Work Family Conflict

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Boston College

Work-Family Conflict

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Abstract

Work can be a very satisfying experience; for many people, work defines a large piece of their identity.   Yet work sometimes intrudes into other aspects of our lives in ways that are problematic. Work-family conflict results when the needs of the family and the needs of the workplace cannot both be met, because the time and effort required by one of these roles makes it difficult to fulfill the other. When it is present in people's lives, work-family conflict can have negative effects on physical and psychological health and the overall quality of life. Certain personality characteristics and learned skills can mediate or exacerbate the effects of work-family conflict. A family systems perspective aids in understanding the many ways in which work-family conflict can affect and can be affected by different subsystems and family members. Finally, the employer has a role in mediating work-family conflict by creating formal programs and fostering an organizational culture that help people to reduce or eliminate work-family conflict in their lives.

<u>Introduction</u>

For as long as people have worked, the issues of work and family have always been a part of our lives. Recently in this country, it has become more difficult for families to make ends meet with only one income, so it is common for families to have two working adults. Workplaces are expecting people to put in increasingly long hours, with the result that we are now "the workaholism capital of the world, surpassing the Japanese," according to sociologist Arlie Hochschild (Wallis, 52, 2003). Children are spending more time in structured activities and many families find themselves struggling to make all the pieces of their lives fit together.

Work can be a very satisfying and positive experience for people. The experience of multiple roles, such as family member and employee, is generally beneficial. Work provides many people with social support, opportunities for increased self-efficacy and an expanded frame of reference (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Even work that is seemingly solitary provides people with opportunity for social exchange. Work gives us an identity within our societies; we say, "I am a welder" or "I am a teacher." (Blustein, 2004). Yet, work sometimes intrudes into our lives in ways that are problematic. There are many factors that contribute to conflict between work and family, and many ways to understand and resolve problems that result.

Work-family conflict occurs when the demands of work are in disharmony with the demands of family (Bruck, Allen and Spector 2002). In fact, work-family conflict is problematic for many working parents in this country. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health now identifies work-family conflict as one of the ten major stressors in the workplace (Kelloway, Gottlieg & Barham, 1999).

One of the major contributors to work-family conflict is the fact that Americans have insufficient time in their days. Harvard University Economist Juliet Schor identified some of the reasons why Americans have less time than ever in her book, *The Overworked American; The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*. She points out that Americans have increased their working hours by one month per year in the past two decades. In addition, there has been a decline in real wages, a rise in consumerism and management trends that give current employees more work in order to avoid having to hire new ones (Schor, 1991).

Over time, work-family conflict can lead to a number of psychological and even physical problems. People with high levels of work-family conflict are more likely to experience depression, increased stress, increased physical complaints and lower energy levels. The quality of life within the family and within the marriage may decrease. Some people with high levels of work-family conflict tend to experience a decrease in the quality of life itself (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001).

Researchers have defined three forms of work-family conflict, and a multitude of related factors, all of which involve different demands and stressors in the lives of workers. These three forms of work-family conflict are known as "Role Pressure Incompatibility Factors" (Carlson, 1999).

The first of the incompatibility factors is time-based conflict, which occurs when the time devoted to one role means that it is difficult or impossible to devote time to another role. This can take many forms. A job that requires long hours reduces the time available to fulfill other roles. Some jobs preoccupy people so much that even when they are not at work, they are thinking about work. Jobs that require inflexible hours mean that time cannot be taken off to deal with situations that arise from another role. Finally,

jobs that require unusual or irregular hours, such as shift work, may mean that it is impossible to be present when the family role requires it.

Strain-based conflict occurs when strain from one role makes it difficult to perform in another role. For example, anxiety and fatigue caused by strain from one role will likely make it difficult to perform in another role. People who have jobs that are emotionally exhausting are especially susceptible to experiencing this type of conflict.

Behavior-based conflict occurs when behavior in one role is not compatible with behavior that is necessary for another role. This often takes the form of people who work in places that expect self-reliance and emotional stability having trouble at home, where the expectation is to provide warmth, caring and emotional openness (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Inter-role conflict occurs when pressures in one role are incompatible with pressures in another role. It can be further broken down into objective and psychological conflict. An example of objective conflict would be if a breakfast meeting was scheduled for the same time when you have to drive your children to school. A psychological conflict, on the other hand, could mean having to decide whether to go into work on the weekend or spend time with the family. Both types of conflict are connected with work-family conflict.

Another way to understand the link between work-family conflict and stress is through the Conservation of Resources Model (COR). The COR model is based on the idea that people are always trying to acquire and maintain resources. Resources include objects, energy (e.g. time, money and knowledge), conditions (e.g. employed, married status), and personal characteristics (e.g. self-esteem). Stress occurs when there is a threat of losing resources. In order to relieve this stress, action must be taken. For

example, someone who fears that their children are suffering from the lack of parental time spent together may put in fewer and fewer extra hours, and eventually decide to work at a different job in order to be able to fulfill the needs of the job domain and the family domain (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

Categories of Work-Family Conflict

When family and work get in the way of each other, conflict often results. There are a multitude of theories that have been developed to categorize work-family conflict in order to understand it better.

One way to look at work-family conflict is to break it down into two categories: family interference with work (FIW) and work interference with family (WIF). FIW occurs when family work prevents one from doing work on the job, and WIF occurs when work that needs to be done from the job prevents one from doing family "work." Both FIW and WIF have been widely researched, and some researchers suggest that they are two distinct and separate forms of conflict, as opposed to simply being covered by the umbrella of work-family conflict (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Both FIW and WIF are predictors of stress, but FIW is more common as a primary cause of stress. It is hypothesized that this is due to the fact that many workplaces expect that family life will be kept separate from work. Individuals who experience FIW are more likely to experience stress and consider leaving their jobs (Kelloway, Gottlieb & Barham, 1999).

Another way of looking at work-family conflict is to categorize it into the three ways of dealing with the time based conflicts that often result. These are spillover, compensation and segmentation.

Spillover is a type of conflict that occurs when attitudes, behavior and other aspects of one role are experienced by an individual in a different role (Leiter & Durup, 1996). An example of spillover would be when stress from work becomes so overwhelming that one becomes stressed at home.

