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Theoretical Progression of Work and Life Relationship: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

In this study we will discuss the historical changes in the work and life relationship which resulted in development of new theories. After an introduction to work-life relationships, different theories of work and life are presented in the second section of this paper. These theories are categorized into three generations based on their characteristics in the historical evolution of work-life studies. In the third section measures of work and life spillovers are described. In section four, critiques of the current methodologies which is being used in the work and life studies are presented. Discussion section which is presented in following section includes some arguments regarding the ways to select the most appropriate theories for work-life studies. Also in this section some recommendations are presented for enhancing the commonly used methodologies of the research on work and life relationships. Finally, in the last section, some recommendations for future studies are presented.

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Theoretical Progression of Work and Life Relationship: A Historical Perspective

1. Introduction

Individuals have different social roles such as the employee role, the parent role, the marital role, the leisure role, and the home management role (Small & Riley, 1990). Historically, work-family studies have focused on work-family conflict, where researchers argue that conflict between work roles and family roles can be a source of stress that influences important “physical” and “physiological” outcomes (Adams, King, & King, 1996). Work-family conflict has been studied under three forms of inter-domain conflict in work-family context: time based, strain based, and behavior based (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). These studies focus on negative and/or positive work to family and/or family to work conflicts (Grzywacz 2000; Grzywacz & Marks 2000a).

In her historical study of work-family relationships MacDermid (2005) describes the importance of studying work-life (work-family) relationships for the four major stakeholders involved in this relationship: researchers, employers, workers, and workers’ families. She explicitly explains that empirical findings justify that this area of study *matters* to these four groups. Many academic studies about work and family relationships have been published during the past two decades, which shows the attention of researchers to this topic. Employers want to decrease this conflict with an underlying assumption that workers who experience less conflict will be more productive. Also studies show that work-family conflict is a key indicator of workers and their family’s quality of life (Galinsky, Bond, and Friedman., 1993). These evidences show the importance of this area of research for different groups of stakeholders.

2. Work-Family Theories

Work and family studies mainly focus on studying the conflict between different roles that individuals have in their society, specifically their roles at work, and their roles as a family member. Boundary theory and border theory are the two fundamental theories that researchers have used to study these role conflicts. Other theories are built on the foundations of these two theories.

Most of the early studies in this area (e.g. Small & Riley, 1990) have looked at the relation between the work and the family from *boundary theory* perspective. According to this theory, since people have different roles in their workplace and in their family life, therefore they are frequently engaged in the *role transformation* (Chen, Lai, Lin, Cheng, 2005); which means, they have to leave a role and play another role (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). According to this theory, in the context of work and family relationship, individuals can not have different roles at the same time.

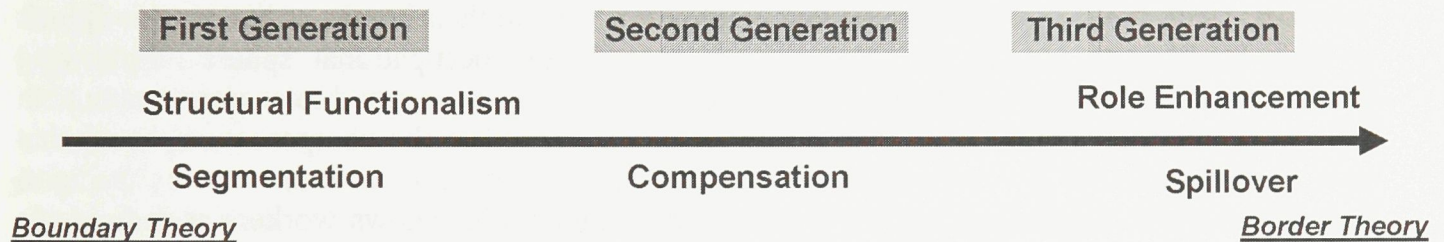
Border theory is a “new theory that improves the work-family theories” (Chen *et al.* 2005). According to this theory work and family are two different spheres that influence each

other (Chen *et al.* 2005). This theory focuses on identifying the factors that create work and family conflict, and tries to find ways to manage these two spheres and the border between them, in order to reach a balance between work related roles and family related roles (Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2002).

