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Managing work-family conflict: Exploring individual and organisational options

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ABSTRACT: The current work-family conflict literature often fails to examine how employees attempt to manage conflict. This study of 203 government workers examined individual options (e.g. hiring domestic help) and organisational options (e.g. use of flexitime) as predictors of work-family conflict. Of the individual options, help from family and relatives, and the use of domestic services were positively associated with work-family conflict, while time spent on self was negatively linked. Use of domestic services and stress reduction techniques were positively associated with family-work conflict, while time spent on self was negatively linked. Of the organizational options, use of the childcare subsidy was positively associated with work-family conflict, while use of unpaid leave was found to be negatively linked with work-family conflict. Use of unpaid leave was also negatively linked to family-work conflict, while use of flexitime was positively associated. Overall, findings indicate individual and organizational options are more likely to increase rather than decrease conflict suggesting a reaction to conflict rather than a buffer.

Keywords: *work-family conflict, managing conflict, individual options, organizational options, work-family practices.*

INTRODUCTION

Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) highlighted the strategic importance of work-family issues and their increasing importance for managers. The balancing of work and family issues is becoming increasingly important for employees and employers to consider. Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2005) noted that workers face challenges of managing their work and family roles, and importantly, these challenges have become more numerous and complex. The focus towards work-family issues and work-family practices in particular, has been driven by a number of major demographic changes. These include the increased participation rates of working women and mothers (Milliken, Martins & Morgan, 1998), the rising number of dual-career couples and single parent families (Goodstein, 1994), and the enlargement in the elderly population (Goodstein, 1995; Hendrickson, 2000). At the heart of work-family policies is the necessity for these programs to help employees balance their work and family roles (Haar & Roche, 2008; Goodstein, 1994; Judge, Boudreau & Bretz Jr., 1994). Given the increase in workforce demographics, these changes have made balancing work and family considerably more challenging. For example, Kelliher and Anderson (2008) noted that UK firms have increasingly offered flexible work practices to respond to these challenges. Goodstein (1994) noted that these changes "have increased the interdependence of work and family spheres and intensified the conflicting demands of work and family" (p. 354). Due to these factors, managing the conflict between work and family responsibilities has been recognized as a critical challenge for organizations (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Despite the profusion of research on work-family conflict, we actually know little about how employees may manage this conflict. Byron (2005) stated that

"more employers should offer training to their employees on managing family conflict, although the benefits of this type of training to employers are not well established. Clearly, employees are not checking their family concerns at the workplace door, suggesting that employers may have an interest in helping employees with these concerns" (p. 193).

While some work-family studies have explored the potential buffering effects of supervisor support (Fu & Shaffer, 2000), the present study seeks to contribute to the work-family conflict literature by exploring methods of conflict management utilized by employees. We sought to explore two types of conflict management: (1) individual options such as hiring domestic services, and (2) organizational options, such as using work-family practices. This is important given calls for further studies to explore the role of work-family practices on work-family conflict (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Frone & Yardley, 1996). Following established methodological approaches (e.g. Frone & Yardley, 1996); the present study investigates conflict from two directions (work to family conflict and family to work conflict). The present study uses the term work to family conflict (WFC) to refer to work intruding with family life, and family to work conflict (FWC) to refer to family life intruding with work. In response to Byron (2005), the present study seeks to explore the influence of personal and organizational factors towards managing work-family conflict to provide a better understanding of how employees might utilize organizational and personal factors to better manage their work-family interface.

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT
Work-family conflict is among the most commonly studied outcomes in the work-family literature (Byron, 2005; Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001). While there can be both a positive and negative spillover between work and family domains (Westman, 2001), the work-family conflict research focuses on the difficulties employees have in balancing their work and family commitments. Work-family conflict is of particular importance to those interested in work-family practices, as these are often depicted as allowing greater balance between work and family responsibilities (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005), which suggests that there should be some interaction between work-family practices and work-family conflict. The relationship between employee work lives and non-work pursuits has been previously scrutinised (Kanter, 1977). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggested that the conflict an employee experiences between their work and other life roles deserve particular attention from researchers. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (p. 77). Simplified, conflict between an individual's work and home responsibilities can be labelled work-family conflict (Boles, Johnston, & Hair, 1997). According to Frone, Barnes and Farrell (1994), work-family conflict reflects the overall goodness-of-fit between work and family life, and has been conceptualized as an important source of stress that can influence an individual's well being.

