Job, Family and Individual Factors as Predictors of Work-Family Conflict

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ABSTRACT

The growing interest in understanding fully the interface of work and family roles and their antecedents has stimulated the development of a predictive model of work-family conflict. A model is developed on predictors of work-family conflict which suggests that the predictors could be job-related (job type, work time commitment, job involvement, role overload, job flexibility), family-related (number of children, life-cycle stage, family involvement, child care arrangements) and individual-related (life role values, gender role orientation, locus of control, perfectionism). This present model is based on the stress-strain model (Dunham, 1984) whereby the predictors are referred to as stressors, and the conflict as strain.

INTRODUCTION

Changes in the workplace and demography of employees have made studying the relationship between work and family more important. Research that examines work-family conflict has advanced over the last few decades and has led to the development of theoretical models, empirical studies, and organization-sponsored work-family initiatives. As organizations attempt to help employees manage the balance between work and family demands, there is a growing body of research on the topic of work-family conflict. Besides the rapid increase of married women entering the work force while continuing to maintain the majority of the family and household responsibilities (Jackson, Tal, & Sullivan, 2003), the interest in the topic has also in large measures been fuelled by the recognition that work-family concerns are highly salient for the well-being of employees. Empirical evidence also confirms that work-family conflict is often a severe stress factor at work leading to various negative outcomes, including impaired well-being (Karatepe & Tekinkus, 2006).

Researchers have identified work-family conflict as one of the major stressors in the workplace in the United States (Allen, Herts, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Frone, 2003). In Canada, time in employment increased for many, as did the non-work demands resulting from the continued change in family structures and the continued rise in the percentage of employees with child care, elder care or both (Duxbury & Higgins, 2003). Men have assumed more family responsibilities, in part due to high rates of divorce resulting in increased involvement in single parenting (Gill & Davidson, 2001). As a result, many men, like women, are beginning to experience increased levels of stress and conflict as they juggle work and parenting responsibilities (Tennant & Sperry, 2003).

The concept of work-family conflict has been explained by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal (1964) using the role theory framework. They proposed that the major determinant of an individual’s behavior is the expectation of behavior that others have for him or her. The role theory predicts that the expectation surrounding each of these different roles a person performs can generate inter-role conflict when they involve pressure to dominate the time of the focal person to satisfy all
expectations of his or her work and family roles since each role requires time, energy and commitment. Using this framework, Kahn et al. (1964) defined work family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family spheres are mutually incompatible. Such incompatibility is indicated by the fact that participation in the work role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family role and vice versa.

Besides the negative influence of participation in several roles, the social identity theory proposes that people can invest in several roles and achieve work-family balance by ensuring that conflicting identities in their multiple roles are separated, or by applying consistent personal values across identities (Lobel, 1991). By ordering these various identities on the basis of salience to the individual, this conflict can be resolved. For example, when roles with higher salience receive a higher level of time investment by the individual because they are more central to that person’s self image, effort and identity are kept in a state of equilibrium and conflict may be avoided. The enrichment argument suggests that a greater number of role commitments provide benefits to individuals rather than draining them (Rothbard, 2001). There are several resources derived from one's work role, such as income, job autonomy, and social support from co-workers and/or supervisor, that can positively influence one's experiences and well-being in the family domain. Similarly, individuals' home and family lives can also strengthen or enrich the quality of their work lives by providing a variety of supportive resources to draw upon.

It is evident that our work lives can either enhance or detract from our family lives. In the same manner, our family lives can have positive or negative influences on our work attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. For example, extensive and inflexible work hours, over-involvement in work, and job stress may produce distress within the family domain, as well as withdrawal from family responsibilities, and adversely affect one's overall quality of life. Similarly, extensive care-giving responsibilities and intensive involvement with family activities can limit individuals' career choices and aspirations and negatively affect their work involvement, job satisfaction, and intention to continue their employment. Although researchers argue that both depletion and enrichment processes operate simultaneously for employees who assume both roles (Ohlott, Graves, & Ruderman 2004; Ruderman et al. 2002; Wadsworth & Owens, 2007), work-family interference still must be managed because the existence of enhancement does not eliminate role conflict.