Based on explicit study of these two fundamental theories, Nippert-Eng (1995, 1996) explains that individuals can select different boundary management strategies on a continuum ranging from segmentation to integration. In other word, individuals may select one of the divisional strategies: keeping distance between work and family life and treat work and family roles as different roles that playing one role requires leaving another role; or integrating work and family domains, and try to manage a balance between these two spheres (Nancy P. Rothbard, Katherine W. Phillips, and Tracy L. Dumas, 2005)

Based on the literature review of more than fifty scholarly journal articles we identified five major theories for explaining work and family relationship: Structural Functioning, Segmentation, Compensation, Role Enhancement, and Spillover. In this section of the paper these theories will be explained in the context of the *integration-segmentation continuum*. We categorized these five theories into three groups (first, second and third generations) based on their historical evolution (Figure I). In the following sections this historical evolution is explicitly explained.

Figure I: Work-Family Theories; Integration-Segmentation Continuum



2.1 First Generation of Work-Family Theories

The theories presented in this category are the earliest theoretic views of work-family relationships. These theories –Structural Functionalism and Segmentation– have two fundamental common characteristics:

- A. Approving the separation between work and family life.
- B. Focusing merely on the *negative* effect of work and family relationships.

Structural Functionalism

The roots of this theory can be traced back to early twentieth century, when industrial revolution was separating economic work from the family home (MacDermid, 2005). World War II (WWII) revitalized the economy after the big depression, largely through the boom in manufacturing of bullets, guns, planes, and jeeps. During WWII, large numbers of productive workforce, mainly men, were sent overseas for the war. As a result women were encouraged to enter the work force. Immediately after the war many women who had recently entered into the workforce, were persuaded to return to home, engage in their family roles, and to make room for

returning soldiers to join the work force (Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, and Steinmetz, 1993). The structural functionalism theory which emerged following the World War II was largely influenced from the industrial revolution and the changes in the social role of men and women during this period. Structural functionalism theory believes in the existence of separation between institution (workplace) and families. According to this theory these two (Workplace and Families) work best “when men and women specialize their activities in separate sphere, women at home doing expressive work and men in the workplace performing instrumental tasks” (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993).

Segmentation

The roots of this theory, as one of the earliest view of work and life relationship, go back to industrial revolution of early twentieth century as well. Based on this theory work and home life do not affect each other (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), since they are segmented and independent from each other (Hart, 1999).

Blood and Wolfe (1960), who were pioneers of this perspective, applied this concept to blue collar workers. They explained that workers in unsatisfying or un-involving jobs would *naturally* separate work and home. In 1979, Piotrkowski, opens the way to the development of second generation of work-family theories by arguing that this segmentation of work and home would be a *deliberate* rather than *natural* act.

2.2 Second Generation of Work-Family Theories: Compensation theory

In 1979, Piotrkowski explained that employees “look to their homes as havens, [and] look to their families as sources of satisfaction lacking in the occupational sphere”. Following Piotrkowski’s (1979) work, Lambert (1990) explored the workers’ respond to occurrences in both their work and their family lives. The results of this study led to the compensation theory that says, “Individuals may try to compensate for a lack of satisfaction in work or home by trying to find more satisfaction in the other”. The theory of compensation views workers as individuals who are “seeking out greater satisfaction from their work or family life as a result of being dissatisfied with the other” (Lambert, 1990).

What distinguishes compensation theory from the previous theories is that, in compensation theory, for the first time, the positive effect of work to family has been recognized. However, it is important to note that the original view of compensation theory (e.g. Piotrkowski, 1979) had focused on positive effect of *family life to work*, and it was only the more advanced view of compensation theory (Lambert, 1990) that recognized the positive effect of *work to family* life along with its negative effect on the work-family relationships. This latter view of work and family theory led to development of new theories –third generation– of work and family which we discuss in the next section.

2.3 Third Generation of Work-Family Theories

The third generation of work-family theories acknowledged the relationship between work and family. Moreover, these theories considered both positive and negative effect of work to family and family to work.