In *The Time Bind* (1997), Arlie Hoschild talks about parents who manage their time at home with their children so carefully it is as though "spend quality time with children" is simply another task on their "to do" list. These parents are at work for such long hours that they have little time to spend dealing with the rest of their lives— including housework, children, and other family and friends. She describes this as "Taylorized family life" (51). At the turn of the 20th century, Frederic Taylor introduced the concept of "Scientific Management" to factory workers to make them more efficient. In this fashion, parents are now managing their time with their children at home, setting aside a precise hour of "quality time." The idea that children can be managed in the same way as work tasks apparently does not work as well as parents might hope. Children are not always ready to play or take a bath when their parents are, resulting in conflict despite the good intentions of their parents (Hoschild, 1997). Children do not usually fit very well into a managed system of accomplishing the tasks of the day, and as a result, spillover can cause great stress for both children and their parents.

Spillover does not necessarily have to take the form of attitudes. Conflict may also arise when tasks from work spill over so that parents find themselves putting in long hours at home to finish composing memos or sending emails. Family time starts not the time from the moment when the parent walks in the door, but instead it becomes a carefully and deliberately chosen block of time when the parents can put aside their work, turn off their phone, stop checking emails and simply spend time with their family. Yet

spillover can be positive. For school-age children, having a parent come home early is beneficial, even if it means that the parent must spend some of the time at home doing work.

Compensation is the process of constantly balancing and counterbalancing the demands of each role (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). One of the main ways that people create this balance is by making "informal work accommodations to family." Informal work accommodations to family are ways in which people alter the way they perform their jobs to help them complete family tasks. They are distinguished from other ways to help people deal with work-family conflict by the fact that they are not formal programs, but simply informal allowances made by employers to help employees deal with conflict (Behson, 2002). For example, an employer may allow an employee to take a late their lunch hour later so that they may meet with a child's teacher in the afternoon.

Another way of compensating is to work from home so that parents feel as though they are spending time with their family but are able to get work tasks done at the same time. This type of compensation may be more of a psychological compensation than an actual one, because even though the parent may be present in the home, they are not able to get most family work done while they are doing work from their jobs. Although it cuts out commuting time and allows parents to know more about what their children are doing, it may increase conflict because of the way in which it reduces boundaries between work and family. It would be an impossible feat to be typing a memo and doing housework at the same time, or to be listening to an account of a child's day and having a conference call with colleagues at the same time.

One positive aspect of compensation is the fact that it allows people to make changes that accommodate family and work when either domain has pressing needs. Not

all families, however, have this luxury. Spouses in dual-earner (rather than dual-career, where both partners have professional or managerial level jobs) marriages tend to have less bargaining power with their employer and thus less ability to allow family to take priority when family members need it to (Aryee et al., 1999). In addition, working class jobs tend to have considerably less stability, which further reduces bargaining power (Rubin, 1976).

In addition to having less bargaining power, working class families often lack the resources to make accommodations to their families in the workplace. One of the main reasons is the fact that working-class jobs usually require people to be physically present at the workplace for a certain block to time in order to get the job done. A working class workplace often cannot accommodate family needs with the flexibility that many professional workplaces have (Rubin, 1976).

Segmentation is dividing one's life so that "work is dealt with at work and home is dealt with at home." It is another way of coping with the demands of work and family, but it is different from spillover and compensation because it does not result in feelings of conflict and stress in the same way. Segmentation more clearly separates work and family. Segmentation would then appear to be an excellent coping strategy. Unfortunately, it is not possible for a large majority of people. Segmentation requires a supportive spouse or other person who can deal with the unexpected needs of children or kin that may arise while one spouse is at work (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1982).

Work-family conflict affects individuals, families and the ways in which workplace policies are made. In turn, people, their families and their workplaces all affect how work-family conflict will be experienced. Individual people have personality traits and learned skills that either predispose them to experiencing more work-family

conflict or help mediate its effects. Our families can be affected by work-family conflict, or they can help us to make it a less prevalent force in our lives. Finally, our employers have a legal responsibility to provide certain services that may help us to be there for our families, but some workplaces go above and beyond to provide more extensive services. Understanding the role that these factors play in our lives can help us to deal with work family issues in a positive way.

Individuals and Work Family Conflict

Individual personality characteristics are significant factors related to the levels of work-family conflict that a worker will experience. For example, the amount of behavior based conflict that a person experiences has a great deal to do with his or her personality and interpersonal skills. Behavior based conflict is the biggest predictor of work-family conflict. It occurs when behaviors at either the work place or the home are incompatible with each other (Carlson, 1999).

People who possess personality characteristics such as interpersonal flexibility and who monitor their behavior tend to have less behavior-based conflict. Basically, people who are aware of their behaviors and are able to behave in ways that are situationally appropriate have an easier time changing their behaviors in different situations, and thus experience less behavior based conflict (Bruck, Allen & Spector, 2002).

Carlson (1999) found that personality variables, such as negative affectivity, are a bigger factor in predicting work-family conflict than are situational role variables, such as role conflict and role ambiguity. Negative affectivity is the tendency to experience situations in a dire manner. People with high levels of negative affectivity focus on the negative aspects of all situations. They tend to experience high levels of distress, dissatisfaction and discomfort. Not surprisingly, high levels of negative affectivity are related to high levels of work-family conflict.

People with type A personalities tend to experience more strain and behavior based conflict. Their personalities are characterized by high levels of ambition, persistence and impatience. People with Type A personalities also tend to have high levels of occupational stress, anxiety and depression. Surprisingly, having a type A

personality has not been linked to time based conflict. It is suggested that the reason could be that Type A personalities tend to be highly organized, which may help them to put aside more time to spend with their families. Alternately, they may be so ambitious that they are completely absorbed in their work and do not consider spending time with their families to be a priority (Carlson, 1999).

People with Type A personalities may also have high levels of conscientiousness, a personality trait that involves organization, planfulness, dependability and hardworkingness. People high in conscientiousness tend to have lower levels of work-family conflict (Wayne et al., 2004).

Emotional stability is another personality factor that may be helpful in mediating the effects of work-family conflict. Emotional stability is defined as a lack of neuroticism and lack of negative affectivity. Kinnuen et al. (2003) found emotional stability to be related to positive family climate, low levels of depression and low levels of job exhaustion.

