
Authors:
Melissa Warner, University of Guelph- Industrial/Organizational Psychology
Rebecca Slan-Jerusalim, Korn/Ferry International
Karen Korabik, University of Guelph- Department of Psychology

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Basic Concepts & Definitions

In this entry, we describe the impact of co-workers on the work-family (W-F) interface, including the positive and negative impacts that co-workers have on their fellow workers. Specifically, the purpose of this entry is to describe what is known about co-worker support for W-F issues and backlash against the use of W-F policies and practices.

A great deal of research has been dedicated to exploring the effects of W-F conflict on organizations and individuals (see Korabik, Lero, & Whitehead, 2008). However, the primary focus in this literature has been on the support provided by organizations and supervisors to help employees alleviate W-F conflict. Until recently, relatively little attention was given to the important role that co-workers play. Moreover, when the effect of co-workers has been examined, the emphasis has been on the general support they provide rather than support specifically for W-F issues and W-F policy use. In addition, most of the literature on the role of co-workers has been concentrated on W-F conflict instead of W-F enrichment and facilitation. Finally, only lately has any consideration been given to understanding co-worker backlash, how co-workers influence decisions about W-F policy use, or how such policy use impacts co-workers.

Co-worker support. Research has shown that, like organizational and supervisor support, co-worker support can be emotional, instrumental, or informational in nature (Antani & Ayman, 2004; Korabik, McElwain, Warner, & Lero, 2007). Emotional co-worker support refers to the affective component of support (e.g., listening and empathy), while instrumental co-worker support refers to tangible assistance intended to help solve problems. Informational co-worker support refers to support related to receiving information from others. Research shows that instrumental and emotional support are differentially related to outcomes (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). For example, Ducharme and Martin (2000) found that affective and instrumental co-worker support exerted significant and direct, yet independent,
effects on job satisfaction.

Co-worker support has also been conceptualized as being either perceived or received. Perceived co-worker support refers to the perception that support would be available from co-workers should an individual wish to access it. In contrast, received co-worker support refers to the support reported to have been received from one's colleagues. The general social support literature indicates that perceived support is a better predictor than received support of coping effectiveness, adjustment outcomes, and psychological and physical well-being (Cohen & Syme, 1985; Hobfoll, Nadler, & Leiberman, 1986).

Co-worker support can also be seen as pertaining to issues in either the work or the family domain (Ayman & Antani, 2008). Thus, co-workers can provide work-related support by working longer hours so that a colleague can take care of family matters or family-related support by giving advice about problems with child rearing. Co-worker support for W-F issues, therefore, can be defined as the degree to which individuals perceive or receive emotional, instrumental, and/or informational support in the work or family domains for W-F issues from their co-workers.

Clearly, however, not all social relationships are characterized by supportiveness. Co-workers may choose to neither offer nor accept support for a number of reasons. As Ayman and Antani (2008) point out, the relationship between co-workers is an involuntary one and is not necessarily egalitarian. In a business context, individuals may fear that asking for help will make them appear incompetent or that receiving help may require them to reciprocate, thereby increasing, rather than reducing, their sense of burden.

Co-worker backlash. In addition to failing to receive support, workers might actually experience a backlash from their co-workers. Co-worker backlash can be defined as the opposition, resentment, animosity, or annoyance workers perceive or receive from their co-workers regarding their use of W-F policies or their efforts to balance their work and family lives (Korabik & Warner, 2009). Most studies in this area have concentrated on the backlash reactions and behaviors reported by co-workers as a result of workers' use of W-F policies and practices. Behaviorally, co-worker backlash can take a variety of forms. Some co-workers may refuse to help those who use W-F policies. “In extreme cases, nonusers may ... exclude them from informal gatherings, withhold work-related information or blame them for problems that occur in their absence” (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008, p. 318). Backlash may also lead co-workers to reduce their organizational citizenship behaviors or lower their contributions to the organization (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008).

