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**COPING STRATEGIES OF PART-TIME MBA STUDENTS:  
THE ROLE OF BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT**

COPING STRATEGIES OF PART-TIME MBA STUDENTS:  
THE ROLE OF BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Workforce Development Education

By

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May 2012  
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## **Abstract**

Using the framework of boundary theory as applied to the work-life-school construct, the study focused on part-time MBA students who worked full-time, their tendency to segment or integrate their numerous roles, and the coping tactics they utilized in redistributing their efforts as they added graduate school to these roles. The research population consisted of a convenience sample of all first and second year Managerial MBA students enrolled at the University of Arkansas. A quasi-experimental research design was used to analyze the sample.

The results of the research indicated that the part-time graduate student who was employed full time faced specific work-home-school challenges that forced revision in work-life balance overall. The addition of a part-time MBA program to the life of a full-time employee created a tremendous amount of stress as boundaries were renegotiated. The addition of school as a third domain to the work-life construct appeared to force students toward an integration of boundaries in an attempt to complete added responsibilities.

A high percentage of students were classified as integrators based on responses related to the segmentation-integration continuum. Students tending toward segmentation on the continuum were more likely to actively set expectations regarding their boundaries and confront violators of those boundaries than were integrators. Responses to the open response question suggested that, despite the high proportion of integrators in the study, students often voiced a preference for segmentation and experienced stress based on the forced integration caused by ongoing demands at work, home and school.

This dissertation is approved for  
Recommendation to the  
Graduate Council

Dissertation Director:

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Dr. Michael T. Miller

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Finally, profound thanks to the rest of my family: my sister, Jody Davis, who keeps everyone and everything together; my wonderful husband, Michael Dunagan, who I appreciate more every day; and my beautiful daughter, Sara, who kept me company at the computer with her homework, novel-writing, and music. I am incredibly blessed.

## **Dedication**

To  
Aaron Davis  
1922-2006

He believed in us without reservation.



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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Status of the Issue**

Changes in the workplace and in the way we work are occurring at an unprecedented rate. In just the last two decades, email, smart phones and remote access to company computers have provided employees the ability to work anywhere and anytime. “Today, technology has brought profound changes to the ways people work, with boundaryless organizations, virtual workspaces, and the potential for constant wireless connection to one’s work” (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009, p. 704). These shifts in where and when we can work have created significant changes in how we work. A growing number of white collar employees no longer follow the traditional workday, leaving work and returning home at 5 p.m. Rather, these employees are finding that they increasingly must work during time that was once reserved for family and personal pursuits. More than ever, individuals are asked to take on multiple roles, both at home and work, and to switch between roles quickly and effectively.

The proliferation of roles is thought to have begun with the onset of the industrial age as people left homes and farms for employment (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Before this period, work for most people was associated with food production by families at home. With industrialization and the arrival of millions of jobs away from home, work and employment became the same (Clark, 2000). Increasingly, a person’s home life became isolated from his or her work life and cultural norms encouraged employees not to allow home issues to creep into time dedicated to the workplace.

Kanter (1977) helped to dispel what she termed the “myth of separate worlds” offering that work and home were necessarily linked. As employees have experienced increased access

to work, shifts have been made in how all areas of life are addressed. Now, employees must make conscious choices about whether to keep work and home separate or to allow the boundaries between the two to blur (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000).

Although companies may attempt to create programs that allow employees greater control, issues arise. In their study of employees at a large, public U.S. university, Rothbard, Phillips and Dumas (2005) found that corporate-sponsored work-life programs may not always fit the needs of individuals seeking to better control their roles. Companies may enact policies that increase employees' abilities to integrate work into personal lives when, in actuality, many employees need help in making clear divisions between work and home.

Schieman, Milke and Glavin (2009), in their *stress of higher status* research, found that workers with higher status jobs had more flexibility, but that this permeability was a key factor in the level of work-life stress experienced by these individuals. Using telephone interviews with 1,800 adults, Shieman and Young (2010) found that employees who had control of their schedules actually saw more blurring of the lines between work and home, with potentially negative consequences.

Employees who return to graduate school are even more challenged to prioritize responsibilities inherent in work, home and school. Through surveys of 159 adult students enrolled in St. Louis University's School for Professional Studies, Giancola, Grawitch, and Borchert (2009) found that work was likely a stronger source of stress than home or personal life for adult students because they have the least control over work. While work-family conflict and work-life balance constructs have been investigated by researchers for decades, as have the issues inherent in work-school and home-school stressors experienced by adults, how individuals successfully deal with their roles at work, at home, and at school concurrently is an issue that merits further consideration.

## **Problem Statement**

Individuals employed in the corporate world make choices everyday regarding the interaction between their roles. Individuals employed full-time who choose to attend graduate school experience an even more complex set of roles between which they must navigate. These professionals, typically in mid-level and often high-pressure positions, must balance the interplay of work, family and school, making decisions daily regarding what or who should take priority. Little research has been done to understand the challenges facing these part-time graduate students who work full-time, especially in terms of how they navigate the boundaries between the roles they inhabit.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Despite the large number of individuals who enroll in graduate school while working full-time and maintaining responsibilities at home, little is known about what they experience. This study extended the research surrounding work-life issues to include the impact of simultaneously attending graduate school on the working professional. Specifically, the study focused on how part-time MBA students navigated the demands on their time and made choices as to how to rebalance the distribution of their efforts to meet the demands of work, home and school. How these individuals navigated their roles at work, at home, and at school and what tactics they used to successfully balance these three contextual environments were key to the research. To evaluate these issues, the preferences of employed students for segmentation or integration of roles and the boundary management coping techniques they use to effectively defend or blur boundaries between the three constructs of work, home and school were measured. By better understanding the choices that these individuals make in balancing roles,

those who work with this student population will be better equipped to assist them in the recruiting process and during their time in the program.

### **Research Questions**

Adult students have been the subject of numerous and varied studies for decades. Still, little research has been carried out on graduate students and even less on fully employed graduate students. The research questions guiding the study included:

1. What was the profile of the part-time MBA adult graduate student?
2. What were the preferred tactics used by the adult student in incorporating roles at school into those already developed at work and at home?
3. Were the tactics utilized by students in year one of the program different from those utilized by students in year two of the program?
4. Did integrators use significantly different tactics than segmentors?
5. What tactics were shown to be the best predictors of a person's tendency to integrate or segment work-life-school boundaries?

### **Limitations**

The population studied was representative of mid-level managers, primarily working in northwest Arkansas vendor company satellite offices operating with the sole purpose of supplying Wal-Mart or at the retailer headquarters of Wal-Mart and Sam's Club. The sampled population was limited to part-time MBA students, the majority of whom were employed full time at these companies. While the population represented a variety of nationally-prominent companies, there was overrepresentation from companies focused on consumer-packaged goods and the retail industry in general.



Many of the students who participated in the study were originally from outside the northwest Arkansas region, and were required by their companies to complete a rotation with the Wal-Mart business for career advancement. These employees typically spent a minimum of two years on the required rotation and knew that they could complete an MBA at the University of Arkansas during this time. Some companies paid a portion of the MBA tuition and a few paid for the entire degree, making attending graduate school one of the benefits to employment. This benefit posed a limitation to the study as participants could have presented specific biases based on the level of company support received.

The hybrid nature of the MBA program also limited the study since other part-time MBA programs were delivered either 100% onsite or online. Students experiencing hybrid delivery may have experienced more academic support than those in online programs but less than those in programs delivered completely onsite.

### **Delimitations**

Although work-life research commonly has focused on gender-related challenges, the study did not focus on difference of boundary preferences or boundary management tactics between men and women. This was due, in part, to the relatively small number of women in the part-time MBA program where they typically made up approximately 25% of the population. The researcher also delimited the study by focusing on MBA students only rather than other graduate student who also worked full-time.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

In employing a constructivist point of view, *boundary theory* assumes that individuals construct reality regarding boundaries so that they have perceived control over or a sense of order within their worlds (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Kreiner, et al., 2009).

Individuals develop boundaries based on the roles they envision for themselves at work, at home, at school, within the community, or anywhere that they interact with others. Katz and Kahn (1978) identify *roles* as “standardized patterns of behavior required of all persons playing a part in a given functional relationship” (p. 43). An individual takes on numerous roles in every environment in which he or she exists. At home, he or she may be a spouse, parent, child or partner. At work, the same individual may be a supervisor, an employee, a co-worker or a business associate. At school, the roles taken on may be student, peer, contributor or teacher, depending on the day or the assignment.

*Role boundaries*, according to Ashforth et al. (2000), refer to “whatever delimits the perimeter—and thereby the scope—of a role” (p. 474). How these boundaries intersect for the individual is a critical question in boundary theory. Any boundary may have some degree of flexibility or permeability. Ashforth et al. (2000) defined *flexibility* as “the degree to which the spatial and temporal boundaries are pliable” and contrasted this term with that of *permeability* or “the degree to which a role allows one to be physically located in the role's domain but psychologically and/or behaviorally involved in another role” (p. 474).

Within boundary theory, the terms *segmentation* and *integration* are used to describe opposite ends of a continuum. Ashforth et al. (2000) recognized that individuals who tend toward segmentation of roles treat their own roles as more inflexible and/or impermeable than do individuals who strive for integration within roles. A person who completely segments work roles from home roles would, for instance, never discuss home life while at work or work while at home, nor would the person check work email, take telephone calls or do any activity pertaining to the job while at home. Someone inclined to integrate work and home roles would,

comparatively, take calls from the family while at work, discuss the workday with a spouse or work on a report after dinner.

It is in segmenting or integrating roles that *work-home conflict* can occur. Kreiner et al. define work-home conflict as “a generalized state of tension that results from incompatible expectations and challenges associated with work and home” (Kreiner et al., 2009, p. 705). This term arose from the concept of work-family conflict but distinguishes the fact that individuals may experience tensions that are personal in nature but do not involve the traditional family concept.

How an individual deals with boundaries found in differing and sometimes conflicting roles is defined by Nippert-Eng (1996) as *boundary work*. More specifically, Nippert-Eng defined boundary work as “the strategies, principles, and practices that we use to create, maintain and modify cultural categories” (1996, p. 7). In doing so, individuals may choose to segment or integrate aspects of their lives to create a personal situation that works effectively. Boundaries may change as situations, the individual, or the people who surround the individual change.

Individuals who choose to attend graduate school while working full-time and maintaining a satisfactory personal or home life are, in many respects, continually negotiating and renegotiating boundaries, essentially performing boundary work while they adapt to tensions and responsibilities brought about by the introduction of school into already complicated lives.

The study was an extension of the concepts of boundary theory identified by Ashforth et al. (2000) and boundary management as delineated by Kreiner et al. (2009). Within this research, the boundaries inherent in the roles taken on by the full-time employee who had chosen to attend a part-time MBA program were examined. How these work-life-school boundaries changed as the individual adapted to the school environment were also investigated as were the

tactics used by these individuals to either segment or integrate these boundaries based on their preferences and needs.

By better understanding these boundaries and tactics, higher education professionals who work with this student population can gain a better understanding of the pressures inherent in the working adult becoming a student as well as the methods employed by the successful student in adapting from the work-life construct to the work-life-school construct.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study has significance for employers faced with human resource questions on work-life balance, mid-level employees considering advanced degrees, and higher education administrators who work with the part-time graduate student employed full-time. Employers are struggling with numerous issues surrounding work-life benefits including costs and employee needs and how these benefits impact employee productivity in a positive way (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Employers need more information regarding the effectiveness of benefits that help employees either separate work from their personal lives or better integrate the two. They also need to understand the challenges faced by employees who attempt advanced degrees.

On the other hand, employees are faced with multiple and conflicting choices regarding how can they most effectively incorporate all aspects of their lives to operate efficiently and effectively while maintaining a reasonable quality of life in all roles, even while a student. Little research done with adult students has been focused on MBA students and the issues they face as adult students returning to school. Unlike the adult student often documented in the research who is underprepared or underserved and beginning an undergraduate experience, the part-time MBA student is already employed in a full-time, likely high pressure job and has demonstrated

success in the workforce. The study provides these individuals with strategies that could serve to help make the adjustment to school less difficult.

Finally, higher education administrators who evaluate admissions applications, create services for working graduate students, and are concerned with program attrition should find value in research that better delineates the experience of the working adult student enrolled in graduate programs. The information helps to define the experience of this specific student population and informs the development of admission policies designed to target the successful student and to provide services to help facilitate this success.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Boundary theory has been advanced by researchers as the means by which individuals compartmentalize different aspects of their lives. Common terms in boundary theory are *segmentation* in which competing roles are maintained separately and *integration* in which roles are allowed, at some level, to mix. Nippert-Eng (1996) was the first researcher to apply boundary theory to the conflicts inherent in one's work life and home life. She viewed boundaries as constructs that could be and often are negotiated by the different parties involved (self, spouse, supervisor, co-workers, and others). She suggested that individuals may have specific preferences for segmenting or integrating work and home. Rather than viewing segmentation and integration as conflicting constructs, she placed them on a continuum, suggesting that individuals would fall somewhere between the two extremes, depending upon their situations and levels of comfort.

Ashforth et al. (2000) advanced boundary theory as it applies to work-life by incorporating the concept of role transitions as a challenge to work-life balance. Individuals on the segmentation end of the spectrum tended to have distinct separation between roles while

those on the integration end of the continuum were more willing to allow for overlap between roles. Role transition, that is, moving from one role to another (from home to work, for example), requires effort on the part of the individual. Those individuals who are most comfortable with segmentation are not necessarily comfortable when work intrudes on the home environment or vice versa. Individuals who are closer to the integration end of the continuum have few issues with their roles intermingling (doing work at home, taking family calls at work) but may find it difficult to focus on one role when it becomes necessary. Both the segmentor and the integrator will experience work-life stress when their preferred method of boundary management is violated.

In their review of boundary theory and work-family border theory, Desrochers and Sargent (2004) found that boundary theory, as applied to the work-life construct, can be said to have two overarching assumptions. One is that clearly segmenting work and family make both easier to manage, while the other is that integrating work and family makes transitions between work and family easier. Depending on the individual and his or her personality and work-home environments, either segmentation or integration may be appropriate.

Fairchild stated, with respect to the adult student, “Many full-time students are unable to fully anticipate the effects of their combined role demands” (Fairchild, 2003, p. 13). Students in the Managerial MBA program often face what can be a difficult adjustment period when coming to terms with the addition of the roles of the student to their already busy lives. Depending upon the student and his or her academic background, the program demands range from 10 to 30 hours per week in reading, assignments, and other course requirements. Regardless of the preparation done by the student prior to entering the program, learning how to manage this time demand is a challenge.

Inherent in boundary management are the tactics used by individuals to segment or integrate their roles based on their preferences and the needs of others. Kreiner et al. (2009) in their qualitative study of Episcopal priests looked at how the individual responded to potentially conflicting work-home needs or responsibilities. Their research provided a crucial step in the application of boundary theory to the work-home construct as it was the first to study, in-depth, the impact of boundary issues on the individual and identify tactics employed by individuals in addressing boundary issues. They identified the term *work-home boundary violation* and defined it as “an individual’s perception that a behavior, event, or episode either breaches or neglects an important facet of the desired work-home boundary” (Kreiner et al., 2009, p. 713).

Kreiner et al. (2009, p. 715) identified a series of four tactics that individuals use to manage boundaries: behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative. Behavioral tactics involve the use of other people and tools to secure the boundaries around the home environment. Using caller id to screen work calls is an example of a behavioral tactic. Temporal tactics include blocking or calendaring specific times for specific activities related to home or work. Blocking in this way protects the boundaries as well. Physical tactics help to contain the work or home environment boundaries or integrate based on individual preference. Creating a home office where work can be done is indicative of a physical tactic. Finally, communicative tactics involve managing the individuals that one interacts with at work and at home so that one can meet expectations and they understand clearly the individual’s level of comfort with work-life integration and what constitutes an infringement of the individual’s boundaries.

Boundary theory, as defined by Ashforth et al. (2000) and the boundary management tactics as defined by Kreiner et al. (2009) were used as theoretical frameworks for the research design of the study. Specifically, the role transition preferences as applied to the segmentation-

integration continuum identified by Ashforth et al. (2000) and the boundary management tactics identified by Kreiner et al. (2009) were used as starting points for the questions developed as part of the survey research. This was the first time these boundary-focused frameworks had been applied to the constructs of work-home-school, including employed student views regarding their roles on the boundary continuum, their preferences for segmentation or integration, and the effect different approaches to boundary management had on their abilities to navigate their roles.

### **Chapter Summary**

Work-life balance has taken on increased importance as access to technologies has changed the way work is done. No longer is work accomplished during the workday alone. In a global environment, employees must be ready to work any time of the day or night. This change in the work paradigm has been rapid, but no more so than for the part-time graduate student who is employed full-time. These students must navigate home responsibilities, work crises, and unpredictable school workloads, deciding daily which tasks have priority and which must be delayed. Using a framework of boundary theory as applied to the work-life school construct, this study focused on the part-time MBA student who worked full-time and the choices they made and the coping tactics they utilized in redistributing their efforts as they added graduate school to their numerous roles.



## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

A wide selection of literature was reviewed for the study including work in the areas of adult and graduate student motivation and stress, work-life and work-family issues, and boundary theory as applied to the work-life construct. Journal articles and books were retrieved from the Mullins Library resources on the University of Arkansas campus, including a liberal use of interlibrary loan. Library search engines used included ProQuest and Ebsco. Google Scholar was also used to search smaller journal collections like Sage and Emerald. Key words used in a variety of combinations to retrieve literature included adult learner, graduate student, motivation, stress, work-life, work-family, role strain, coping, MBA, business student, and part-time.

#### **The Part-Time Graduate Student in the United States**

In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education reported that over 2.8 million students were enrolled in graduate and professional programs in the United States. Of these students, the majority or 55.2% were enrolled part-time (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). Enrollment in graduate programs is expected to increase significantly over the next decade with projections of 3.4 million students in postbaccalaureate programs by 2020 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b).

Bell (2011), writing for The Council of Graduate Schools, reported that students studying business made up 24.4% of the master's degree students enrolled nationwide in 2010. Graduate students studying business part time increased by an average of 1.2% annually between 2000 and 2010 while students enrolled in any program part time increased by 1.6% annually during the same period. Master's degrees awarded in the area of business have outpaced total master's

degrees awarded with a growth of 5.6% between 1999-2000 and 2009-2010, as compared to 4.6% for master's degrees overall during the same period.

The Council of Graduate Schools defines nontraditional graduate students as those who are 30 or older, simultaneously engaged in work, family and school responsibilities, and attending graduate school in order to change or improve their employability (Wendler et al., 2010). Examining the needs of adult graduate students, Polson (2003) found that graduate students are more likely to be employed full-time and enrolled on a part-time basis than they were in the past. Based on their study of graduate students mental health needs, Hyun, Quinn, Madon and Lustig (2006, p. 247) echoed Polson's findings, saying "Because of demographic and social changes in recent decades, graduate students are more likely to have multiple familial and financial responsibilities entering graduate school than did students in the past."

Full-time employees who decide to pursue graduate education do so for a variety of reasons. Although personal development is a clear aim of further education, career advancement is almost always of primary concern. In writing about the importance of graduate programs to America's economic and social future, Stewart (2010, p. 38) held that "Student perceptions of the value of a graduate degree are grounded in both increased employer recognition of graduate degrees and the simple earning improvements that students can make." The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that, in 2010, employees holding advanced degrees earned an average of \$1,351 per week, over \$300 more than the bachelor's degree only graduate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

### **Motivations to Earn an MBA**

Students are motivated to earn an MBA for a variety of reasons. Piotrowski and Cox (2004) surveyed undergraduate business students at the University of Western Florida and found

that those students planning to earn an MBA believed the degree would advance their employment opportunities and increase their incomes. This common perception of the MBA as a means to career enhancement and student motivation to enroll in an MBA program does not appear to change over time, although, unlike many graduate programs, most students are required to leave school to gain work experience prior to enrolling in an MBA (Rapert et al., 2004). Baruch and Leeming (2001), in their study of MBA graduates in the UK, found that students reported that they made the decision to undertake the MBA in order to improve career prospects. These students believed that they would improve their career prospects through gains in management knowledge and increases in the competencies needed for success (Baruch & Leeming, 2001).

Schleef (2000) interviewed both law and business students at an elite private Midwestern university regarding the decision to enroll in the chosen field. She found that, for both groups, the majority of students selected their field to gain a professional status, pursue intellectual interests and gain an upper-middle-class lifestyle. In fact, she interpreted their motivation to be more related to maintaining a high social class status through appropriate education than motivation to pursue specific disciplines.

Buchanan, Kim, and Basham (2007) reported that the business master's students they surveyed were more motivated to achieve professional advancement than they were to acquire knowledge. They found that these students were motivated to pursue business graduate degrees in order to gain alternative opportunities to the jobs currently held. O'Connor and Cordova (2010) found similar results, determining that part-time students in their study entered their graduate program to obtain a targeted position, expand their knowledge, and gain a credential that would advance their careers.

In their analysis of a British MBA ranking system, Bikerstaffe and Ridgers (2007) determined that students enroll in MBA programs based on four factors including career opportunities, personal development/educational experiences, salary increases, and networking opportunities. Employed graduate students ideally receive significant support from family, coworkers and others when they add the role of graduate school to their load. However, students often find that, rather than a supportive environment, they must justify their decision to enroll in a program (Polson, 2003). They find that their roles at home, school and work are in conflict with one another. Performing effectively in these multiple roles can lead to chronic stress for the graduate student (Oswalt & Riddock, 2007).

### **Challenges for the Part-Time MBA Student**

Adult learning is a common topic among higher education researchers, but relatively little work has been done regarding the graduate student experience or, more specifically, the MBA student experience (Hyun, et al., 2006; O'Connor & Cordova, 2010). Research that focuses primarily on the adult student enrolled in undergraduate or preparatory courses has little to offer with regard to the part-time graduate student who is employed full time.

These part-time graduate students face what may be defined as a more narrow, yet significant, set of issues than do adults in undergraduate or other programs. These students have already successfully navigated an undergraduate experience. MBA students are typically required, as part of the program admission process, to have post-baccalaureate work experience prior to program entry (Rapert, Smith, Velliquette and Garretson, 2004). Because of this work requirement, these students have disconnected from their previous academic network and may find they are lacking a defined academic support system at the time of enrollment. Polson (2003) found that graduate students who do not enroll directly after finishing an undergraduate

program have difficulty finding peer support and usually have responsibilities to others that strain their financial and time-based resources.

A significant portion of these part-time master's degree students, especially MBA students, come into a graduate business program with little or no academic background in business. "It is not uncommon to find (MBA) cohorts with undergraduate degrees and/or work experience in diverse specialties such as health, music, political science, and language" (Rapert et al., 2004, p. 18).

Students who enroll part-time in graduate school while working full-time find themselves facing specific adjustment challenges. First among these is how to manage work, school and family or other commitments, defined here as work-life balance. This student is not only a learner, but also a person with conflicting roles. Coping successfully with the stress inherent in coexisting roles while in school is key to academic success and overall happiness. Reporting on the literature focused on assessing the needs of graduate students, Nesheim, Guentzel, Gansemer-Topf, Ross and Turrentine (2006) found that graduate students described multiple experiences that impacted their academic work including frustration and difficulties meeting the personal and professional demands they faced. In their study of graduate students and stress, Oswalt and Riddock (2007) confirmed that graduate students reported high levels of stress overall with the primary source being academic performance. Stewart (2010) added to the work on graduate student stress, indicating that these "students confront very different life opportunities and work obligations that affect the amount of time they are able to devote to study" (p. 40).

Adding the new role of student to an already busy set of work-life responsibilities requires significant adjustment in time and commitment allocations. The first year is particularly

difficult as students must adapt to the culture and values of their new role as a learner (Nesheim, et al., 2006). Support from family and work has been found to alleviate some of the consequences that naturally occur when roles are in conflict or strained. This support can take many forms but, as Yum, Kember and Siaw (2005) found in their study of coping mechanisms among part time students in Hong Kong, the support typically results in the student gaining time for study free from other obligations.

Unfortunately, support is not always easy to gain or maintain. O'Connor and Cordova (2010) conducted a phenomenological study of alumni who had attended as part-time graduate students to better understand their experiences. In analyzing their results, they argued that part-time graduate students experience unanticipated problems in the workplace including peers who dismissed the value of the academic work and supervisors who diminished the value of study time (O'Connor & Cordova, 2010). On the other hand, Yum et al. (2005) described part-time students who were employed full-time reporting that employers were willing to make arrangements to allow class attendance. However, the same employees reported that they did not have the ability to decrease their level of work in order to gain study time. In fact, many of these part-time students were in professional positions which required hours worked beyond the normal workday (Yum et al., 2005).

Giancola et al. (2009) suggested that the stressors involved with work and school are more intense than those associated with family and school since students have the least control over work. "Though students can forgo certain social activities or find someone to take care of a child or other personal responsibilities, they may not have the same level of control regarding their job tasks" (Giancola et al., 2009, p. 258). Overall, they found that work was the biggest

source of stress for the adult student while stress from school had less impact on a person's general well being.

Oswalt and Riddock (2007) found that, of the items queried in their survey, students reported that school work, finances, their graduate assistantship, job, and career planning were among the top stressors. These students also reported additional stress factors not included in the original survey. When categorized, these items were found to include, among other things, time management and multi-tasking (Oswalt & Riddock, 2007).

Offstein, Larson, McNeill, and Mwale (2004), in their qualitative study of Ph.D. students, asserted that demands on graduate students included academic requirements, responsibilities inherent in family and other relationships, their own personal standards, and conflicting roles including that of student, spouse, parent and employee. Offstein et al. (2004) identified coping mechanisms enacted by these students and categorized them into two types, control and support strategies. Control strategies involved actions taken by an individual to cope with a situation and control the outcomes.

These control strategies include attempts to establish a structured schedule or routine, striving to manage time efficiently, make wise choices and use efficient methods, and pursuing self-awareness by paying attention to personal health, preferred modes of learning and the need for planning flexibility and "down-time" into one's schedule. (Offstein et al. 2004, p. 400)

Support strategies involved looking to family, friends, peers in the program and mentors for support. Building relationships with individuals was seen as key to successful support strategies (Offstein et al., 2004).

## Work-Life Definitions

The literature on work-life issues takes on several different forms. Early in its development, work-life research focused on the tensions and potential struggles faced by individuals attempting to balance work and a family, a concept that was generally titled *work-family conflict*. The concept was based on a traditional family model that assumed one male breadwinner who conducted “work” and one stay-at-home spouse who managed “family.” Employees could afford to work long hours without sacrificing family responsibilities.

Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek and Sweet (2006), editors of *The Work and Family Handbook: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives and Approaches*, stress that the dialogue regarding work-family issues escalated in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as the population, workforce and family structure saw major changes. By the 1990s, companies and governments were creating a demand for research that could be used in developing policies that would effectively address these changes (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006). It has, in essence, become a new, multi-disciplinary field attracting scholars from diverse areas including management, anthropology, sociology, labor economics, and psychology. Almost any discipline in the social sciences or liberal arts can find common ground in the work-life field.

The terminology used in the discipline is somewhat contentious among researchers with a significant group considering the term work-family as evocative of the traditional family model. This group of researchers feels that the term does not account for the myriad of lifestyles, married or unmarried, children or no children, that are impacted by work. This group of advocates prefers the term work-life in that it is more widely representative of reality. Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (2006, p. 8) addressed this dispute, arguing that “the scope of the construct ‘life’ is so broad that, for the purposes of research, it loses analytic sharpness.” For the purpose



of the study, the term *work-life* was used unless specific literature that used the term *work-family* was discussed.

The term *conflict* in work-family conflict makes the assumption that the two concepts *work* and *family* are contradictory and cannot coexist or contribute positively to one another. As a construct, work-family conflict assumes that a person has only a set amount of energy to expend at home and at work and, if taxed, conflict results (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). Indeed, Schieman et al. (2009) found that over 70% of “women and men reported at least some exposure to work-nonwork interference” (p. 983).

This concept stems from the scarcity hypothesis put forward by Goode in 1960 (MacDermid, 2005). The scarcity hypothesis holds that people have a limited capacity to fulfill the demands of their roles. Because each person has a fixed amount of resources, applying those resources in one role makes them unavailable for another role (MacDermid, 2005). “Work-life formulations assume that the work sphere is essentially about constraints and alienation, while ‘life’ is about self-realization, liberty or the pursuit of happiness” (MacInnes, 2008, p. 45).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), in their examination of the literature, defined three types of work-family conflict including time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behavior-based conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when a responsibility in one role interferes with a responsibility in another. Strain-based conflict occurs when the requirements of roles cause feelings of anxiety, fatigue, or other psychological strain. Behavior-based conflict occurs when, for example, the behaviors appropriate within a home role are unsuitable in the work environment.

While research regarding conflict in work and home roles is common, not all researchers focus on work-life issues from a scarcity perspective. Often called the role enhancement theory

or the expansionist theory, this more positive grounding of work-life assumes that multiple roles are not necessarily bad and that human energy is an expanding and flexible resource. “The benefits of multiple-role engagement are reflected in positive mental health, physical health and relationship health” (Barnett & Gareis, 2006, p. 210). Ashforth (2001, p. 264) suggested that work and home served “as a foil” to each other, “providing a diversity of experiences and thereby complementing one another.” While this is a promising interpretation for work-life, the construct of work-family conflict continues to dominate the field.

More recently, anthropology has added its voice to the field of work-life research. Viewed through this discipline, work-life becomes a cultural construct in which the researcher views the human synergy that occurs in work and family from a developmental or evolutionary perspective. This interpretation regards the interplay of work-life as a part of the human condition. Darrah (2007), in his qualitative study of family dynamics and time, suggested that the cause of work-life conflict is time and humans’ perception of it. Activities must be scheduled into specific times, times that are organized into work or home constructs by most individuals.

How effectively this time is managed is a significant means by which individuals evaluate their success. Darrah stated that the issues surrounding work-life may well be “viewed as creating conditions for preparing the inhabitants for the realities of global competition, a shrinking liberal state, heightened individual responsibility, and uncertainty about the strategies that offer the best chances for long term success” (2007, p. 268).

### **Workplace Culture and Work-Life Practices**

The culture of work has changed dramatically over the last three decades in terms of diversity of employees, diversity of work expectations, and the overall relationships between

employees and companies (Wharton, 2006). However, these changes are relatively recent as compared with the overall work-life debate. In 1977, Rosabeth Kanter first used the phrase “the myth of separate worlds” in her groundbreaking monograph of work-family company policy. She described the concept of an organization that did not recognize that employees had lives outside of work competing for time, energy and attention (Kanter, 1977; Hall & Richter, 1988; Ashforth, Kreiner, Fugate, & Johnson, 2001; Kossek & Lambert, 2005).

This contrived segmentation of work and home was prevalent throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the ideal worker was present for the full day, rarely absent and never let family interfere with his commitment to work (Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Hall & Richter, 1988). The ideal worker had a spouse at home who could care for family issues and leave him to focus his energies on work (Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005). Home and work were separate and distinct, often with competing expectations (Nippert-Eng, 1996). The ideal worker knew that he was expected to respect this perception of separation and maintain the appearance that his home life never diverted his attention from his work life, regardless of reality.

This workplace culture began to change in the 1970s as the baby boom generation became the driving power behind the workforce. They brought new values and a new approach to work, a style of work termed “knowledge work” that, as Kantar described it in her forward to *The Work and Family Handbook – Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives and Approaches*, was “less observable, more portable, and more demanding of mental energy” (2006, p. xii).

This knowledge work heralded the information age where advances in technology allowed for instant communication and ready decisions. Changes in the work environment have escalated in the last two decades with technology creating the ability to work globally anytime and anyplace. The innovative fax machines and personal computers of the 1990s have advanced

to portable devices, wireless networks and remote access that allow employees to never be without their work (Kreiner et al., 2009).

These new technologies were met with conflicting attitudes. On the one hand, these tools were to help people manage work, information, and responsibilities with much greater efficiency. In fact, it was predicted that workers using these “efficiency-enhancing” tools would work fewer hours than ever before (Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005, p. 45). Others with more pessimistic viewpoints heralded the corporate push for technology use as a means for greater company control on employees. Technology would allow employees to be monitored closely with their every move tracked (Golden & Geisler, 2007). “Employers apply advances in communications and information technology to monitor employees incessantly, render them ever available for work, and reduce their latitude to balance the realms of work and nonwork” (Valcour & Hunter, 2005, p. 62)

The intensity of these technologies and their impacts on the employee have been felt acutely by the business world which must constantly deliver ever faster in order to remain competitive. This increase in organization-level pressure has led directly to stress for managerial and professional-level employees who have seen the boundaries between work and home blur noticeably. These employees are increasingly expected to be available at any time. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) studied employees at three UK organizations and found that workers willing or needing to be available 24 hours a day/7 days a week found it difficult to put work aside in favor of nonwork pursuits, even when circumstances allowed for leisure (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Golden and Geisler (2007) in their research on employees’ relationship with technology held that the PDA, or personal digital assistant, that employees carried back and forth from home to work was one of the original tools that lead to this breakdown of work-life boundaries.

Milliken and Dunn-Jensen (2005) identified three types of pressure affecting U.S. managerial and professional workers. These include the pressure to work faster, work longer hours and work anywhere and anytime. In the current workplace, tasks can be accessed anytime as long as the right technologies are working. Work-related activities are now commonly expected to take place in times that were customarily set aside for family and personal pursuits (Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005). This pressure is the result, not only of new universal technologies that allow for instant access to work, but, as Kossek and Lambert (2005) speculate in their overview of work-family literature, of a new and intensive global economy where, for globally-oriented companies, work that needs attention is occurring somewhere in the world at every hour of the day (Kossek & Lambert, 2005).

Unfortunately, the image of the perfect worker has remained solidly entrenched among executives, managers, professional employees and anyone working toward these positions. Corporate cultures and managers continue to endorse Kanter's "myth of separate worlds" (Kanter, 1977) by ignoring the impact of work on nonwork (Hall & Richter, 1988). Thompson, Beauvais and Allen (2006), writing from an organizational psychology position, pointed out that the management-level employee working toward a successful career must invest full attention on work at the same time in life when child-rearing – that most intense of family responsibilities – is focusing employee attention on the home as never before. Based on long-standing corporate culture, these employees often must show that they are physically present at work for far more than the standard eight-hour day (Thompson et al., 2006). In this commonly-held culture, personal time is seen as a lack of commitment to an employer and even to fellow employees (Edmunson & Deters, 2005).

While individuals in management, professional or executive positions may initially be thought to have more resources at their disposal with which to operate, researchers find reason to question this concept with the stress of higher status hypothesis (Schieman et al., 2009). Schieman et al. (2009) proposed that positions with more authority, skill, decision-making latitude and earnings are consistent with higher status. Work, jobs, occupations, and careers that are labeled *higher status* report higher levels of work-life conflict. In their study of Canadian executives, Schieman, Whitestone, & Van Gundy (2006) found that higher status work often comes with more authority and more flexibility but often demands more work hours and mental involvement than other types of work. Consistent with boundary theory, higher status individuals experience more permeable boundaries between work and other roles than do individuals with lower status positions (Schieman et al., 2009). Schieman et al. (2006) reported that “men and women in jobs with more authority, demands, involvement, and hours report more work-to-home conflict” (p. 252).

Time and the uses of time are central to the work-life construct. How people view time is central to understanding the decisions that people make in choosing between work and home responsibilities (Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005). Hochschild (1997), in her classic book *The Time Bind*, suggested that people spend time on what they value and on what they are valued for doing. More recently, she has suggested that busyness may be a reactive adaptation to what she terms the ‘market culture’ saying “constant busyness is the most potent ‘opiate of the masses’ - a way of suppressing feelings and ideas that might challenge the status quo or the market culture into which we have unwittingly slid” (Hochschild, 2008, p. 89).

Milliken and Dunn-Jensen (2005, p. 46) described time compression as the “effort to squeeze more tasks into a finite period of time.” Individuals feel the need to work faster and

accomplish more in the same amount of time that required less output in the past. Zvonkovic, Notter, and Peters (2006, p. 159), in their review of family studies research, took the concept of time compression a step further, defining both the term “time-deepen” as doing more with less time and “multi-task” as doing many things at once.

Darrah, in his research regarding busyness in the modern family, held that families where both adults worked have far less time to handle home responsibilities, especially unanticipated needs. “Since the 1970s, many couples have been performing the tasks of two paid employees and a domestic assistant” (Darrah, 2007, p. 262). Darrah (2007) also maintained that the individuals he studied attempted to protect the routines they had developed in order to retain a level of control over time.

Human resource departments at companies have increasingly focused on work-life balance, expanding programs, ostensibly to aid employees (Kreiner et al., 2009). However, Edmunson and Detert (2005, p. 418) reported finding employees in their study relating that their “organization ‘talks a good story’ about work-life balance but actually has no process in place for working through or negotiating the difficult tensions between work and life roles.”

Even companies that make work-life benefits available to their employees are seen to subtly discourage their use with “an entrenched long-hours culture and unaccommodating attitudes among managers and co-workers” (Beauregard & Henry, 2009, p. 16). Thompson et al. (2006) identified barriers to companies attempting to develop programs that contribute to better work-life balance including: deeply held values and assumptions about work and family; organization structural difficulties in implementing programs; lack of support from supervisors; the perception that family issues are limited to women; the question of how to maintain equity among employees; and a lack of clear data on the effectiveness of work-life programs.

Examples of practices adopted by companies to enhance employees' work-life balance include flexible hours that allow employees to determine when they work, shorter work weeks, working at home, job sharing, formalized leave programs, and company childcare (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). These practices can be implemented in different ways. Flexible hours, for instance, could mean working reduced hours, working outside the regular workday, working from home or working longer hours one day to free time on another day (Rau & Hyland, 2002; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Despite efforts to bring work-life practices into the workplace, companies see wide variations in their actual use. At the same time, work-life researchers often fail to differentiate between availability of practices and whether or not the practices are actually used (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). As such, companies find it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs for their employees and the success of the company.

At the same time, employees are enacting their own practices, not formalized by their companies, by taking work home, working while traveling and other means of expanding the time available to get work done (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005). Kelliher and Anderson (2010) found that employees using flexible work hours tended to feel an added obligation to the employer and respond by working additional hours that were not required. Work outside the workday also comes into play when urgency toward a particular task or goal arises. Urgent work-related activities are typically "advantaged" or given priority over nonwork activities (Milliken and Dunn-Jensen, 2005).

One of the most difficult challenges for employers in developing and implementing effective work life policies is a lack of understanding regarding which employees benefit from which practices. In their study of employees and organizational policy, Rothbard, Phillips, and



Dumas (2005) found that demographic descriptors like gender, number of children, age and other factors have little bearing on the preferences of workers for specific work-life policies. Parents, for example, may not necessarily want or use on-site childcare, preferring instead, a clear separation of the parenting role from the work role (Rothbard et al., 2005). Individual employees present companies with highly divergent needs and values, making it almost impossible to identify which practices are most valuable to the employee and the company overall.

### **Boundary Theory and Work-Life**

Workplace policies may strengthen or weaken boundaries between work and nonwork roles (Rothbard et al., 2005). Boundary theory, as applied to work-life issues, suggests that individual employees differ greatly in their preferences regarding the segmentation versus the integration of work and nonwork (Ashforth et al., 2000). In fact, work-life practices may be found to be essentially ineffective if they do not take into account individual values, needs and preferences (Ashforth et al., 2000). Edmunson and Detert (2005, p. 409) found that managing work-life boundaries is a process that requires “an ongoing negotiation between employee and employer.” The needs of either or both may change rapidly, requiring that work-life agreements be redesigned regularly.

The concept of socially constructed boundaries has been used by a diverse group of disciplines to explain individual and organizational experiences including political science, anthropology and psychology (Kreiner et al., 2009). Because boundary theory looks carefully at how employees move between roles, it is seen as a strong framework by which to understand work-life tensions (Thompson et al., 2006). One of the first to apply boundary theory to the work-life construct, Nippert-Eng (1996, p. 21) portrayed home and work as two separate

constructs that individuals create “by mentally and physically drawing boundaries around activities, self, people, and things.”

This concept was expanded by both Ashforth et al. (2000) and Clark (2000), working independently. Ashforth et al. (2000) employed the term boundary theory while Clark (2000) developed the concept of work-family border theory. Although some differences exist between the two theories, the application to work-life issues is essentially the same (Desrochers, Hilton, & Larwood, 2005). However, the term boundary theory, as defined by Ashforth et al. (2000) has been more commonly applied by researchers in the work-life arena.

A primary assumption of boundary theory is that individuals hold multiple roles that are, at times, in conflict with one another. Individuals transition between these roles in different ways. Some individuals prefer segmentation while others prefer integration. Segmentation and integration can be viewed as two ends of a continuum. Individual preferences fall somewhere on this continuum. Someone who favors segmentation would keep work life and home life entirely separate, not allowing any contact between one and the other. An integrator, on the other hand, sees work and home as one entity and is comfortable when roles occur simultaneously. Most individuals fall somewhere between these extreme ends of the continuum (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth, 2001).

More recently, researchers have been critical of Nippert-Eng’s vision of boundaries and boundary work. Warhurst, Eikhof and Haunschild (2008, p. 10-11), in their critique of work life literature, were unsympathetic regarding Nippert-Eng’s interpretation of boundary work as a personal undertaking only. They believed that boundary work must take into account “external constraints and impositions” outside the employer-employee relationship that force segmentation or integration.

## **Role Identities, Transitions and Boundaries**

The concept of role can be defined as the behaviors one exhibits when in specific situations. Katz and Kahn (1978) considered the roles people have in formal organizations to be based more on the social setting rather than an individual's personality characteristics. In fact, they suggested that role behavior within an organization is based on doing what must be done to fulfill others' expectations for the purpose of receiving whatever extrinsic awards are offered by doing so.

Ashforth (2001) defined a role as "a position in a social structure" (p. 4). A person's belief in his or her work ability and its value to a group form a basis for role identity (Fenwick, 2008). Ashforth (2001) further defined role identity as "the goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons that are typically associated with a role." (p. 6). Role identities are set apart by the domain in which they occur, typically work and home, although multiple role identities may exist within each domain: subordinate, supervisor, colleague, spouse, parent, child (Ashforth, 2001). Ashforth (2001) suggested that a person is more likely to select roles that "reinforce, complement, or extend the self in personally and socially desirable ways." (p. 294).

Researchers in the work-life field generally agree that home and work as well as the boundaries we use to separate them are social constructs. Ashforth (2001) stated that because boundaries are defined socially, "there is an element of choice and arbitrariness in how individuals define roles and thus, transitions." (p.5). Because no formal standards exist within company culture or society for these boundaries, it is up to the individual to create his or her own boundaries (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

Hall and Richter (1988), in their article on organizational policy and work-family balance, found that, as people experience transitions, their self-concept changes. There is, in effect, a work self and a home self. Barnett and Gareis (2006) suggested that having multiple roles provides benefit to the individual in that successes in one role can protect against the negativity associated with stress in a different role and provide a variety of opportunities in which to experience positive occurrences.

Individuals may also change or evolve behaviors associated with a certain role with what Hall (2002) called response learning or the conscious effort to “continuously scan and read external signals and to develop or update a diverse set of role behaviors, so that they maintain an effective response to constantly changing environmental requirements” (p. 206). As a part of their work on the study of time spent at work and non-work, Wittington, Maellaro, and Galpin (2011) coined the term “strategic cheating,” defining it as “a disciplined approach to setting boundaries around time and energy commitments, and making strategic tradeoffs that reflect our espoused values and priorities” (p. 70).

Role transitions can occur at the macro or micro level. A macro role transition is defined as a large change: from one job to another, from being childless to being a parent. Micro role transitions occur as a person switches between the roles he or she fills every day. Ashforth (2001) defined micro role transition as the “psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between simultaneously held roles” (p. 7). Micro role transitions are usually temporary and reoccurring, involving the “juggling of simultaneous roles rather than movement through sequential roles” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 293). Going from home to work and back is a common example of a micro transition. In regard to micro role transitions, Ashforth, Kreiner, Fugate and

Johnson (2001) stated, “to switch roles is to potentially switch worlds; and yet many people do it every day with hardly a second thought” (p. 288).

### **Role Boundaries and Work-Life Conflict**

Boundary theory is used to understand “how individuals engage in daily role transitions and to understand the psychological movement between roles, from role exit to role entry” (Sutton & Noe, 2005, p. 159). Nippert-Eng (1996) suggested that research had differentiated between work and home as two categories. By viewing them as oppositional, Nippert-Eng believed that researchers tend to ignore the potential for overlap between the two. By recognizing that work and home do overlap, either by choice or due to circumstances, researchers are better able to understand the tensions between the two. Ashforth et al. (2001) offered the idea that having autonomy regarding the development and maintenance of role boundaries as well as the crossing of boundaries reduces the difficulty of micro role transitions.

Sutton and Noe (2005) provided a simple definition of role boundaries in terms of social constructs, stating that they are the way people draw distinctions or differences in the assorted roles they hold. Boundaries make it easier for an individual to concentrate on what is important in the moment, leaving issues involved in other roles outside the created boundary (Ashforth et al., 2000). This setting aside of responsibilities specific to roles becomes easier when one recognizes that often roles are connected to certain places or times (Ashforth et al., 2000). For instance, an individual who coaches on the weekend will not need to focus a great deal of attention on coaching during the workweek. Similarly, a parent of a young child will typically not be on a client call during the bedtime routine.

Work-life conflict arises when one role interjects itself into another, requiring an individual to quickly switch roles or function in multiple roles simultaneously. Fenwick (2008) put forward that, given the rapidly changing work environments, “people learn to ‘shapeshift:’ they literally learn to perform different selves and knowledges in different environments, while learning to establish some coherent identity to anchor themselves” (p. 22)

Katz and Kahn (1978) defined role conflict as “the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult” (p. 204). Ashforth et al. (2001) suggested that conflict in the form of interruption may require one to enact two or more roles at the same time. Kreiner et al. (2009) described work-home conflict as a “generalized state of tension that results from incompatible expectations and challenges associated with work and home” (p. 705).

### **The Segmentation-Integration Continuum**

Boundary theory makes the assumption that the multiple roles individuals hold fall somewhere on the segmentation-integration continuum. Someone who is at the segmentation end of the continuum works best when home and the workplace are mutually exclusive (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 5). This individual has clearly defined roles for both work and home. This manifests itself in the individual’s actions in both roles. People who are strong segmentors will likely not bring pictures from home to work nor will they take work home. The boundaries around their roles are, for the most part, impermeable and inflexible. Segmentation efforts typically focus on creating boundaries of time and physical space (Ashforth et al., 2001). Sutton and Noe (2005) discuss the costs of segmentation in terms of the “difficulty individuals face when they try to cross role boundaries and the difficulty faced when transitioning between their role at work to their role at home” (p. 159-160).

Unlike the segmentor, the integrator is most comfortable when roles are allowed to blur. This individual is comfortable taking calls from home while at work, as are they able to take work calls or emails at home. For this person, boundaries are quite flexible and highly permeable. While someone who is highly integrated in his or her roles can switch gears rapidly, the person may find that it is difficult to disconnect the roles, concentrating fully on one while disengaging from the other (Kreiner et al., 2009). Individuals who foster overlapping roles find it difficult to establish or maintain boundaries when needed (Ashforth et al., 2001).

Warhurst et al. (2008) separated integrators into two groups. The adaptor brings work into the nonwork environment but does not necessarily feel comfortable doing so. The amalgamator, on the other hand, enjoys the blurring of work-life boundaries and does not feel the need to participate in work-life policies that aim to provide balance between the two.

Navigation of boundaries is dependent on a person's preferences and capacity regarding flexibility and permeability. Hall and Richter (1988) defined flexibility as the extent to which boundaries are pliable or elastic. A role that is flexible can be carried out in different settings (Ashforth, 2001). "Permeability is the degree to which a role allows one to be physically located in the role's domain but psychologically and/or behaviorally involved in another role" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474).

Nippert-Eng (1996) described a cultural boundary in terms of the comparative ease or difficulty with which a person can move across borders. "When two or more domains are highly flexible and permeable with respect to one another, they are said to be integrated. Conversely, highly segmented roles have inflexible and impermeable boundaries" (Desrochers et al., 2005, p. 446).

Access to flexibility in the workplace is often the basis for human resource policies that seek to assist employees in balancing work and life. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) found that individuals who could control their work with flexible hours had higher levels of job satisfaction than others. It is this type of finding that drives workplace policies regarding flexibility. However, research has found that policies centering on flexibility often do not take individual preferences into account or consider how a person experiences flexibility overall (Rothbard et al., 2005; Kossek et al., 2005).

Kossek et al. (2005) called for a move away from research that focuses on the formal access to (or lack of) flexible work options and the tendency to assume that flexibility is positive, looking instead at the effects of these options on the individual. The reality is quite different in that not only do individuals have clear preferences, but also these may change regularly. Golden and Geisler (2007) found that individuals expressed the need for segmentation or integration of work and personal life at different times, depending upon the circumstances.

Role blurring is said to occur when roles become more integrated and boundaries become less distinct. “Role blurring may foster confusion and interruptions such that the transition challenge for highly integrated roles lies in *creating and maintaining boundaries* between the roles” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 480). Flexible work arrangements that compel an individual to switch back and forth between multiple roles blur boundaries significantly (Kossek & Lambert, 2005).

An example of role blurring occurs with the individual who works at home. Unless specific steps are taken to delineate a physical work space and specific work times (boundaries) this individual will likely be interrupted with issues arising from the home roles – that of parent, spouse, neighbor or a myriad of other roles with contingent expectations (Ashforth, 2001; Rau &



Hyland, 2002; Kreiner et al., 2009). Complete integration of work-life is rare given the issues inherent in the concept. Ashforth et al. (2001) theorized that “it seems likely that most individuals will prefer at least some segmentation” (p. 277).

Forced integration can cause tremendous stress for individuals who must adapt to roles overlapping for periods of time. Kreiner et al. (2009), in their study of Episcopal priests, defined this as an intrusion *boundary violation* that punctures a boundary temporarily as in unwanted work-related phone calls at home. They found that this type of forced integration caused negative emotions and physical exhaustion in those experiencing it. Kreiner et al. (2009) also define the term “distance” when a person “desires integration, but segmentation is forced” (p. 713). In the model proposed by Kreiner et al. (2009), work-family conflict occurs as a result of building tension associated with work-home boundary violation events. In this model, the boundary violation is an event while the resulting work-family conflict is analogous to the emotional state.

Why individuals prefer specific means of integration or segmentation is up for debate. “These twin forces – role proliferation and role blurring – raise important questions regarding how individuals manage the challenge of frequently transitioning between their multiple roles and, where designed, of segmenting their roles” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 260). Milliken and Dunn-Jensen (2005) suggested that individuals segment work and home with nonpermeable boundaries to protect home life from the encroachment of work tasks. However, Kreiner et al. (2009) proposed that nonpermeable boundaries are found between roles with large differences in identities.

## Boundary Management

Boundary theory assumes that, whether implicit or explicit, every individual has a preferred approach regarding the connection or disconnection of work and home. These individual approaches are based in deeply held values and the environment in which one must operate at home and at work (See Kossek et al., 2005).

How one manages the boundaries for different roles has been labeled in several ways in the literature. Nippert-Eng (1996) called the process *boundary work*. Kossek et al. (2005) used the term *flexibility enactment* to describe the way boundaries are used and psychologically managed. Kreiner et al. (2009) coined the term *work-home boundary violation* to signify an individual's perception that a behavior, event, or episode either breaches or neglects an important facet of the desired work-home boundary. They term management of these boundary violations as *invoking triage*.

Kossek et al. (2005) suggested that boundary management is more complicated than simply looking to segmentation versus integration. Instead, the researcher must observe how an individual integrates or blends types of boundaries that may be temporal, mental, physical and/or behavioral (Kossek et al., 2005). Research by Mickel and Dallimore (2009) found that individuals made life-quality decisions based on perceived personal or work-related gains and losses.

Strategies employed by individuals to manage boundaries appear to be related to internal choices and motivations as well as external resources. Mickel and Dallimore (2009) determined that individuals managed the tensions associated with making life-quality decisions through five different strategies: “a) adopting a guiding philosophy, b) engaging in an ongoing practice, c)

perceiving tradeoffs as ‘nothing given up of value/importance, d) applying a present orientation, and e) applying a future orientation’ (p. 627).

Kreiner et al. (2009) concluded that people employed four tactics in managing boundaries: behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative. Behavioral tactics utilize people and technologies to help secure the home environment including email, voicemail, and screening calls. Temporal tactics include blocking time for specific tasks and removing oneself from the work-home environment temporarily through vacations and other means. Physical tactics include the actions taken to solidify or permeate the boundaries between home and work including having a work office in the home or bringing family photos into the work environment. Communicative tactics center around managing the expectations of others regarding what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate breaches of boundaries at work and at home.

External support from others is also found to be key in boundary management. Thompson et al. (2006) identified three types of support. Instrumental support is direct help in the form of “time, skill, advice or resources.” Emotional support includes behaviors like “empathy, trust, love or listening.” Informational support is given when someone provides “information to help solve a problem” (Thompson et al., 2006, p. 289).

Darrah (2007) established that individuals apply management techniques and tools from work in the home environment. He classified these into two types of practices: buffering and coping. Buffering practices involved the use of external tools or resources. These included devices that improved productivity like phones and calendars, a network of helpers who could provide services like childcare, and the time management tools used at work that are brought into the home. Coping practices were comprised of internal behaviors and applied practices that helped organize and define work. People utilizing coping practices planned the day and adhered

to developed routines, anticipated issues and developed backup plans, were flexible regarding changes to plans, protected certain times from intrusion, understood the plans of others and anticipated how they could impact individual plans. They controlled or eliminated things to help minimize demands on time, breaking activities into individual parts and performing these parts as time allowed, systematically tracking what needed to be done and prioritizing based on perceived value of the activity.

### **Boundary Management and the Adult Student**

While stress and the adult student is a relatively common research topic, little research exists regarding how the working adult student, specifically the adult graduate student, manages work-life boundaries when school is added to an already busy life. Lowe and Gayle (2007) examined what they termed work/life/study balance among adult learners in Scotland through a boundary theory lens. They identified four categories of work/life/study balance. In the first category, individuals achieved “a good balance” through segmentation of school, work, and home with little overlap occurring. The second category, “manage to balance,” saw individuals integrating study into their routines through negotiation with key individuals. With the third category, titled “find it difficult to balance,” the student had attempted to negotiate integration but had been only partially successful and found that renegotiations had to occur regularly. The final category, “conflicting demands create stress” saw instability and a lack of successful negotiation for study time. Students in this category had to manage boundaries constantly as circumstances changes.

Other studies examine work-life balance for the adult student but do not utilize boundary theory nor do they typically focus on graduate education. In her study of women returning to school, Home (1998) found that lower incomes predicted increased vulnerability to role conflict

for employed adult women with families who attended school. Their perceived intensity of student demands predicted conflict, overload and contagion (role spillover), with family and job demands following.

Hammer, Grigsby, and Woods (1998) surveyed undergraduates and graduate students at Portland State University and established that adult students reported family-school conflict as greater than work-school conflict. Those students who perceived that the university was providing effective support services reported the lowest levels of work-school conflict. Students who were not satisfied with their educational experience reported higher levels of work-school conflict.

Butler (2007), in his study on undergraduate work-school conflict, determined that job demands and work hours were positively related to work-school conflict while job control and job-school congruence (where work and the courses taken are complementary) were positively related to work-school facilitation.

Dyk (1987) provided one of the only resources for work-life among graduate students in her qualitative study of graduate students and school-family conflict. By interviewing graduate students, she found that they coped with the stress of school and family responsibilities by actively attempting to change the expectations of others, altering their own expectations of themselves, and implementing time management strategies.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Significant research exists regarding work-life conflict. However, much of it focuses on organizational level policies and the impact on business rather than focusing on the individual. Ashforth (2001) stated that, "What is missing is a holistic sense of the person, of how the various attributes cluster together into a profile that represents a flesh-and-blood individual" (p. 20).

Specifically, Ashforth (2000) called for more research as to why people tend to segment or integrate roles while Kossek et al. (2005) suggested that more should be done to determine “how people differ in their preferences for managing work and family boundaries or in their feelings of control over job flexibility” (p. 246).

Much research focuses on the organization and the impact of work-life policies system-wide rather than how the individual experiences work-life issues. Desrochers and Sargent (2004) found that few researchers have investigated the dynamics of individual preferences for segmentation or integration. They also suggest that researchers should focus more attention on how individuals cope with boundaries and the movement between them.

With respect to individual application or coping, Kreiner et al. (2009) argued that most research in the work-home field neglects to offer any directions or specific tactics as to how individuals might diminish stress in the work-home arena. Ashforth et al. (2001) suggested that the key variables for future research may be “the nature of normative demands (what others expect) and the degree of autonomy role occupants have to enact or even modify those demands” (p. 284)

Nesheim et al. (2006) criticized current research on graduate students saying that it “focuses on attrition, student experiences, socialization, and programmatic interventions. Although useful, this research tells educators very little about the needs and experiences of students at their particular institutions.” Butler (2007) offered that, “It would be valuable to know how work affects students over a longer period as well as to understand day-to-day associations between work and school.

Little research has been found to examine the issues of work-life balance and the part-time student who works full-time, particularly through the lens of boundary theory. With regard

to research directed at work-life issues among students, Giancola et al. (2009) suggested that the construct of job control and its impact on work stressors felt by adult students should be investigated. Indeed, the level of flexibility and control the employee has with a job appears, based on the literature, to be fundamental to the ability of the employee to cope with the pressures of work, family, school and the myriad of other things that demand time and energy.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature frames an image of the adult graduate student as a person under a great deal of pressure from a variety of sources including family members, school and work. Stress levels caused by conflicting roles were depicted as high, and coping techniques uncovered by different authors vary. However, similar themes in coping appeared to include a need for support from others, at home, at work and at school as well as mechanisms or techniques that allowed an individual to dedicate time for each role in a way that causes minimal disruption to other roles. More than other adult graduate students, those pursuing an MBA were motivated by a desire for career advancement and the likelihood of earning a widely-recognized credential that would aid in this advancement.

Graduate students often enrolled part-time in a graduate program because work responsibilities exclude the option of enrolling full time. These work responsibilities often included a full-time job that required a significant portion of the student's mental, physical and emotional energy. The work-life construct for those working full time was often defined by the conflict inherent in roles that overlap or take resources from one another.

The literature reflected a workplace culture that recognized a need for work-life balance yet maintained an intense tradition of focusing on work through long hours and ready availability during personal time. The pressure on individuals to fulfill all existing roles was often intense

and increased with the addition of graduate school into an already full schedule. Because part-time MBA students were often employed in a business role while taking courses, the literature reflected the likelihood that these students were under significant stress from competing roles at work, home and school.

The boundary theory literature helped to define preferences by individuals for segmenting or integrating work-life roles, allowing researchers a framework by which to understand how individuals successfully enact coping mechanisms and techniques for better success in all roles. However, most studies to date have been undertaken from a corporate or policy perspective, rarely taking into account how individuals handle role conflict. Predicting a person's desire for segmentation or integration was represented as difficult and subject to change, making it challenging for companies, and even the individuals themselves, to create work-life scenarios that led to both corporate success and individual satisfaction.

Little research was identified as to how the adult graduate student, specifically the part-time MBA student, managed boundaries. While stress and coping were readily recognized as things a part-time graduate student working full-time must face, the choices and sacrifices that these students made were unclear. The goals of the study were to better understand the boundary preferences for segmentation or integration of individuals in a part-time MBA program and to identify the coping mechanism and techniques used by these individuals as they attempted to balance work, life, and school roles.



## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to examine the boundary preferences and boundary management tactics of students enrolled in a part-time MBA program who worked full time. To accomplish the purpose, 115 MBA students enrolled in the Managerial MBA at the University of Arkansas were surveyed. This chapter presents an overview of the population as well as the research methodology, data collection techniques, and the statistical tests used to analyze the data.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions for the study were intended to be descriptive and inferential as described by Creswell (2009). The questions were designed based on boundary theory and boundary management tactics as described by Ashforth et al. (2000) and Kreiner et al. (2009). Foundational to these questions were the concepts of the segmentation – integration continuum and role boundary structure as an approach to work-life-school challenges and the tactics employed to protect or blur the boundaries based on individual preferences.

1. What was the profile of the part-time MBA adult graduate student?
2. What were the preferred tactics used by the adult student in incorporating roles at school into those already developed at work and at home?
3. Were the tactics utilized by students in year one of the program different from those utilized by students in year two of the program?
4. Did integrators use significantly different tactics than segmentors?

5. What tactics were shown to be the best predictors of a person's tendency to integrate or segment work-life-school boundaries?

### **Research Methodology**

A quasi-experimental research design employing a survey with scaled items and one open response question was used. Managerial MBA students were surveyed to gather data regarding how work-life-school boundaries were defined, to understand preferred tactics by which they managed boundaries and to determine whether students changed in their use of tactics as they progressed through the program. Data were collected with a web-based survey designed with Qualtrics survey software.

Because the population was enrolled in a hybrid program delivered, in part, online, all individuals had access to the technology necessary to access the survey (Dillman, 2000). Current student university email addresses were used to send the survey link to all individuals in the first and second year Managerial MBA cohorts. These email addresses were also used to send program and course-specific information and were considered the program's official mode of contact with the population, ensuring that all students received notification of the survey (Dillman, 2000). IRB approval was obtained from the University of Arkansas prior to data collection (Appendix A).

The use of a survey allowed for a systematic and controlled approach to data collection. Because the survey was delivered online, the cost was minimal. Given the ease of access to the total student population, a high response rate occurred with 81% of students completing the survey. Students in both the first-year and the second-year cohorts were surveyed during the same one week period at the beginning of the spring 2012 semester to provide comparative data for the two groups.

The survey was delivered with Qualtrics software and administered online. The use of online delivery helped to remove the possibility of data input error and transcription errors for the open response question while speeding the process overall (Lalla & Ferrari, 2011). Online delivery also had the benefit of allowing students to respond at times convenient to them and ensured that all students had an opportunity to answer (Lalla & Ferrari, 2011).

### **Research Setting and Informants**

First-year and second-year students in the two-year Managerial MBA program at the University of Arkansas were the target population for the study. These working adult students selected a program that, while not accelerated, was organized around a highly accessible hybrid model of delivery that requires students to attend face-to-face courses 14 Saturdays per year (four or five sessions per course) and complete the remainder of each course online. The cohort-based program was designed to work around the responsibilities inherent in being a full-time employee in the retail and vendor community of Northwest Arkansas and provided many of the support systems critical to adult student success (Kasworm, 2003a).

During the face-to-face course days, faculty members delivered intensive course content. The remainder of each class occurred online with students participating in discussion boards, team projects and on individual assignments. Students in the Managerial MBA program took a course load of six credit hours per semester, with the exception of the first semester when a two credit hour introductory course was also required. Each three-hour course required that students attend four hours of lecture for five (fall/spring terms) or four (summer term) Saturdays per semester, respectively. A class day consisted of one course lecture from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and a second course lecture from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Students were provided time to socialize or work on team projects at a pre-class breakfast and during the lunch hour. This Saturday timeframe once

every three to five weeks was the only time the students were physically together during the semester although student teams could choose to meet outside the regularly scheduled course meeting times.

During the period of this study, hundreds of vendor companies were located in Northwest Arkansas most commonly for the sole purpose of doing business with Wal-Mart. This company, the world's largest retailer in 2012, based its international headquarters in Northwest Arkansas. For vendor companies during this period, the Wal-Mart account was almost always the largest part of their business, making the work done by employees critical to the companies' overall profit margins.

Students employed by vendor companies reported that they typically worked long hours and traveled regularly. They were constantly evaluated on the value they added to their companies and their jobs were never entirely secure. Conversely, these same employees often switched companies since their skills and experience with the "Wal-Mart business" were highly transferable. The Saturday courses allowed these students to attend class without interruption since students, with rare exception, could return to the area on the weekends, regardless of their travel agendas.

Students in the Managerial MBA program were already successfully employed and opted into the graduate program to reach specific personal and professional goals. The majority were in managerial or professional level positions, having worked an average of six to ten years in most cases. Some had moved to the area with their companies, knowing that the two-year Managerial MBA program was available and that they would be able to complete it during the time they were assigned to Northwest Arkansas and the Wal-Mart business. Kasworm (2003b)

called this “proactive life planning” and the Managerial MBA students at the University of Arkansas embodied her description.

### **Selection of Subjects**

A convenience sample consisting of the available population of all students from the part-time Managerial MBA program (approximately 115 individuals) at the University of Arkansas was surveyed. First-year students surveyed were beginning the second semester of the program in the spring semester while second-year students were beginning the fifth semester of the six-semester program.

During the period of the study, a student was admitted to the Managerial MBA program based on undergraduate GPA calculated on the last 60 undergraduate hours taken, GMAT or GRE score, work background, and personal essays. Student cohorts had an average GMAT score ranging from 570 to 580 and an undergraduate GPA ranging from 3.0 to 3.3. Academic backgrounds of admitted students varied with most cohorts consisting of approximately one-third undergraduate business majors, one-third engineering majors and one-third liberal arts and sciences majors. Approximately 50% of all applicants were admitted to the program each year. Between 55 and 65 students were admitted annually.

### **Instrumentation**

A survey instrument (Appendix B) was designed specifically for this research study. Pilot testing of the instrument was completed using volunteers currently enrolled in the Professional Master’s in Information Systems at the University of Arkansas. The pilot test was conducted to aid in establishing the validity of the instrument and the readability of the questions.

Like the Managerial MBA, the Professional MIS program during the period of this study was a part-time program designed for students who were employed full time. Professional MIS students attended courses on the same Saturdays as did the Managerial MBA students. Like the Managerial MBA, the Professional MIS was a two-year degree that required students take 6 hours per semester. As a group, the Professional MIS student demographics showed a younger student overall than students in the Managerial MBA with approximately half of those responding having two years of experience or less after completion of the bachelor's degree.

The survey was distributed to approximately 30 Professional MIS students on January 9, 2012, prior to the start of the spring 2012 semester. Eleven students responded. For the purpose of analysis, this number was reduced to ten, eliminating one respondent who failed to complete all questions.

A Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was performed to determine the internal consistency reliability of the instrument. In order to perform the Cronbach's alpha test, the questions were grouped by the following constructs (and treated as subscales): boundary preference, behavioral, temporal, physical and communicative. The constructs were based upon those identified by Kreiner, et al. (2009). Initial data analysis indicated that several questions were weak. To address this issue, these questions were either revised or deleted.

After these revisions and deletions, a Cronbach's coefficient alpha was again performed. Overall, the survey demonstrated a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .784, exceeding the minimum level of 0.7 typically interpreted as acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

The final survey instrument consisted of 45 questions scored on a six-point Likert-type scale, 8 demographic questions, and one open response question. High scores for each construct represented a greater likelihood toward specific preferences in boundary segmentation/

integration and preferred boundary management tactics. Minimum and maximum values for each construct are listed in Table 1.

Table 1  
Work-Home-School Boundary Construct Values

Construct	Minimum	Maximum
Boundary Preference: Segmentation	4	24
Boundary Preference: Integration	5	30
Behavioral	15	90
Using other people	3	18
Leveraging technology	5	30
Invoking triage	3	18
Allowing differential permeability	4	24
Temporal	6	36
Controlling work time	4	24
Finding respite	2	12
Physical	9	54
Adapting physical boundaries	5	30
Manipulating physical spaces	2	12
Managing physical artifacts	2	12
Communicative Tactics	6	36
Setting expectations	2	12
Confronting violators	4	24

Questions related to the segmentation/integration constructs were based on Ashforth et al. (2000) work on boundary theory and its application to work life. Questions related to boundary management tactics were based on the work done by Kreiner et al. (2009) that grew out of the literature subsequent to the work by Ashforth et al. (2000). The constructs, questions and related literature are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

## Survey Questions by Construct and Literature Base

Constructs Measured	Literature Base	Survey Question	Question Number
Boundary Issues			
Boundary Preferences - segmentation	Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009	I prefer to keep work, home and school completely separate.	2_1
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009	I don't like to take personal calls at work.	2_2
	Schieman, Milke and Glavin (2009); Shieman and Young (2010); Greenhaus and Beutell (1985)	I prefer to be at work during specific hours every day (8 am to 5 pm for example).	2_3
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009	When people call me at home about work-related matters I get irritated.	2_4
Boundary preferences-integration	Kreiner et al., 2009	I stop work to tend to personal things when I need to.	2_5
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009	I do my school assignments whenever I have time, at work or at home.	2_6
	Zvonkovic , Notter, and Peters, 2006	I am really good at multi-tasking.	2_7

(table continues)



Table 2 (continued)

Constructs Measured	Literature Base	Survey Question	Question Number
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009	I don't mind if my family calls me at work.	2_8
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009	I prefer a job that allows me to have flexibility in when and where I get work done.	4_4
	Boundary management tactics		
Behavioral			
Using other people			
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Darrah, 2007	At work, I have people who help me screen interruptions.	2_9
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Darrah, 2007	I sometimes use a babysitter, housekeeper or other "hired help" to help me free up time for school assignments.	2_10
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Darrah, 2007	My family members help me screen work calls.	3_1
Leveraging technology			
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2009; Darrah, 2007	I check the number on the phone to determine if I want to take a work call at home.	3_2

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs Measured	Constructs Measured	Constructs Measured	Question Number
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Darrah, 2007	I screen work calls when I'm at home.	3_3
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Darrah, 2007	I use Dropbox or other "cloud" technologies to access my school work at different locations.	3_4
	Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Darrah, 2007	I set an "out of office" on my computer when I block time during the week to work on school work.	3_5
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Darrah, 2007	I can access my work computer from any computer any time (remote access).	3_6
Invoking triage	Kreiner et al., 2009; Milliken and Dunn- Jensen, 2005	I effectively prioritize the multiple demands on my time from work, home and school.	3_7
	Milliken and Dunn- Jensen, 2005	I have a predetermined set of priorities that I use when issues from work, home and school are demanding my time all at once.	3_8
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Milliken and Dunn- Jensen, 2005	Work usually gets priority over other things in my life.	3_9

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs Measured	Literature Base	Survey Question	Question Number
Allowing differential permeability	Kreiner et al., 2009	I talk about school at work.	3_10
	Kreiner et al., 2009	I talk about work with my classmates.	4_1
	Kreiner et al., 2009	I talk about work at home.	4_2
	Kreiner et al., 2009	I talk about my family and friends at work.	4_3
Temporal			
Controlling work time	Ashforth et al., 2000; Offstein et al., 2004; Darrah, 2007	I block time to work on school work in the evenings.	4_5
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Offstein et al., 2004; Darrah, 2007	I block time to work on school work on the weekends.	4_6
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Rau & Hyland, 2002; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010	When I take time for personal things during the workday, I try to make up for the time by working in the evening or on the weekend.	4_7
	Kreiner et al., 2009	I try to avoid working on the weekend	4_9
Finding respite			4_8
	Kreiner et al., 2009	I find ways to take “mental breaks” that remove me from my work, home and school responsibilities.	

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs Measured	Literature Base	Survey Question	Question Number
Physical  Adapting physical boundaries	Kreiner et al., 2009	After I take a <u>real</u> break from everything, I am better able to handle my responsibilities.	4_10
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996	I have one spot where I like to do my school work.	5_1
Manipulating physical spaces	Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996	It is easiest for me to do my school work at the office outside of work hours.	5_2
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996	I have invited people from school to my home.	5_3
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996	I purposefully live in a town different from where my workplace is located.	5_4
	Kreiner et al., 2009	People at work know where I live.	5_5
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Darrah, 2007; Nippert-Eng, 1996	I dress differently at work than I do at home.	5_6

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs Measured	Literature Base	Survey Question	Question Number
Managing physical artifacts	Nippert-Eng, 1996; Darrah, 2007	I keep all my personal, school and work appointments on one calendar.	5_7
Communicative tactics			
Setting expectations	Kreiner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Darrah, 2007	My family members know they should only interrupt me at work for emergencies.	6_1
	Ashforth et al., 2000; Pols Lowe and Gayle, 2007on, 2003; Darrah, 2007;	I have asked my family members not to interrupt me when I'm working on school work.	6_2
Confronting violators	Kreiner et al., 2009	I have confronted family members who interrupted my school work too much.	6_3
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Polson, 2003	I have had to set boundaries with my family and friends about when they can interrupt me at work.	6_4
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Milliken and Dunn-Jensen (2005); Darrah, 2007	I have asked a supervisor or coworker to stop contacting me at home so much.	6_5

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs Measured	Literature Base	Survey Question	Question Number
	Kreiner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Darrah, 2007	I have had to make rules with certain classmates about when or how to contact me about school work.	6_6

Demographic data were also collected as a part of the study. The data included the number of children at home, the number of years of full-time work experience, frequency of travel, average hours per week spent on work-related things, and average hours per week spent on school-related work. One open-ended response question was included to probe specific challenges in balancing work, school and home.

The following operational definitions were used in developing the survey and analyzing the data collected. While the definitions were based largely on work done by Ashforth et al. (2000) and Kreiner et al. (2009), they include, when appropriate, the construct of school in addition to those of work and home.

**Boundary theory:** An individual constructs fences or walls around work and home and other domains as a way of ordering his or her world (Ashcroft et al., 2000)

**Segmentation:** A preference for maintaining roles at work, home and school as mutually exclusive (Ashforth et al., 2000).

**Integration:** A preference for mixing roles and domains like work, home and school (Ashcroft et al., 2000).

**Boundary violation:** A person's belief that something (a behavior, occurrence, etc.) negatively impacts the desired state of work, home and/or school boundaries (Kreiner, et al., 2009).

**Intrusion boundary violation:** An imposition of one domain and its associated roles into another domain/roles that creates forced integration (Kreiner et al., 2009).

**Boundary management: Behavioral:** Utilizing people and technologies to help secure a boundary (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Boundary management: Temporal: Blocking time to do roles associated with specific domains or removing oneself entirely from conflicting domains (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Boundary management: Physical: Actions taken to purposefully solidify or weaken boundaries between domains (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Boundary management: Communicative: Managing the expectations of others regarding one's boundary preferences (Kreiner et al., 2009).

## **Data Collection**

Participants were introduced to the survey during the first Saturday class of the spring 2012 semester. During this class, students' learned about the research goals, the survey instrument and the research timeline as well as their role as potential volunteers for the study. Directly after this discussion, the survey link was emailed to both the first- and second-year cohorts with a survey deadline of one week.

Three different follow up emails from the researcher were sent to all students to maximize the response rate (Fowler, 2002). As part of the informed consent requirement, all informational emails as well as the first page of the survey clearly stated that student participation was voluntary and that a student was free to stop the survey at any time. Data were collected with Qualtrics survey software.

## **Data Analysis**

After the surveys were completed, the overall response rate was calculated as was the response rate for each cohort surveyed. Response bias was not considered a factor since the time period in which the survey was conducted was only one week with more than 80% of the responses recorded in the first four days that the survey was available.

Data from the Qualtrics software were imported into SPSS software in order to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Specific questions were reverse coded to ensure

that all constructs and subscales were unidirectional. The open responses were copied directly from the SPSS file into Microsoft Word for evaluation of trends.

*Research question one:* What was the profile of the part-time MBA adult graduate student?

Descriptive statistics performed on the demographic questions were used to develop a profile of the part-time MBA student at the University of Arkansas. Statistics included mean, standard deviation, variance, and ranges for each question posed in the demographic section of the survey. In addition, the boundary preference scales, construct scales, and construct subscales were averaged to identify a score for each individual on each scale and subscale.

Tendency to segment or integrate was determined by averaging responses to the questions related to the boundary preference construct. Data in questions 5 through 9 were reverse coded so that high values in both the segmentor subscale and the integrator subscale indicated that the respondent was a high segmentor/low integrator.

No individuals scored in the 5 or 6 range indicating high segmentor. Conversely, no individual scored in the 1 range, indicating high integrator. Instead, respondents fell into the 2, 3 or 4 categories with 24.7% averaging 2 (high integrator), 49.5% averaging 3 (low integrator) and 25.8 averaging 4 (low segmentor).

For the purposes of the study, the term integrator was used for individuals averaging between 2 and 3, and the term segmentor was used for individuals averaging 4 on the 6-point Likert scale. With this schema, 69 integrators and 24 segmentors were identified. Individuals scoring a 2 or 3 on the boundary preference scale were coded as 0 and individuals scoring a 4 on the boundary preference scale were coded as 1, creating a variable for analysis termed “boundary preference.”



*Research question two:* What were the preferred tactics used by segmentors and integrators in incorporating roles at school into those already developed at work and at home?

The differences between the tactics used by the segmentors and those used by the integrators were analyzed by performing independent t-tests on constructs and subscales by boundary preference in order to determine if significant differences occurred in the tactics used by segmentors and the integrators to incorporate roles at school into those already developed at work and at home.

*Research question three:* Were the tactics utilized by students in year one of the program different from those utilized by students in year two of the program?

An independent t-test was used to compare the tactics employed by the first-year and the second-year MBA cohorts without regard to boundary preferences. In addition, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in year one segmentors and integrators and year two segmentors and integrators. Finally, a Tukey's post hoc test was performed to determine the relationships between year in the program, tendency to segment or integrate and the constructs and subscales.

*Research question four:* Did integrators use significantly different tactics than segmentors?

Pearson product moment correlations by preference to segment or integrate were performed for each tactic construct (behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative) as well as subscales represented in each of the four constructs. Independent t-tests were also performed for each subscale by boundary preference.

*Research question five:* What tactics were shown to be the best predictors of a person's tendency to integrate or segment work-life-school boundaries?

Regression modeling was performed in an attempt to construct a model for predicting, based on the tactic utilized, whether a prospective MBA student would be a segmentor or an integrator. In order to predict the boundary preference, the preference was used as the dependent variable and the constructs were set as the independent variables. The remainder of the study was approached with the constructs as the dependent variables with the boundary preferences as the independent variables.

### *Open Response Analysis*

Using the data analysis model for qualitative data outlined by Creswell (2009), the open response data were copied from the Qualtrics survey results file into a Word file to allow for analysis. Since all responses were entered by the respondents, no mistakes were made in transcribing or otherwise manipulating the data prior to analysis. Responses were numbered to provide an identifier for each comment. A total of 84 open responses were received. These were sorted and coded according to themes that emerged as delineated by Creswell (2009) in order to provide supporting information for the overall study.

### **Chapter Summary**

Using boundary theory as applied to the work-home-school construct, first and second year students in the Managerial MBA program at the University of Arkansas were surveyed to evaluate their inclination to segment or integrate their roles within these three environments. Students were also surveyed to determine the tactics they used to manage the boundaries between these roles.

The final survey consisted of 43 questions scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale, one open response question, and eight demographic questions. The response rate for the survey was 81% with 93 of the 115 students surveyed responding. A Cronbach's alpha test on the survey

responses resulted in a reliability index of .714. A quasi-experimental research design was used to analyze the sample. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including frequencies, means, t-tests, Pearson product moment correlation, ANOVA, Tukey post hoc and regression. The open response question was analyzed using qualitative coding methods and results were used to further explore the survey data.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

The study sought to better understand how part-time MBA students who were employed full-time managed the demands on their time and navigated their roles at work, home, and school. Using boundary theory as applied to the work-life-school construct, the study provided new information regarding how the part-time MBA graduate student managed multiple and often conflicting roles.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Although research regarding adult students pursuing higher education is common, few studies have been undertaken using a graduate student population (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Hyun et al., 2006; Offstein et al., 2004; Dyk, 1987). Even more uncommon are studies that have focused on the working professional pursuing a graduate degree. The study was undertaken to explore the tactics by which working graduate students managed to balance work, home, and school.

Because the work-life or work-family construct already had an extensive body of literature on which to draw (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006; Kossek & Lambert, 2005), this research served as a starting point for the study. An exploration of key literature in the work-life arena resulted in a focus on boundary theory and role management as related to the work-life construct. This theoretical framework served as the foundation for the study. Graduate school was added to the work-life construct as a third role, creating a new work-life-school construct to study through the boundary theory lens.

A quasi-experimental research design using a survey with a six point Likert-type scale and one open response question was used. The survey was developed as no previously existing instrument was available. Survey questions were developed based on current literature focusing on boundary theory, specifically the studies that have explored the management of role boundaries. Questions were based on both the work and life domains as delineated in the literature and also introduced the construct of school as a third role domain. Nine questions were designed to identify respondents on the segmentation-integration continuum. The remaining questions were grouped within the boundary management tactics identified by Kreiner et al. (2009) including behavioral, temporal, physical and communicative tactics. Eight demographic questions were also included in order to develop a profile of the respondents. The instrument was delivered online and data were collected over a period of one week. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and the open responses were analyzed using coding procedures outlined by Creswell (2009).

### **Population Demographics**

The target population consisted of 115 students enrolled in either year one or year two of the Managerial MBA program at the University of Arkansas. The convenience sample included all students enrolled in the second and fifth semesters of the six-semester, two-year MBA program designed specifically for the working professional. Students selected for the program typically had a minimum of two years of work experience and had demonstrated academic ability on the GMAT or GRE test prior to enrollment.

Ninety-three students responded to the survey for a total response rate of 81%. Of the total responders, 55 individuals or 59% were first year students and 38 individuals or 41% were second year students. At the time of the survey, the first year cohort had 64 students enrolled

and the second year cohort had 51 students enrolled. The overall response rate for the first year cohort was 86% while the overall response rate for the second year cohort was 75%. A Cronbach coefficient alpha test performed on the completed survey resulted in a reliability index of .714, exceeding the minimum level of 0.7 generally interpreted as acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

### **Data Analysis**

*Research question one:* What was the profile of the part-time MBA adult graduate student?

A profile of the part-time MBA student at the University of Arkansas was developed using descriptive statistics to analyze the demographic questions included in the survey instrument. Of those responding to the survey, 73% were men, a number representative of the overall Managerial MBA enrollment. Just over 35% of the students reported having children under the age of 18 in the home, and approximately 33% of first year students and almost 40% of second year students had one or more children living at home.

Years of work experience varied considerably. When asked how many years they had worked since graduating with the bachelor's degree, the largest percentage (28%) reported having worked 3 to 5 years. Over one third reported having worked 10 years or more and 15% had worked 15 years or more (see Table 3).

Table 3.

*Reported Work Experience Post-Baccalaureate*

Years Worked	Frequency n <sup>2</sup>	Percent
0 – 2 years	19	20.4%
3 – 5 years	26	28.0
6 – 9 years	17	18.3

10 – 14 years	17	18.3
15 or more years	14	15.1

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Approximately 25% of students reported working for a retail company. The international headquarters for both Wal-Mart and Sam's Club are located in the region. It can be assumed that most of these individuals who reported working for a retailer worked for one of these two companies. Approximately 57% of respondents said they worked for a vendor company located in the area in order to sell directly to Wal-Mart and/or Sam's Club. Fewer than 9% reported working for a local, state, or federal government agency and just over 3% worked for a non-profit organization. Four percent were self-employed and only one student was not currently employed.

Work travel played a significant role in the lives of more than 48% of the students who reported traveling at least once every few months. Almost one quarter traveled once or twice a month while just over 4% traveled weekly for work. Approximately 24% traveled a few times a year and another 24% reported that they did not travel at all for work.

Overall, work took up a considerable portion of Managerial MBA students' lives (Table 4). Only 17% of the population reported working 40 hours per week or less. Almost 51% of students worked up to 50 hours per week. Approximately 27% reported working up to 60 hours per week and slightly more than 5% worked 60 hours or more each week. More second year students reported long work weeks than first year students with just over 89% of second year students reporting that they worked more than 40 hours as compared to approximately 78% for first year students.

Table 4.

*Reported Work Hours Per Week*

Hours Worked	Frequency $n^2$	Percent
20 hours or less	1	1.1%
21 – 39 hours	3	3.2
40 hours	12	12.9
41 – 50 hours	47	50.5
51 – 60 hours	25	26.9
60 hours or more	5	5.4

School-related work took a significant portion of the week for most students as well. More than 62% reported spending 11 hours or more on assignments, studying, and other homework, and almost 9% spent more than 20 hours on school-related tasks each week. Not all students spent significant time on school, however; over 37% reported spending ten hours or less on work outside the classroom (see Table 5).

Table 5.

*Reported School-Related Hours Per Week*

School Hours	Frequency $n^2$	Percent
10 hours or less	35	37.6%
11 – 15 hours	27	29.0
16 – 20 hours	23	24.7
21 hours or more	8	8.6



Students were identified as segmentors or integrators based on the mean score of responses for questions 1 through 9 on the instrument with the highest score (6) indicating a high segmentor and a low score (1) indicating a high integrator. As noted, no student scored a mean of 1, 5, or 6. Therefore, integrators were identified as those individuals with mean scores between 2 and 3, while segmentors had a mean score of 4.

Based on these findings, the typical Managerial MBA student was male, worked in the retail/vendor industry and spent a significant amount of time each week on work-related tasks. Many traveled regularly for their work and most reported working more than a 40-hour week. Time spent on school work was more limited, but most students appeared to devote more than ten hours per week to homework and other assignments. On the segmentation-integration continuum, students tended toward integration overall.

*Research question two:* What were the preferred tactics used by segmentors and integrators in incorporating roles at school into those already developed at work and at home?

The differences between the tactics used by the segmentors and those used by the integrators were analyzed using an independent t-test. Findings indicated that, regardless of an individual's tendency to segment or integrate, the tactics used were similar with the exception of the two subscales in the communicative construct. Both integrators and segmentors tended to use the behavioral, temporal, and physical constructs in a similar manner as evidenced by mean values in the 3 to 4 range (see Table 6). An independent t-test performed for each subscale by boundary preferences showed a significant difference in how segmentors and integrators used the tactics setting expectations ( $t = -3.38, p = .001$ ) and confronting violators ( $t = -3.38, p = .001$ ).

Table 6.

*Mean Values by Boundary Preference and Construct*

	Boundary Preference	Frequency n <sup>2</sup>	Mean	SD
Behavioral	Integrator	66	3.59	.580
	Segmentor	23	3.61	.592
Temporal	Integrator	69	4.54	.582
	Segmentor	23	4.67	.548
Physical	Integrator	69	3.93	.498
	Segmentor	24	3.80	.485
Communicative	Integrator	69	2.35	.795
	Segmentor	24	3.16	.842

The independent t-test conducted on the constructs also showed significance for the overall behavioral construct ( $t = -2.01, p = .048$ ); however, a subsequent independent t-test performed on the subscales within the behavioral construct showed no significant difference between the integrator and segmentor populations for any behavioral tactic tested.

*Research question three:* Were the tactics utilized by students in year one of the program different from those utilized by students in year two of the program?

An independent t-test was used to compare the tactics employed by the first year and the second year MBA cohorts without regard to boundary preferences to determine if length of time in the program led students to change the tactics they used in managing their boundaries. The results revealed no significant differences in the behavioral, temporal, physical, or communicative constructs overall ( $t = -1.5, -.483, -.37, -1.02; p = >.05$ , respectively).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in year one segmentors and integrators and year two segmentors and integrators. Significant differences were found in the communicative construct ( $F(3, 89) = 6.66$ ,  $p = .00$ ) with regard to both year in the program and boundary preference. Year one integrators were significantly different than year 1 and year 2 segmentors ( $p < 0.01$ ). A Tukey post hoc test was run to determine where the significance occurred within the communicative construct subscales (see Table 7). For the setting expectations subscale, significant differences were found between the year one integrator and year one segmentor ( $p = 0.005$ ) as well as the year one integrator and year two segmentor ( $p = 0.012$ ). The confronting violators subscale demonstrated differences between the year one integrator and the year one segmentor ( $p = .013$ ) and the year one integrator and the year two segmentor ( $p = .050$ ).

Table 7.

*Tukey Post Hoc by Boundary Preference and Year in Program*

Variable	Boundary Pref/Year	Boundary Pref/Year	Mean Diff.	SE	Sign.
Setting Expectations	Year 1 Integrator	Year 2 Integrator	-.493	.266	.257
		Year 1 Segmentor	-1.100	.318	.005
		Year 2 Segmentor	-1.339	.424	.012
Confronting Violators	Year 1 Integrator	Year 2 Integrator	-.221	.206	.706
		Year 1 Segmentor	-.767	.246	.013
		Year 2 Segmentor	-.859	.327	.050

When communicative subscale means for year one and two integrators and year one and year two segmentors were examined, the integrators demonstrated a distinct tendency toward integration tactics as compared with the segmentors (Table 8).

Table 8.

*Mean Values by Year in Program, Boundary Preference, and Communicative Subscales*

Communicative Subscale	Year in Program	Boundary Preference	Freq .n <sup>2</sup>	Mean	SD
Setting Expectations	Year 1	Integrator	38	2.72	1.167
	Year 2	Integrator	30	3.22	.944
	Year 1	Segmentor	17	3.82	1.298
	Year 2	Segmentor	8	4.06	.623
Confronting Violators	Year 1	Integrator	38	1.95	.728
	Year 2	Integrator	30	2.17	.859
	Year 1	Segmentor	17	2.72	1.019
	Year 2	Segmentor	8	2.81	.884

The size of the year one and the year two integrators was similar; however, the number of segmentors in year 2 was relatively small in comparison to the total sample population.

Therefore, these data may be biased due to the method of data collection.

*Research question four:* Did integrators use significantly different tactics than segmentors?

Pearson product moment correlations were performed by boundary preference for each tactic construct (behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative). A positive correlation was indicated between boundary preference and the behavioral construct ( $r^2 = .210, p = .048$ ) and the communicative construct ( $r^2 = .406, p < .001$ ).

Pearson product moment correlations were then performed for the subscales within both the behavioral and the communicative constructs. The correlation coefficients for the subscales within the communicative construct for both the subscales confronting violators and setting expectations were significantly correlated with an individual's tendency to segment or integrate (setting expectations:  $r^2 = .373, p < .001$ ; confronting violators:  $r^2 = .354, p < .001$ ). However, the behavioral subscales were not found to significantly correlate with a person's tendency to

segment or integrate. Based on these findings, it would appear that there is a relationship between how integrators and segmentors tend to exhibit behaviors in communicating their boundary needs, specifically in their tendency to set expectations for others regarding their boundaries as well as confronting those who violate their boundaries.

An independent t-test performed for each subscale by boundary preferences also showed a significant difference between how segmentors and integrators used the tactics setting expectations ( $t = -3.38, p = .001$ ) and confronting violators ( $t = -3.38, p = .001$ ).

*Research question five:* What tactics were shown to be the best predictors of a person's tendency to integrate or segment work-life-school boundaries?

Regression modeling was performed in an attempt to construct a model for predicting, based on the tactic(s) utilized, whether a prospective MBA student would be a segmentor or an integrator. A multiple regression model was constructed using the segmentor/integrator scale average as the dependent variable and the constructs as independent variables. The model using only the communicative construct resulted in the communicative construct accounting for 20% of the variance in predicting the level of expected segmentation/integration ( $\hat{Y} = 0.351X + 2.107$ ).

A model adding the behavioral constructs was not significant with the addition of the behavioral construct resulting in only an additional 3.3% of variance in the prediction. Additional constructs were added to determine the percentage of variance that could be explained by each successive additional variable. The adjusted  $R$  square values indicated that even with all four predictors in the model, only 23% of the variability in the predicted value could be explained by the model.

### *Open Response Text Analysis*

Prior to coding the data, the researcher reviewed all open response comments to gain an overall impression of the tone and attitudes presented in the data (Creswell, 2009). Following this initial review, a systematic analysis was performed. The data were then coded based on themes that emerged from this analysis. Although themes from at least one qualitative study examining individual tendencies to segment or integrate as well as the associated coping skills were available (Kreiner et al., 2009), themes chosen during this analysis were based on information that naturally emerged from a review of the data that occurred prior to the inferential statistical analysis. These themes were specific to the Managerial MBA student population and their specific challenges in balancing work, school and home.

The open response prompt was “What is the biggest challenge for you in balancing your responsibilities with work, home, and school.” Of the 93 students responding to the survey, 84 or approximately 90% answered the open response prompt. Coding was done without regard to the demographic information linked to each respondent. For example, demographic characteristics such as respondent’s gender, employer type, or time spent on school work were not considered as a part of the analysis.

Themes that emerged in the analysis included *time management*, *coping strategies*, *work challenges*, and *school challenges*. Subthemes for time management included *lack of time*, *prioritization*, *scheduling*, and *unpredictability*. Subthemes for coping strategies were *compromises*, *sacrifices*, and *segmenting strategies*. Specific work challenges and school challenges restricted to an individual’s work environment or the academic program’s curriculum were identified as well. These themes, subthemes, and the number of associated responses are found in Table 9.

Table 9.

*Open Response Themes*

Theme	Subtheme	Number of Responses
Time Management	Lack of Time	27
	Prioritization	15
	Scheduling	11
	Unpredictability	3
Coping Strategies	Compromise	7
	Sacrifice	15
	Segmentation	10
Work Challenges		8
School Challenges		9

Lack of time was the most common problem that students identified when asked about the biggest challenge to balancing work, home, and school. Some students felt that there simply was not enough time in the day to finish everything that needed done to their satisfaction. Several mentioned juggling competing deadlines as a problem. Others saw work and school as taking up time that was once “personal time,” forcing the student to cut down on hobbies, socializing and other activities.

A sense of frustration in the inability to balance work, home and school was evident in several responses. These students appeared to actively prioritize school ahead of home lives and, as illustrated in the quotes below, a theme of dissatisfaction was apparent.

**Managerial MBA respondent 41:** I am currently working around 11hrs/day and sometimes have to work weekends as well to keep up in addition to doing my school work on weekends and at night so my family has missed me especially my 8yo. I've also missed a great deal of soccer games, choir performances and church. I don't go out with friends anymore due to need for study time or see family that live nearby. Cost to further my education was more than I initially bargained for, but I don't quit things I start and I intend to finish despite what it is costing me in time for myself, my family, and friends.

**Managerial MBA respondent 4:** Putting my family first should be very easy, though in actuality, it is quite a challenge. The guilt that I feel when I leave my children to finish (sic) school assignments on the weekend causes me to resent the MBA program, though I realize that it is necessary.

Other students prioritized school ahead of personal relationships and other responsibilities but saw it as a temporary state leading to a goal that would have a positive impact on the entire family.

**Managerial MBA respondent 35:** My wife and kids understand that it is there (sic) sacrifice as much as mine to better myself, in hopes that it will pay dividends in my career in the near future. They understand that it is a finite timeframe and there is an end to school. Their understanding and support make this possible.

Another group of students refused to allow school to take priority over family and work. These students were willing to sacrifice their performance in the program in order to meet their other responsibilities.

**Managerial MBA respondent 18:** I allocate as much time as I possibly can to the MMBA program, but it's still not as much as I would like, as I feel that I am forced to do the bare minimum to make the grade.

**Managerial MBA respondent 4:** I have found the best way to cope is to do my best in school while forcing myself to prioritize (sic) it at the bottom of the list.

While work was definitely seen as a challenge to work-home-school balance, no student reported choosing to allow work performance to be substandard in favor of school performance. Based on the comments received, work was always prioritized ahead of school, and it was evident that many of these students felt extreme pressure to perform at top capacity in their jobs while school performance was far less critical.

**Managerial MBA respondent 18:** I have an extremely demanding job and am expected to travel globally each week - Maintaining employment will always be priority #1 for me, because of this, I have had to willfully sacrifice my school work to ensure I am successful at work - I allocate as much time as I possibly can to the MMBA program, but it's still not as much as I would like, as I feel that I am forced to do the bare minimum to make the grade.



**Managerial MBA respondent 37:** My employees require that I complete my job duties on time and better than the competition, therefore, it is challenging (sic) to balance home and school when not only my income depends on my work performance (sic) but 30 other individuals also depend on how I spend my time.

**Managerial MBA respondent 82:** As a fortunate employee receiving corporate sponsorship to cover the 100% cost of attendance (sic), I know that the needs of my employer must come first. This means that they would likely rather see me accomplish everyday working demands first before worrying (too much) about getting an A+ on every assignment.

Coping strategies in balancing work, home, and school were varied. A number of students focused on the things in their lives that they had sacrificed to make time for school. Others focused on ways in which they were able to compromise with family members to create more time for school. Several students mentioned the specific coping technique that involved segmentation of school, work, and family life in order to accomplish responsibilities.

Sacrifices took on many forms with one of the prevalent being sleep. Other students sacrificed community roles, vacation time, and time with children.

**Managerial MBA respondent 54:** I had to stop doing anything that wasn't related to work, home, or school-- for example, I was in the Lion's Club, Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, United Way Board, Community Events coordinator, and District chairman of the Boy Scouts of America. I had to resign all of these positions (temporarily) so that I could have blocks of time for school work

**Managerial MBA respondent 51:** I am constantly faced with the challenge of not spreading myself too thin. There are only so many hours in a day and I feel like if work and school take 80% of that day my child suffers the loss.

Compromises were less commonly discussed but still evident. These compromises typically involved asking another person for help with responsibilities, most often family members.

**Managerial MBA respondent 41:** I maintain the housekeeping and cooking with some help from my husband. My husband takes care of helping the children with homework so I can study after cleaning up from dinner.

Segmentation efforts were evident in several responses. The importance of transitioning roles was evident in the comments, and one individual specifically described transition techniques from one role to another that allowed the student to move from a work mindset to a school mindset.

**Managerial MBA respondent 46:** When I am at work I try to put all other issues aside and focus on my task and duties at work and then when I leave in the afternoon I have to switch focus and clear my mind of all my work issues and focus on all my task (sic) due for school. I try to make time for exercise (sic) to clear my mind during the transition but sometimes that causes me more stress when I begin to feel like I am losing hours of the day.

Blocking time was also discussed as a technique that helped students find time for school. Some students described using Sundays as the day they dedicated completely to school work. Others talked about working late at night or early in the morning when family and work responsibilities were less pressing. Educating the family about these blocks of time dedicated to school work was important in protecting the time.

**Managerial MBA respondent 54:** I tell people that the most important thing about going back to school for an education is to free up blocks of time for study BEFORE you start the course and make sure that your family is aware of those blocks of time so that they don't creep into them.

Overall, the analysis of the open responses showed individuals who were struggling to meet their commitments yet determined not to fail in achieving the goal of earning an MBA. Frustration about heavy workloads, disorganized courses that did not allow for adequate planning, extensive homework, and unpredictable family issues were all evident. However, overall the students approached these challenges with what appeared to be intentional strategies for accomplishing as much as possible in all three arenas of work, home, and school.

## **Chapter Summary**

Students in the Managerial MBA program at the University of Arkansas tended to integrate boundaries between work, home, and school rather than segment them. A high percentage of students were classified as integrators based on responses related to the segmentation-integration continuum. Students tending toward segmentation on the continuum were more likely to actively set expectations regarding their boundaries and confront violators of those boundaries than were integrators. Responses to the open response question suggested a portion of the students preferred segmentation and experienced stress based on the forced integration caused by ongoing unmet demands at work, home and school.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

The results of the research provided new information regarding the experiences of the part-time graduate student who was employed full time while working toward a degree. The addition of school as a third domain to the work-life construct is unique, as researchers have typically focused on the relationship of work-life to home-life as well as the reverse. The addition of graduate school to the life of a full-time employee has a tremendous, yet relatively unexplored, impact on work-life balance. The study sought to better understand the distinct interplay between and consequences of these three constructs.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Students in the Managerial MBA program at the University of Arkansas were surveyed to determine their tendencies to segment or integrate their roles at home, work, and school as well as the tactics they used to manage the boundaries between these roles. Students in the second and fifth year of the program were surveyed for a total population of 115 individuals.

A quasi-experimental research design was used to analyze this convenience sample. The survey instrument was developed utilizing a theoretical framework of boundary theory applied to work-life as described by Ashforth et al. (2000). Questions were created based on subsequent work in boundary management tactics by Kreiner et al. (2009) as well as other literature on boundary role management derived from the work of Ashforth et al. (2000) or the earlier work of Nippert-Eng (1996). Boundary management tactics were grouped by the behavioral, temporal, physical and communicative constructs identified by Kreiner et al. (2009).

An initial survey was piloted on eleven students in the Professional MIS program at the University of Arkansas. A factor analysis was performed to reduce the 93 questions in the original survey to a more manageable number. The final survey consisted of 43 questions scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale, one open response question and eight demographic questions.

The survey was distributed to the Managerial MBA population in January 2012 and data were gathered for a period of one week. The response rate after one week was 81% at which point the survey was closed. A Cronbach's alpha test on the responses resulted in a reliability index of .714. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including frequencies, means, t-tests, Pearson product moment correlation, ANOVA, Tukey post hoc and regression. The open response question was analyzed using qualitative coding methods as outlined by Creswell (2009).

## **Conclusions**

Findings indicated that it was only in the communicative tactic that individuals who tended toward segmentation versus those who tended toward integration behaved differently in how they communicate with others about their boundaries between work, home, and school. Segmentors tended to more actively manage the expectations of others by defining boundaries between work, home, and school, and were more likely to protect those boundaries when someone attempted to violate them. Although the study did not extend to determining the effectiveness of setting expectations or confronting violators in managing work-home-school boundaries, it may be predicted that individuals who successfully employ these tactics may achieve more success in managing their boundaries and meeting their commitments.

*Research question 1: What was the profile of the part-time MBA adult graduate student?*

The typical part-time MBA student in the Managerial MBA program at the University of Arkansas worked for a company that is part of the retail industry in Northwest Arkansas made up of the two retail giants, Wal-Mart and Sam's Club, as well as the hundreds of vendor companies housed in the region to sell products to these retailers.

More than 70% of the students responding to the survey were male. The majority of respondents had at least a few years of work experience and more than 30% had ten years of experience or more. Almost half of the respondents reported traveling regularly for work, defined as every few months at minimum. Almost 90% of the fifth semester or second year students and almost 80% of the second semester or first year students reported working more than 40 hours per week. More than 30% of the total respondents reported working more than 50 hours per week. The majority of students reported spending 11 hours or more on school-related work each week.

Students were identified as segmentors or integrators based on their responses to questions one through nine on the instrument. A high mean score on the questions indicated a high segmentor while a low mean score indicated a high integrator. No respondent scored at the extreme ends of the scale. Instead, students scored a mean of either a 2, 3, or 4. Therefore, students with mean scores of 4 were identified as segmentors while student scoring a mean of 2 or 3 were considered integrators. Overall, 74.2% showed a tendency to integrate their roles rather than segment them based on their responses to these questions.

*Research question 2: What were the preferred tactics used by the adult student in incorporating roles at school into those already developed at work and at home?*

Although segmentors and integrators appeared to utilize the communicative tactics differently, no definitive conclusions could be drawn based on this research. An independent t-

test revealed that the tactics used by both segmentors and integrators were not significantly different in the behavioral, temporal, or physical constructs. A review of the mean scores for these constructs by boundary preference showed very similar scores for integrators and segmentors.

The independent t-test conducted for the behavioral construct demonstrated significant differences between segmentors and integrators. The mean scores for the communicative construct were lower for integrators than for segmentors. A subsequent t-test performed on the subscales represented in the communicative construct, including “setting expectations” and “confronting violators” showed no significant difference between integrators and segmentors.

*Research question 3: Were the tactics utilized by students in year one of the program different from those utilized by students in year two of the program?*

Although no significant differences were found in how year one and year two students utilized boundary management tactics, the study found that year one integrators tended to utilize the tactics in the communicative construct, including ‘setting expectations’ of others and ‘confronting violators’ in significantly different ways than did year one and year two segmentors.

The tactics used by year one (second semester) and year two (fifth semester) students were compared using an independent t-test, without regard to identified boundary preferences. The results demonstrated no significant differences in how year one and year two students used any of the tactics represented in the behavioral, temporal, physical, or communicative constructs.

The tactics used by year one segmentors and integrators and year two segmentors and integrators were then compared using a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Significant differences were found in how year one integrators used communicative tactics as compared to both year one and year two segmentors ( $p = < 0.01$ ).

A Tukey post hoc test was performed to determine which of the two tactics within the communicative construct were different for students based on boundary preference and time in the program. For both the tactic of ‘setting expectations’ of others regarding an individual’s boundary preference and the tactic of ‘confronting violators’ who infringed upon an individual’s boundary preference, significant differences were seen between year one integrators and both year one and year two segmentors. A subsequent examination of the means for year one and two integrators and year one and two segmentors showed that integrators in year one appeared less likely to set expectations or confront violators than did the segmentors in either year one or year two of the program.

*Research question 4: Did integrators use significantly different tactics than segmentors?*

Significant differences were found in how integrators and segmentors set the expectations of others regarding their preferred boundary management and how they confronted those who violated their boundaries between work, home, and school. Pearson product moment correlations were performed for each tactic construct by boundary preference. Although no correlations were found between boundary preference and the temporal and physical constructs, positive correlations were found between boundary preference and the behavioral and communicative constructs.

When Pearson product moment correlations were completed for the subscales within the behavioral and communicative construct, correlations were found only in the ‘setting expectation’ and ‘confronting violators’ subscales that made up the communicative constructs. A subsequent independent t-test confirmed that there was a significant difference in how segmentors and integrators utilized these two subscale tactics.



*Research question 5: What tactics were shown to be the best predictors of a person's tendency to integrate or segment work-life-school boundaries?*

Regression modeling found that how a person uses the tactics that make up the communicative construct, including setting expectations and confronting violators are the best predictors of a person's tendency to integrate or segment individual boundary roles in the work-home-school environments. Overall, the findings suggest that the addition of the role of school to an individual's work and home roles may lead them to apply more integration tactics than the same individual might when balancing only two roles. Students in the study who scored toward the segmentation end of the segmentation-integration continuum showed a propensity toward integration.

Supplemental open responses illustrated a student population struggling to meet the demands of multiple roles at work, home and school, and seeking relief from overwhelming schedules. Kreiner et al. (2009) found that individuals typically desired segmentation of roles over integration when given the choice. The analysis of the open response question supported this finding, showing that at least a portion of the population was attempting to segment but feeling unsuccessful in doing so.

These results were consistent with the work of Ashforth et al. (2000) who found that integration of roles eases the transition between roles, allowing an individual to move between the work and home roles more easily. The addition of a third, highly intensive role such as graduate school may compel the overcommitted individual toward integration of roles during the program, causing what Ashforth et al. (2000) and others, termed a *blurring* of roles, despite an individual's preferred boundary management style. The stress caused from this blurring of roles is recognized by researchers as the primary contributor to work-life conflict. The addition of

graduate school to the work-life domain appears to increase role blurring and its associated stress.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for practice.**

Students beginning a part-time MBA program often are anxious regarding how they will accomplish the work of the program in addition to their other responsibilities. MBA faculty and staff working with employed, part-time students have conversations each semester with students who are considering leaving a program temporarily or permanently in order to effectively address concerns at work and at home. These discussions are most often initiated by the student only after having experienced a crisis at home, work or school.

Professionals who work with part-time graduate students should be aware of the issues facing employed adult students attempting to add the role of graduate school to already busy lives. Based on the finding of the study, students adding this third role appear to work harder to integrate roles, even when conscious segmentation could help alleviate stress. Trying to work on school assignments while stopping regularly to answer work email, for example, may feel productive but actually causes strain that impacts a person's effectiveness in all roles. Educators should be alert to the tendency to integrate roles, helping the student to identify points in which segmentation may be more effective.

Some students reported that they utilized what Kreiner et al. (2009) termed *triage*, knowing that work and family always received priority over school. This tactic should be presented to the students as one method of balancing work, home and school. Students who are uncomfortable with making school a third priority consistently may find that simply explaining the unpredictable nature of their responsibilities, especially with the addition of graduate school,

to others may help both the student and the family member to better set expectations for the duration of the program. Additionally, students should be informed of the value of confronting violators of their work-home-school boundaries. By establishing these boundaries and, when possible, not allowing violators from one role to intrude on another, the individual may be better able to manage competing responsibilities.

### **Enrollment management practices.**

Graduate programs that operate using the principles of enrollment management have numerous points at which to communicate with the student. Recruitment, orientation, mentoring, advising and alumni services are all key functions where faculty and staff gain the opportunity to talk about how to be successful in an MBA program.

Recruiting is an important part of an MBA program and business schools often dedicate significant staff resources to attracting high caliber students. Prospective students are eager to understand how attending an MBA program part time will work with their schedules. Staff who organize and make presentations at open houses and other recruiting events should be prepared to discuss coping techniques that are needed when adding school to the work-home construct.

Higher education professionals also should be prepared to talk with students during the initial orientation to the program, and throughout each semester, about the role of boundaries in the successful completion of a graduate program. While some students may see value in labeling themselves ‘multi-taskers’ who are capable of handling a myriad of responsibilities simultaneously, the study and the findings of previous researchers suggest that a blurring of roles leads to stress. Students should be helped to understand that this stress may be mitigated by the careful application of appropriate boundaries. By developing and maintaining boundaries

between work, home and school a student may find that role-related stress decreases and a better work-life-school balance is maintained over the duration of an academic program.

Staff members who operate graduate programs in business should be supported in developing mentoring programs in which students further into the program mentor new students. These experienced students are, perhaps, in the best position of all to aid the new student in adapting the third role of school to the work-home construct.

Finally, alumni who participate in program recruiting can assist prospective students in alleviating concerns regarding the stress of attending graduate school part time while working full time. Alumni are often the best recruiters for any program and knowledgeable alumni who have successfully navigated the boundaries between work, home, and school are in the best position to provide practical advice and support to incoming students.

#### **Academic advising.**

The regression model developed here indicated that the academic advisor could aid the employed adult students who are entering graduate school by helping them to identify their tendency to segment or integrate. The research indicated that segmentors tend to set the expectations of others regarding boundaries and confront those individuals who do not respect these boundaries. Asking meaningful questions regarding how a new student uses these communicative tactics in the work-home construct could assist the professional educator in identifying those students who may tend toward integration and who may experience more stress when incorporating the role of school into work and home responsibilities.

Identification of these tendencies to integrate may be particularly useful in the first semester or year of the program when students are more susceptible to exiting the program. Academic advising that sensitizes the student to the stress that they may be self-inflicting by

trying to integrate roles while helping them recognize segmentation coping mechanisms could lessen the number of students leaving the MBA prior to graduation.

### **Curriculum issues.**

Based on analysis of the open response question and the subtheme regarding issues surrounding the curriculum, students also can be alerted to the uneven patterns of school work and encouraged to work ahead as much as possible when the load is lighter so as to increase the likelihood of discretionary time for work and home when responsibilities become more intense. The student should understand the nature of competing priorities and develop personal mechanisms to handle work, home, and school-related stress that works best.

The open response analysis yielded information about the impact of team work on student time and ability to accomplish work. MBA programs traditionally use team work as a learning tool and make teams required to accomplish some assignments. The concept behind team work is that students must learn to operate in teams in a business environment and team training in the MBA program can provide this experience in a nonthreatening environment. The employed students in the study, however, indicated that they already spent a significant amount of time working in teams in the workplace. Several suggested that the teamwork required in the MBA program only prolonged the amount of time needed to complete assignments and added to overall frustration when team members did not produce a fair share of the work or did not produce work in a timely manner. Faculty and staff should be aware that, for the part-time graduate student who works full time, team-based assignments may add very little to the learning process but, instead, increase frustrations about the program's overall value.

A quality MBA program should be academically rigorous, pushing students to demonstrate a deep understanding of the material. Higher education practitioners will operate

successful part-time programs if they remain sensitive to the delicate balance of work, home and school that the typical student must maintain. Motivated part-time students can become successful alumni, but only when higher education faculty and staff work together to create programs that works for the employed adult.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Respondents in the study were more likely to use integration tactics rather than segmentation tactics. Future research should examine the preference of part-time graduate students toward segmentation or integration prior to beginning an academic program and again after the students have been in the program a significant period of time. This research could help to determine whether adding a third role, school, to the work-home construct does, indeed, increase intrusion violations and push the working adult graduate student toward the integration of roles.

Although the literature shows that gender likely plays a role in how one perceives or experiences work-life balance, this topic was not explored in the study. Students in the Managerial MBA program were overwhelmingly male, at 74%. Similarly, minority students were not identified as a distinct group due to the relatively low numbers of students in the program overall. Research into the female or minority population in isolation or, more specifically, the female or minority individual who chooses not to attend an MBA program due to work and home responsibilities is an important avenue for future research.

The population studied was limited, primarily, to either students who work for one of the retailers in Northwest Arkansas or who work for vendor or consulting companies that do business with these retailers. Despite the variety of companies, goods, and services represented in the study, the Northwest Arkansas business community has its own distinct culture that

influences work-life-school balance. Furthermore, the economy in Northwest Arkansas is distinctly different from regional economies around the U.S. and world. The region has, in effect, been protected somewhat from economic downturns common to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century due to the presence of Wal-Mart, a company that typically does well when people become more sensitive about price.

This relative financial security plays a role in how students respond to the work-life-school paradigm, by creating what is possibly a more intensive business environment in the region than seen elsewhere. This environment may place additional stressors on students that may not be found in other regions. Research on work-life-school issues found in a wider population of students outside the Northwest Arkansas region would be an excellent topic for future research.

The distinctiveness of the Walton College part-time MBA population and curriculum is a limitation of the study. The population studied in this research was limited to one institution and one program. The part time MBA program at the Walton College is designed primarily around the retail industry. Programs at other institutions are often designed to serve regional industries like aeronautics or finance, for example. Future research should extend the population to include part-time MBA students at other Research 1-type institutions to better understand the challenge faced by a broader cross-section of part-time MBA students.

The Walton Managerial MBA program is also cohort-based, with entering students taking the same courses for the most part and graduating together. Many part-time MBA programs at other institutions are not cohort-based but allow students to move in and out of courses based on their schedules and personal circumstances. In addition, other programs may be online or available in the evenings rather than on the weekend as is the Walton College program.

A cohort-based program may lend itself to a more solid peer support structure. Additionally, staff working with the population see the same students at regular intervals and are able to develop relationships that often enable them to quickly identify specific problems based on, for instance, a lack of attendance or unusually poor performance. This quick identification of potential problems allows for a more rapid response and solution focus from staff regarding situations that might, in a non cohort-based program lead a student to simply stop coming to class or not enroll in subsequent semesters.

Conversely, the cohort-based program in the study contained numerous team-based assignments which appear to increase tensions between students within the program. Students report problems in finding meeting times and issues with low-performing team members. These issues can be exacerbated as faculty extend team assignments over several semesters in the program and students find themselves in the same groups again and again. A program that contains less team-based curricula and more individually-based assignments may lead to fewer issues surrounding time management related to group meetings and less frustration overall. The type and nature of the graduate program studied should certainly be a consideration in any future research on the work-home-school boundary constructs.

As no differences were found in how segmentors and integrators utilized the tactics in the behavioral, temporal and physical constructs, future research should consider further study in these areas. Questions for each construct and associated subscales could be analyzed individually with consideration for success in and overall satisfaction with the program. This analysis could help practitioners better understand which tactics lead to better balance of the roles within work, home, and school.



## Discussion

Boundary incongruence results when a person's environment does not match a personal preferred level of segmentation or integration between the roles in life. In their study of Episcopal priests, Kreiner et al. (2009) documented a number of distinct tactics that individuals used to respond to boundary incongruence successfully. With reference to the work and home domains, they arranged these tactics into four categories: behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative. The study extended these tactics to include the work-home-school constructs and an individual's propensity to segment or integrate role boundaries.

Although no boundary research is available that provides numbers as to the predicted ratio of employed individuals who are segmentors versus those who are integrators, the literature has developed based on the concept that both types exist in the workplace. Ashforth et al. (2000) and Rothbard et al. (2005) argued that individuals differed in their preferences for segmentation and integration, pointing out that organizations have incorrectly assumed that employees prefer integration of home and work life. This assumption has led to the development of countless work-life programs like at-work daycares, exercise facilities and job share programs that only a limited number of employees accessed effectively.

Despite researchers who identified segmentation as a potentially preferred technique to achieve a quality work-life balance, respondents in the study clearly trended toward integration over segmentation. This tendency to move toward integration is consistent with Desrochers and Sargent (2004) who found that, although segmentation made the work/family domains easier to manage, integration made transitions between the two easier. Approximately one quarter of individuals scored in the middle of the segmentation-integration continuum, (scoring between 3 and 4 on the 6-point Likert-type scale) exhibiting a tendency to blend both segmentation and

integration tactics. Just over 74 % of the respondents fell on the integration side of the continuum. There were no true segmentors, or individuals who fell on the extreme segmentation end of the integration-segmentation continuum within the population studied.

Ashforth et al. (2000) suggested that integration of roles eases the transition between roles, allowing an individual to move between the work and home roles more easily. The addition of a third, highly intensive role such as graduate school may compel the overcommitted individual toward integration of roles during the program, causing what Ashforth et al. (2000) and others, termed a *blurring* of roles, despite an individual's preferred boundary management style.

If the findings of previous researchers are accepted, and it is acknowledged that the general population of the full-time employed contains individuals with a tendency to segment as well as individuals with a tendency to integrate, then the results of this research enhance the understanding of the working graduate student. The population surveyed reported utilizing integration tactics almost exclusively or blending integration and segmentation tactics. This finding suggests that the addition of school to the work-life construct may encourage integration in individuals who, prior to beginning the MBA program, tended to segment their work and home life more distinctly.

Almost 83% of the students surveyed reported working over 40 hours a week with 32% reporting working over 50 hours per week. Adding graduate school, requiring 10, 20 or more hours of effort per week to this busy work schedule may impel even the most committed segmentor to integrate roles. This view is supported by the fact that no significant differences were found in the temporal construct with both segmentors and integrators exhibiting virtually identical patterns in how they controlled their time related to work and school.

The findings indicated that all students, regardless of what their preferred tendency to integrate or segment might be, utilized behavioral, temporal, and physical tactics in a similar manner but differed in their use of the communicative tactics. Mean scores falling in the mid-range of the scale indicated that there was a tendency in both groups to blend or utilize both integration and segmentation tactics as needed in the tactics represented by the behavioral, temporal, and physical constructs. Significant differences, however, were seen between the integrator and segmentor populations in both subscales of the communicative construct including setting expectations and confronting violators. Table 10 below illustrates the mean scores for both subscales by integrator and segmentor.

Table 10.

*Mean Scores for Communicative Subscales by Boundary Preference*

Subscale	Boundary Preference	N	Mean	SD
Setting expectations	Integrator	66	2.95	1.10
	Segmentor	23	3.85	10.6
Confronting violators	Integrator	66	2.07	.791
	Segmentor	23	2.76	.996

Segmentors tended to set stricter boundaries or set ‘expectations’ for family members regarding interruptions to both work and school than did the integrators. In confronting violators, segmentors tended to enforce boundaries with family, friends, and coworkers regarding interruptions whereas integrators tended to exhibit more flexibility with these interruptions. The open responses provided by students tended to reflect a stronger tendency toward segmentation than did the responses to the survey questions. This was displayed most strongly in comments related to prioritization of responsibilities where respondents appeared to prioritize work ahead of both home and school while the home and school constructs seemed to compete for time.

The students' commitment to work may help to explain the overall tendency of the population toward integration. If work is consistently the priority for these employed students, then they must find avenues by which to accomplish home and school responsibilities without jeopardizing work results. Prior to enrollment, home responsibilities could be more effectively prioritized around work. When the third role of school is added to a schedule, priorities become less clearly delineated. Students noted the uneven flow of school work within the curriculum, indicating that sometimes school required significant amounts of time whereas sometimes it did not.

(The biggest challenge is) managing the weeks when school work is heavy compared to lighter weeks. It is sometimes difficult to plan for weeks with heavy homework/study requirements when work is also busy. **Respondent 67**

This lack of balance in the school workload could lead to frustrations in attempting to balance roles within the work-home-school constructs. The frustrations seen in this student population are consistent with that seen in the literature where graduate students face work and family obligations that result in substantial stress (Nesheim et al., 2006; Stewart, 2010).

Fairchild (2003) found that adult students were not always able to anticipate the impact of these demands on their combined roles. What worked one semester or even one month might not work the next. Coupled with an intense but ever changing work schedule and a set of home responsibilities that students in the study describe as unpredictable, the move to integration is not necessarily surprising.

With so many competing responsibilities, when and how a responsibility is met becomes secondary to the fact that it is accomplished at all. Thus, students who might have, prior to enrollment in graduate school, set aside or segmented time in the evenings and on weekends for their families, now, with the addition of the school role, must prioritize and integrate these new

responsibilities as they are able. They do not, in other words, have the luxury of extra blocks of significant time that they can set aside for “just” school or “just” home responsibilities.

Boundaries between the work, home, and school roles become more permeable and, unlike the more traditional work-home or work-life construct, the work-home-school construct has no cultural “rules” regarding expectations and behaviors (Clark, 2000), including what aspects of which roles get priority over others.

The analysis of the open responses found multiple instances of students describing their inability to control their responsibilities or find time to accomplish everything that needed to be done despite attempts to prioritize or segment. However, the analysis of the survey data found a tendency in the population toward integration of roles rather than segmentation. This disparity in the study results may be explained if the competing work-home-school responsibilities are defined as intrusion violations. Based on the findings of Kreiner et al. (2009) these intrusion violations would force a student toward an integration of roles, despite the individual’s preference toward segmentation.

Prioritization was also a common theme in the analysis of open responses. Students who discussed priorities in their comments always prioritized work ahead of school, and many students also prioritized work ahead of their home lives or family. This was consistent with the findings of Giancola et al. (2009) who found that work was the biggest source of stress for the adult student. These findings also corresponded to those of Yum et al. (2005) who found that part-time students who were employed full time were not able to decrease their levels of work even with the additional responsibilities of school.

Several students were clear in how they prioritized work, home and school, outlining which were allowed to take priority and which were considered lower priorities. This approach

in managing work-life-school tension is much like that described by Mickel and Dallimore (2009) who found that a key strategy to managing competing responsibilities was to “adopt a guiding philosophy” or lens with which decisions about tradeoffs among work and home were made (p. 627).

Frustrations with competing priorities and the inability to adequately address all responsibilities were evident in the population and indicative of what Kreiner et al. (2009) called boundary *incongruence*. The authors define this incongruence as “the degree of mismatch between what an individual desires regarding work-home segmentation/integration and what the individual perceives he or she is afforded by various aspects of the environment” (p. 711). Respondent 24 illustrated incongruence between home and school stating “On a family vacation last summer, my spouse was close to ending my schooling because of time pressure from summer classes. I was up early and late to be able to participate in the family activities.” Incongruence between work, home and school was a more common theme as demonstrated by Respondent 38.

The biggest challenge is when the busiest times all meet together, lots of work at school, work, and the need to give my family attention. Time seems to be the factor if I don't keep myself very scheduled, things don't get done and you have to slack on one of them.

Kreiner et al. (2009) described the consequence of this boundary incongruence as a *boundary violation* where an individual's preferred boundary is breached. Although some boundary violations are time-bound as in an unwanted work call intruding on home or school time, others are less definable but more invasive for the individual. Kreiner et al. (2009) described a type of boundary violation as “when an individual is simply unable to prevent unwanted spillover from one domain to another” (p. 713). They called this an *intrusion* violation

that is created when an individual is subjected to more integration than is desired. They further state that this type of violation can lead to both negative emotions and exhaustion.

The culture of the workplace was evident in the demographic analysis of the student population studied as well as their open responses. Students reported working long hours with 83% reporting work weeks of more than 40 hours. Work stress and the inability to accomplish everything required was a common topic and consistent with the *stress of higher status* hypothesis put forth by Schieman et al. (2009).

Because of the inherent flexibility in where and how their jobs were performed, these higher status individuals typically experienced more permeable boundaries between work and other roles than individuals in lower status positions. This propensity toward integration was consistent with the findings in the study that showed full-time employed graduate students tending toward integration.

The challenge for these individuals is in developing and maintaining boundaries between their roles. Ashforth et al. (2000) considered high levels of integration to cause confusion for the individual and that boundaries should be created when possible. Doing school work at home, for instance, can lead to countless interruptions from family members unless a boundary is created and respected in most circumstances.

Despite a tendency to integrate most aspects of their lives, the segmentors in the study appeared more likely to negotiate or “set” the expectations of others regarding boundaries and confront those who violated these boundaries. This management of boundaries between work, home, and school rather than integration of the three appeared to be critical to successfully balancing the three, often conflicting domains. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that

more segmentation may make for a more successful, or at the very least, a more balanced student.

### **Chapter Summary**

The results of the research indicated that the part-time graduate student who was employed full time faced specific work-home-school challenges that forced revision in work-life balance overall. The addition of school as a third domain to the work-life construct appeared to force students toward an integration of boundaries in an attempt to complete added responsibilities adequately. The addition of an MBA program to the life of a full-time employee created a tremendous amount of stress as boundaries are renegotiated. Educators must continue to develop means by which to alert new students to these stressors and provide information about coping mechanisms that can lead to a better work-home-school balance.



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Appendices



Appendix A  
IRB Approval

January 9, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marion Dunagan  
Michael Miller

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 11-12-390

Protocol Title: *Challenges and Coping Strategies of Part-Time MBA Students:  
The Role of Boundary Management*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 01/09/2012, Expiration Date: 01/08/2013

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 138 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

Appendix B  
Survey Instrument



UNIVERSITY OF  
**ARKANSAS**  
SAM M. WALTON  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

**The purpose of this study is to better understand how graduate students who work full time cope with their responsibilities at work, home, and school.**

**Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you retain the right to withdraw at any time. All individual responses will be held in strictest confidence, and only group data will be reported.**

**If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact Marion Dunagan at (479) 575-2996 or Dr. Michael Miller at (479) 575- 3582.**

**INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Remember, all responses are completely confidential and only group data will be reported.**

0%  100%

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Work-Life-School Balance Survey						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have had to make rules with certain classmates about when or how to contact me about school work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have had to set boundaries with my family and friends about when they can interrupt me at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have asked my family members not to interrupt me when I'm working on school work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My family members know they should only interrupt me at work for emergencies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have asked a supervisor or coworker to stop contacting me at home so much.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have confronted family members who interrupted my school work too much.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

0%  100%

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Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)



UNIVERSITY OF  
**ARKANSAS**  
SAM M. WALTON  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

**What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**5. How many children (under the age of 18) are currently living in your house?**

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 +

**Since graduating from college with my bachelor's degree I have worked for:**

- 0 - 2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 or more years

**Where are you currently employed?**

- A retail company
- A vendor company
- Non-profit, tax-exempt, or charitable organization
- Local, state or federal government employee
- Self-employed in own business or professional practice
- Not currently employed

**I typically travel outside the immediate region for work:**

- Almost every week
- Once or twice a month
- Every few months
- A few times a year
- I don't travel for work

**In a typical week, I work:**


- 20 hours or less
- 21-39 hours
- 40 hours
- 41-50 hours
- 51 - 60 hours
- 60 hours or more

**In a typical week I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours on school-related things (assignments, studying, discussion boards, etc.)**

- 10 hours or less
- 11-15 hours
- 16 - 20 hours
- 21 hours or more

**I am a:**

- First year MMBA student
- Second year MMBA student
- Other

0%  100%

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Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)