Self-esteem may also be a factor in moderating work-family conflict. People who have high levels of self-esteem are guided more by their own internal cues for behavior than people with low self-esteem. Therefore, when making choices about what would be in their best interest in terms of work and family, they tend to make the choice in their best interest. People with lower levels of self-esteem may be more easily influenced by the external factors in their environment, which can result in them making work and family choices that are not as much in their best interest, and thus experiencing more work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003).

Learned Skills

Some of the ways that people cope with work-family conflict may be due less to inherent personality traits and due more to learned skills. Rosenbaum and Cohen (1999) found that learned resourcefulness was a helpful skill for working mothers of young children to have in coping with work-family conflict. Learned resourcefulness includes such skills as planning, problem solving, positive self-talk and control of emotional and somatic responses to stress. In addition, they found that self-efficacy, which is the belief that you are capable of doing things well, can a useful resource.

A great deal of research on work-family conflict is focused on coping behaviors. Coping behaviors are efforts people take to manage overwhelming demands in any aspect of their lives. Coping involves evaluating the environment in terms of its threats and challenges to one's well being and developing strategies to reduce any negative consequences (Behson, 2002).

How the employee copes with stress can have a great influence on how well he or she deals with work-family conflict. There are two major coping strategies involved in dealing with work-family conflict. Emotion-focused coping involves changing the way that a situation is interpreted. Some examples of this coping strategy include denial and wishful thinking. For example, when faced with a child having trouble in school, a parent may deny that poor grades are a real problem. Alternately, the parent may blame him or herself for not being smart enough to help the child do his or her homework. Wishful thinking could take the form of simply wishing that the child were able to do better in school. The factor that these coping strategies have in common is that none of them involve doing anything that actually helps the situation (Behson, 2002).

Conversely, problem focused coping involves changing one's relationship to the problem by acting in a way that will have an effect. Examples of this include seeking out information on how to deal with the problem or changing one's behavior. The parent whose child was having trouble in school could meet with the teacher or become stricter with the child about completing homework. Problem focused coping is considered to be a better way of handling work-family conflict because it often results in a change in the situation for the better and reduces stress. People who use problem-focused coping tend to exhibit less strain than those who do not use problem focused coping (Behson, 2002).

Negative Effects of Work-family conflict on the Individual

Work-family conflict has been linked with a number of negative physiological and physiological problems. Frone, Russell and Barnes (1996) found that both family to work conflict and work to family conflict were significantly and positively related to depression, poor physical health and alcohol use.

Overall feelings of well-being and quality of life are also affected by work-family conflict. Grant-Vallone and Donaldson (2001) found that work-family conflict predicted self- and co-worker reported positive well being, consistent for people of different genders and in different work and family situations. People who are emotionally invested in their work and family roles tend to be greatly affected by work family conflict and experience a decrease in quality of life as a result (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Spillover may have a negative effect on well being (Geurts et al, 2003).

For employed mothers, work-family conflict was found to be significantly and indirectly related to increased cigarette use and heavy drinking. Researchers have also found that family dissatisfaction was directly and positively related to the frequency of heavy drinking (Frone, Barnes & Farrell, 1994).

Eventually, stress that results from work-family conflict can overwhelm people to the point that they begin to burnout. Burnout occurs when people become so crushed by the demands of their lives that they can no longer function. Often people with burnout experience irritability, negativity, intense self-criticism, anger at those who place demands on them and fatigue. More often than not, people who suffer from burnout feel as though the effort that they are putting into their work and their lives is pointless (Levinson, 1981).

In terms of work-family conflict, both work and family can contribute to burnout. Often, it starts as a result of one factor and builds to the point where all stressors in one's life contribute to the burnout. Working at a job where one's efforts are fruitless or where one gets little or no recognition for the work being done is a common stressor. The every day tasks and situations involved in raising children and or in simply dealing with one's family can be frustrating and upsetting too. Either of these situations can be exacerbated by the emotional overflow from the other domain, resulting in an overwhelming burnout situation (Freudenberger & North, 1985).

Among people for whom work and home present similar challengers, burnout is especially common. Nurturing others as a part of a job and then coming home and having to nurture children and a partner can be very taxing. Two classic examples of people who struggle with this are Nurses and Social Workers (Freudenberger & North, 1985).

Personality characteristics can promote positive adaptation and act as a protector or can act as a risk factor, contributing to stress and burnout. Some aspects of personality may be related to temperament, yet behaviors and ways of coping may be learned, too.

The lens through which we see and handle situations in our lives can have a great

influence on the amount of work family conflict that we experience.

Work-Family Conflict and the Family Subsystem

Work-family conflict can also affect the family—both the individual members, and the family as a whole. Social scientists who study the family have come to view it as a system that consists of individuals who share a history, are emotionally bonded and who formulate strategies for dealing with each other's needs. Understanding the family as a system means understanding that each member is influenced by factors in the lives of the others. Connections between family members are reciprocal and non-linear (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1999). As a result, it is important to understand that work-family conflict is a factor that has effects on all members and subsystems inside the family unit.

Interestingly, for many people work is personally rewarding in ways that can both enhance and conflict with family life. For example, some women identify with working as a means to self-actualization. When they become mothers, not working may be a disadvantageous situation that results in frustration and even depression. Maternal depression can have negative consequences on the marital/partner subsystem and the parent/child subsystem (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 2000).

In addition, if work contributes positively to how parents see themselves, parents may approach their parenting roles and responsibilities more positively. Having more than one role is generally associated with higher self-esteem and greater life satisfaction (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Conversely, loss of the work role may be a parent and family risk factor. For example, the incidence of child abuse is higher among fathers who are unemployed but would rather be working than it is among working fathers (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1999).

In her 1997 book, *The Time Bind*, Arlie Russell Hochschild reveals that some parents actually prefer working to spending time with their children. She did a study at a

large corporation which she calls "Amerco" to protect anonymity. She surveyed over 3,000 working parents and did case studies of a few families. The surveys showed some interesting results. For example, many people assume that working parents continue to work long hours because they can't afford to work shorter ones. In reality, the best paid employees are the least interested in cutting back hours to spend time with their children, and the most poorly paid employees are the most interested. This seems to indicate that for some higher-paid employees, their jobs may be more rewarding to them than their families. In addition, Hochschild mentions a nationwide survey of working mothers that found that the most well off were just as likely as poor mothers to return to work as soon as possible (Hochschild, 1997).