Relationship between co-worker support and co-worker backlash. The concept of psychological engagement can be useful when trying to understand the nature of support and backlash. Psychological
engagement occurs when people cognitively connect with others (Tyler & Blader, 2000). Some research indicates that support and backlash are types of psychological engagement, and they are often discussed as diametrically opposed attitudes (e.g., Smith & Pope, 1990). An alternative perspective, in which co-workers would be considered a source of both workplace support and backlash comes from applying Voydanoff’s (2008) ecological W-F model. Voydanoff postulates that within-domain resources and within-domain demands can operate simultaneously on individuals, influencing their level of W-F conflict or facilitation. Within-domain resources (like co-worker support) are seen as facilitating processes that can improve role quality and well-being when they are applied across domains (to help ease family-based strain). In contrast, within-domain demands (like co-worker backlash or resentment) are viewed as processes that can lead to increased stress across domains (i.e., in the family). Our research (Korabik et al., 2007; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Warner & Korabik, 2007; Warner, 2009) supports the view that co-worker support and co-worker backlash are separate constructs that can co-exist.

**Importance of Topic to W-F Studies**

A better understanding of co-worker support and backlash as reactions to W-F issues and the use of W-F policies and practices is important for improving worker well-being and organizational effectiveness. Helping to find strategies that increase co-worker support and/or decrease co-worker backlash should reduce the W-F conflict and/or increase the W-F facilitation and enrichment that workers experience. Finding ways to decrease co-worker backlash against their colleagues who use W-F policies should benefit both parties. If their co-workers are less resentful, the workers who have a need for such policies should feel less anxious about utilizing them. This should in turn enhance the ability of the policies to reduce their W-F conflict, which should help to make workers more satisfied and productive and reduce turnover. Those workers who do not have similar W-F issues will also benefit because they should feel less taken advantage of, and the quality of their relationships with their co-workers should improve. At the organizational level, greater co-worker support and less co-worker backlash should help establish a family-friendly work culture.

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

**Predictors and Consequences of Co-Worker Support**

*General co-worker support.* Although still limited in comparison to the research on organizational and supervisor support, some studies have examined the role of general co-worker support (i.e., not support specifically for W-F issues or W-F policy use) in the reduction of job stressors. This literature has identified several benefits of co-worker support. For example, co-worker support has been shown to have a direct positive impact on organizational and individual outcomes such as emotional exhaustion,
depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Greenglass, Burke, & Konarski, 1997; Kruger, Botman, & Goodenow, 1991; Thompson & Cavallaro, 2007). Co-worker support has also been associated with reduced work stress and strain and increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance (Beehr, Jex, Stacy, & Murray, 2000; Brotheridge, 2001; Ducharme & Martin, 2000; Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O'Neil, & Payne, 1989). Furthermore, co-worker support has been related to increased family cohesion as well as decreased role strain, work interference with family, negative W-F spillover, and difficulty managing work and home demands (MacDermid, Williams, Marks, & Heilbrun, 1994; Thompson & Cavallaro, 2007).

There are mixed findings regarding the saliency of co-worker support versus supervisor support. Some researchers (e.g., LaRocco & Jones, 1980) have found that supervisor support is a stronger moderator of the relationship between job stress and strain than is co-worker support. However, it has also been found that support from co-workers plays a larger role in the reduction of stress than supervisor support (e.g., Greenberger et al., 1989; House & Wells, 1978, as cited in Ducharme & Martin, 2000) and that supervisor and co-worker support contribute the same amount of variance to the reduction of stress (e.g., Karasek, Triantis, & Chaudhry, 1982).

**Co-worker support for W-F issues and W-F policy use.** There have been very few studies that have examined co-worker support specifically for W-F issues and the W-F interface. Two studies have examined received co-worker support and have found it to be associated with increased W-F conflict. More specifically, Antani and Ayman (2004) found that support received from co-workers for work-domain issues was associated with significantly increased levels of family-to-work conflict. Supporting their findings, Mesmer-Magus, Murase, DeChurch, and Jimenez (2008) found that the extent to which co-workers supported their colleagues by providing informal work accommodations was positively associated with both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict, although more so for the latter. Given the concurrent nature of these data, the results of these studies might indicate that when individuals are experiencing higher levels of W-F conflict, they are more likely to be offered, and to utilize, more support from their co-workers.