Role enhancement theory

According to the role enhancement theory “multiple roles bring rewards such as income, heightened self-esteem, opportunities for social relationships, and the experience of success” (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). From this perspective, the combination of certain roles has a positive, rather than a negative effect on well-being, and “only beyond certain upper limits may overload and distress occur” (Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, and Pulkkinen, 2006). This theory states that “participation in one role is made better or easier by virtue of participation in the other role” (Frone, 2003). Moreover, this theory acknowledges the negative effect of work-family relationship, in which, only beyond a certain upper limits may overload and distress occur, however, the central focuses of this perspective is mainly on the *positive* effects of work and family relationship, such as resource enhancement (Kirchmeyer, 1992), work-family success or balance (Milkie & Peltola, 1999), positive spillover (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b) and facilitation (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Wayne *et al.* , 2004).

Spillover

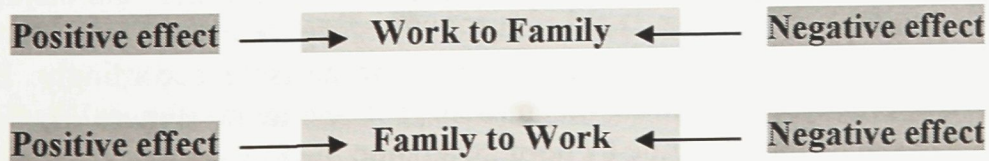
Spillover is a process by which “an employee’s experience in one domain affects their experience in another domain” (Hart, 1999). Spillover occurs “where the events of one environment affect the other” (Glowinkowski & Cooper, 1986).

Spillover as the most popular view of relationship between work and family, considers multidimensional aspects of work and family relationship (Figure II). These multidimensional each type of spillover is presented as follow (Kirchmeyer, 1993):

- Positive Work-to-Family spillover involves the spread of satisfaction and stimulation at work to high levels of energy and satisfaction at home.
- Negative Work-to-Family spillover refers to how the strains produced by stressful work situations drain and preoccupy the individual making it difficult to participate adequately in family life.
- Positive Family-to-Work spillover involves non-work supporting, facilitating, or enhancing work.
- Negative Family-to-Work spillover involves non-work making work difficult, problematic, or unsatisfactory.

Spillover occurs “where the events of one environment affect the other” (Glowinkowski & Cooper, 1986). According to this theory “workers carry the emotions, attitudes, skills and behaviors from their work role into their family life and vice versa” (Lambert, 1990). Theoretically, Spillover is perceived to be of two types: Positive or Negative (Crouter, 1984; Lambert, 1990).

Figure II: Multidimensional aspects of Spillover



3. Measures of Work-family Spillover

In this section of the paper the fundamental models of work-family relationship are presented. The focus of this study is on the methodologies and specifically the measures that scholars have used in their models for assessing the work-family relationships. After presenting some of the famous models in this area and explaining their contributions to this area of study, the critiques of this models is presented based on the literature review of scholarly articles. The next part of this paper presents our recommendations for designing better methodologies for measuring work and family relationships.

3.1 Small & Riley Work Spillover Scale

In their pioneering study of work and family relationship of bank executives Small and Riley (1990) developed a Work Spillover Scale (WSS) consisting of 20 items. The authors assessed the extent to which work had *negative* spillover into four major family roles: the parent role, the marital role, the leisure role, and the home management role.

One of the highlights of their study is that the data was collected from both the workers and their spouses. The sample of the study consisted of 618 bank executives, and of 236 of their spouses. Different versions of questionnaires were prepared for workers and their spouses to measure the negative effect of work-family relationships (See Appendix I and II). This methodology can help to decrease the self assessment bias in data collection.

In their 1990 study Small & Riley were focusing only on negative effect of work-family relationship. Their main goal was to measure the *role-conflict* of workers when they transform their role. Although these researchers did not develop a specific measure for *positive* spillover, but some of the items in their WSS reflect the concept of positive spillover. Therefore, on the Integration-Segmentation Continuum (Figure I), Small & Riley's perspective can be pinpointed around the middle of continuum, between second generation theories and third generation theories.

