

Handling work-family conflicts: future agenda

Introduction

Workers across industries seem to be struggling to find the balance between work and family life in a highly connected world (Kossek *et al.*, 2012). Many people are looking at alternate career options in order to better integrate their life interests and work. Such shift is fueled by increasing demands of the workplace, and little time to pursue non-work activities (Skidelsky, 2017). American Psychological Association has reported that stressors are mainly related to work, family and the attempt to balance the two (*Monitor on Psychology*, 2011, p. 60). The quest to balance work with the rest of the life seems to be unfulfilled.

Younger employees in several cultures who face stress at the beginning of the career are often advised to “get settled,” the idea being increasing the resource pool in order to deal with stressors at work. Little do people realize that settling in induces another role in life – that of the family. Soon the roles at work and those outside of work get into conflict with each other. Such conflicts have been documented in the academic literature since a long time (e.g. Kanter, 1977).

A quick overview of the development of the field

The earliest works in the work-family interface seem to have been carried out in response to the strain felt in work vs non-work life roles. Considerable growth in the literature happened in trying to understand and alleviate the stress between different roles at the workplace. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) made a significant departure from the then approach while systematically arguing that the work-family interface must be attended to. From their review, it appears that the first empirical work around the theme appeared in 1971 (Willmott, 1971). However, it is only after Greenhaus *et al.*'s (1987) study that the subject area grew rapidly (Chang *et al.*, 2010). Frone *et al.* (1992, 1997) paid attention to the finer distinction between influence from work to family vs family to work and developed measures around the concept. Then, Carlson *et al.* (2000) presented a multidimensional (3 × 2) conceptualization. They integrated the extant literature around three types of conflicts – time based, strain based, and behavioral – and around two interfaces – work to family and family to work. This model was successfully validated in Carlson *et al.* (2000) and Carlson and Kacmar (2000). It is now considered to be the cause of a rapid increase in the number of studies around the area (Chang *et al.*, 2010). The approach seems to be still popular as two of the studies in this issue try to understand the differences between work-family and family-work conflicts.

The closely related nature of the above two conflicts has been highlighted in several studies. In line with the initial thought, Chang *et al.* (2010) argued that it is munificent to treat work-family balance as a part of work-life balance.

As one sifts through the literature, it emerges that work-life conflicts have received attention mostly in the USA and similar cultures. Perhaps, it is because such conflicts have been noted to be a phenomenon that has had its roots in industrialization where work is typically outside of home, and rewards at work are used to cater to the immediate surroundings of a worker (Clark, 2000). Carlson and Kacmar (2000) noted that the primacy of the values of individuals seem to have a role in how people deal with conflicts.

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In continuation, it is important to understand how other rapidly industrializing countries that have cultural values different to those of the USA (or other countries in the GLOBE studies' Anglo cluster) view, and deal with their work-life conflicts. This position has been more recently endorsed by Ollier-Malaterre Foucreault (2016) in their review of cross-national research on work-family interface. They create an easily understood classification on arguably robust cultural dimensions used in the cross-cultural literature. It is a matter of delight and differentiation that this issue takes the agenda a level deeper – into the realm of cultural values. This issue provides an opportunity to look at work-family conflict studies from cultures that are different from the industrialized economies in the Anglo cluster defined by GLOBE studies. The next section introduces the studies included in the section.

Papers in this issue

Jaga and Bagraim's study of Hindu women in South Africa becomes the first study for the issue. This study is rich in its articulation and presentation of the challenges faced by women trying to balance the realities of workplace while upholding their traditions. They provide insights into how deeply held values in Hindu families that are passed through acculturation processes as one grows up, disrupt the balance between expectations at work and family. Such conflict is also exacerbated by the societal cross-cultural context that comes into play from Hindu families living in another nation where they become a minority diaspora. This being a qualitative study is also a departure from other studies in the issue. Jaga and Bagraim are able to uncover some of the deep-rooted value conflicts that raise more questions for the future researchers. They highlight the role of collective family identity that could be viewed as a resource (Hobfoll, 1989) in maintaining the balance. It also highlights value construal and its role in dealing with conflicts.

Moreover, the depth and transparency of the analysis allow the study to make a scientific contribution in a largely quantitative journal. The richness of the conflict and the underlying layers of issues get successfully represented in the paper. It appears to be a bold methodological departure that still maintains contact with the basic principles of science from most other studies in the work-family or family-work conflicts.

