



A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE FUNDAMENTAL THEORIES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SRI LANKAN CONTEXT

W.N. Sellahewa^{1}, T.D. Samarasinghe²*

¹*Uva Wellassa University, Sri Lanka*

²*Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka*

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of work and family research is fundamentally challenged by the lack of a commonly accepted basic theoretical framework and key constructs. Several researchers including Pitt-Catsouphes in 2006 have stated that there is no single prevailing framework or perspective on work-life balance (WLB) is universally accepted. Because the academic body of knowledge regarding work-family relationship relies on a variety of theoretical frameworks, which include segmentation, enrichment, facilitation, spillover, social identity, compensation, human capital, instrumental, resource drain, conservation of resources, ecology, border, integration and ladder theories. In order to specify the nature of the cross relationships between work and family life within the context of past research, the basic theoretical approaches linking work and non-work domains are reviewed in this paper. A number of theoretical propositions have been developed ranging from complete separation to full integration of these two edges. But some of the theories are partly overlapping. Some views have become more accepted than others. Empirical evidence exists in support of each of the propositions and therefore it has become very complex to identify the correct view. Each perspective has been outlined in brief under this systematic literature review to reconcile the various perspectives on Work-life balance.

In simple terms, “work life” can normally be regarded as any paid employment related works. “life” includes activities outside work. In the community, there is growing concern on balancing the quality of home and quality of work life. At present, a higher proportion of women from all social classes are engaging in paid employment in Sri Lanka. But, there are enough number of evidence to support the imbalance in between the work life and the family life among the working crowd in Sri Lanka as such in the world context. There are various explanations for supporting this. The consequences include the growth of single-parent families, increasing the number of divorce cases, poor bond in between the parents and children and less willingness to take responsibility for care of elderly relatives, etc. In addition, the pressures and demands of work, reflected in longer hours, more exhaustion and the growth of evening and week-end work has been caused to less scope for “quality” family time.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The current study aims to examine the available theories on balancing work-life and personal-life. Therefore, the core objective of this study is to review the existing literature on work-life balance and consolidate them to gain a broader understanding.

METHODOLOGY

Relevant articles published in between 1960 to 2021 were identified through online searches using the keywords such as work-like balance, spillover, compensation, conflict etc. The major conceptual frameworks pertaining to work and life domains included in this study are segmentation, enrichment, spillover, compensation, conflict and instrumental theories with adequate descriptions. Gathered details has been analyzed qualitatively with adequate descriptions.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Segmentation theory

The earliest view of the relationship between work and home was that they are segmented and independent and do not affect each other. Blood and Wolfe (1960), who were the pioneers of this approach, applied this concept to blue collar workers and observed that for workers in unsatisfying or un-involving jobs, segmentation of work and home is a natural process. In the segmentation theory, there is no interaction between the work life and the family life. As stated by Young and Kleiner in 1992, Segmentation theory considers work and family as distinct entities and experiences in one will not affect or influence experiences in the other. According to this theory, one can classify one's life and his or her work roles and both the roles are seen as having totally separate functions. However, majority of the people experience that there is a relationship in between work life and the family life.

Enrichment theory

Enrichment theory refers to the degree to which experiences from instrumental sources like skills, abilities, values or affective sources like mood and satisfaction enhance the quality of the other domain (Morris and Madsen, 2007). According to Greenhaus and Powell's explanation, enrichment as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role and reported that employees perceive that their work and family roles enrich each other. So if someone has a good day at work, she/he comes home happily and is able to have extra energy to allocate to the family. And if one has a wonderful family life, she/he is able to bring these positive emotions to work. It also encompasses the positive influence of one role to another. Accordingly, it can be evidenced that this theory is more practical than the segmentation theory with reference to Sri Lankan context.

Spillover theory

Spillover theory suggested that workers carry the emotions, attitudes, skills and behaviors that they establish at work into their family life and vice versa (Piotrkowski, 1979). According to Staines, positive work experiences would be associated with positive family experiences and negative work experiences would be associated with negative family experiences (Staines, 1980). However, all the negative and positive instances in work place or home will not be influence on the other domain. In contrast to the idea generated by spillover theory, a number of partly overlapping theoretical approaches (conflict, compensation etc.) proposes a negative relationship between the two spheres. Most often, these approaches are applied to studying involvement in one sphere and comparing it to involvement in the other domain. Most remarkably, the conflict perspective maintains that high involvement in one sphere entails sacrifices in the other.

Compensation theory

The Compensation theory proposes that workers try to compensate for the lack of satisfaction in one domain (work or home) by trying to find more satisfaction in the other (Lambert, 1990). Compensation theory also predicts that the workplace and family life are part of the same environment. However, work and home have a compensating effect on each other. One can usually make up for what is missing in one Environment from another. If one feels unfulfilled at work, this negative experience could be compensated by a more positive experience at home (Young and Kleiner, 1992).



Instrumental theory

The instrumental theory suggests that activities in one sphere facilitate success in the other. (Zedeck and Mosier, 1990; Guest, 2002). Guest (2002), cites a traditional example where a worker strives to maximize work outcomes, even at the price of working long hours, in order to be able to buy a car and thus improve family life or own leisure time. Similar to the spillover approach, the instrumental approach suggests a positive relationship between the two spheres. It suggests that one domain serves as means for obtaining things needed in the other domain (Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach, 2001). This theory supports to the employees in Sri Lankan context as well because majority of the employees rely on an occupation that brings a maximum economic assist to them.

Conflict theory

Conflict occurs when the demands of work and home roles are incompatible in some respect so that meeting the demands in one domain (work or home life) makes it difficult to meet the demands in the other domain. Inter-role conflict theory refers to what occurs when meeting the demands in one domain makes it difficult to meet the demands in the other domain. In the literature, this has also been termed opposition or incompatibility theory (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). The conflict model proposes that with high levels of demand in all spheres of life. For an instance, satisfaction in one environment entails sacrifices in the other due to the fact that these two environments are incompatible because each of them has own norms and requirements (Zedeck and Mosier, 1990). Recently, interest has been concentrated in on the conflict model the themes such as dual career families.

Empirical Findings

Parasuraman et al. (1992) who looked at two career couples found that relations within the work environment and within the family environment. The attributes of the work environment, defined as role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload were related to job satisfaction, but not to family satisfaction. Family conflict and parenthood were found to be related to family satisfaction but no to job satisfaction. Thus it may seem that this study demonstrates a true separation between work life and the family life, for the sample they have taken. The authors of this research explain their results by defining them as segmentation. This was because the subjects were able to compartmentalize or segment different spheres of their lives to minimize strain arising from multiple roles. The separate spheres pattern viewed the family as a domestic heaven for women and work as a public arena for men (Zedeck, 1992). However, this view of segmentation was challenged by researchers who demonstrated that work and family are closely related domains of human life (Bruke and Greenglass, 1987; Voydanoff, 1987).

Researchers such as Bromet et al. (1986) looked at a sample of blue collar working wives and found some support for the spillover theory from the self-reports of the subjects. A study by Doby and Caplan (1995) also looked at spillover, however with the perspective of a threat to their eputation of the subject. The researchers hypothesized that a worker experiencing emotional distress because of loss of a good reputation, or unfavorable criticism by the supervisor, or co-worker could bring negative emotions from the workplace to the family life. Willians and Alliger (1994) took a sample of working parents and found that negative moods spilled more easily than positive moods over the course of the day.

According to Piotrkowski (1979) men look to their homes as havens a source of satisfaction lacking in the occupational sphere. The Compensation theory proposes that workers try to compensate for the lack of satisfaction in one domain (work or home) by trying to find more satisfaction in the other (Lambert, 1990). Compensation theory also predicts that the



workplace and family life are part of the same environment. However, work and home have a compensating effect on each other. One can usually make up for what is missing in one Environment from another. If one feels unfulfilled at work, this negative experience could be compensated by a more positive experience at home (Young and Kleiner, 1992). Staines (1980) defines compensation as a negative relationship between work and family.

CONCLUSION

Various scholars have highlighted several theories used to explain the relationship between work and life outside work. The segmentation model hypothesizes that work and non-work are two distinct domains of life that are lived quite separately and have no influence on each other. In contrast, a spillover model hypothesizes that one world can influence the other in either a positive or a negative way. Compensation model proposes that what may be lacking in one sphere, in terms of demands or satisfactions, can be made up in the other. Another model is an instrumental model whereby activities in one sphere facilitate success in the other. Conflict model is a model which proposes that with high levels of demand in all spheres of life, some difficult choices have to be made and some conflicts and possibly some significant overload on an individual occur.

REFERENCES

- Ashforth, B.E. and Johnson, S.A. (2001). Which hat to wear? The relative salience of multiple identities in organizational contexts. In: M.A. Hogg & D.J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*: 31-48. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2009). Workaholism and Relationship Quality: A Spillover–Crossover Perspective. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 14: 23-33.
- Barnett, R.C., and Hyde, J.S. (2001). Women, men, work, and family: An Expansionist Theory. *American Psychologist*, 56(10): 781-796.
- Becker, G. S. (1975). *Human capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bellavia. G. and Frone, M. (2005). Work-family conflict. In: J. Barling, E.K. Kelloway, and M. Frone (Eds.), *Handbook of Work Stress*, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, pp. 113-147.
- Belsky, J., M.E. Lang and Rovine, M. (1985). Stability and Change in Marriage across the Transition to Parenthood: A Second Study. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47: 855–865.
- Bird (2006), Work-life balance: Doing it right and avoiding the pitfalls. *Employment Relations Today*, 33: 21-30.
- Bromet, E.J., Dew, M.A. and Parkinson, D.K. (1990). Spillover between work and family: A study of blue-collar working wives. In: J. Eckenrode, and S. Gore (Eds.), *Stress between work and family*, New York: Plenum Press, pp. 133-152.
- Clark, S.C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work-life balance. *Human Relations*, 53(6): 7470-7770.
- Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. and Scharlach, A. (2001). *Families and work: New directions in the 21 st century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.