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The complications and challenges of the work-family interface: A review paper

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Abstract

During the last few decades researchers have developed a genuine interest in the interaction of the work and family domains. This paper is an attempt to review the recent literature and to categorize the various outcomes produced by the relationship between work and family. In other words this review article assesses the consequences of the work-family interface through the perspective of conflict and facilitation, as argued in previous research.

Keywords: work-family interface; outcomes; conflict; facilitation

1. Introduction

Over the last twenty five years, researchers seem to have acknowledged the relationship between the domains of work and family as an extremely important issue (Eby et al., 2005; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006). Despite the fact that in the past work and family were considered to be unrelated to each other (Kanter, 1977), the growing body of empirical research has proven this was just a myth and has ultimately shed light on their interdependence (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006). At first this relationship between the two domains was believed to be strictly negative (Work-Family Conflict), nevertheless scholars have only recently argued that the work-family interface can also have a positive side (Work-Family Enrichment).

Even though this interface has been a vigorous area of research activity in recent decades, to the best of authors’ knowledge there is not another recent review article that presents both the positive and negative consequences of the

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work-family relationship. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to focus on the work-family literature in order to identify the outcomes that derive from both the conflict and the facilitation process, and to propose areas that have not been given attention yet.

2. Work-family interface

Both the conflict and the enrichment theory, as well as the key aspects of the work-family literature are presented in this chapter.

2.1. Work-Family Conflict

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985: p.77) were the first who referred to the work-family conflict and defined it as “a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”, meaning that “participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009; Kalliath, Hughes & Newcombe, 2012). In other words, individuals hold a number of roles, which in order to fulfill they consume resources, such as time and energy. The amount of these resources is fixed and thus the involvement in multiple roles results in the allocation of much greater resources to one role than the others (Rothbard, 2001; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). As a consequence the individual’s effectiveness in some life roles is being compromised (Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006) and thus the experience of conflict between the work and the family domains is inevitable (Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008).

Despite the fact that at first researchers used to study only one direction of the conflict (work interference with family) (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Bedeian et al., 1988), they soon realized that work-family conflict is a bidirectional phenomenon (Choi & Kim, 2012; Kalliath, Hughes & Newcombe, 2012), and as such it consists of two dimensions, work-to-family and family-to-work (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997; Zhao, Qu & Ghiselli, 2011). According to Netemeyer et al. (1996: p. 401), work-family conflict (WFC) refers to “a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities”, whereas family-work conflict (FWC) refers to “a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities” (Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008; Karatepe, 2009).

2.2. Work-Family Facilitation

Even though in most academic circles the relationship between work and family was considered to be negative, researchers have recently argued that the interaction between the two domains might also be positive (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Stoddard & Madsen, 2007; Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Rotondo & Kincaid, 2008; Wayne, 2009; Choi & Kim, 2012; Russo & Buonocore, 2012). According to the role expansion theory conceptualized by Marks (1977) “role fulfillment can even create energy that can be used to enhance the fulfillment of other roles” (Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009: p. 618). In other words, engagement in multiple roles can nurture a number of benefits for employees, which in turn can “outweigh the difficulties or costs associated with work and family roles” (Demerouti et al., 2004; Kinnunen et al., 2006; Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008: p. 517).

To examine the synergistic effect of work and family roles, scholars have utilized a variety of different labels (Grzywacz & Butler 2005; Greenhaus & Powell 2006), such as enrichment, facilitation, enhancement and positive spillover (McNall, Nicklin & Masuda, 2010). In spite of the fact that there are some differences between these terms (Carlson et al., 2006; Russo & Buonocore, 2012), they are apparently not well understood (Hammer & Hanson, 2006; McNall, Nicklin & Masuda, 2010), and thus they are often used interchangeably in the literature (Frone, 2003; Wayne, 2009). Due to Sieber (1974) work-family enhancement is the attainment of useful in several life challenges resources from a particular domain (Russo & Buonocore, 2012), whereas positive spillover happens when the individual transmits the benefit to another domain (McNall, Nicklin & Masuda, 2010). Work-family facilitation refers to “improvements in the life system through resources gained in a specific sphere of life”, as argued in 2008 by Grzywacz and Butler, whereas work-family enrichment appears to be “the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role”, as Greenhaus and Powell (2006: p. 73) postulated (Russo &
Buonocore, 2012). This positive side of the work-family interface is also considered to be bidirectional (Vanderpool & Way, 2013), and so it consists of two different directions, work-to-family facilitation (WFF) and family-to-work facilitation (FWF) (Frone, 2003; Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008).