The relationships between work-family conflict and employee attitudes and health have been well examined and established (Lallukka et al., 2009; Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006; Frone, Russell & Barnes, 1996; MacEwan & Barling, 1994). According to Frone et al. (1994), little research has been devoted to the issue of *managing* work-family conflict. We suggest that while the work-family conflict literature has explored many sources of conflict, for example hours worked (Major, Klein & Ehrhart, 2002), what has been missing is an attempt to explore how employees might seek to manage these sources of conflict. For example, employees might seek the aid of professional services such as housecleaning, or the help of family to effectively manage their work and family responsibilities. Consequently, the present study seeks to provide

some insight into the management of work-family conflict. In addition, we also test the relationships between use of work-family practices and work-family conflict levels, as this has been notably overlooked in the literature (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

HYPOTHESES

Managing Conflict: Individual Options
Examining how employees manage the conflicting demands of work and family roles has not been well explored (Frone et al., 1994). In their review of the work-family literature, Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley (2005) criticized the over emphasis on the work domain, noting that there was a "virtual omission of nonwork domain variables such as leisure activities" (p. 185). Adams, King and King (1996) noted that social support from family has received little attention in the work-family conflict arena. Furthermore, Eby et al. (2005) found that of around 1000 articles on work-family, only five explored leisure behaviors/practices such as time spent alone. Consequently, the present study explores a total of four individual options relating to background characteristics broadly identified by Eby et al. (2005). We suggest that employees might manage their childcare responsibilities through the aid of family (e.g. helping with childcare emergencies), and manage home-life responsibilities through professional domestic services (e.g. housecleaning). In addition, individual options like using stress reduction techniques (e.g. relaxation) may also provide some link to work-family conflict. We suggest these options might interact with both WFC and FWC. For example, increased work demands might lead an employee to use family help to cover neglected home responsibilities (WFC), but could also be used when a sick child at home threatens the employee missing an important work deadlines (FWC). Furthermore, use of domestic services might reduce home demands (FWC), and might also reduce strain-based conflict at work (WFC), where an employee might freely bring work home without leading to additional conflict because the home now holds fewer responsibilities. As such, we hypothesize that these individual options will interact with both types of conflict.

Given this is a new area of study in the work-family literature; there is little empirical data to support the direction of these options influencing work-family conflict. Consequently, does employing domestic services lead to a reduction in work-family conflict, or does excessive conflict lead to seeking these services? Boles et al. (1997) noted that work-family conflict results from trying to meet an overabundance of conflicting demands from work and family commitments. As such, we might expect most of these options to be positively associated to work-family conflict, in effect, being a reaction to increased conflict. Therefore, we hypothesize that employees who are using family help, domestic services, and stress reduction techniques, will report higher WFC and FWC. This leads to the first set of hypotheses.
Hypothesis 1a: Higher use of individual options (family help, domestic services, and stress reduction) will be positively related to WFC.
Hypothesis 1b: Higher use of individual options (family help, domestic services, and stress reduction) will be positively related to FWC.

While the first set of hypotheses predicts positive relationships, we also propose a negative association. Work-domain antecedents (such as time at work) have been found to link to both WFC and FWC (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) noted that time-based conflict occurred when time in one role means time cannot be devoted to other roles. Similarly, Bartolome and Evans (1979) noted that time demands may produce a preoccupation with one role even while participating in another role. A partner spending time with family but mentally preoccupied with work issues is an illustration of this demand. Quick, Henley and Quick (2004) noted the importance of the self, and highlighted self-management as a means to achieve greater work-family balance. They stated

"The individual must play an active role in self-management in order to balance work

and family lives. A key step in this process is the realization of the need to balance both of these aspects of their lives and the examination of self-expectations. It is important for employees to be aware of the demands that they place upon themselves in order to understand how to generate reasonable expectations that allow for a balance between the two domains" (pp. 435-436).

Consequently and related to Quick et al. (2004) we argue that employees who spend time on themselves may be of benefit towards achieving greater balance (less conflict). Hence, we suggest that employees spending more time on themselves will allow them to refocus their attention, whether towards their work or family roles, and thus will be negatively related to both dimensions of conflict. This leads to our second set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2a: Higher use of time spent on self will be negatively related to WFC.
Hypothesis 2b: Higher use of time spent on self will be negatively related to FWC.