Hochschild also explored the idea that people were afraid of layoffs. One of her questions on the survey asked employees if the reason that they worked long hours was that they were afraid that they would get laid off. Almost all of the respondents said no, even those who had been laid off before. This means that people are drawn to work longer and longer hours not because of fear of losing their jobs but instead, they are drawn to stay at work because of the positive rewards of spending time with their "work family."

Hochschild suggests that the reason why parents so readily give up family time for work is for the social rewards of the workplace. She points out that recent trends in management techniques focus on the family in a way that allows people to feel recognized and appreciated in a way that they never were before. Social networks are encouraged and employees are given the chance to spend time together in teamwork activities that turn many workplaces into a place of warmth and support. "Amerco" encouraged its employees to show their loyalty to the "Amerco family." Unlike the real

families of these people, Amerco provided them with support towards getting along with each other and doing a good job at work. Hochschild points out that there are no ceremonies in the home that reward family members for doing a competent job, and there are no training sessions offered at their convenience on how to understand each other. The workplace can be so rewarding for people that they neglect spending time with their family, and the quality of their family life suffers.

Marital Subsystem

The influence of work-family conflict on the marital subsystem of the family is widely researched. This research focuses on the influence of work-family conflict on individual marital partners and on the marriage as a whole, as well as on how the quality of the marital relationship either contributes to or protects marital partners from work-family conflict. The marital subsystem is greatly impacted by and has a great impact on levels of work-family conflict. An individual's level of work-family conflict was found to be a significant predictor of their partner's level of work-family conflict, more so than perceived work schedule flexibility and family involvement. This means that partners can play a great role in mediating the effects of work-family conflict for each other (Hammer, Allen & Grigsby, 1997).

Different types of partner support have been linked to decreased levels of work-family conflict. Instrumental support involves picking up children from activities and cleaning around the house. Emotional support involves encouragement of work outside the home and attentive listening to the problems that one's partner is having in the workplace. Most research on this topic has been done on women's work-family conflict and how it relates to the supportiveness of her husband. It shows that emotional support

from husbands is more important in terms of reducing work-family conflict than instrumental support (Rosenbaum & Cohen 1999).

Some research indicates that women experience more work-family conflict than their male counterparts. This is largely due to the traditional male roles as "provider" and "breadwinner." Fulfilling these family roles means being at work, so that men can do both at the same time—they can support their family while working. Conversely, women's traditional role of being caretaker in the home requires them to be present in the home to provide for the family in the form of childcare and housework, which cannot be done while at work (Barnett & Baruch, 1987).

Women who come from equalitarian marriages, where both partners believe that they should do roughly equivalent work, tend to have less work-family conflict. It is theorized that women in equalitarian marriages do not necessarily feel that "their place is in the home" and therefore do not feel that they are being bad mothers or wives by working outside of the home. If a marriage is not equalitarian, the division of work is more likely to follow traditional gender lines. In this situation, there is a higher likelihood of time-based strain because of the fact that women who are expected to put in a full day at work and then come home to perform all of their traditional housework duties will be doing almost twice the amount of work that their husbands are doing. A lack of emotional support often results in distress for women in non-equalitarian marriages, possibly because they interpret that to mean that they are not adequately fulfilling their duties for their role in the home. This distress tends not to be felt by women in equalitarian marriages. In a more equalitarian marriage, the housework is split, resulting in less time based strain. In addition, husbands in equalitarian marriages are

more likely to be supportive of their wives efforts to work outside the home, both instrumentally and emotionally (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 1999).

For men, work-family conflict is higher when their wives place more priority on their husband's career than on their own. A possible reason for this may be that these husbands feel great pressure to be successful in their careers and support their families. Another contributing factor may be that now more than ever, men are expected to take an active role in caring for their families. As a result, they are in a bind of having to work as hard as they can to support their families and still spend as much time as possible with their children, instead of just providing for them as they did twenty or thirty years ago (Hammer, Allen and Grigsby, 1997).

Now that there are more dual-career and dual-earner couples, expectations may be changing. It is becoming more common to find families where both partners experience equal levels of work-family conflict. It is assumed that in more equalitarian marriages, men have increased family duties when their wives also work. This results in both partners contributing roughly equal amounts of work in the family and workplace domains. Equal amounts of work leads to equal amounts of responsibility and possibly stress in the form of work-family conflict (Eagle et al., 1997).

Studying the couple as a unit allowed Hammer, Allen and Grigsby (1997) to understand more ways that work-family conflict affects the marital subsystem of the family.   They make a distinction between "dual-earner" and "dual-career" couples. The dual-career couple exists when both partners have a relatively high level of investment in and commitment to their particular careers. The dual-earner couple, on the other hand, exists when one or both partners have just "a job", a way to earn money but not necessarily something that they are particularly committed to.

When compared to couples where only one partner works, dual-career couples do not differ significantly in terms of work-family conflict and life satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Hammer and associates found that in dual-earner couples, work-family conflict was less of a problem because it was easier for one or both parents to place priority on the family. Because of the relative unimportance of their job in their lives, it is an easier choice to make children a priority. They also found that the symptom of burnout had the most significant crossover effects from one spouse to another in both dual-earner and dual-career couples. In addition, an individual's level of work-family conflict was shown to be an excellent predictor of his or her partner's level of work-family conflict, for both types of couples.

Interestingly, marital status alone has been shown to have little influence on levels of work-family conflict (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 1999; Hammer, Allen & Grigsby, 1997). This may be due to the fact that emotional support is not present in all marriages, and for people who are either married or divorced, emotional support can come from people other than their partners. It also may be because work-family conflict seems to be influenced so much by the individual and the culture of the workplace.