2.3. Research on both conflict & facilitation

In order to achieve a better understanding of the work-family interface, it is necessary to include in every empirical study the exploration of the two directions of conflict and facilitation together (Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Lu et al., 2009; Karatepe, 2010). Despite the fact that in the literature there is a growing interest in the negative side of the work-family interaction, research on the enrichment process appears to be scanty (Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008). And since it is plausible that the outcomes stated in the work-family conflict literature may not necessarily generalize to work-family facilitation (McNall, Nicklin & Masuda, 2010), both the role strain hypothesis and the role enhancement hypothesis (Lallukka et al., 2013) have been taken into consideration in this paper, so as to examine the wide variety of consequences linked to the work-family interaction.

3. Methodological approach

To identify relevant articles computerized searches were conducted using Scopus, the abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature. The term that has been employed as a key word was “work-family” along with (AND) the terms “outcomes”, “consequences” and “meta-analysis”, which they were used interchangeably. At first the authors intended to review articles published over the last five years, however the vast majority of the search results were studies focused only on facilitation, which did not serve the purpose of this paper. Hence, it was decided to extend the search to articles that have been published over the last decade, meaning that the publication dates would range from 2003 to 2013. Following this procedure 440 articles were identified, and after skimming through their abstracts, only 80 of those were selected. These research papers were then studied and only if their hypotheses were referred to specific work-family outcomes, they were included. Thus, out of the 80 only 48 articles managed to meet all the inclusion criteria simultaneously.

4. An overview of work-family outcomes

In this chapter the authors present a review of all the outcomes of work-family conflict and facilitation, addressed in the last decade’s literature.

4.1. Conflict outcomes

Research on the outcomes of work-family conflict is extremely prevalent over the last two decades. Some of the numerous studies that have linked the negative interaction between work and family roles, with various work, non-work and health related consequences, are mentioned in this chapter.

In a research conducted by Grice et al. (2011) it was investigated in which way the WFC and FWC are associated with the mental & physical health of postpartum women in Minnesota. Results indicate that both directions of work-family conflict are inversely associated with mental health scores, but no clear association was found between job spillover and physical health. The latter was examined in other studies as well, and the majority of the findings suggest that work-family conflict results in poor health (Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006). However, Van Steenbergen and Ellemers (2009) in their research concluded that WFC is related to poorer scores on health outcomes, whereas FWC was not related to any of the health outcomes measured (cholesterol, body mass and physical stamina). In another study by Lallukka et al. (2010), the associations of work-family conflict and unhealthy behaviors among British, Finnish and Japanese employees, were explored. According to the findings, only few and inconsistent associations with unhealthy behaviors were observed. It was found for example that a positive relationship exists between work-family conflict and unhealthy food habits for women in Finland, work-family
conflict was clearly associated with smoking but only among Finnish men and that work-family conflict was related with drinking among women in Britain, but not Japan (Lallukka et al., 2010).

Moreover, as indicated in the literature, work-family conflict exacerbates exhaustion, both physical and emotional (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Yanchus et al., 2010; Karatepe, 2010; Kalliath, Hughes & Newcombe, 2012). Besides, it is also positively linked to negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, resentment, frustration and even anger (Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006), as well as to increased levels of psychological strain (Kalliath, Hughes and Newcombe, 2012). Another area that it also appears to be strongly related to work-family conflict is sleep. More precisely, in a study by Lallukka et al. (2013) clear associations were detected between FWC and subsequent sleep medication among men, but not among women. On the other hand, WFC presented a less significant relationship with sleep medication among women, but none among men (Lallukka et al., 2013). Similar are the results of previous research by Lallukka et al. (2010), which suggest that work-family conflict may lead to an increase of sleep complaints.