Managing Conflict: Organizational Options
The effectiveness of work-family practices is mixed. Eby et al. (2005) noted that studies of work-family practices have sought to test the benefits towards employees for managing work-family conflict. However, Frone and Yardley (1996) concluded that the literature generally fails to provide strong, consistent support for the effectiveness of work-family programs and this limitation has been supported in the literature (e.g. Gonyea & Googins, 1992; Kingston, 1990). As such, Frone and Yardley (1996) have suggested studies must seek to document the efficiency of work-family programs. This is especially prevalent given that Eby et al.'s (2005) study of the literature noted there were fewer than four percent of studies in the work-family literature explored work-family benefits. In this regard, Byron (2005) found support for schedule flexibility influencing work-family and family-work conflict, indicating that some practices can be beneficial for reducing conflict. Overall, the examination of use of multiple work-family practices as a form of organizational options for employee management of work-family conflict is appropriate. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) stated, "research on organizational work-family policy is often disconnected from studies on individuals' experiences with work-family conflict" (p.146). They cited Judge et al. (1994) as one of the few studies that examined the relationship between both work-family conflict and policies with job satisfaction. However, a limitation of that study was that it examined attitudes towards policies and support networks but not actual use. A New Zealand study by Haar and Spell (2001) found work-family practices positively associated with conflict, while another New Zealand study by O'Driscoll, Poelmans, Spector, Kalliath, Allen, Cooper, and Sanchez (2003) reported work-family benefits used was significantly correlated with WFC but not FWC. The present study seeks to build upon this approach by testing the relationship between individual work-family practices and work-family conflict.

Frone and Yardley (1996) supported a dual approach to work-family conflict and work-family practices, suggesting previous studies have failed to link work-family conflict reduction with work-family practices because they used a single measure of work-family conflict. These authors cited Goff, Mount, and Jamison's (1990) lack of association between childcare center use and work-family conflict as being due to measuring work-family conflict as a uni-dimensional construct rather than separate work-family and family-work measures. Frone and Yardley (1996) proposed that had Goff et al. (1990) used separate measures, they might have found childcare use linked to FWC but not WFC. This is because work-family practices tend to target the family rather than the workplace. However, the firm at the centre of the present study offers six work-family practices with a wide range of coverage of roles (both family and work), which might provide employees with a greater ability to balance *both* work and family commitments. Consequently, we suggest work-family practice use might link with both WFC and FWC.

Similar to the individual options, we suggest some work-family practices may be a reaction to higher work-family conflict, while some may be negatively related. While flexitime has been associated with lower work-family conflict (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), this was only indirectly through job control, while in his meta-analysis; Byron (2005) found direct support for more schedule flexibility leading to lower conflict. Similarly, a positive link between childcare demands and work-family conflict has been established (Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980; Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & O'Brien, 2001). As such, we suggest these work-family practices related to flexibility will reduce conflict, while those using childcare practices will be a reaction conflict and thus be positively associated. This leads to the next set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: Users of flexitime will be negatively related to WFC.
Hypothesis 3b: Users of flexitime will be negatively related to FWC.
Hypothesis 4a: Users of childcare subsidies will be positively related to WFC.
Hypothesis 4b: Users of childcare subsidies will be positively related to FWC.

Similar to the individual option of time spent on self, we suggest that work-family practices that provide employees with time out from the organization will be more likely to be negatively linked to work-family conflict (Quick et al., 2004). As such, the last two work-family practices of time off in lieu and unpaid leave should allow employees to balance their time demands (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and thus be able to better manage their conflicts. This leads to our final set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5a: Users of time off in lieu and unpaid leave will be negatively related to WFC.
Hypothesis 5b: Users of time off in lieu and unpaid leave will be negatively related to FWC.

METHOD
Sample and Procedure
Data were collected from a New Zealand public sector financial organization, as part of a larger study on work issues. The present study was conducted within the firm's Intranet, of which all employees are connected. A total of 622 employees were emailed the survey. The survey was conducted at two times, with a one-month period between data collection. This was done to reduce problems associated with common method variance. A total of 203 matched surveys (same person filled out survey one and survey two) were received, for a response rate of 32.6 percent. The organization offers a small number of work-family practices: flexitime (flexible start and finish times), time off in lieu (where overtime can be accumulated and taken off later), childcare subsidy ($10 per week towards preschool childcare), and unpaid special leave (for any reason e.g. stress, with job guaranteed for breaks up to one month, with longer periods offering only limited job security). The average age of the respondents was 40.5 years (SD=10.89), with the majority married (79%), female (75%) and union members (67%). On average, employees had 2.3 children, tenure of 12.6 years (SD=9.6), and had a salary around $40,000, with 77% of respondents were blue-collar, and 23% white-collar workers.