3.2 Grzywacz and Mark's 16-item Scale

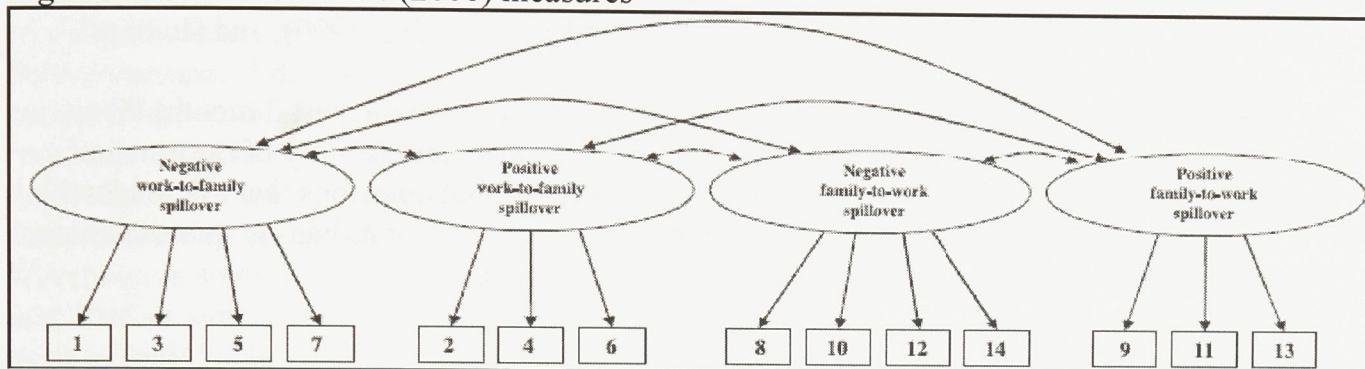
In their groundbreaking study Grzywacz and Mark (2000) developed a scale for measuring all dimensions of the work and family spillover. Their scale consisted of 16 items (Appendix III). Using the data (N=1986) from National Survey of Midlife Development in United State (MIDUS), the authors found that negative work to family spillover, negative family to work spillover, positive family to work spillover, and positive work to family spillovers are "distinct work-family experiences" (Grzywacz and Mark, 2000).

Unlike Small and Riley (1990) who had focused on role-conflict (and therefore, negative workfamily relationship), Grzywacz and Mark (2000) recognized both positive and negative effect of work-family relationship, and developed their measure accordingly. Based on the description of the proposed Integration-Segmentation Continuum (Figure I), Grzywacz and Mark's perspective can be best describe by third generation theories.

3.3 Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts and Fulkkinen's four-factor Model

In their study of 202 Finnish employees, who had spouse or partner, Kinnunen *et al.* (2006) studied both the negative and positive work to family and family to work spillovers. Kinnunen *et al.* (2006) proposed four distinguished groups of measures for each form of spillover (Figure III, Appendix IV). These researchers proposed “a four-factor model” (including negative work-to-family spillover, negative family-to-work spillover, positive work-to-family spillover, and positive family-to-work spillover). Confirmatory factor analyses indicated that this approach was “superior” compared to the other factor models examined (including Grzywacz and Mark's 2000 model). Kinnunen *et al.*'s (2006) approach best fits in the third generation of Integration-Segmentation Continuum.

Figure III: Kinnunen *et al.* (2006) measures¹



3.4 Other Measures

Some of the other measures that have been used by other scholars for studying work-family relationships are presented here. For developing these measures the authors have mainly used Small & Riley's (1990), and/or Grzywacz and Mark's (2000) methodologies.

- Kirchmeyer (1993, 2000), developed particular sets of measures for assessing positive and negative spillovers.
- Positive spillover was assessed using 15 statements about spillover in accordance with Sieber's (1974) four positive outcome of role-accumulation (role privileges, status security, and personality enrichment).
- Negative spillover was assessed by 8-item measures based on Greenhaus & Beutell's (1985) three forms of inter-domain conflict (time based, Strain based, and behavior based).
- Higgins and Duxbury (1994, 1998) assessed the Positive, Neutral, and Negative impacts of work-family spillovers, on seven aspects of their work-life (e.g. productivity, their ability to relocate, their ability to travel, etc.). These authors used role enhancement theory for developing their measures.

4. Critiques of the Work-Family Research Methods

Critiques presented in this section are limited to the methodology alone, and does not include the critique of the theories.