Regarding the impact of work-family conflict on job performance Hoobler, Hu and Wilson (2010), the findings showed that both WFC and FWC are negatively related not only to manager’s reports of their subordinates’ job performance, but also to workers’ self-report of their performance. Due to Karatepe and Bekteshi’s 2008 study though, work-family conflict does not have any significant relationship with job performance. In a subsequent research however, Karetepe and Kilic (2009) found that there is a relationship between work-family conflict and job performance, but instead of negative it is positive, which then tried to interpret by using the argument of Van Dyne, Jehn, and Cummings (2002, p. 69), according to which “strain may have caused the employees to focus on their work, thus producing high sales performance with increased efficiency”.

As far as life, marital and job satisfaction are concerned the results presented in the literature are incongruent. According to Zhao, Qu and Ghiselli (2011) work-family conflict in general, and especially FWC have a negative effect on life satisfaction. Yanchus et al. (2010), as well as Greenhaus, Allen and Spector (2006), reached the same result, however Karatepe and Bekteshi (2008) argue that WFC doesn’t have any bearing on life satisfaction. Only FWC has a negative relationship with life satisfaction, they state (Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008). In addition to these findings, Karatepe and Uludag (2008) in a study of frontline hotel employees in Turkey claimed that FWC has a significant negative association with marital satisfaction, whereas WFC has not. Regarding job satisfaction, most researchers agree that the effects of work-family conflict on it are deleterious (Greennhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006; Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Hoobler, Hu & Wilson, 2010; Yanchus et al., 2010). Nevertheless, Choi and Kim (2012), as well as Karatepe, Kilic and Isiksel (2008) both agree that WFC has a negative impact on career satisfaction, whereas FWC has a positive effect on job satisfaction according to the first study, or a non significant according to the second.

Furthermore, though Karatepe and Uludag (2008) suggested that both directions of conflict (WFC and FWC) were found to have a significant positive relationship with turnover intentions, in the studies of Karatepe, Kilic and Isiksel’s (2008) and Balmforth and Gardner’s (2006) the findings indicate that only FWC is positively related to turnover intentions. In addition, research by Post et al. (2009) on the same subject shows that FWC does indeed increase employees’ intentions to leave organization, indirectly though since work dissatisfaction plays a key role in this relationship. Some other work-related outcomes are mentioned in Zhao and Mattila’s research (2013), due to which WFC reduced individual’s positive affective reactions to their jobs (also stated in Zhao, Qu & Ghiselli, 2011), while FWC decreased both positive affective job reaction and affective organizational commitment. In the same study the results show that FWC is also negatively linked to customer satisfaction (Zhao & Mattila, 2013).

Work-family negative interaction can also have an impact on the hierarchical level attained by the employee, whose work and family roles are at odds with each other (Hoobler, Hu & Wilson, 2010). Salary is also negatively affected by FWC, and positively affected by WFC, due to the same research (Hoobler, Hu & Wilson, 2010). In another study by Ten Brummelhuis, Bakker and Euwema (2010) that focuses on the relationship between work-family conflict and coworkers’ outcomes it is argued that employee’s FWC is not only positively correlated to coworkers’ turnover intentions and sickness absence, but it also has a negative impact on coworker’s performance.

Work-family conflict also produces various family-related outcomes. In their study Kalliath, Hughes and Newcombe (2012), exclaimed that work-family conflict is negatively related to the quality of the individual’s relationship with his/her partner, as well as the quality of time spent with children, family and friends. Strazdins et al. (2013) focused on work-family conflict and its detrimental association to children’s mental health. Cinamon,
Weisel and Tzuk (2007) pointed out that WFC of one spouse has a positive relationship with FWC of the other spouse, while both dimensions of conflict (WFC and FWC) have a negative impact on the quality of parent-child interaction and parental self-efficacy. Finally, Cho and Allen’s (2012) research results indicate that work-to-family conflict interferes with parent-child interactive behavior. More specifically, WFC has a significant negative impact on parent-child active activities, that is educational and recreational activities, but the findings for passive activities appear to be incongruent.

4.2. Facilitation outcomes

Despite the fact that research on work-family facilitation is much more limited than the one on conflict, mostly due to recent studies a far “better understanding of the effects of work-family dynamics on work, non-work and individual outcomes” has been achieved (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Wayne, Randel & Stevens, 2006; Van Steenbergen, Ellemers & Mooijaart, 2007; Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009: p. 618).