Measures
Work-family conflict was measured using the 14-item Inventory of Work-Family Conflict (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000), with statements divided equally (7 each) between work and family interference, with anchors 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. WFC items included "After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do", and "My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse, partner or parent I'd like to be". FWC items included "My family takes up time I would like to spend working", and "At times, my personal problems make me irritable at work". Adequate levels of reliability (Cronbach's alpha) were obtained for both WFC (.73) and FWC (.86).

Managing conflict through individual options was measured using four distinct items designed by the authors. It asked employees how many times they used different techniques for

managing their work and family roles. Each item followed the stem "In a typical month, how many times do you…" and asked questions relating to seeking help from family, domestic services and colleagues, coded 1=never, 2=once a month, 3=once a fortnight, 4=once a week, 5=more than once a week. The full list of questions is shown in Appendix A. Managing conflict through use of organizational options was based on Rothausen, Gonzalez, Clarke and O'Dell (1998), with a five item scale for work-family practice use, 1=past use, 2=present use, 3=anticipated use, 4=never used, 5=unaware. Respondents were classified as users (those responding 1, 2, and 3) and nonusers (those responding 4 and 5) for each practice. A total of four variables were created, one for each work-family practice.

Similar to other work-family conflict studies (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001), we controlled for gender (1=female, 0=male) and age (number of years). We also controlled for salary, given that some of the individual responses might relate directly to income, such as the purchase of services. Salary was coded 1=under $20,000 per annum, increasing by $10,000 lots till 7=income over $70,001 per annum. In addition, we controlled for job satisfaction, as Kossek and Ozeki (1998) have asserted that job satisfaction is often negatively related to work-family conflict (Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996). Job satisfaction was measured using a 6-item scale similar to that used by Lounsbury and Hoopes (1986), and coded 1=extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied. Questions focused on the work itself, pay and fringe benefits, the work site physical surroundings, their immediate supervisor and promotional opportunities. This measure had an adequate internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .75.

Analysis
To examine Hypotheses 1 to 4, hierarchical regressions were conducted. In this analysis, demographic and attitude variables (gender, age, salary, and job satisfaction) were entered as control variables in Step 1. To ascertain the contribution of using organizational options, over and above the contribution of individual options, these predictors were entered separately. Similar approaches have been utilized before in work-family conflict studies (e.g. Haar, Spell, O'Driscoll, & Dyer, 2003; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Therefore, individual options were entered in Step 2 (family help, domestic services, spend time on self, and stress reduction). Uses of organizational options (work-family practices) were entered in Step 3 (flextime, childcare subsidy, time off in lieu, and unpaid leave). In all, two sets of regression models resulted (WFC and FWC).

RESULTS
Descriptive statistics and correlations between all the variables are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the overall mean scores for WFC (2.5) and FWC (2.1) are below the mid-point (score 3), indicating a below average level of conflict, and these two types of conflict are significantly correlated (r= .67, p< .01). WFC is significantly correlated with salary (r= .15, p< .05), job satisfaction (r= -.19, p< .01), enlisting family help (r= .19, p< .01), time spent on self (r= -.21, p< .01), and childcare subsidy (r= .15, p< .05). FWC is significantly correlated with salary (r= .20, p< .01), job satisfaction (r= -.16, p< .05), and hiring domestic services (r= .21, p< .01). Time spent on self (M= 3.7) is clearly the most popular individual option (the next being stress reduction with M=2.7), with this option being used on average more than once a fortnight. However, domestic services (M= 1.7) is used the least, with an average usage of less than once a month. Of work-family practice use, flextime is by far the most popular practice, with 99% of respondents using this practice, and time off in lieu is also popular (66%). The other two practices enjoy less usage, with childcare subsidy (30%) and unpaid leave (27%) being much less than the other two practices.

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Salary	4.0	1.1	--											
2. Job Satisfaction	3.3	.64	-.10	--										
3. Family Help	2.3	1.4	-.03	.04	--									
4. Domestic Services	1.7	1.2	.10	.08	.15*	--								
5. Stress Reduction	2.7	1.3	.07	.07	.03	.01	--							
6. Time Spent on Self	3.7	1.2	.01	.06	-.05	.08	.31**	--						
7. Flextime	.99	.07	.06	.06	.02	.04	.04	.04	--					
8. Childcare Subsidy	.30	.46	.06	.01	.08	-.01	-.10	-.09	.05	--				
9. Time Off In Lieu	.66	.47	.10	-.10	.02	.08	-.00	-.04	.10	.08	--			
10. Unpaid Leave	.27	.44	.11	-.00	.10	.08	.06	-.07	.04	.11	.09	--		
11. Work-Family Conflict	2.5	.80	.15*	-.19**	.19**	.11	.00	-.21**	.00	.15*	-.01	-.06	--	
12. Family-Work Conflict	2.1	.61	.20**	-.16*	.10	.21**	.08	-.09	.13	.05	-.01	-.08	.67**	--

N=203, *p<.05, **p<.01

Results of the regressions of the hypotheses for WFC and FWC are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression Analysis for Conflict

	CRITERION VARIABLES	
PREDICTORS	**WFC**	**FWC**
Step 1: Control Variables		
Gender	.07	-.01
Age	-.01	-.10
Salary	.18*	.22**
Job Satisfaction	-.12†	-.13†
R^2 Change	.06*	.06*
Step 2:Individual Options		
Family Help	.16*	.09
Domestic Services	.15*	.27***
Stress Reduction	.06	.13*
Time Spent on Self	-.27‡	-.18**
R^2 Change	.10‡	.09**
Step 3:Organizational Options		
Flexitime	.01	.15*
Childcare Subsidy	.16*	.07
Time Off In Lieu	-.01	-.04
Unpaid Leave	-.19**	-.17**
R^2 Change	.05*	.05*
Total R^2	.21	.21
Total Adjusted R^2	.16	.15
Total F Statistic (18,172)	3.822‡	3.689‡

†$p < .1$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ‡$p < .001$
Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.

Of the individual options, enlisting family help was significantly and positively associated with WFC (ß= .16, p< .05), but not FWC (ß= .09, *non significant*). Use of domestic services was positively associated with WFC (ß= .15, p< .05), and FWC (ß= .27, p< .001). Use of stress reduction techniques was positively associated with FWC (ß= .13, p< .05), but not WFC (ß= .06, *non significant*). Overall, use of these individual options was positively related to higher WFC and FWC, supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Time spent on self was significantly associated with WFC (ß= -.27, p< .001), and FWC (ß= -.18, p< .01), supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Of the organizational options, flexitime use was significantly and positively associated with FWC (ß= .15, p< .05), but not WFC (ß= .01, *non significant*). This positive relationship was against that hypothesized, and thus provides no support for Hypotheses 3. Use of childcare subsidy was positively associated with WFC (ß= .16, p< .05), but not FWC (ß= .07, *non significant*). This provides support for Hypothesis 4a but not 4b. Use of time off in lieu was not significantly associated with either WFC or FWC. However, use of unpaid leave was significantly associated with WFC (ß= -.19, p< .01), and FWC (ß= -.17, p< .01), providing some support for Hypotheses 5.

Overall, both regression models were significant: WFC F = 3.822 (p< .001), Total R^2 = .21; and

FWC = 3.689 (p< .001), Total R^2 = .21. The total R^2 scores indicate that around 20% of the overall variance in WFC and FWC was accounted for by individual and organizational options. From the R^2 Change figures, we can see individual options accounted for 10% (p< .001) of the total variance for WFC, and 9% for FWC (p< .01), while organizational options account for 5% (p< .05) of the total variance for both WFC and FWC. This shows that individual options account for approximately twice the variance for WFC and FWC compared to organizational options.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to improve our understanding of how employees may manage work-family conflict through exploring a range of options and their influence on conflict. This included individual options such as engaging domestic services, and use of organizational options such as individual work-family practices. Examining organizational practices was in response to calls for greater examination of the relationship between work-family practice use and work-family conflict (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) and the lack of studies exploring the links between work-family practices and conflict (Eby et al., 2005). The present study also explored which options (individual or organizational) held greater influence on WFC and FWC. The findings indicated that individual options accounted for almost twice the amount of variance for both WFC and FWC, indicating that individual options may be better predictors of work-family and family-work conflict than use of work-family practices. Importantly, we found different options held different directional relationships (positive and negative) with work-family conflict, and these are discussed below.

Negative Links to Conflict

A goal of the present study was to find whether individual responses and use of work-family practices would be negatively linked with employee conflict levels. Of the individual options, only time spent on self was negatively related to both WFC and FWC. Time spent on self implies that the more home time an employee spends on himself or herself, the less conflict between work and family they experience. This links well with Quick et al. (2004) who asserted the importance of the self and the role that self-management may play in allowing employees to balance their work and family commitments. This finding offers a practical solution to employees seeking ways to reduce their conflict, for example by relaxing, reading and spending time on themselves. This response might provide employees with a chance to relax, re-energize, re-organize, and while the work and family demands probably have not changed or dissipated; perhaps employees feel more able to cope with these demands. It is important to highlight that this option, unlike others options like domestic services, is both simple and cheap (free).

Of the work-family practices, only use of unpaid leave, where employment is guaranteed for up to one month off work, held a significant negative relationship, and indicates that users (past, present and future) of this practice enjoy reduced levels of WFC and FWC. Perhaps this shows that employees can 'opt out' of the organization temporarily when their workloads or family responsibilities become too much. For example, a family crisis (FWC) might be averted by spending a month away from work allowing for focus on the family. Similar to the individual option, this is based on time, but also basically free from an organizations perspective as the employee 'opts out' at limited organizational expense. As the leave period is unpaid, the wage costs can in turn be spent on temporary help. However, whether this is a 'good' choice for employees is debatable, given that the employee will not earn any income during this period. Furthermore, if the demands are work related taking time out may allow the employee to recharge their energy only to come back in to high workplace demands. Clearly, further research towards this area is required.

Positive Links to Conflict

As predicted, a number of individual and organizational options were positively linked to work-family conflict. As suggested by Boles et al. (1997), work-family conflict results from trying to meet conflicting demands from work and family, and these positive relationships towards both WFC and FWC may indicate a reaction to conflict, and thus be triggered by conflict rather than a potential technique for reducing conflict. As expected, we found employees calling upon family help more often when the demands of work interfering with the family are heightened. Similarly, employees using domestic services more often are also registering higher WFC and FWC, suggesting this may be seen as a viable option by employees seeking some solution to their increased conflict. From Table 1, we can see there is no significant correlation between salary and use of domestic services (r= .10, *non significant*), indicating that salary level plays little part in determining the use of domestic services. Hence, when conflict levels increase, employees will respond through greater use of domestic services and that decision is not influenced by income. Given that such help does not reduce work-family or family-work conflict it indicates that as employees struggle with work and family issues they are then likely to engage such domestic services.

Further, the use of stress reduction techniques was positively linked to FWC, again indicating this might be a response to family issues entering the workplace. While accessing family help, and using domestic services and stress reduction techniques did not reduce conflict, it might maintain or stabilize the conflict, and this help might allow employees to manage a crisis that might otherwise have spilled into other roles. This is an area for further research, which may be better captured through a qualitative methodology. For example, are some options viewed as short term, such as using domestic services only for a short period till a crisis (e.g. FWC) is over? Furthermore, a longitudinal study might be useful for testing whether these options have benefits towards managing/reducing conflict in the long-term, such that conflict is reduced when this option has been in operation overtime. In addition to the individual options, two organizational options were also positively associated with work-family conflict. While use of the childcare subsidy was positively linked, this variable was not significant correlated with use of family help (r= .08, *non significant*), indicating that childcare is a major issue for respondents, particularly for WFC. Consequently, whether family or organizational practices are used to help with childcare issues, it appears these options are both reactions to heightened WFC.