Other studies have examined perceived co-worker support. Of these, Thompson, Kirk, and Brown (2005) found no significant direct effect of co-worker support on W-F conflict. By contrast, Major, Fletcher, Davis, and Germano (2005) found greater co-worker support to be associated with significantly decreased W-F conflict. Korabik and Warner (2009) found that the more workers perceived support from their co-workers, the less they reported their work interfered with their family. Greater co-worker support was also related to greater work-to-family enrichment and increased W-F policy use.

Taken together, these results appear to indicate that when workers are experiencing more W-F conflict,
they are likely to receive more support from their co-workers. In turn, when workers perceive their co-workers as more supportive, they are likely to report more W-F policy use, less W-F conflict, and more W-F enrichment. Because these findings are based on a very small number of studies, replication is necessary. This is particularly true because there are many methodological differences among the studies (e.g., the inconsistent separating of co-worker support from other support constructs, combining different forms of support, using different types of samples, and measuring support and W-F conflict differently) that might offer alternative explanations for the differences in their results.

**Predictors and Consequences of Co-Worker Backlash**

Past W-F research has demonstrated that few workers are actually using the W-F policies offered by their organizations (Korabik et al., 2008). According to Kossek and Van Dyne (2008), this can be explained in terms of equity theory because unequal access to and use of family-friendly benefits can create co-worker backlash, which inhibits workers from taking advantage of the policies that are available to them.

**Distributive justice principles.** One factor that can contribute to feelings of co-worker backlash is the distributive justice principle upon which W-F policies are based. Often, W-F policies are formally available to everyone (equality principle), but, in reality, only those who “qualify” as having a need are able to use them (need principle; Grandey, 2001; Kirby & Krone, 2002). The need principle of distributive justice suggests that people will perceive fairness when resources are allocated to those with the greatest need. However, the need principle can be problematic for several reasons. First, the fact that those with the greatest needs are treated more favorably runs counter to the individualistic orientation of North American capitalism (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Thus, the need principle is likely to be viewed negatively in organizations that usually operate according to the norms of equity and/or equality. As well, the need principle is contrary to a merit-based reward system. Thus, some workers (policy users) perform less work (i.e., lower input) and yet receive the same rewards (i.e., same output) as their colleagues who do not utilize W-F benefits. Furthermore, when a justification of the need is required, the organization or the supervisor (as the organization’s representative) is responsible for valuing one individual’s need over another’s. The decision as to whose need requires use of W-F policies is highly subjective. Perceptions of inequity (in comparison to others or to oneself in the past) may subsequently produce a backlash against the organization or the policy user.

Grandey and Cordeiro (2002) suggest that the evidence for a strong backlash against organizations for having need-based W-F policies is limited. This may be because employees are directing their resentment towards their individual co-workers as opposed to the entire organization. However, it may also be that individuals are more likely to hold need-based values when it comes to W-F issues (Rothausen, Gonzalez, Clarke, & O’Dell, 1998).
**Self-interest.** Co-worker backlash may also be related to self-interest. Some research (e.g., Flynn, 1996) shows that when W-F policies can only be used by some employees, those who are not able to access them may feel excluded and resentful. Yet other findings have been mixed. Most research has found that employees who stand to benefit from a policy and those who have personally used the policy consider the policy to be fairer than those who cannot take advantage of the policy (Grover, 1991; Parker & Allen, 2001). Korabik et al. (2007) found that workers without children reported feelings of backlash against those with families. However, Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, and Ferrigno (2002) found that parents and non-parents did not differ in their level of resentment toward policy users. Rothausen et al. (1998) conducted a study that compared the proximal and distal reactions of several employee groups to onsite child-care centers. They found that those with less self-interest (non-users) had more negative proximal reactions (specific attitudes) than those with greater self-interest (current, past, and anticipated future users). They found no evidence of backlash, however, when it came to distal reactions (e.g., global satisfaction with benefits, job satisfaction, or turnover intentions).

