

Work Role Characteristics as determinants of Work Family Conflict: An empirical analysis

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In this article, we have developed a model based on the existing literature and examined the relationship between work role characteristics and Work family conflict. Data was collected from 230 faculty members from self-financing Engineering colleges in and around Coimbatore city. Using multiple regression analysis it was found that work conflict, supervisory support, and job involvement influence work family conflict. The results are discussed and implications to the institutions as well as to the individuals are suggested.

The conceptualization of various theories such as the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978), the spillover theory (Staines, 1980), the compensation theory (Staines, 1980; Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh, & Reilly, 1995) and the work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) initiated a new perspective on studies on work role characteristics. Relating the frameworks given by the theories to work role, it could be taken to mean that the happenings in the work role are interconnected with that of the family role. These theories discuss the ways in which work roles impinge on family roles resulting in incompatibility between the work role and family role.

Empirical studies are available giving evidence that multiple roles as an employee in organization and husband/wife/parent in the family lead to perception of conflict (Alpert, & Culbertson, 1987; Burke, 1988; Googins, 1991). Many authors (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek 1964)) have argued that a change in time and energy expended in work leads to conflict with family thus making participation in family role more difficult by virtue of participation in the work role. In other words, given the work role characteristics, the pressures/demand from the work role becomes incompatible with the pressures/demand from the family role. This is termed as work family conflict (WFC).

Studies on WFC are found to be very extensive. Many models have been developed and have amply laid bare the antecedents and the stressfulness of WFC. A thorough review of prior stream of

research (Ahmad, 1996; Aryee, Fields, & Luk, 1999; Batt, & Valcour, 2003; Bedeian, Burke, & Moffet, 1988; Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Burke, & Greenglass, 2001; Burley, 1995; Carlson, & Kacmar, 2000; Carlson, & Perrew, 1999; Frone, Barnes, & Farrell, 1994; Frone, & Rice, 1987; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Frone, Yardley, 1996; Fu, & Shaffer, 2000; Grzywacz, & Bass, 2003; Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003; Herman, & Gyllstrom, 1977; Higgins, & Duxbury, 1992; Lo, 2003; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2000; Mikkelsen, & Burke, 2004; Mishra, 1998; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996; Noor, 2002; Noor, 2004; Pande, 2000; Parasuraman, & Simmers, 2001; Rajadhyaksha, 1997; Rice, Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1993; Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2003; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, & Luk, 2001; Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001; Wang, Lawler, Walumbwa, 2004; Wesley, & Muthuswamy, 2004; Wesley, Oomen, Sumithra, & Varkey, 2003; Wiley, 1987; Williams, & Alliger, 1994 and Yang, Chen, Choi, & Zou, 2000) however, demonstrates that these studies have captured only one or two role characteristics of the work domains. Hence, a study that captures a complete list of role characteristics and the conflict produced by their joint occurrence is needed (see figure 1 for the model). This is expected to give a more consistent result than that produced by few work role characteristics. Earlier support for this observation was offered by Paradine, Higgins, Szeglin, Beres, Kravitz, & Fotis (1981).

The present study principally seeks to examine the perception of work role characteristics and WFC and the joint effect of work role characteristics on