Work-family conflict has been conceptualized by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) on the basis of source of conflict. They devided work-family conflict into three types of conflict, namely, time-based, strain-based and behavior-based conflicts. Time-based conflict refers to the conflict that arises when the time devoted to one role makes it difficult for the individual to participate in the other role. An example might be where a parent-teacher meeting conflicts with an important meeting at work. (e.g., requiring employees to work late with little notice might make it difficult for employees to meet family obligations, like picking up a child at daycare). According to Buck, Lee, MacDermid and Smith (2000), the notion of time-based work family conflicts is derived from the scarcity model which suggests that human energy is in limited quantity, although research (Nordenmark, 2002) seems to also support the expansion model which argues that alternative resources provided by multiple roles outweigh the possible stressful effects of multiple role engagements.

Overall, researchers are recognizing that work-family conflict is a complex, multi-dimensional construct. Work-family conflict is conceptualized as a construct with dual direction (work-to-family and family-to-work), multiple forms (time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based) and specific to multiple life roles (e.g., spouse, parental, elder care, home care, and leisure). Acknowledging the prevalence of work-family conflict and its negative outcomes, it is therefore critical to develop a model on predictors of work-family conflict.
PREDICTIVE MODEL OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

The growing interest in understanding fully the interface of work and family roles and their antecedents has stimulated the development of a predictive model of work-family conflict. In this paper, it is predicted that the expectations surrounding each of the different roles a person performs can generate interrole conflict. The interrole conflict occurs because it is not possible for the focal person to satisfy all expectations of his or her work and family roles since each role requires time, energy and commitment (Khan et al., 1964). This conflict perspective stems from the scarcity hypothesis which assumes that individuals have limited time and energy. The author acknowledges that work and family are the two central spheres in most adults’ lives and the interdependence of these two spheres or systems for the dual-career family as proposed by Pleck (1977) in his concept of the work-family role system. Recognizing the bidirectional nature of the interrole conflict construct two distinct types of conflict, namely, work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict are included in the framework.

The model is developed based on the stress-strain model (Dunham, 1984) and the social identity theory (Lobel, 1991), as well as the work of researchers (Figure 1). According to the stress-strain model, the predictors are referred to as stressors, and the conflict as strain. Social identity theory posits that people classify themselves in various social categories which define their identities and the roles they hold in a social environment. For example, a person could view himself/herself as a valued employee, a loving spouse, or a good parent, among other things. Each of these roles provides a different aspect of identity to the individual. Some will view being a valued employee as the most important aspect of their identity, while others may gain more pleasure from the role of spouse and therefore value it more. Conflict can arise when an individual who values a particular role is forced by situational constraints to spend less time than he/she would like in that role. The model in this paper suggests that these constraints or predictors could be job-related, family-related and individual-related factors predicting the extent of work-family conflict experienced by an individual.

Job-Related Factors

There are many studies examining the characteristics of work domain as predictors of work-family conflict. One of the characteristics is job type and conflict levels. Employees in managerial and professional positions report higher levels of work-to-family conflict than those working in non-managerial and non-professional positions (Duxbury & Higgins, 2003). Among Spanish employees, Carnicer et al. (2004) found that there was a positive association between job category level and work-family conflict whereby managers experienced greater work-to-family conflict than lower category employees. Related to the job category level in the study was the employees’ education levels. Employees with a master’s or doctoral degree experienced greater work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict than employees with high school education. A study of female Malaysian operators, clerks, secretaries, nurses and physicians found that physicians experienced the greatest intensity of work-to-family conflict. However, operators experienced the greatest intensity of family-to-work conflict (Aminah Ahmad, 2005).

Studies suggest that work time commitment is related to the intensity of work-family conflict experienced by employees. One of the commonly measured forms of work-family conflict is time-based conflict, defined as conflict that occurs when the amount of time devoted to one role makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Long hours could have negative consequences for families and for workers who struggle to balance the demands of work and family roles.
Work-family researchers have found that time committed to work contributes to conflict between employees’ work and non-work roles (Beauregard, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Darcy & McCarthy, 2007; Kinnunen, Vermulst, Gerris, & Makikangas, 2003; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002; Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001).