**Face time.** Another predictor of co-worker backlash is face time at work, meaning the capacity to be physically co-present with co-workers. Kossek and Van Dyne (2008) believe that equity issues surface when workers reduce their face time by taking advantage of policies that allow them time, timing, or place flexibility. They propose that “[i]f co-workers feel that use is inequitable, the cross level motivational effect on overall group performance will be negative. In contrast, if co-workers feel that use is equitable, this cross level motivational effect will be positive and will enhance group performance” (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008, p. 311).

Reduced face time at work decreases opportunities for interaction with co-workers. Fewer opportunities for interaction make it less likely that W-F policy users can provide support to their co-workers because they may not realize that help is needed and/or they will not be there to provide assistance. Communication, problem solving, cooperation, and coordination also become more difficult as face time is reduced (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). All of these issues were brought up as reasons for co-worker backlash by participants in Korabik et al.’s (2007) qualitative research.

Kossek and Van Dyne (2008) propose that both the form and the intensity of policy use matter. They feel that place flexibility (the location of work) has a more dramatic effect on co-worker backlash than either time or timing flexibility. However, they also note that there are differences in the intensity of policy use and that light-intensity users will provoke less severe reactions than heavy-intensity users. This thinking is supported by a recent meta-analysis demonstrating that when employees telecommuted more than 2.5 days/week (heavy intensity), they were able to decrease the W-F conflict they experienced, but at the expense of worsened relationships with their co-workers (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).
Increased workload. Single childless workers report that they are expected to do more work (e.g., stay late, work on weekends, take off-peak holidays, and go on more business trips) to accommodate the needs of their co-workers with families (Casper, Hearst, & Swanburg, 2003, as cited in Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007; Kirby & Krone, 2002). As a result, single childless workers report feeling W-F backlash (Young, 1996, 1999, as cited in Casper et al., 2007). Increased workloads and W-F backlash have also been reported by other groups of co-workers (Flynn, 1996; Korabik et al., 2007; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008; Lee, MacDermid, Williams, Buck, & Leiba-O’Sullivan, 2002; Warner & Korabik, 2007).

Type of exchange relationship. Another possible predictor of co-worker backlash is the type of social exchange relationship that co-workers prefer to have with one another. Clark and Mills (1979) have discussed two types of relationships: exchange and communal. Acquaintances and business partners are examples of those who typically have exchange relationships, whereas friends and family members typically have communal relationships. In work settings, benefits are commonly exchanged. For example, an individual might cover for a colleague who has to leave work early. In exchange relationships, there is recognition that the receipt of a benefit incurs a debt that must be repaid. This debt must be of comparable value to the benefit that has been received, and repayment must occur within a specified time frame. On the other hand, in communal relationships, the receipt of a benefit does not incur a debt.

If both individuals in a relationship follow the norms of the same type of relationship (either exchange or communal), then each person’s behavior is considered fair by the other person (Mills & Clark, 1994). However, problems occur when there is a mismatch between the two parties’ perceptions of the type of relationship they are in (i.e., communal or exchange) and the type of transaction (e.g., communal or exchange) that occurs. This discrepancy can create feelings of resentment, betrayal (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), or exploitation (e.g., Clark & Mills, 1979; Mills & Clark, 1982). For example, if a co-worker believes that she is in an exchange relationship with a colleague and takes on extra work to cover for her colleague, she will expect to be repaid. However, it may be that her colleague never repays her with comparable benefits (perhaps because the colleague believes that they are in a communal relationship and there is no need to reciprocate). Under these circumstances, the person who provided the assistance may feel resentful of the colleague who does not reciprocate.

Task interdependence. As team-based structures have become more popular, work has become increasingly interdependent, and workers have become more responsible for assisting their co-workers when necessary. These circumstances often involve making informal accommodations that help co-workers to juggle their work and family roles. Examples of accommodations can include covering or trading off job duties or shifts and providing missed materials or information (Mesmer-Magus et al., 2008). Although these accommodations benefit those employees with family responsibilities in that they have a pool of co-workers to call upon when they need help (Mesmer-Magus et al., 2008), the possibility
of negative consequences increases for the co-workers with whom they share tasks (Grandey & Cordeiro, 2002; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008; Parker & Allen, 2001). These consequences may occur because conditions of high task interdependence can result in: (1) more intensive social comparison (Colquitt, 2004) in which inequity is more apparent; (2) higher expectations of reciprocity (Settoon & Mossholders, 2002), which might not be forthcoming; and (3) a greater possibility for exploitation (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2003).