Vanderpool and Way (2013) in their study they investigated the effects of the positive side of the work-family interface on job anxiety and turnover intentions and the results indicate that there is a negative relationship in both cases. Employees’ intentions to leave the company have also been a research objective of Russo and Buonocore’s (2013) study, as well as Balmforth and Gardner’s (2006). The first explores the way in which work-family enrichment is associated with nurses’ turnover intentions and the findings suggest that those who experience work-family enrichment were less likely to think about leaving their jobs, while professional commitment mediated this relationship (Russo & Buonocore, 2013). The second focuses on the relationship of work-family facilitation with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions. According to its findings, both directions of work-family facilitation seem to be significantly and positively related to job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment, and negatively related to employees’ turnover intentions. However, only one dimension of facilitation, WFF is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior (Balmforth & Gardner, 2006).

The positive relationship of work-family enrichment and affective organizational commitment is also demonstrated in the studies of McNall et al. (2010) and Karatepe and Kilic (2009). Additionally, in the study of Karatepe and Kilic, it is also argued that WFF is significantly and positively related to job satisfaction, while FWF is not. On the contrary, Choi and Kim’s (2012) finding was exactly the opposite, meaning that their results did not provide support for the effect of WFF on job satisfaction, but only of family-work facilitation’s positive effect on job satisfaction. As far as family and life satisfaction is concerned, McNall et al. (2010) indicate that there is a positive association with both dimensions of enrichment, whereas in the study of Karatepe and Bektushi (2008), the results suggest that WFF is indeed positively related with life satisfaction, but the relationship between WFF and life satisfaction is not empirically supported (Karatepe & Bektushi, 2008). In addition Karatepe and Bektushi (2008), show in their study that both WFF and FWF have a positive impact on job performance. This result is confirmed in Van Steenbergen and Ellemers’s (2009) research, but it does not find full support in a subsequent study of Karatepe and Kilic (2009), since they concluded that only FWF enhanced job performance.

In regard to individual’s health, scholars have pointed out that WFF and FWF are related to better scores on health outcomes, meaning both components of it, physical (such as cholesterol, body mass, physical stamina) and mental (psychological) health (Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009; McNall, Nicklin & Masuda, 2010). Finally, Van Steenbergen and Ellemers (2009) showed that there is a negative correlation between work-family facilitation and sickness absence.

5. General discussion & concluding thoughts

As argued by Frone (2003) “studying the relationships of the two aspects of conflict (WFC & FWC) and facilitation (WFF & FWF) simultaneously with various job outcomes provides a fruitful picture of the work-family interface” (Karatepe & Kilic, 2009: p. 978). However, while examining the results of this paper, it has been made quite clear that the literature focuses mostly on individual and work-related outcomes produced by the work-family
role interaction. In the authors’ opinion, this dearth of empirical research on the family-related outcomes should be instantly addressed.

A potentially promising avenue for future research could be the association of both work-family conflict and facilitation with: children’s school performance, children’s career choices and attitudes towards work, as well as spouse and children’s life satisfaction, psychological strain and negative emotions. Moreover, it should be investigated whether the hierarchical level attained by one spouse or his/her intention to ask for a divorce is linked to the work-family role interaction of the other spouse. Finally, emotional intelligence, decision making, sexual life, relations with coworkers, as well as individual’s intentions to marry and have children, should also be examined in relation to the work-family interface.

A number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present paper. Surely one of them is the fact that only one research database was used, in order to identify the reviewed articles. In addition, there may be studies published between 2003 and 2013 that have not been taken into consideration, due to the fact that only journals which fall into the categories of social sciences / psychology / business, management & accounting and decision sciences were admitted in the article selection phase.

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to give an account of both the positive and negative work-family outcomes that are mentioned in the literature. Despite the fact that studies on the work-family interface have been channeled over the years into different paths, such as social support, work-family friendly policies, flexible work arrangements, abusive and supportive supervision etc., it should not be forgotten by researchers that some questions concerning the outcomes that derive from the work-family role interaction remain unanswered.

References