The Marital Subsystem throughout Different Stages of Development

Work-family conflict may focus on different issues depending on one's life stage. For example, in the early years of marriage for young couples, building a marriage and two careers at the same time can be difficult. Some young couples worry that their career goals will prevent them from being able to build a strong marriage or raise a family. Interestingly, people whose mothers worked during their childhoods feel less worry about being able to balance work and family demands than their peers who had stay-at-home

mothers.   It seems that when people have mothers who modeled balancing work and family, they are able to see themselves balancing it also (Barnett et al., 2003)

Work also influences the marital subsystem in later stages of development. Many women who have not worked while they were raising their children will go back to work once their children leave the house. This can result in marital stress because men are usually reaching the peak of their careers at this time in their lives. At the same time, their wives may be looking towards beginning their own path of career achievement. This realization can bring a great deal of stress into the lives of these men, and as a result, it will become a stressor on the marriage. Often, realizing that they have reached the peak of their careers will result in a shift of focus for these men from achievement in their jobs toward other activities in their lives, which may not be in synch with the goals of their wives (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1999).

Retirement is another factor that can cause stress in the family system in later life. It is somewhat ironic that even when the working years are done, work can cause conflict for families. One source of conflict for individuals in the marriage is making the change in identity from a "working person" to a "retired person". For those individuals who have been forced into retirement for one reason or another, this can be a very difficult transition to make.   Some of the conflict that retirement causes also comes from having to renegotiate the family system to allow for the large changes in free time and new activities that may be pursued by either or both partners. In some marriages, work has been used to keep husband and wife apart so that they don't have to deal with the conflicts in their marriage. As a result, retirement can present a large problem when spouses are suddenly spending all day together. In addition, conflict can result when husbands retire before their wives. It is suggested that the reason for this comes from a

tendency for husbands not to do more housework after they retire, so these wives are in the situation of doing work at work and coming home to more work while their husbands do little to help (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1999).

Children

In general, children are shaped by their parent's workplace in an indirect way. This effect is best understood through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Ecological Development. This theory states that children develop within a complex system of relationships in multiple levels in their environment, including systems in which they do not physically exist (Berk, 2002).

The first level in Bronfenbrenner's theory is the microsystem. This consists of the activities and interaction patterns in the child's immediate surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This can be the immediate classroom and the interaction that a child has with his or her teacher and classmates or the interaction a child has with a parent in the family. For example, mothers who are employed may provide a model for some girls. Daughters of employed mothers have been found to get better grades in school and to be more self-confident (Scarr, Philips & McCartney, 1989). The quality of daycare that the employer makes accessible is another factor that may impact the child on this level. High quality daycare was found to impact children's development in such a profound way that it actually compensated for poor quality home environments in some cases (Scarr, Phillips & McCartney, 1989). In addition, many children in employer-provided day care programs may have classmates who may be the children of their parents' co-workers, so that workplace issues may have even more of a direct influence.

The second level in Bronfenbrenner's theory is the mesosystem. The mesosystem encompasses connections between microsystems such as home, school, neighborhood,

and daycare center, that foster children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Even

though a child might not be directly interacting with the workplace of his or her parent,

the parent exists as a connection between the child and the workplace. Spillover from

parents in terms of attitudes, behaviors, or stress from the workplace can have an impact

on the child on this level. It was found that parent's stress from work can raise the level

of tension between parents and their adolescent children (Crouter & Bumpus, 2001).

Parental beliefs surrounding issues of work and family would also affect the child at this

level. It was found that women tend to have more positive experiences of motherhood if

their work status matches their interest in working. Thus, if a woman feels pressure from

her spouse to stay home when she wants to work or work when she wants to stay home,

her experience of motherhood may be less positive (Pistrang, 1984). In addition, marital

conflict between parents around work-family conflict would impact the child at the

mesosystem level. It was found that both mothers and fathers are more likely to have

tense interactions with their children the day after a marital conflict (Almeida,

Wethington & Chandler, 1999).

The exosystem consists of places that do not contain the children but which

manage to affect their experiences in the settings that the children are in. For the most

part, a parent's workplace would exist in the exosytem for a child. Changes in workplace

policy, as in different employee provided daycare providers would impact children on

this level.

The macrosystem is the outermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's model, and it

includes the cultural values, laws, customs and resources of a society (1986). The culture

has a great influence on how work-family conflict is experienced in a child's life. For

example, the United States has traditionally favored stay-at-home mothers and thus some

of the policies in this country do not adequately address the needs of families with two

working parents. Many other countries have more extensive maternity and paternity

leave and government provided day-care programs (Scarr, Phillips & McCartney, 1989).

For parents, childrearing can be a source of great stress. When asked what the

largest contributor to work-family conflict was, an Employee Development head replied

simply: "Children" (Appendix B). Mothers, especially, tend to experience more time put

into childcare, more disputes with their children and greater role strain than fathers, even

when both mother and father are working the same number of hours (Lee et.al., 2003).

Non-normative caregiving

In later stages of life, many adult children find themselves caring for their own

parents. Sometimes adult children have developmental issues that require parents to care

for them more than most other adult children. Both of these situations are considered to

be non-normative caregiving. Non-normative caregiving produces more distress in the

caregiver than normative caregiving. Interestingly, distress does not always occur with

caring for kin. Often, there is a feeling of satisfaction in the giver that he or she is able to

"give back" to older relatives after they have given so much to him or her. It is also

theorized that reaching out to relatives in such a meaningful way makes people feel as

though they have a happy, complete family life. Distress does occur, however, when

caregiving takes up a great deal of time and interferes with the ability to do work and

have a career (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993).

Families are impacted by work-family conflict in many ways. The family as a

whole and individual members can be impacted. Despite the problems that can arise,

work is necessary for family functioning. Work allows families to support themselves,

and offers many psychological rewards for individual family members, but it can be

problematic when it interferes with normative family functioning.

The Role of the Workplace in Mediating Work-family conflict

People spend a great deal of time at work—for most people, at least 40 hours a week. Employers have great power to provide services and create workplace cultures that allow their employees to live a life that finds a balance between work and family. The way that a workplace is structured can also affect the amount of work-family conflict that people experience.

Work-family conflict also occurs in both directions--family interference with work and work interference with family. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) describe these as two distinct forms of conflict, because they come from different sources. The direction that conflict originates from seems to depend on the differences in structure of different jobs and careers. For example, Bruck, Allen and Spector (2002) interviewed professional employees and found that family interfering with work was not related to job satisfaction. On the other hand, a longitudinal investigation by Kelloway, Gottelib and Barnam (1999) suggests that family interference with work is a better predictor of employee strain than work interference with family for non-professional employees. For many non-professional employees, the workplace is a highly structured environment. The home however, is a place where accommodations can be made and plans delayed without any serious consequences.