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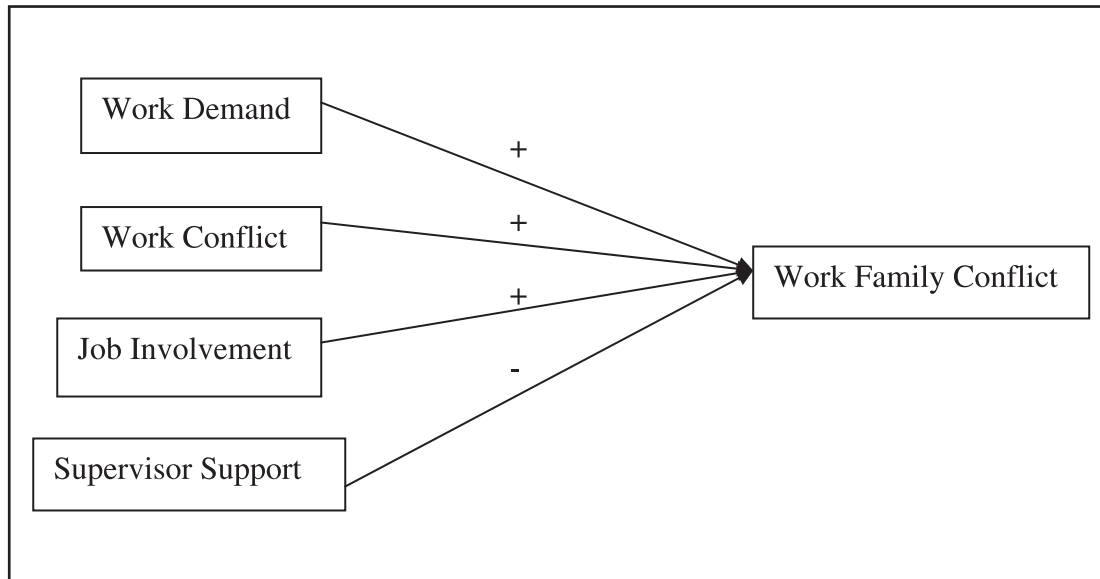
WFC. The model hypothesized to work demand, work conflict and job involvement positively influencing WFC and supervisor support negatively influencing WFC

Method

Measures

The data were collected using a questionnaire containing items consistent with past research in this area. Accordingly, Work demand scale consisted of four items adopted from Williams, & Alliger (1994);

Figure.1. The predictive model of work family conflict by the work role characteristics



Work conflict twelve items adopted from Higgins, & Duxbury (1992), Supervisor support consisted of six items originally developed by Shinn, Wong, Simko, & Ortiz-Torres, (1989) and adopted from Batt, & Valcour (2003) and Job involvement consisted of a shortened form of Lodahl & Kejner's (1965) scale. Before administering it to the respondents, the items were validated by a panel of 8 experts. All the items scored more than 0.50 on the content validity ratio index (Lawshe, 1975) and were considered to have adequate validity. The items on WFC were further standardized using factor analysis (Wesley, & Muthuswamy, 2005). The number of items was 5 for WFC. The items were made on a 5-point scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither disagree nor agree; 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted and Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of the scaled measures were computed to test the reliability of the instrument for use in this study. The reliability coefficient is 0.80 for WFC (Wesley, & Muthuswamy, 2005); 0.65 for work demand; 0.77 for work conflict; 0.66 for job involvement; and 0.61 for supervisor support.

The reliability coefficients are more than 0.60, which is an acceptable value (Malhotra, 2004).

Sample

Survey data were collected from teaching faculty in Self-financing Engineering colleges in the city of Coimbatore, India. The criteria for inclusion in this study were that the respondents should be married for at least two years and should have been working in the same institution for not less than one year. This was done to ensure that the respondents would have a perceptible experience of WFC. Half of the questionnaires were administered in person and the remaining by choosing a contact person for distribution. However, the respondents were either met or contacted over phone later to solicit their kind cooperation in filling up the questionnaire. A thorough follow-up was done to expedite the process of filling up the questionnaire. Out of 403 questionnaires distributed, 230 were usable and complete yielding a response rate of 57.1%.

Data analyses

The mean of the items under each dimension was used as a composite measure of the respective dimensions of work role characteristics and WFC. To assess the predictive effect of work role characteristics on WFC, multiple regression was performed. The work role characteristics entered the regression model as independent variables and WFC as dependent variables.

Results

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and inter correlations among the study variables. The intercorrelations among the study variables indicate low to high correlations however, there is no evidence of multi-collinearity (Green, Tull, &

Albaum, 1999).

Table 2 below presents the regression results. The R^2 is found to be 0.34 indicating that 34% of the variation in the dependent variable (WFC) is explained by the work role characteristics. It is also found that adjusted R^2 is found to be 0.33 which means that any time another independent variable is added to this model, the R^2 will increase (even if only slightly). The regression model results in the ANOVA which is reported by F - ratio = 29.62 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the R^2 is significant for the regression model.

