Community as a Context for the Work-Family Interface (2002)

Author: Patricia Voydanoff, University of Dayton- Fitz Center for Leadership in Community

Date: October 2, 2002

Basic Concepts & Definitions

Workplaces, families, and individuals attempt to coordinate work and family opportunities and responsibilities within the context of communities. Workplaces and families are embedded in the communities in which they are located. Work, family, and individual relationships are intertwined with relationships among members of various communities. Communities may both help and hinder the efforts of work organizations, families, and individuals to enhance work-family integration. Communities are of two types: territorial and relational. For example, Phillips (1993, p. 14) defines community as "a group of people who live in a common territory, have a common history and shared values, participate together in various activities, and have a high degree of solidarity." Small and Supple (2001, p. 162) state that community refers to "social relationships that individuals have based on group consensus, shared norms and values, common goals, and feelings of identification, belonging and trust."

These definitions of community are too broad to be useful for viewing community as a context for work-family role coordination. Therefore, Voydanoff (2001) has formulated six aspects of community that may be useful for this purpose. They include community social organization, social networks, social capital, formal volunteering and informal helping, sense of community, and community satisfaction. These aspects of community operate on different levels of analysis. Community social organization, social networks, and social capital are community-level concepts. Formal volunteering and informal helping, sense of community, and community satisfaction are individual-level concepts.

Community social organization generally refers to local territorial communities, most commonly neighborhoods. As defined by Sampson (1999, p. 253), community social organization refers to "the ability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls." Examples include community supervision and control of teenage peer groups, informal local friendship networks, and local participation in formal and voluntary organizations (Sampson & Groves, 1989).

Social networks are linkages among defined sets of persons, such as kin, friends, neighbors, or co-workers. They differ according to characteristics such as size, composition, heterogeneity, and density.
Wellman (1999) describes contemporary community networks as narrow specialized relationships rather than broadly supportive ties; as sparsely knit, loosely bounded, and frequently changing; and as supportive and sociable although spatially dispersed rather than neighborhood-based. For example, virtual communities or computer supported social networks provide relatively specialized support through intimate secondary relationships and weaker ties that may span large distances and create global community networks (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Some believe that social networks at work may be replacing other types of communities such as neighborhoods and reducing the time and commitment given to family life and other community activities (Hochschild, 1997).

Social capital brings together the basic elements of community social organization and social networks. The resources inherent in networks are combined with the realization of collective goals associated with community social organization to create social capital. Social capital also includes cultural processes such as trust and norms of reciprocity that facilitate social action (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 1998). Social networks and community social organization provide resources that can be used to facilitate actions and create social capital. Social capital in turn may generate further resources that contribute to formal volunteering and informal helping and generate a sense of community. Social capital consists of objective (participation in formal and informal associations) and subjective (trust in institutions and individuals) elements (Paxton, 1999).

Volunteer work is time and effort devoted to helping others without remuneration or coercion (Wilson & Musick, 1998). It encompasses two types of activity--formal volunteering and informal helping (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Formal volunteering is assistance provided through organizations, either mutual-benefit associations in which the beneficiary is the membership (e.g., professional and union groups) or community-oriented service organizations that benefit clients or others outside the organization (e.g., church-related or fraternal organizations) (Janoski & Wilson, 1995). The work of volunteers provides substantial assistance to nonprofit formal support organizations. Informal helping or support is assistance given to friends, neighbors, and extended kin. It includes instrumental aid such as money, goods, and services; emotional support; companionship; and information such as advice and feedback. Formal and informal supports may substitute for each other or complement each other in meeting the needs of families (Kagan, Lewis, Heaton, & Cranshaw, 1999).

Sense of community is a multidimensional concept that includes a feeling of belonging, the sense that the individual and the group matter to each other, the feeling that members' needs will be met through group resources, and shared history and experiences (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Although most research has investigated sense of community from the perspective of individual members, it also is an aggregate variable operating on the community level (Sonn, Bishop, & Drew, 1999).
Community satisfaction reflects the subjective evaluation of a community as a whole or the evaluation of specific aspects of a community. It can refer to satisfaction with community services, safety, the attractiveness and upkeep of the physical environment, and satisfaction with community participation, social relationships, and social support. As with sense of community, community satisfaction can be conceptualized as a collective property. Formal volunteering and informal helping, sense of community, and community satisfaction are interrelated.

**Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies**

Only recently have scholars and practitioners begun to include community characteristics in analyses of work-family role coordination. Resources and demands that may influence the interconnections between work and family roles accompany membership and participation in a community. Resources include access to instrumental and emotional social support, companionship, value consensus, role models, identity maintenance, sense of belonging, and the reward of helping others. These resources may facilitate work-family role coordination by helping families adapt to work-related demands and by assisting work organizations meet the needs of families. However, community membership and participation also may be associated with demands such as disadvantaged communities, lack of community supports, excessive obligations, lack of reciprocity, and relationship conflicts. In addition, community participation is a fixed resource in that time spent in community activities is unavailable for other activities. Thus, communities also may hinder the coordination of work and family activities.

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

Ecological systems theory provides a useful framework for the examination of relationships among work, community, and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). From this perspective, Microsystems of face-to-face relationships are connected to each other to form mesosystems in which one or more Microsystems influence another microsystem.

Research on how the six aspects of the community domain affect work-family role coordination is sparse. Most studies focus on individual-level community variables and examine the combined effects of work and community characteristics on family outcomes. Community characteristics can influence relationships between work and family in three ways:

- Community and work variables may have additive effects on family functioning and well-being. A recent study finds that maternal employment, parents' membership in community organizations, and their involvement in children's activities are positively related to adolescents' grades (Bankston & Zhou, 2001). Another study reports that mothers' limited paid work hours and mothers' and adolescents' moderate to high involvement in youth activities are positively related...
to adolescent adjustment. Parents’ negative work spillover and adolescents’ peer-based school problems are negatively related to adolescent adjustment (Voydanoff, in press).

- Community characteristics also may mediate relationships between work characteristics and family outcomes. For example, sense of community partially explains the positive effects of organizational and supervisor support on family adaptation (Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, in press). In addition, satisfaction with friends and parents’ school involvement counteract the negative effects of economic strain on family satisfaction and adolescents’ grades (Gutman & Eccles, 1999; Voydanoff, Donnelly, & Fine, 1988).

- Community characteristics may moderate relationships between work characteristics and family outcomes. However, no studies were located that examine such relationships.

Research on the effects of community characteristics on relationships between family characteristics and work outcomes is even more limited. One study finds that business discussion networks spanning multiple domains of social life facilitate business start-ups, whereas a high proportion of kin in these networks reduces the likelihood of business start-ups (Renzulli, Aldrich, & Moody, 2000). Immigrants and ethnic minorities use their social networks as resources for establishing and maintaining small businesses in particular neighborhoods or industries. However, in some groups the networks are neither strong nor extensive enough to support such businesses (Portes, 1998). Ethnic communities also may promote work and family values that conflict with those of the dominant culture and make it difficult to coordinate work and family responsibilities (Rana, Kagan, Lewis, & Rout, 1998). Family support networks are positively related to young women’s employment, whereas the community unemployment rate shows a negative relationship (Parish, Hao, & Hogan, 1991). In addition, formal and informal instrumental support buffer the negative effects of family caregiving overload on work strains (Pearlin, Aneshensel, Mullan, & Whitlach, 1996).

Our knowledge of community as a context for the work-family interface is in its infancy. However, initiatives are underway that promise to increase our understanding. For example, Pitt-Catsouphes and MacDermid (personal communication) are studying the ways in which dual-earner families with children in middle school use work and community resources to develop and implement strategies that promote family well-being. Ann Bookman (2000) has reported preliminary findings from a qualitative study of the complex relationships among work demands and schedules, caring for children and elders, community supports, and diverse patterns of community involvement.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

Research on the interconnections among work, community, and family is still in its early stages. Additional studies are needed that document the conditions under which community resources and demands
influence the ability of workplaces and families to coordinate work and family opportunities and responsibilities. Hopefully, such research will lead to the development of workplace, community, and government policies and programs that enhance rather than hinder the integration of work, community, and family life among working families. These three major institutions need to work together to provide such policies and programs. As Googins (1997) has pointed out, corporations cannot be expected to accept sole or major responsibility for such a broad-based issue. Others need to be more involved, including the government, informal community supports, and formal community organizations in the nonprofit sector.

References


**Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:**
*(Click on titles to link to citations/annotations in the Literature Database.)*


**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...](#)).

Concepts related to adult development are relevant to all of the "Individual" domains in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Study. In addition, theories of adult development are relevant to Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings.

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>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains