Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry


Authors: Jeffrey H. Greenhaus, Ph.D., Drexel University, and Romila Singh, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Date: February 25, 2003

Basic Concepts & Definitions

In the last three decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of research devoted to understanding the linkages between work and family life. A variety of linking mechanisms have been proposed that explain the nature of the relationship between work and family roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), the most prominent of which are conflict (or interference), accommodation, enrichment, compensation, and segmentation.

Work-family conflict or interference refers to simultaneous pressures from the work and family domains that are mutually incompatible in some respect such that meeting the demands of one role makes it difficult to meet the demands of the other role. Sometimes referred to as negative spillover, work-family conflict can take different forms and can originate either in the work domain or the family domain. [For a more detailed description of work-family conflict, see the Encyclopedia entry on work-family conflict.]

Work-family accommodation refers to the process by which individuals reduce their involvement in one role to accommodate the demands of the other role (Lambert, 1990). Work-family accommodation can be used as a strategy in response to actual or anticipated work-family conflict such that individuals reduce their involvement in a role that is less important to them. The reduction in involvement can take either of two forms: behavioral (e.g., curtailing the amount of time devoted to a role) or psychological (e.g., restricting the level of ego attachment to a particular role).

Another linking mechanism, work-family compensation, represents efforts by individuals to offset dissatisfaction in one role by seeking satisfaction in another role (Lambert, 1990; Zedeck, 1992). These efforts can take the form of decreasing involvement in a dissatisfying role and increasing involvement in a more satisfying role. Alternately, individuals may respond to dissatisfaction in one role by pursuing rewarding or fulfilling experiences in the other role. The latter form of compensation can be either supplemental or reactive in nature (Zedeck, 1992). Supplemental compensation occurs when individuals shift their pursuits for rewarding experiences from the dissatisfying role to a potentially more satisfying one. For example, individuals with little autonomy at work seek more autonomy outside of their work role.
On the other hand, reactive compensation represents individuals' efforts to redress negative experiences in one role by pursuing contrasting experiences in the other role such as engaging in leisure activities after a fatiguing day at work.

*Work-family segmentation* originally referred to the notion that work and family roles are independent of one another such that individuals can participate in one role without any influence on the other role (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). More recently, segmentation has been viewed as an intentional separation of work and family roles such that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of one role are actively suppressed from affecting the individual's performance in the other role (Lambert, 1990).

Unlike conflict or interference, *work-family enrichment* refers to the process by which one role strengthens or enriches the quality of the other role. Work-family enrichment has also been referred to as work-family enhancement, work-family facilitation, and positive spillover. All of these terms describe the notion that a variety of resources from work and family roles have the capacity to provide positive experiences in the other role.

Two mechanisms that are important to make note of, although they are not "linkages" in the sense of a causal relationship between work and family life, are *work-family balance* and *work-family expansion*. We define work-family balance as the extent to which individuals are equally involved in-and equally satisfied with-their work role and their family role (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, in press). Work-family expansion refers to the notion that simultaneously engaging in multiple work and family roles is beneficial for the physical, mental, and relationship health of individuals (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). The quality of the roles, rather than the number of roles occupied, or the amount of time spent in particular role, determine the degree to which individuals experience the positive effects of participating in multiple roles.

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

It is evident that our work lives can either enhance or detract from our family lives. In the same manner, our family lives can have positive or negative influences on our work attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. For example, extensive and inflexible work hours, over-involvement in work, and job stress may produce distress within the family domain, withdrawal from family responsibilities, and adversely affect one's overall quality of life. Similarly, extensive care-giving responsibilities and intensive involvement with family activities can limit individuals' career choices and aspirations and negatively affect their work involvement, job satisfaction, and intention to continue their employment. In contrast, there are several resources derived from one's work role, such as income, job autonomy, and social support from co-workers and/or supervisor, that can positively influence one's experiences and well-being in the family domain. Similarly, individuals' home and family lives can also strengthen or enrich the quality of their work lives by providing a variety of supportive resources to draw upon.
Because work and family lives have a profound influence on one another, understanding the linkages between work and family roles has important implications not only for organizations and individuals, but also for educators and researchers interested in this area. With the growing representation of women in the workforce and a blurring of traditional gender-based roles, both men and women are confronted with the daily challenge of handling their work and family responsibilities in a way that meets the needs of their family as well as their employer.