Co-working couples. A backlash against couples who work for the same organization (i.e., co-working couples) may also occur due to perceived nepotism or the potential for ethical conflicts or interpersonal problems (Sweet & Moen, 2004). Sweet and Moen (2004) offer several anecdotes concerning co-worker backlash against members of co-working academic couples. Moen and Sweet (2002) found that having a greater number of co-workers was somewhat positively related to job prestige and control over work schedules for co-working husbands, but associated with more negative work-to-family spillover for both husbands and wives who worked together. In terms of effects on the couples themselves, there was a tendency for childless co-working couples in an early career development stage to have more spillover than co-working couples with greater family demands or those at later career stages (Moen & Sweet, 2002; Sweet & Moen, 2004). On the whole, however, there appeared to be few negative effects as a result of co-working with one’s spouse (Sweet & Moen, 2004).

Co-worker backlash and the use of W-F policies. Co-worker backlash may play a role in pressuring employees into not using W-F policies (Korabik et al., 2007; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). For example, Kirby and Krone (2002) found that workers who heard their co-workers complaining about the additional responsibilities they had when people used W-F policies took this negative discourse into account and sometimes chose to refrain from using the policies that were available to them. Research has shown that workers often fear that using W-F policies will result in negative consequences, hampering their career advancement opportunities and upsetting their co-workers (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Perlow, 1995, as cited in Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

There can also be a discrepancy between supervisory support and co-worker support for W-F policy use. For example, a supervisor may encourage a subordinate to use a W-F policy, but that individual’s co-workers may make that person feel guilty for doing so. Reus and Liu (2004) found that co-worker resentment of workers who used W-F policies could create a negative work environment and cause group members to conform to majority influences (and, hence, not use W-F policies). This effect can have severe consequences. For example, both Haar and Spell (2006) and Korabik and Warner (2009) found that when their co-workers expressed opposition towards workers’ use of W-F policies, the workers reported higher turnover intentions.
Strategies to reduce co-worker backlash. The participants in Korabik et al.'s (2007) qualitative study had a clear understanding of the negative consequences (e.g., extra difficulties in work coordination) that they caused their co-workers. They discussed a variety of strategies that they used to reduce co-worker backlash and restore equity. These included: trying not to take unfair advantage, showing their appreciation for the support they had been given, being supportive of others’ needs, and helping others whenever they could. In addition, Kossek and Van Dyne (2008) have suggested several organization-level interventions that might be useful for reducing co-worker backlash and the resulting negative outcomes for W-F policy users. These include: providing incentives for cooperation among co-workers, enhancing trusting co-worker relationships, and setting clear policies, norms, and expectations.

Implications for Research and Practice

The examination of co-worker support and backlash as reactions to W-F issues and the use of W-F policies and practices is a relatively new area of research. Despite this, the findings from the studies that have been conducted thus far draw attention to the important crossover effects that occur from co-worker to co-worker in the workplace, both within and across domains. Furthermore, the findings from this research highlight the fact that managers need to incorporate the saliency of co-workers into their management strategy.

There is still much work that needs to be done in this area. Starting with the theoretical groundwork (i.e., definition and identification of nomological network), further research into the constructs of co-worker support and backlash is needed. For example, exploration into the work group contextual factors that either encourage or inhibit co-worker support and examination of individual factors that may influence one’s degree of supportiveness versus backlash toward W-F policy use is needed. Increased exploration into the concepts of co-worker support and backlash as reactions to W-F policy use will allow further empirical research in this area, including the examination of how these constructs relate to each other, to other work and family variables, and to outcomes such as job and family satisfaction. This research is needed as the occurrence of W-F conflict is rising, and very little is known about the role of co-worker support or backlash in reducing or exacerbating this conflict (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Similarly, there is a need for more research into the impact of co-workers on W-F facilitation and enrichment.