Taking a different track compared to Jaga and Bagraim, Kim and Young demonstrate that there is indeed no difference between work-life conflict and affective commitment of married vs single childless women in a male-dominated culture (South Korea). This is an interesting piece of research because traditional view of work-family conflict is built around the assumption that there is a "family" to be catered to. Male-dominated and patriarchal cultures such as South Korea (GLOBE project, <http://globeproject.com/results/countries/KOR?menu=list>) make it a norm that women have to be caretakers for the family. South Korean women have been subject to social, cultural and economic inequalities (Kim *et al.*, 2016). Kim and Young challenge the stereotype arguing that single childless female workers could have much broader array of activities that organizations should consider as fair employers. Their finding about mentoring or supporting nature of the organization playing an important factor in determining affective commitment of women toward the organization highlights the changing employee demands from organizations. Organizations indeed need to work toward catering to varied needs of different groups in line with their expectations. Together, this indicates to a shift toward balancing three value axes proposed by Simon Dolan and colleagues (Dolan, 2011; Dolan *et al.*, 2006) that would drive affective commitment. Put together, Kim and Young make a strong argument for providing equal support to women irrespective of their family status.

Edna Rabenu, Ahnor Tziner and Gil Sharoni's article is the next reading. They treat work-family conflict as a dependent variable. They collect data from yet another male-dominated culture – Israeli-Arab employees. Their argument being that such patriarchal cultures would have been more stressful for employees while they try to meet

various role requirements. Rabenu *et al.*'s SEM analysis revealed a strong positive association between stress at work and work-family conflict for her largely female sample (77.5 percent), thereby hinting at strong spillovers between the two spheres of life. The work and the family worlds are not as separable as believed to be. More importantly, they found that organizational justice and citizenship behaviors had a mitigating influence on stress levels of the employees. Together, it seems to be pointing in the direction of organizations benefiting from caring for their employees by upholding norms of justice, and promoting positive citizenship behaviors in the workplace (Niehoff and Moorman, 1993; Organ, 1988). It is therefore a natural progression that her article is placed next to Kim Hye Kyoung's argument in favor of more support via positive behaviors at the workplace.

Next to appear in the issue is another study on South Korean employees by Hyongdong Kim. Apart from a larger sample size and use of ordinal scales with appropriate logistic regression analysis, the study also compared the differential influences of mentoring on career goals of male vs female employees who face work-family spillover effects. As the reader would go through the results, the data and the differences between genders were consistent with the cultural values hinted in the previous paper. Male managers derive more positive work-family spillover from their work that feeds into their careers. Female managers, on the other hand, have to bear the burden of creating a balance between work and family at the cost of career goals. They are also likely to face negative spillover effects more than their male counterparts. More importantly, perhaps the mentoring programs are also reinforcing the existing norms. The final argument that the organizations need to have more holistic programs to offer support to female managers also sounds similar to Kim and Young's article. However, lurking from underneath the layers, there is a stark difference in the two approaches.

Unlike Kim and Young, Hyongdong does not question the patriarchal male-dominated view of the society. The study is instead built on the premise of upholding the tradition – the role of the women is to take care of the family – by situating the gender's role identity in the home culture. Both papers put together indicate toward a rich discussion of the work-family balance in South Korea. While one takes an assimilative stance, the other raises call for freedom to express.

A nuanced reader of the whole issue would also note subdued tone in which the suggestions for more equal treatment of women employees is raised. Is there a cultural effect at work here? As we find out the answers, the issue gets enriched with the inclusion of two different approaches to study the same phenomenon, each study feeding into the other.

The next two papers in the issue are built around achieving the balance between work and family. Lior Oren and Liron Levin's article using conservation of resources (COR) framework (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) appears next. Conceptualization was simple yet interesting. Efficacy of COR was proved yet again (see, e.g. Hobfoll, 2011) in the case of work-family as well as family-work conflicts since the effects were observed for both, threat of loss and the actual loss of resources. This is also consistent with the definition of conflict (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2008) where by actual or perceived loss leads to a tension. Oren and Levin have indeed demonstrated an application of the COR concept in a different domain thus advancing the framework. The extension, however, could not hold for work-family enrichment. Only family-work enrichment was observed in the condition of a resource gain. While Oren and Levin elucidate several strengths and limitations, it would be an interesting extension to replicate the study for the enrichment part with a pre-dominantly male sample. It seems gender of the participants had a strong role to play. Given Rabenu *et al.*'s commentary on distinct gender roles in the region a likely conjecture could be that working fathers would perceive work-family enrichment more strongly compared to working mothers. This could also mean extending the COR measure toward organizational resources at work

(see Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993, p. 137). It is noteworthy that the inter-linkages of the studies in this edition would push the boundaries of arguments further.

Adding another dimension to the trial of COR framework by Oren and Levin to understand how work-family conflicts are handled, Padhi and Pattnaik test the utility of boundary theory paradigm (Nippert-Eng, 1996, also see Clark, 2000 for a more detailed treatment). They argue that the work and family roles are distinct to each other. The Indian duo's choice of paradigm is rather interesting as it echoes Markus and Kitayama's (1991) note on how Indians describe themselves. A student of research methods might be delighted to note that even in quantitative studies the choice of paradigm could be influenced by a researchers' acculturation. It is not so intriguing to note that segmentors (who keep work and home separate) reported lower work-family conflicts compared to the integrators (who can mix both work and home) though the differences between the two were not significant. Segmentors are being consistent with their cultural values. The researchers also successfully point out that the integrators find more enrichment. Thus, there seems to be some more evidence from this context to support propositions of Clark (2000).