For people who work in more flexible workplaces, the existence of ways to accommodate family needs that occur during the working hours can be a great help in managing work-family conflict. These are commonly described as "informal work accommodations to family" (Behson, 2002). Informal work accommodations to family are any techniques that allow employees to deal with family issues at work or during working hours. They are accommodations to family that temporarily and informally

adjust work patterns to help employees balance work and family responsibilities. Since these accommodations are not permanent, the actual structure of the job does not change. These include using lunch hours to deal with family matters, using the office phone to call and check in on children, and leaving early to take children to doctor's appointments and coming in later or doing the work at home to make up for the missed work time. Research has found that flexibility in the workplace that allows for informal work accommodations to family can be more important than the formal work-family programs and benefits that many organizations offer. Unlike the use of informal work-family programs alone, the frequent use of informal work accommodations to family has been associated with lower levels of stress (Behson, 2002).

In addition, research shows that these informal work accommodations to family may decrease absenteeism and burnout, and may also increase the quality of job performance (Behson, 2002). The fact that taking an afternoon off to take a child to a doctor's appointment actually decreases absenteeism seems slightly counterintuitive, but from the perspective of an employer, if the employee is getting the necessary work done later, they are not at a loss. If employees have to call in sick or take family leave to go to a doctor's appointment, then, in all likelihood, none of the day's work would get done. The organization would also be paying the employee for the time that he or she wasn't working, and pay for time not worked is the most costly benefit by far that organizations offer (Dessler, 364, 2002).

Clearly, these informal work accommodations are not applicable to all employees in all jobs. Certain jobs require the employee to be present at the workplace for a certain amount of time, as in factory work. Still, for the employees whose workplaces allow

them such flexibility, this can be a great benefit for helping them deal with work-family conflict.

Dependent Care Benefits

A great deal of literature discusses the formal role of the employer in reducing work-family conflict. This can range from formal dependent care programs to simply increased levels of manager support for employees with young children. Employer-provided formal dependent care programs are sometimes known as "family-responsive programs." Family responsive programs must include the legally required family leave programs, but can range to full service programs that help parents to meet the demands of their family life without having to take time away from work (Greenberg, 2002).

Family leave programs are required by law (Greenberg, 2002), yet some companies go beyond the legal requirements and allow their employees to take up to a year off after the birth or adoption of a child. AT&T is one of these companies that found it advantageous from a corporate perspective to allow their employees to take up to a year of unpaid leave because the cost was only 32 percent of the employee's annual salary, compared with 150 percent to find and hire a permanent replacement (Greenberg, 2002).

Some companies also provide child-care facilities for employees or subsidies for child care. The manner in which companies subsidize these programs is different at each organization. Some companies will pay for everything, some will just make the location available, and others will make the cost based on a sliding scale—employees who make more have to pay more. Many organizations allow for a certain amount of tax-sheltered money from an employer's pay to be set aside in "flexible spending accounts." The money from these accounts can be used to pay for child care.

In addition, some companies offer elder care programs so that employees who are struggling to care for their parents don't have to worry about finding care for them during the day. Other companies have services that help employees to identify and secure child care and elder care programs. (Greenberg, 2002).

With companies that do provide childcare on-site or nearby, there are advantages and disadvantages. Finding adequate child care can be a major source of stress for people (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 1999).   It is a relief for many parents to know that their child is safe and near by in case of illness or other emergency. At the same time, having all of your children's peers be the children of your coworkers can provide an extra source of stress.

Flexible Work Schedules

Having a flexible work schedule is ranked as the most valuable benefit option by employees (Allen, 2001). Flexible work schedules allow employees to adapt their working hours in a variety of ways to meet their needs.

Flextime programs are policies that allow employees to alter the time that they get into work and leave. Despite the fact that those employees are still working a full day, they can meet the needs of their children more easily. The way that they adjust their schedule may mean that children may only have to go to before or after school care programs instead of both. Flextime has been ranked by employees as the most valuable family benefit option, ahead of day care programs. It allows parents to have more control over their schedules, and they find that this is far more valuable than just having a child care program or center available, because they would often prefer to be the ones doing the childcare. Having two parents who work flextime may mean that their school age children never have to attend day care. Typically, flextime will require parents to work

during a core time period during the middle of the day and then allow them to structure

the rest of the day according to the needs of their families. These policies do not work

for all parents, obviously, because certain professions require that employees are at work

for a certain period of time at a certain time of day. People who work in retail, people

who work as support staff and people who do shift work are examples of those who do

not benefit from these policies. For those jobs that are more conducive to flexibility,

however, this can be a great way to help balance work-family conflict (Greenberg, 2002).

Teleworking is a third type of flexible work schedule where employees are

permitted to work in their homes a few or all days per week and fax or email in the work

that they have done. It was found that teleworking reduces work-family conflict.

However, in order for an employee to be a successful teleworker, they must have a

supportive spouse, good self management stills, and a way to minimize interruptions

from children (Madsen, 2003).

Teleworking can be great for people who have a long commute that adds extra

hours to their time away from home. Employees who work from home tend to experience

lower levels of work-family conflict. They also tend to have higher motivation to do well

in their jobs (Hill, Ferris & Martinson, 2003). Supervisors must be able to trust

employees to work unsupervised and complete a full day's work at home, which can be a

great obstacle to overcome for some employees (Appendix A).

Some organizations are offering another type of flexible work schedule called

"compressed workweeks". An employee who works a compressed work week would

still work the same number of hours, just spread out differently. Usually, they still work

80 hours over each two week period, but will work an extra hour each day so that they

can have a full day where they are not working every two weeks. This works out to be

advantageous for employers as much as employees. Having a weekday without work means that employees can schedule doctor's appointments meetings with teachers and other things that have to take place during the workday on their day off. This results in employees actually spending less time away from their work (Appendix A).