Therefore, understanding the mechanisms by which work and family life affect each other will help individuals and their employers determine the most effective ways to reduce work-family interference and increase work-family enrichment. For example, human resource professionals, training and development personnel, work-family and diversity consultants, and other decision makers can use these insights to design policies and programs aimed at promoting a higher quality of life for employees. Similarly, understanding different facets of the work-family interface can help working women and men not only achieve a better balance between their work and family roles, but also become more responsive to their subordinates' work-family concerns. Finally, this knowledge will be helpful for educators and researchers in management, organizational behavior, sociology, family studies, and other areas who are interested in gaining additional insight into the nature of work-family relationships.

State of the Body of Knowledge

The work-family literature has long been dominated by a conflict perspective that has emphasized the potential for role interference and stress among individuals who participate in work and family roles. As noted by Hammer and Thompson in their *Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia* entry on work-family conflict, work-family conflict can be time-based, strain-based, or behavior-based (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Each form of work-family conflict represents a type of interference between one role and the other role. Moreover, in some instances, work interferes with family (work-to-family conflict), whereas at other times, family interferes with work (family-to-work conflict).

Extensive research has been conducted to determine the factors that produce work-family conflict. Most of the factors that have been examined are environmental pressures that reside within the work domain (e.g., work stressors, time pressures, unsupportive supervisor, organizational culture) or within the family domain (e.g., young children, eldercare responsibilities, unsupportive spouse). Recent research has determined that individual factors such as personality characteristics (Carlson, 1999; Stoeva, Chiu, & Greenhaus, 2002), interpersonal attachment styles (Sumer & Knight, 2001), and psychological involvement in work and family roles (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992)—also play a role in producing work-family conflict. The negative consequences of extensive work-family conflict include ineffectiveness at work and within the family, dissatisfaction with work and family roles, stress...

Often, there is a connection between work-family conflict and work-family accommodation. Anticipating extensive conflict between work and family responsibilities, individuals may reduce involvement in the less important role to accommodate the role that is currently viewed as more important or more pressing. For example, parents may reduce their involvement in work to accommodate the needs of their children, in effect, “permitting” their family responsibilities to interfere with work. Accommodation may evoke the image of a tradeoff as individuals “trade” success in the less favored role for opportunities to succeed in the more highly favored role (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

Whereas conflict, interference, and accommodation generally represent negative effects of one role on another role, work-family enrichment represents positive effects. Because work-family enrichment has not been studied as extensively as work-family conflict, we know less about enrichment than conflict. Nevertheless, based on the early work of Sieber (1974), research has recently been accumulating on the work-family enrichment process, attempting to measure the concept and identify its determinants and outcomes (Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000a, 2000b; Kirchmeyer, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Sumer & Knight, 2001).

It appears that work-family enrichment occurs when individuals successfully apply a resource acquired in one role to a task in the other role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2002). For example, parents may develop interpersonal skills through interactions with their children that they subsequently apply to their work role, thereby enhancing their managerial effectiveness (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). Conversely, employees learn skills or develop perspectives at work that can enable them to be more effective as parents (Crouter, 1984). Just as conflict or interference can operate in two directions (work-to-family and family-to-work), so too can enrichment.

Like enrichment, work-family compensation can produce positive effects of one role on another. For example, an individual who lacks the opportunity to make decisions in his or her job may compensate by pursuing leisure or recreational roles that provide extensive opportunities to make decisions (e.g., a little league coach). However, there is a substantial difference between compensation and enrichment. Compensation arises from a deficiency in a role whereas enrichment, as we have seen, arises from a strength or resource in the role. There has not been a great deal of empirical research on compensation, although Edwards and Rothbard (2000, Figure 2) present several mechanisms by which compensation may operate.

Segmentation, the separation or independence of work and family roles, has gained recent attention in the literature. Segmentation is currently viewed as an active strategy to maintain a boundary between
work and family roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Work-family role segmentation can also be viewed as a characteristic of the two roles rather than as a personal strategy. Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) believe that two roles are segmented when their boundaries are inflexible and impermeable to one another and when they are very different from one another in terms of role requirements. Ashforth et al. (2000) suggest that segmented roles have both advantages (less blurring or confusion between work and family responsibilities) and disadvantages (difficulty in crossing the boundary from one role to the other).