Another line of research has examined job involvement as an antecedent of work-family conflict. There is a recognition that individuals may be actively participating in one role while simultaneously feeling distracted by thoughts, emotions, or demands that are tied to another role (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). According to the spillover theory, moods, stress, and thoughts generated in one role domain often influence or spill over into other domains (William & Alliger, 1994). Moorehead (2001) argued that this overlap is a relatively positive one and refers to this as “synchronizing work and family.” In contrast, one might argue that these overlapping thoughts are distractions, which are the product of poor role quality, and may thus result in negative outcomes. Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between job involvement and work-family conflict (Hammer et al., 1997; Darry & McCarthy, 2007). This implies that individuals with high levels of psychological involvement in their work role may be more preoccupied with their work and, hence, may devote an excessive amount of energy to their role at the expense of their family role, resulting in work-family conflict.

When the total demand on time and energy are too great for an individual to perform the roles adequately or comfortably, role overload occurs (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Individuals who occupy work roles and perceive that their workload is more than they can handle, would experience negative emotions, fatigue and tension. These feelings would then have positive effects on work-family conflict. Aminah Ahmad and Maznah Baba (2003; 2004) examined the role overload experienced at work and its
relationship with work-family conflict among Malaysian female physicians in public hospitals. The study found that 87.7% of the physicians experienced moderate to heavy workload which could be attributed to the relatively high frequency of on-calls and an increase in the number of outpatients to be attended as well as the increase in the number of patients in the ward leading to a high patient to physician ratio. The physicians also experienced a considerable intensity of work-family conflict and the conflict tended to increase with an increase in the workload. Other researchers have also demonstrated a significant relationship between role overload and work-family conflict (Fu & Shaffer, 2001).

Casey and Chase (2004), and Allen (2001) stressed the importance of flexible work arrangements including job schedule flexibility. They found that the adoption of job schedule flexibility was related to less work-family conflict. Similarly, Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly, (2002) and Carnicer, Sanchez, Perez, and Jimenez (2004) found schedule flexibility was negatively related to work-family conflict.

Family-Related Factors

Several aspects of family structure are associated with work-family conflict including dependent care responsibilities, especially care for the elderly and disabled children or adults and life cycle stage. Duxbury and Higgins (2003) found that both male and female Canadian employees with dependent care responsibilities report higher levels of work-to-family conflict. Intuitively, these results make sense as employees with children and/or elderly dependents are more likely to have inflexible commitments at home that will conflict with expectations or demands at work. This study also found that employees with dependent care responsibilities were at higher risk of caregiver strain. The presence of children in the household has also been positively related to work-family conflict (Carnicer et al., 2004).

The association between life-cycle stage and work-family conflict has been documented by researchers (Aminah Ahmad, 2007; Lu, Gilmour, Kao, & Huang, 2006). Work and family role demands encountered during adulthood varies with an adult’s life-cycle stage. Among female factory operators with youngest children aged less than three years, Aminah Ahmad (2007) found that operators with youngest child aged less than three years experienced more work-to-family conflict than those with youngest child aged three and above. Similarly, Lu et al. (2006) found that age of the youngest child was negatively correlated with both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work family. The findings support the contention that working mothers with younger children would experience more work-to-family conflict than those with older children. Parents of dependent young children, especially mothers, have higher family demands than those with older children. These greater, often unpredictable demands, such as childcare arrangement and care of sick child, would result in lower levels of control over the work and family interface and thus higher levels of work-family conflict. However, as the children get older the demands, especially those related to childcare, would decrease, resulting in increased levels of control and lower stress for the parents.

Studies have shown that family involvement, which refers to the degree to which individuals identify with their family, the relative importance of the family to individuals’ self-image and self-concept, and individuals’ commitment to their family, is related to work-family conflict. For example, a mother with an ill child may not be able to stop thinking about her child even though she must be at work and fulfill her work-role responsibilities. Carlson and Kacmar (2000) found that employees who were more involved or immersed in the family domain experienced more family interference with work conflict. Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Collins (2001) found a positive relationship between family involvement and work-family conflict, a relationship that was stronger for males than females.
Child care arrangements have an important impact on parents experiences of work and satisfactory provisions help protect against pressures of dual-earner lifestyles. The importance of child care in balancing professional and personal life among female gynecologic oncologists has been reported (Gordiner et al., 2000). Among married women in dual earner families, concerns about their child, including quality of child care arrangements, accounted for substantial amounts of variance in the role strain experienced by these women (Greenberger & O’Neal, 1990). A study of female production operators in manufacturing companies revealed that the operators experienced work-to-family conflict and the intensity of conflict experienced was negatively related to satisfaction with child care arrangements (Aminah Ahmad, 2007).

