

Work family conflict can be studied keeping spillover theory as basis, as spillover will help in understanding influence of one role (work or family) on another (family or work).

Few important criticisms of this theory are as follows

1. Different individuals face various situations in their lives but when and why they face is not given much importance in this theory.
2. Link between different interface types and various antecedents and consequences is missing.
3. Different authors have given different explanations for both the concerned interfaces i.e. work to family and family to work. (Duxbury, Higgins & Lee, 1992; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; O'Driscoll, Ilgen & Hildreth, 1992).
4. How conflict is generally dealt by individuals is also ignored.

3. Conservation of resources theory

Conservation of resources (COR) theory is based on the principle that individuals try to obtain and preserve resources. Example of various resources can be energies (like money, time, knowledge), personal characteristics (like self-esteem), and conditions like marital status, tenure. In this process, fear of losing or the actual loss of these resources may lead to various negative outcomes like job dissatisfaction, stress, tension or depression. Many individuals take various steps like quitting the job to either protect or replace these resources; else depletion of such resources leads to burnout (Hobfoll and Shirom, 1989).

It is different from the role theory which states that multiple roles can be beneficial and they cannot be just considered as cause of role conflict. A basic assumption of this theory is that an individual possesses some resources, which he/she feels are very important and always tries to protect them to not lose them. As a result, it is predicted that stress may occur due to circumstances that exemplify:

1. Fear of losing resource
2. Real loss of resources
3. Absence of fair benefit in resources

Three Principles of Conservation of Resources Model:

Conservation of Resource theory's first principle states that fear of losing resource has a huge impact on individual then gaining the same (Hobfoll, 1991). For example: Receiving medal for best efforts during battle would not compensate the loss of losing a best buddy in same battle (Hobfoll et al., 2012).

Second principle states that individuals procure resources in order to mitigate resource loss and thereby have more of these resources. Various researchers have considered this principle as one of the coping mechanism (Ito & Brotheridge, 2003).

Example: It's important for an individual to be with family/friends when they require support in their bad times, to acquire more social support (Hobfoll et al., 1995). Doing such act on time gives personal satisfaction which helps individual to cope up more efficiently with other stressors.

Third principle states that resource loss often leads to the loss of extra assets. For example: Individuals may give up resources like trust, optimism in case of any traumatic event. (Hobfoll, 1991).

4. Self-discrepancy theory

This theory is based on the association between different sets of self-belief. Discrepancies in what we believe and what it actually is, leads to issues as there is always contrast between desires for ourselves and our real practices. This results in various negative outcomes like unhappiness, disappointment and disassociation. It can also result in emotional disturbances like nervousness and guilt. (Higgins *et al.*, 1986)

As far as work family conflict is concerned, self-discrepancy theory surpasses clashing desires originating from various areas. It completely focuses on clashes that emerge when an individual spool what he/she is as compared to the standards forced by self and others.

5. Social identity theory:

Individuals are part of social groups and to survive smoothly they have to conform to group norms. Hence they are supposed to play multiple roles being a social member (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Intensity of each role depends on the relationship with the person involved in conversation and the extent to which goals are shared with others. In different situations people tend to behave differently and it majorly depends on the environment they are into. Greater the acquaintance of any individual with a particular role more is the level of commitment in that role, hence it clearly attracts more energy and time.

6. Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is based on the communication between people. As per this theory, interaction in a relationship is the outcome of the returns and costs which is part of the exchange. Most relationships are comprised of give and take, nonetheless both the ends are never equal. People look forward to benefits which they gain from the relationship and if benefits are more then they tend to outweigh the cost paid for it, this results into positive relationship. Whereas when cost involved is greater than the rewards in the relationship, this leads to negative relationship. Based on the cost and returns, people decide whether to proceed with the social affiliation (Homans, 1976).

Blau (1964) differentiated social exchange based on economic and social criteria. An economic criterion includes monetary benefits involved in the exchange relationship and is strictly adhered within agreements and contracts. Social exchange will not involve any formal contracts or agreements. It is a relationship which goes past measurable rewards and is based on social and emotional bond. This can be improved with more communication and greater trust.

Lambert (2000) in her recent studies have highlighted on linkage between social exchange theory and work family conflict. She found that work life benefits are positively related to organization citizenship behavior. As per her study, employees feel obligated to exert extra efforts in return to extra work family benefits received. This signifies importance and strength of social exchange dimension.

CONCLUSION

Work family conflict interrupts life of employees professionally as well as personally. Performance of employees also gets impacted due to huge amount of stress created because of work family conflict. Indirectly this also effect career growth of employees in organization and may lead to absenteeism and lower job satisfaction levels. Hence it is important for all the organizations to understand work-family conflict and keep a check on the overall well-being of his/her employees in short as well as long run and to manage their work-family conflict effectively.

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