Work-family balance is not a linking mechanism because it does not specify how work and family affect each other. Rather, it reflects an individual's orientation toward his or her involvement in different life roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Because balanced individuals are highly engaged in work and family roles, they may be more likely to meet their needs in both roles, experience relatively little stress in participating in multiple roles, and derive high self-esteem from the competence they achieve in work and family activities (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Relatively little research has been conducted on the process by which individuals achieve work-family balance, and at least one recent study (Greenhaus et al., in press) casts some doubt on the virtues of leading a balanced life.

Similarly, work-family expansion is not a linking mechanism but rather reflects the benefits that accrue from engaging in multiple life roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). For example, men and women who engage in all three roles of spouse, parent, and employee report heightened levels of physical and mental health and overall well-being (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Repetti, Matthews, & Waldron, 1989). There are many processes that contribute to the beneficial effects of multiple roles such as additional income, social support from one's family and co-workers/supervisors, an expanded frame of reference, and additional opportunities to experience success and develop a sense of self-confidence. However, overload and distress may occur when the number of roles becomes too great or when the demands of one role become excessive.

Implications for Practice and Research

Future research should be directed toward understanding the full array of linkages between work and family life. For example, research should examine the process by which resources are transferred from one role to another to understand the conditions under which work enriches family and family enriches work. Work-family compensation also warrants considerable attention so we can understand the conditions under which compensation takes place, and the effects of compensation on individual well-being. Research should also examine whether a segmentation strategy reduces work-family conflict and/or produces difficulties in moving between work and family roles. Finally, research is required to measure work-family balance and determine whether individuals who live a balanced lifestyle are better off psychologically than those who do not.
Work-family problems, if not managed effectively, not only affect individuals and their families, but also adversely affect their employers and ultimately society at large. Hence, the responsibility for developing and implementing effective ways for reducing work-family interference and increasing enrichment should be shared by organizations, individuals and their families, and policy-makers.

Employers offer a wide variety of work-family benefits and programs such as on-site child care, support groups for working parents, referral services, flextime, telecommuting, and part-time work options. Employees who avail themselves of these programs report feeling more satisfied with their jobs, express greater loyalty toward their organizations, and miss fewer days of work (Lobel, 1999). Organizations, in turn, reap benefits in the form of improved employee productivity and morale and a progressive public image that they use to attract and recruit better talent. Many of these programs may not be able to eliminate work-family interference, but they are an important first step in providing employees with sufficient flexibility to achieve a more fulfilling balance between their work and family lives. However, companies need to move beyond offering a patchwork of solutions and programs and undergo a fundamental culture shift that recognizes the legitimacy of work-family issues (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). Changing the deeply held organizational beliefs, values, and assumptions regarding employees' need for balanced work-family lives is critical to the success of implementing various work-family benefits and policies (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

While corporations have largely been at the forefront of work-family initiatives, other institutions such as the government and the non-profit sector need to play a larger role in working toward cultural change and fostering family supportiveness (Googins, 1997). Balancing work and family lives is a matter of public policy and the government can play a key role in pushing work-family issues into the public spotlight and stimulating debate in the area. Indeed, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 has provided a critical first step toward mandating universal provision of leave along with assurance of job security. More recently, California was the first state in the nation to enact paid family leave mandating up to six weeks of Family Temporary Disability Insurance (FTDI). In effect, the government can and should be instrumental in providing a forum for the institutions of work, family, and community to come together and develop a national consensus on how to enhance the quality of work and family life. However, before that can happen, we need to come to a national agreement on what the role of government should be in supporting working families (Rayman & Bookman, 1999).

Regardless of corporate and government initiatives, individuals have an endless number of decisions to make to reduce the level of interference between work and family roles and to promote enrichment between these roles. As a first step, people can attempt to work for employers with progressive work-family cultures and supportive work-family policies and programs. They can also build supportive relationships with individuals in different roles such as work, family, and the community and draw on the tangible and intangible resources that these individuals provide. In addition, self-insight, the ability to
prioritize life roles, and the willingness to periodically reexamine goals and strategies are critical in managing the relationship between work and family (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

**References**


Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:


**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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptors</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues &amp; 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-recipient 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**