Contrary to the Korean sample, Padhi and Pattnaik did not find gender-based differences corroborating the observations of differences between cultural practices and values in the gender egalitarianism dimension in GLOBE studies (<http://globeproject.com/results/countries/IND?menu=list>). They appear to be in favor of asking the organizations to care for employee's families and to encourage interaction, which connects seamlessly to suggestions in Lior's study – by way of improving the resource set.

The last paper in the issue of Wang, Lee and Wu, from Taiwan, addresses the linkage between work-family conflicts and outcome behaviors of hospitality industry workers. Both the sample and the context are quite rich and understudied. While the emotional labor among hospitality industry workers has found favors with researchers, the impact of conflicts on people's behaviors is relatively understudied. This paper highlights data on conflicts, turnover intent and engagement in citizenship behaviors. More importantly, there was a methodological control (not just statistical control) for reducing common method variance bias. It could potentially be an important marker in the literature. The context of hospitality and an eastern culture makes the study more intriguing. Readers familiar with the eastern cultures would probably know it already, what is considered citizenship in the western cultures is mostly an in-role behavioral expectation in several other contexts. Hospitality sector just accentuates the effect further. Given the results of the paper, it is of concern to note that the women face a different set of challenges at work compared to their male counterparts. Married employees, and/or those with children also reported lesser turnover intent, meaning a plausible linkage with continuance or normative commitment (not the affective commitment). Rich implications for the world of practice and policy emerge in this paper.

The connections between various studies thus make the issue a rich repertoire of studies on two counts. First, there is a richness of methods ranging from Jaga and Bagraim's qualitative study to a more numbers-based logistic regression of the panel data by Kim and Young, to the methodological control of common method variance in the paper by Wang, Li and Wu. This indicates the spread of interest in inquiring about work-family conflicts. Second, the issue has studies from relatively understudied contexts. This improves the depth of the subject area and provides more information about challenges related to the concept of work-life or work-family balance in different cultures. Together they indicate the ubiquity of the concept in the workplace and sustained academic interest in the field of inquiry.

Future agenda: where to go from here?

A few conclusions and research agenda items do emerge because of this special issue on work-family conflict. First, the battle for primacy between work-family or family-work has been understood to be a fact of life. The battle seems to be a lost cause. The negative effects

are to be seen in either case. Work and family do seem to feed into each other in both positive and negative aspects (see, e.g. Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). As the field has understood more about the predictors and effects of work-family conflict, the need is to study how individuals deal with the conflict. For example, a Hindu woman in South Africa feels stress because of violating her value obtained in acculturation in favor of another set of values preferred by the new context. There must be some strategies that are adopted to handle such conflict scenarios. However, there is little known about such processes that allow conflicts to be dealt with. In case the conflicts are being avoided, the stressors are likely to build up in line with the strain view of conflicts. While this special issue has put forth the argument in favor of getting some support or additional resource (including positive behaviors) in order to deal with the conflict and its consequences, it needs to be tested further in at least two ways. First, the systemic/organizational or companion support and its influence on dealing with conflicts needs to be better conceptualized and studied. Second, building on Carlson and Kacmar (2000), the role of individual's values needs to be tested at a more comprehensive level. It could be interesting to see if the World Values Survey or Schwartz value surveys reveal additional meaning for understanding this important interface by highlighting society level preferences for work vs family.

The second and bigger change is to ask for richer, more nuanced descriptions and analysis. It is almost like coming a full circle, but there is a greater need to understand the dilemmas that individuals face in the changing scenario. A recent American Psychological Association (2017) report highlighted the differences in stressors for millennials, gen X-ers, boomers and matures and how their coping strategies are different. It also presented evidence that while the stress levels for the Americans have gone up and some traditional differences across classes exist, stress was equally prevalent among different races and ethnicities, i.e. it was a great leveler. Most importantly, the younger generation is feeling the heat.

Similarly, in India, for example, the gender roles are reported to be segregated with male members been the primary (more often the only) earning member of the family. However, they are fast changing with the greater participation of women in the workforce, nuclear families on the rise, and more opportunities in the service sector. The traditional gender roles are being challenged the same way as reported in earlier studies (Kanter, 1977). Together this is changing the view of work-family interface. The technological and other advancements are forcing integration. As the world values demonstrate a shift in trends, it is bound to impact what is known, and what needs to be known. It is probably time that there are deeper insights into the meaning of work, family, life and balancing the three. Maybe the methodology has to evolve to suit the questions.

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