Table 1 showing mean, standard deviation and Inter-correlations

Variables	Mean (SD)**	work demand	work conflict	job involvement	supervisory support	Work family conflict
work demand	3.83 (0.65)					
work conflict	2.86 (.69)	.154*				
job involvement	3.38 (.69)	.301*	.154*			
supervisory support	2.69 (.98)	.111	.178*	.172*		
Work family conflict	3.12 (.75)	.214*	.560*	.165*	.001	

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** SD = standard deviation

Table 2 showing regression results predicting work family conflict

Independent variables	Mean	SD**	Standardised Beta Coefficients
Work demand	3.83	0.65	0.12*
Work conflict	2.86	0.68	0.55*
Job involvement	3.38	0.69	0.06
Supervisor support	2.69	0.99	-0.12*
R^2			0.34
Adjusted R^2			0.33
F - Value			29.62*

* significant at 0.05 level

**Standard Deviation

On examination of the standardised beta coefficients, it is found that work conflict is the strongest predictor followed by equal influence of work demand and supervisor support on WFC. The statistical significance is in the direction predicted. The results support the hypothesis made in this study except that for job involvement.

Discussion and Implication

The strong prediction of WFC by work conflict indicates that irrespective of gender, the faculty members are subjected to multiple roles within the work role. The multiple roles may be in the form of conducting extra coaching for weak students, doing research, consultancy and publishing papers in journals. In view of this, they experience incompatible expectations from two or more significant others in the work role (e.g., students and the management) which spills over into the family role. Moreover, the researcher suspects that educational institutions do not have a clear job description or deviate from it, if one exists.

Overall, the results elucidate the demanding nature of the profession, the respondents of this study hold. The consequence of the presence of higher work demand is reflected in its positive prediction of WFC. The perceived low supervisor support suggests that the supervisors are more focused towards setting deadlines and expecting the faculty to meeting them rather than understanding their family needs and helping them to balance between work and family. The effect of the low supervisor support is evident in its negative prediction of WFC.

This study has important implications to both the organization as well as the individuals. The positive prediction of WFC by work conflict and work demand suggest that Institutions can help to reduce WFC by making adjustments in the work role through sufficient supervisor support. On account of the absolute necessity to remain competitive, institutions may embark on restructuring and operate with smaller staff. In view of this, institutions can resort to newer initiatives which include the supervisors and the subordinates jointly setting time and ethical standards that would meet the organisations' expectations and match the employees' abilities. In addition, they can also jointly decide on the optimum number of roles to be assigned to the faculty. The design of

the work shall also involve greater autonomy, team collaboration and use of Information Technology.

Limitations and direction for future research

This study is limited to the city of Coimbatore alone and the sample size is small relative to the number of Engineering colleges spread over India. Therefore, to present a better picture on the prediction of WFC, studies should focus on larger samples across the Engineering colleges in India. Secondly, a comparative prediction of WFC across men and women respondents would yield a comprehensive picture on the paradigm shift, taking place on sex role orientation. Thirdly, this study is done on faculty in Engineering colleges. This restrains understanding of WFC on occupationally heterogeneous population. Therefore, future studies could be done on occupationally heterogeneous sample in diverse family forms and skills. Fourthly, research shall focus on capturing the cultural and religious beliefs on work and family. Finally, the conflict arising out of the participation of individuals in multiple roles may be complex. Therefore, a structural equation modeling may be applied to understand the complex nature of this relationship and thus eliminate measurement errors..

Conclusion

Given the cultural differences in the attitudes, values and behaviours between Western and the Indian society towards the family and work roles, this study enables to see the pattern that is emerging in an urbanizing and industrializing society like India. A major contribution of this study is that it proposed and tested a composite model establishing the relationship between the various work role characteristics and WFC using a non-western sample. This study would enable institutions help their employees balance between work and family and look for new ways to gain competitive advantage.

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