However, one surprising finding was the positive links between flexitime use towards FWC and the lack of any influence towards WFC. This is despite support in the literature for flexibility influence conflict (Byron, 2005). This may indicate that flexitime use is utilized more for family rather than work aspects, and that ultimately, this may lead to heightened workplace conflict. For example, employees using flexitime to finish work earlier for a school event may find themselves then having to leave work unfinished, which will ultimately lead to further problems. However, family demands interacting with the workplace might trigger the use of stress reduction techniques (e.g. relaxation, time-out), perhaps as a means to block family responsibilities, or delay their 'intrusion' into the workplace. The positive relationship suggests stress reduction techniques appear again as a triggered reaction to rising conflict levels. Similarly, the positive relationship between flexitime use and FWC might also signify this work-family practice is utilized more as a response to family orientated issues, rather than as an organizational practice for better balancing commitments. This finding is important because flextime is often heralded as allowing employees more flexibility to handle their demands, but the present study suggests this might be more reactionary rather than precautionary behavior. Despite this positive link with conflict, flextime use might still allow employees the ability to react to issues that otherwise would not available without this flexibility, hence this link does not negate the ability of flexibility to save organizations money through, for example, reduced

turnover (Doucet & Hooks, 1999). Overall, it appears that within the current organizational setting, flexitime may not be the panacea that it has been suggested as (Byron, 2005). Furthermore, some studies have found flexible scheduling to be useful in an indirect manner (Thomas & Ganster, 1995) rather than directly reducing conflict. As such, the findings here might also be due to testing direct rather than indirect effects. Overall, the effects from flexitime were counter to those expected encouraging further analysis of its effects towards conflict.

Work-Family Practices

Our findings improve our understanding of the relationship between work-family practice use and work-family conflict. Despite claims that work-family practices allow employees to better balance their work and life commitments, the findings here, within the single organizational setting, indicate the relationship might be more complicated than previously thought, at least from a work-family conflict perspective. Of the work-family practices examined, only flextime and unpaid leave was significantly associated with conflict, and only the unpaid leave relationship was negative as expected. However, although not significantly associated with WFC and FWC, use of the Time Off In Lieu practice was also negative in direction, indicating that the ability to store overtime hours for use at a chosen future date might also have the potential to reduce conflict, although not significantly in this study. The examination of work-family practices also reinforces the bi-directional examination of conflict due to the association with both WFC and FWC. This link counters Frone and Yardley (1996) suggestion that work-family practice use might only link with FWC, and is counter to another study which examined conflict and work-family practice use, which supported a FWC link only (Haar & Spell, 2001). This might be because the work-family practices within the study's organization were broad applicable for employees towards both work and family roles. Frone and Yardley (1996) maintained the sole FWC link would be because work-family practices typically focus upon the family and not the workplace, unlike some of the work-family practices explored here by this organization. Further studies into use of multiple work-family practices can only clarify these relationships and the applicability of work-family practices influencing WFC.

Control Variables

Finally, it is worth noting the significant links between work-family conflict and the control variables. Similar to many other studies (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Netemeyer et al., 1996), a significant negative link was found between job satisfaction and WFC and FWC. This supports the meta-analysis finding of Kossek and Ozeki (1998) which found work-family and family-work conflict significantly and negatively linked to job satisfaction. Furthermore, the present study found a significant link between salary and conflict, with salary being positively associated with both WFC and FWC. This suggests those with higher incomes experience higher conflict levels and this might represent increased responsibilities, such as greater workload and demands, and a relationship between longer working hours and salary is confirmed by Pearson's correlation (r= .39, p< .01). Interestingly, higher income levels did not reduce conflict and Table 1 shows that income does not associate with buying more home-related responses (e.g. professional childcare and domestic services are both r= .10 with salary, both non significant relationships). As such, greater income may bring greater conflict but not increased ability to purchase greater domestic services.

Limitations

As with most survey-based cross-sectional studies, there are some limitations inherent in the sample and methodology that suggest caution when interpreting these results. The New Zealand setting, which is still new to work-family policies, the single organization sample and the use of self-reported data, all limit the generalizability of our findings. Despite this, our study was conducted in a setting distinct from much previous research. For example, Kossek and Ozeki

(1998) reported fault with prior work-family conflict studies for examining "very homogeneous and specific groups and work contexts" (p.141). Our study participants included male and female employees, in both blue- and white-collar jobs. We do acknowledge though, that self-reports might not always give a valid indication of individual responses. Future research might explore conflict levels at time 1 and time 2, and then individual responses and use of organizational practices in time period 2, to allow greater understanding of the influences these options have on employee conflict levels. Another possible limitation of the present study is also the techniques utilized by employees for conflict management. Given that New Zealand is significantly smaller geographically than the United States, it might be suggested that family help are more closely accessible in New Zealand. However, in the United States, findings have shown parents are typically within seven miles of the closest adult child, and within 50 miles of the second (Lin and Rogerson, 1995), which suggests family proximity might be relatively similar irrespective of overall country size.