¹ See Appendix IV for more explanation regarding the items

Virtually all of the studies in this area have used similar strategy for data gathering which is, asking respondents via a questionnaire to indicate that, to what extent their work/family interferes with their family/work (Appendix I, II, III and IV). The answer options are usually in a 5 or 7 Likert format (Kossek and Lambert, 2005). Schwarz and Oyserman (2001) in their study explained this complex cognitive work and the tasks that respondents should follow for answering these questions. These tasks are as follow:

1. Understanding the questions
2. Recall relevant behavior
3. Infer and estimate the data with which to answer the question
4. Map the answer onto the response format
5. Edit the answer for reasons of social desirability

This data gathering methodology imposes the following challenges:

- a. Self-Assessment bias, Self-serving-bias (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999), and Humans' Perception error.
- b. Answering these questions Require specified intervals (e.g. in the past 3 month). Short intervals are recommended because of Memory Loss and Accessibility of information.
- c. Answer to any question is vulnerable to errors of recall, but questions that ask to identify *source* or *cause* of an experience (as do most measures of work & Family questions) are especially vulnerable to *memory errors* (Schacter, 1999).

5. Discussion

Although the researches in this area have furthered our knowledge in this area but the relationship between Work and Family is still unclear since few conclusions can be drawn. One of the problems in this area is the lack of a dominant theory (Tenbrunsel, Brett, Moaz, Stroh, & Reilly, 1995). There is a continuum of theories from segmentation to integration. Some researchers suggest that it is more appropriate to use various theories as overlapping theories (Lambert, 1990). Some authors such as Judge and Watanabe (1994) argue that all of these theories are appropriate, and that researchers should find out what theory is more appropriate for which study.

The fact is, it is practically possible to find few cases that can be described fully by each of these theories. An extreme example would be studying work and family relationships of families working in mines in a developing country; where there is a complete separation between work and family; women at home doing expressive work and taking care of children, and men in the workplace performing instrumental tasks. In this case any integration of work and family roles will create conflict (negative effect). However, as it was explained in the historical evolution of work and family relationships, the separation between work and family is becoming weaker and weaker. This may be caused partly by industrialization, partly by changes in the culture of societies, and partly by changes in working culture of organizations. On one hand, the cultural and technical barriers of joining women to the workforce are decreasing, and on the other hand, integration of family life and work (for both men and women) is becoming more acceptable and possible due to changes in organizational processes, type of works and technical advancements, such as development of telecommunication technologies (Chesley, 2005). In today's new work environment (at least in the developed countries) first generation theories

alone, can not explain the work-family relationships. Moreover, the literature review of various models which are developed by scholars for explaining work-family relationships, indicate that none of the models can be describe solely by a single theory, whether second generation theory or third generation theories.

The finding of this paper supports both, the Lambert's (1990) and the Judge's *et al.* (1994) perspectives. In explaining work and family relationships, researchers should find the combination of theories (and not necessarily a single theory) that can best describe their study. Also, they should treat these theories as overlapping, supplementary theories, and not as substitutionary theories.

The typical strategy in work-family studies is to ask respondents via a questionnaire to indicate that, to what extent their work/family interferes with their family/work. The challenges of using this methodology were explained explicitly in the previous section. For decreasing the Self-assessment, Self-serving-bias, and Humans' perception error, one possible solution is to collect information from spouse (or partners) and/or peer of the respondents as well as the respondents themselves. Small & Riley (1990) and Kinnunen *et al.* (2006) used this approach in their empirical studies. However, this method has some weaknesses, such as increase in missed-data, increase in cost of study, and increase in duration of data gathering and data analysis. Moreover, in some cases gathering data from spouses (or partners) and peers of the individuals is very hard or simply impossible. In conclusion, gathering data from spouses (or partners) and/or peers of individuals is highly recommended, where constrains (e.g. time, cost, accessibility) of the study allows the researches to do so.

6. Future Studies

Although the researches in this area have furthered our knowledge, but still the Work and Family relationships lack dominant theories, since few conclusions can be drawn (Tenbrunsel *et al.*, 1995).

There are few studies that have actually developed measures of work-family spillovers. And there are even less studies that have developed measures that differentiate among different types of spillover. Kinnunen's *et al.* (2006) work in this area is one of the first studies that use different measures for each type of work-family spillover. More empirical studies in this area can help us to develop more effective measures for assessing these relationships. The typical data gathering strategy that ask respondents via a questionnaire to indicate the effect of work and family on each other, creates some challenges for drawing solid conclusions from the empirical studies. Conducting empirical studies using the recommended data gathering method in the present paper can enrich our understanding of the relation between work and family.

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