In terms of workplace policies, research that helps organizations to better understand how to implement W-F policies so as to maximize co-worker support and minimize backlash is vital. Research directed at examining whether certain types of policies result in less backlash than others is also important. For example, there is some research indicating that inclusive policies (e.g., cafeteria-style benefits) produce less backlash than those that cannot be used by all employees (e.g., child-care centers) (Casper et al.,
It is also essential to examine the impact of social policies. Countries with more extensive W-F public policies (e.g., Scandinavia) may have workers who display more support for and less backlash against their co-workers who use W-F policies. Other government initiatives, like Britain’s “right to request” W-F accommodations, may have similar impacts by enhancing workers’ feelings of entitlement. Research on such topics should enlighten our understanding of how to best reduce W-F conflict and enhance W-F enrichment and facilitation, as well as allow individuals and organizations to gain better insight into how to manage W-F balance.

Research in this area has been hampered by the fact that presently there are very few measures specifically designed to assess positive and negative co-worker reactions to work-family issues, and those that do exist are very recent. One of these is a measure of received W-F support developed by Antani and Ayman (2004). It assesses both the instrumental and the emotional support received in both the work and the family domains from a number of non-work and work-related (including co-workers) sources. Another is the Co-Worker Informal Work Accommodations to Family (C-IWAF) scale (Mesmer-Magus et al., 2008). It assesses the tangible actions that co-workers perform to help employees manage their work and family responsibilities. It consists of six factors; namely: (1) offering child-care assistance, (2) engaging in deviating behavior (e.g., concealing a co-worker’s family-related absence), (3) facilitating telework, (4) offering a continuing work modification (e.g., permanently swapping shifts with a co-worker), (5) offering a short-term work modification (e.g., temporarily covering for a co-worker), and (6) engaging in helping behavior. The authors have provided evidence of the measure’s reliability and discriminant validity. Finally, Warner (2009) has developed and validated a measure of perceived co-worker support and backlash as reactions to work-family issues that has four distinct factors: (1) co-worker emotional support, (2) co-worker instrumental support, (3) co-worker informational support, and (4) co-worker opposition.

In conclusion, research in the area of co-worker support and backlash as reactions to W-F issues has practical implications in that an increased understanding of this topic may lead to interventions that are more effective in reducing W-F conflict and increasing W-F enrichment and facilitation among employees. Specifically, when implementing organizational-level W-F policies, organizations need to ensure that there is a network among co-workers that will support, rather than thwart, the new W-F initiative. Moreover, with increased awareness of support for W-F balance among co-workers, employees themselves may find valuable resources among co-workers to buffer potentially unsupportive organizations.

In addition, it is well established that organizational and supervisor supportiveness for W-F balance significantly influences employees’ use of W-F policies and decreases their level of W-F conflict (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002). However, we know relatively little about the role of co-workers in this process. It
has long been recognized that groups within organizations influence their members’ behaviors and beliefs and that these influences can mediate the impact of organizational-level initiatives (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). We need to begin to examine the impact of work groups on the use of W-F policies at the individual level in order to better understand the processes that are preventing workers from taking advantage of these potentially functional interventions.

References:


**Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies**

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. [*More about the Matrix* ...).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.
<table>
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<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences</td>
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<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
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<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences</td>
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<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences</td>
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**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**
About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.
Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

   Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

   Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

   The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu

Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:
1. Our use of the word "family" refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term "work-family" to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term "work-family" (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word "family" continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word "family" to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver/caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, “Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study,” on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.

Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:
1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

**Work-Family Experiences:** The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

**Antecedents:** Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
- Community Antecedents
- Societal Antecedents

**Covariates:** The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see
Column C in Table 1).

- Individual Covariates
- Family Covariates
- Workplace Covariates
- Community Covariates
- Societal Covariates

**Decisions and Responses:** The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

- Individual Decision and Responses
- Family Decisions and Responses
- Workplace Decisions and Responses
- Community Decisions and Responses
- Public Sector Decisions and Responses

**Outcomes & Impacts:** The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

- Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
- Outcomes & Impacts on Families
- Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
- Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
- Outcomes & Impacts on Society

**Theoretical Foundations:** The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
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<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**