In addition, use of domestic services might also differ internationally. For example, New Zealand has a strong 'outdoors' culture, which might lead to greater focus on lawn mowing services rather than housekeeping services. Only further investigation in different cultural contexts can verify if such differences exist, and if the individual responses used by employees are generally universal. It should also be noted that this study does not, and was not intended to, uncover all potential individual responses and organizational practices. We acknowledge that many organizations offer different types and numbers of work-family practices that might better enable conflict management, and that employees might utilize a wider range of responses than examined in the present study. Therefore, the present study should be seen as an exploratory only towards individual responses and use of organizational practices, and not an exhaustive examination. Additionally, our findings relate to the type of work-family practices examined, and the association with both WFC and FWC, which is counter to Frone and Yardley's (1996) argument, might be due to the wide range of practices examined here.

Finally, it is worth commenting on the high correlation between WFC and FWC (r=.67, p< .01). While conceptually conflict has been separated into work to family and family to work, these two measures are typically significantly correlated, for example .30 (p< .01, Adams et al., 1996), .34 (p< .01, Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Collins, 2001), and .27 (p< .05, Judge et al., 1994). Thus, the correlation between these measures appears high in comparison to other studies. While another study using this measure also held a high correlation (r= .70, p< .01, Haar & Spell, 2001), it must be noted that this might have influenced the results. However, despite this similarity between criterion variables, their relationships with the predictor variables are distinct, with four predictors relating significantly to differing criterion variables, and three predictor variables relating to both. This provides some indication of distinction amongst the two criterion variables, but also suggests the measure of work-family conflict used (i.e. Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000) might need to be further developed to differentiate more between work to family and family to work.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations, this study assessed conflict bi-directionally, and examined previously under explored areas including individual responses and use of organizational practices for managing conflict, including use of multiple work-family practices including those outside the direct family domain. While the findings suggest that individual responses account for the largest proportions of variance in WFC and FWC, a comparison is not warranted due to the overall low values for the R^2 Change. However, this finding is in itself noteworthy. It suggests that use of work-family practices and individual responses, ranging from paid childcare and domestic services, to stress reduction techniques and time spent on self, do not provide a great amount of understanding towards work-family and family-work conflict (e.g. a maximum of

10% of the variance only). Significantly, given the promotion of work-family practices allowing employees to balance work and family commitments, we can interpret these overall results as providing only minor support for this aspect, at least towards relationships with work-family conflict. This finding might seriously question the beneficial nature of work-family practices for reducing the conflict levels of employees. Kingston (1990) has warned that in the absence of data proving the efficiency of work-family programs, the general lack of enthusiasm shown by organizations towards work-family policies may continue. Although the findings here are mixed, there is some evidence to suggest work-family programs can reduce conflict. Future studies must seek to explore this avenue to determine what influence work-family practices have upon work-family conflict, as this will likely become critical for organizations seeking to adopt work-family practices.

The findings do encourage additional research into managing conflict, and offer employees and employers insightful suggestions for managing conflict, particularly through encouraging employees to spend more home time on themselves. The findings also indicate that individual responses, which include employee financed options, account for at least as much variance towards WFC and FWC as organizationally funded work-family practices, and this should encourage employers to more closely examine the practices offered to employees, and the programs overall worth. It is also worth noting that the mean scores for time spent on self (M=3.7), indicated employees spend time on themselves less than once a week. Given this links negatively with conflict, employees, employers, unions and government agencies might seek to encourage that as an option for better work-life balance. Perhaps small workplace libraries that promote reading (either at work for a break or take home resources) might be a potential work-family option for businesses to adopt.

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Appendix A: <u>Managing Conflict</u>

The following questions relate to how you manage to better balance your work and family/personal commitments. For each question, respond regarding a typical month, with answers responding to 1=never, 2=once/month, 3=once/fortnight, 4=once/week, 5=more than once a week.

In a typical month, how many times do you…
1. Enlist the help of family and relatives to ease the responsibilities of family life?
2. Enlist the help of professional domestic help (e.g. lawnmowing, housekeeping) to ease the responsibilities of domestic duties?
3. Spend time on yourself (e.g. relaxing, reading, working out) to ease the responsibilities of your life?
4. Utilise stress reduction techniques at work (e.g. relaxation, time-out)?