Job sharing is a practice that allows two employees to work together to perform the same job. It allows employees to have a job that has the importance of a full-job, and yet still allows them half of a workweek to spend with their families. Job sharing is becoming more popular because it satisfies employers who still want to retain skilled employees but do not want to take their jobs into part time positions, because job sharing allows for the position to remain full time. This is especially popular in service industries, where it is important that someone in a particular position is always available and having someone be in a position only part of the time would not work (Greenberg, 2002).

Some companies provide an even wider array of less traditional benefits to their employees who are raising families. SAS Institute in North Carolina is well known for its success with these benefits. Employees are given access to on-site laundry and dry cleaning, take home family dinners, and an incredible array of other unusual benefits. The head of the SAS, Jim Goodnight, credits the success of the company to benefits that attract and keep highly talented and skilled employees (www.sas.com).

Family-friendly benefits can have advantages for employees and their employers. Unfortunately, these benefits do little to actually reduce stress unless changes are also made to the organizational culture. Employees who feel that they will be judged by their supervisor for taking advantage of these programs will be understandably less likely to do so. The mere existence of programs like this does not guarantee that employees will feel

reduced stress; the culture of the organization must also change to allow employees to make informal accommodations to family in the workplace (Allen, 2001).

One of the organizational characteristics that influence levels of work-family conflict is the perception that the employer is family-supportive. This was found to be an important factor in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, lowered turnover intentions and lower levels of work-family conflict. In addition, supervisor support of benefits, especially flexible work scheduling, was found to be the most important factor in terms of positive perceptions of the employer (Allen, 2001).

Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness (1999) focus on "work-family culture" which they describe as the extent to which a work place supports the efforts of its employees to balance their family lives by taking advantage of both informal work accommodations to family and formal benefits. They point out that by not encouraging employees to make use of these benefits and accommodation techniques, employers are contributing to stress in the lives of their employees, which results in a lower ability to be productive and creative on the job. Employees who felt their organizations to be supportive of their efforts to balance work and family were less likely to leave and had lower levels of work-family conflict.

In addition, the mere perception that a workplace is supportive of family can help employees to cope with stress. Allen's (2001) study showed that employees who think that their company is more supportive of family had less work-family conflict and greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment. She found that employee's feelings of company support were not necessarily related to formal benefit systems.

Some employees become so frustrated in dealing with employers that they leave and start their own businesses. In the past 20 years, there has been an accelerated rate of

new business formation, especially among women. Women especially feel motivated to seek the freedom to manage work and family that entrepreneurship allows. Despite the perceived freedom, owning one's own business can often mean a great deal of stress from the responsibility required to make it successful. In addition, devoting too much time to family can mean that the enterprise suffers from not having enough time and energy put into it. Findings by Parasuramian et. al., (1996) suggest that the autonomy that owning one's own business allows means that entrepreneurs experience less family-to-work conflict and higher career satisfaction. So, for some people struggling to balance family and work, entrepreneurship may be a beneficial choice.

The employer has a remarkable ability to provide programs, atmosphere and services that can produce positive change in people's lives and mediate work-family conflict. Formal programs such as child-care benefits and flexible time scheduling can be helpful, but the organizational culture and acceptance of the idea of being a family-friendly workplace goes the farthest to impact the amount of work-family conflict employers cause in people's lives.

<u>Conclusions</u>

Work-family conflict is indeed an issue that can affect almost all aspects of people's lives. People's families, their workplaces and even their own mental and physical health can be affected.

Looking at work-family conflict from a systems perspective, it is clear that there are even larger issues involved. We live in a culture that tells us to always want more, so that we work and work to make more money that we don't have time to spend, at the expense of our relationships with our partners, families and friends. As a result, our workplace becomes our home and begins to meet many of our social needs. Concerns about gender expectations and the need to make sure that negative gender stereotypes and molds are not perpetuated cause women especially to work harder to prove wrong the people who have attempted to hold them back. Government policies and the availability of jobs influence the need for employers to please and attract good employees, which in turn affects the level of benefits and services that they are willing to provide.

Yet there is not always a conflict between work and family. Many people find employers who are especially sensitive to their needs, partners whose work is more flexible than theirs and who can pick up the pieces of their lives, and other ways to make things work. Some people have a choice whether or not they will work, and others find that in order to make ends meet, both partners must work. Compared with 30 years ago, the percent of a family's paycheck that went to the mortgage has increased 60% (Wallis, 2003). Yet it is not always a blessing to be able to chose whether or not to work: there can be a great deal of guilt associated with making the choice to work and put children into day care simply because one wants to work.

The one, constant theme in all of the literature that I reviewed seemed to be the concept of time. Children have a different concept of time than adults, and if parents try to make children fit into their time schedules, it does not work. Adults are spending more and more of their time at work, and work is creeping into our leisure time with Nextel phones beeping in, and BlackBerrys providing constant, unrelenting email access. People are crying out for their employers not to judge them by their "Face Time" spent at their desks and at work but by the quality of work that they do.

It is difficult to figure out what a solution to this problem would be. I think that we need a change in the "we can do it all and have it all" mentality. In my observation, we are quickly proving to ourselves that the idea of having the perfect job, home, children, family and life is an impossible dream. The one concept that does shine clearly through to me is that for those of us who are lucky enough to be able to do so, we need to make choices. We need to decide what is important in our lives and what isn't, because so often, trying to have everything leaves us with nothing at all.

Limitations

Despite the wealth of information on the topic of work-family conflict, there were many shortcomings to the studies that I reviewed. The main shortcoming was the fact that the conflict between work and family is usually discussed as being a causal relationship, and yet most of the studies done are cross-sectional (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). Two of the studies attempted to solve this problem by using longitudinal data. Unfortunately, both of them only collected data two times, six months apart. I doubt that families or workplaces go through enough changes in six months for this data to show much difference.

Another problem that I found with the methodology is the fact that many of the researchers sent out surveys and requested that people return them. It can be inferred that people who took the time to fill out the surveys did not have high levels of time based conflict, because otherwise they would probably not have been able to take the time to volunteer. In addition, people who have strong feelings on the subject of work-family conflict due to personal experience were probably more likely to volunteer than those who were not experiencing work-family conflict.