**Individual-Related Factors**

Besides job- and family-related factors, a number of individual-related factors could contribute to the experience of work-family conflict. The incorporation of individual values into the work-family conflict research is important because life role values are central to organizing meaning and action for working people (Carlson, & Kacmar, 2000). In incorporating values into work-family conflict research, Carlson & Kacmar (2000) has used three multiple perspectives, namely centrality, priority and importance. Centrality refers to the value expression of individuals with regard to how central work or family is in their lives when compared to other life roles. Thus, the different centrality placed on the role of work or family may be helpful in explaining differences in the experience of work-family conflict. Priorities refer to the value expression of individuals with regard to how individuals prioritize their life roles. Variation in values as expressed by prioritization of life roles should lead to differing experiences of work-family conflict. Life roles can also be examined from the perspective of importance which refers to the value expression manifested in the importance an individual places on a given role. The researchers found that individuals who valued work over family experienced greater family-to-work conflict. In addition, the sources, levels, and outcomes of work-family conflict were found to differ depending on the life role values held by the individuals when expressed in terms of work centrality and importance. However, differences in the work-family conflict process were not found for individuals whose values were expressed in terms of priority or family centrality.

Another individual-related antecedent of work-family conflict that has not been much studied is gender role orientation. This refers to the beliefs individuals hold about normal roles of men and women in meeting family and work responsibilities (Harris & Firestone, 1998). Conceptually, gender role orientation is seen as ranging on a continuum from traditional gender role orientation whereby the roles of men and women are seen as distinct and separate, to a focus on non-traditional gender role orientation characterized by role sharing between men and women. Hence, men who saw their roles as interchangeable with their wives’ roles tend to accept more responsibility for tasks associated with childcare, meal preparation and cleaning than men who endorsed specialized roles between men and women.

A study conducted on female nurses and their husbands by Aminah Ahmad (1999) found that nurses experienced varying degrees of conflict in trying to meet the demands of work and family roles. About two-thirds of the nurses experienced moderate to high intensity of conflict. Husbands’ gender role orientation ranged from traditional to egalitarian with slightly less than three-quarters of them holding traditional to moderately egalitarian orientation and slightly more than a quarter holding egalitarian orientation. Significant negative relationship was found between husbands’ gender role orientation and wives’ work-family conflict. This indicates that women whose husbands hold more egalitarian orientation tend to experience less work-family conflict. In addition to husbands’ gender role orientation, women’s own traditional orientation or expectation of gender roles has also been studied. Cardenas, Major, and
Bernas (2004) in their study of women employees consisting mainly of African American and Caucasian women, reveals that their traditional gender role expectations are positively related to family distractions experienced at work. Carnicer et al., (2004) have found that Spanish women who believe more in the traditional gender roles experience greater work-to-family conflict.

There are a number of dispositional factors that may influence the work-home interface. Fride and Ryan’s (2005) model proposes three ways in which dispositional factors may affect this interface. Personality may affect the type and amount of work and home role requirements that an individual experiences, the individual’s perceptions of work and home role requirements, and the coping strategies used to deal with the interference of the two roles. Wayne et al. (2004) found a positive link between neuroticism and both directions of work-home interference, and a negative link between conscientiousness and work-home interference. Negative affectivity was also found linked to work-home interference. Similarly Ratanen, Pulkkinen, and Kinnunen (2005) found that neuroticism was positively linked to work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. A study by Bonebright, Clay, and Ankenmann (2000) revealed that workaholics were found to have significantly more work-life conflict than non-workaholics.

Besides these personality factors, self-evaluations are likely to have an effect on work-home perceptions (Fride & Ryan, 2005). According to the self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970), individuals will seek and be satisfied with roles that maximize cognitive consistency. Those with more positive self-evaluations (including self-esteem, self-efficacy and perfectionism) will choose situations in which they can be effective, and avoid those in which they cannot. Individuals with negative self-evaluations may actually experience more home and work stressors, and therefore perceive greater interference (Fried and Ryan, 2005, Beauregard, 2006).

To date, only a few studies have examined the relationship between locus of control and work-family outcomes. A study of employed Malaysian women with families revealed that an internal locus of control were less likely to experience work-to-family conflict (Noor, 2002). Andreassi and Thompson (2007) conducted a more recent study on employees in the United States of America and found that internal locus of control was negatively related to work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict.

REFERENCES