In addition, some of the studies contradicted each other. Depending on the employee's job and position, there were different problems and different solutions for work-family conflict. None of the studies that I could find fully addressed the fact that different jobs require different skills to manage work-family conflict successfully. For example, Bruck, Allen and Spector (2002) interviewed non-professional employees and found that family interfering with work was not really related to job satisfaction. However, these employees also do not have a way for their families to interfere with their work; they work in shifts with rigid time schedules and do not have access to a personal telephone line or computer. For employees who do have these things, family interfering with work is a different issue altogether. In Behson (2002), most of the employees have professional jobs. He found that family interfering with work was linked to higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of family conflict. It seems that for employees who have access to a means to accommodate their families—those with flexible work schedules, and constant telephone and email access, family interfering with work is a positive way to reduce work-family conflict.

I also noticed that there seems to be a hope among researchers that their study is going to find "the" link between work-family conflict and other factors of people's lives.

I was struck while reading the studies that it seems as though reducing work-family conflict is different for each person, depending on their personality characteristics and coping skills, their level of support from their family, friends, coworkers and supervisors and the culture of their organization. I think that case studies of different members of different kinds of organizations would make a great contribution towards really figuring out the tools that will help people and their families reduce work-family conflict.

Most of the research I found was done using white parents in straight, two-parent middle class to upper-middle class families. There is a distinct lack of information on families who do not fit this mold, families who would likely have different reasons for working, different ways to deal with work-family conflict and different cultural forces shaping how their families function. The lack of research on families who are not middle to upper-middle class means that working class families, would more likely have people who view working to be less of a means of self-actualization and personal growth (Rubin, 1976) and thus would experience work-family conflict differently are somewhat ignored. In addition, there are few studies done on other family members. Children, grandparents, aunts and uncles and other family members who live in the home may have a unique perspective on how work-family conflict affects both the family as a whole and the individual members. Current organizational solutions to work-family conflict, which tend to take the dominant literature into account, are probably not adequately addressing the needs of the all the people they are designed to serve.

In terms of further research on the topic, I would be interested to see the results of a longitudinal study done over a longer time period. It would also be useful to have a study that clearly distinguished between shift workers and salary workers with more flexible time schedules to better determine their different needs in terms of ways to deal

with work-family conflict. It would be interesting to see a study that included many different types of families, from all different backgrounds. Lastly, I think that research needs to be done that takes into account the perspective of the entire immediate family of the employee so that we could get a more accurate picture of the impact of work-family conflict on the family as a whole.

Appendix A: Interview with Director of Human Resources at a Municipal Government City Hall

1. What programs do you have to deal with work-family conflict?

Flexible workweek, which depends on the job structure and doesn't apply in a lot of jobs, but it consists of work adding up to 75 hours every two weeks, and however those hours are reached is pretty much fine.

Compressed workweek, which consists of working 75 hours in 9 days—the hours are still there, but in fewer days.

Teleworking, which is using computers to work from home. 31 employees, which is 15% of the employee population, use teleworking. We are going for 20%. We won an award for teleworking.

Other policies are earning compensatory time, similar to flextime, for overtime-exempt employees. Every hour goes into a bank, with a maximum of 80 hours.

2. What one do you see as most important and why?

All work differently for different people, depending on their circumstances.

3. What changes in how work-family conflict is dealt with have you seen since you started working?

All the programs that I described before are new. Employees like the programs because they have more time with their families and feel that they have accomplished more work. The benefit to the employer with especially compressed workweek is that employees are scheduling appointments that need to be taken care of during the workday such as doctor's appointments during their day off and not taking off time during the workweek. The only problem that we have had so far is with teleworking; we have had two people get in trouble for not doing work at home.

4. What, in your opinion, is the biggest factor contributing to work family conflict?

Unexpected or unplanned events.

5. What would be your ideal solution, if any?

The employer needs to have the supervisors trained so that they have enough flexibility and the ability to plan projects with their employees. Also that they include a flexible time table.

Employees need to use honesty when they use leave so that they can build trust with their employer.

Appendix B: Interview with Employee Development Head.

1. What programs do you have to deal with work-family conflict?

We have the faculty-staff assistance program, which is run by a licensed social worker. She deals with individuals or pairs mostly and deals with issues that people may have with their co-workers or supervisors. Sometimes she deals with issues that impact work. She has a ton of resources for people to use. Any information shared with her is kept confidential. Sometimes, she does work retreats. The parts of people are not separate—work, family, and the whole person are all connected.

There are also individual employee development programs. For example, programs on communication skills and time management workshops and health fairs all impact family life.

In addition, the philosophy underpinning benefits is that they be helpful to people. Another example is that people get money, up to $150 to see a financial planner to plan college savings for their kids and retirement.

Philosophically, the university is looking out for people's welfare more than the bottom line.

Another thing would be job-sharing, usually around a woman having a child. The department head, dean and colleagues have to support it. Sometimes there are problems if the colleagues don't support it. Another thing that people really like is the fact that people get out at 3 p.m. on Friday, which lets them leave early for vacation or go shopping when the stores aren't as busy.

Flextime is on a manager or an individual basis if the managers and individuals feel that it is advantageous. The Undergraduate admissions and financial people have teleworked for a long time. I used to do that and I would get 175% more done when I was working from home.

There are informal arrangements based on individual circumstances.

2. What one do you see as most important and why?

Faculty-staff assistance. Also the cultural and other benefits that come along with being at a university like the theater, sporting events, use of the on campus gym. Having the chance to expose kids to stuff. Also being able to hire students to babysit is convenient. We are probably pretty conservative in terms of work-family policies and procedures; it is really on an individual needs basis.

3. What changes in how work-family conflict is dealt with have you seen since you started working?

More of a realization and understanding of work-family issues especially mothers and attempts at accommodating their needs. Occasionally bring a child in. Maybe it is more in terms of awareness and sensitivity, but it hasn't been formalized. Although, maybe that is ok. The only problem is that you are dependent on the benevolence of your supervisor.

4. What, in your opinion, is the biggest factor contributing to work family conflict?

Children and childcare arrangements.

5. What would be your ideal solution, if any?

        If the University culture, philosophy, policies and thinking, and the intent with which employers and employees use benefits were all good, things would be better. It would be great if we could come at this with a countercultural approach and take a values approach to how we value our leisure time and putting in a fair day's work.

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