WORK – LIFE CONFLICT
THEORETICAL MODELS, OUTCOMES, AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

PRESENTER
- James Hunter
- Director, Employee Assistance Program
- University of Missouri System

OBJECTIVES
- Define work – life conflict
- Review prevailing theoretical models of work – life conflict
- Discuss effects or outcomes of work – life conflict
- Identify predictors of work – life conflict
- Identify interventions for work – life conflict
WHAT IS WORK – LIFE CONFLICT?

- A form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from work and life (family or personal) domains are mutually incompatible in some respect.
- In work – life conflict, participation in the work role makes participation in the family or personal role more difficult.

WHAT IS WORK – LIFE CONFLICT?

- Work – life conflict can occur in two directions:
  - Work can interfere with family or personal pursuits = work to life conflict.
  - Life (family or personal) pursuits can interfere with the completion of work demands = life to work conflict.

PREVAILING THEORETICAL MODELS

Ecological Systems Theory

- This perspective asserts that individual development is lifelong and is best understood by examining the interaction between characteristics of a person and the characteristics of their environment.
- Ecological systems theory illustrates a model of human behavior that includes feedback loops between the person and their environment, with each affecting the other in turn.
Ecological Systems Theory – Four Subsystems

MICROSYSTEM – most proximal or closest to the individual
- The microsystem reflects a pattern of roles, activities, and interpersonal relations that a person experiences in a context that has certain characteristics and that includes other people with certain attributes
- Key microsystems are in the home and workplace

MESOSYSTEM - composed of the linkages between two or more microsystems such as those between work and one’s home life

EXOSYSTEM - identical to the Mesosystem except one of the microsystems does not contain the individual
- An example of the exosystem is the relationship between one’s home life and the work life of their spouse

MACROSYSTEM – a combination of the micro, meso, and exosystem creating a distinct pattern within each domain
- The macrosystem reflects the interactional complexity among the micro, meso, and exosystem
Relevant Questions

- What is the effect of one's home life on their ability to complete paid work?
- What is the influence of paid employment on one's ability to engage successfully in off-work activity?
- How does the work activity of a significant other (spouse, partner, et cetera) affect the home life of the employee?
- In what ways does parental work activity influence their child's home or school experiences?

Role Theory

- A role is a set of activities or behavior that others expect an individual to perform
- Having multiple roles to fulfill is demanding and stressful
- Once people have multiple roles it becomes impossible for them to meet all expectations of each role as these expectations will inevitably conflict in some way
- This type of conflict is labeled interrole conflict and is the essence of work–life conflict

Relevant Questions

- How does role taking influence one's balance between work and their personal life and vice versa?
- In what specific way does multiple role taking either at work or home create role conflicts?
Boundary – Border Theory

- This perspective maintains that each of an individual's roles take place within a specific domain of life, and these domains are separated by borders that may be physical, temporal-worldly, or psychological.
- This paradigm addresses the issue of crossing borders between domains.

Boundary – Border Theory

- Boundary – border theory contends that transactions between borders or domains result in the experience of stress for the individual and others in their ecological sphere.
- This theory also helps illustrate the various challenges individuals encounter as they move back and forth between their work and home lives.
- According to boundary – border theory the flexibility and permeability of the boundaries between one's work and home life will affect the level of integration, the ease of transitions, and the level of conflict between these domains.

Boundary – Border Theory

- Flexibility is defined as the degree to which the boundaries between domains may shift.
- In other words, flexibility is the degree to which roles can be performed outside the typical spatial and temporal boundaries of its domain.
- Permeability is defined as the degree to which elements from other domains may enter.
Relevant Questions

- Does an employee have input into how their job is organized and completed? (Flexibility)
- Are flexible work schedules available for employees who need them to maintain balance? (Flexibility)
- When one is in a particular domain, how easy is it for people, materials, and thoughts from another domain to enter? (Permeability)

PREDICTORS OF WORK – LIFE CONFLICT

- Work-life conflict has causes, predictors, and risk factors that come from three general sources:
  - The individual
  - The family or personal role environment
  - The work role environment

General Intra-individual Predictors

- The following demographic characteristics are predictors of work-life conflict. Take a moment to reflect upon how these factors can generate demands which may conflict with optimal performance.
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Family status
  - Age of youngest child
  - Job type
Personality Characteristics

- Trait negativity such as low agreeableness promotes work–life conflict in both directions
- Preoccupied attachment style promotes life to work conflict
- Hardiness protects people from work–life conflict
- Conscientiousness seems to protect people from family to work conflict
- Effective time management has been found to reduce work–life conflict in both directions

Family Role Environment Predictors

- Spending time on family related work such as childcare and household chores has been associated with higher levels of life to work conflict
- Psychological involvement in one’s family or other life has been shown to predict life to work conflict
- Family or life stressors have also been identified as predictors of life to work conflict
- Using an avoidant or resigned coping style to manage life stressors has been associated with a higher level of life to work conflict

Family Role Environment Predictors

- Marital or other partner tension has been shown to promote life to work conflict
- Having children is another predictor of life to work conflict
- Factors that increase parental responsibility such as having younger children, and living with one’s child increases life to work conflict
- Certain problems that have to do with children such as the availability of child care and feeling overloaded by parenting duties also are associated with high levels of life to work conflict
**Family Role Environment Predictors**
- Factors that help to decrease life to work conflict are as follows:
- Various forms of social support can help to decrease life to work conflict
- Instrumental support such as assistance with child care or household chores from one’s spouse, partner, or other family reduces life to work conflict
- Receiving emotional support from one’s spouse, partner, or other family can also reduce life to work conflict

**Work Role Environment Predictors**
- The amount of time spent at work
- High levels of psychological involvement in one’s work
- Exposure to work stressors such as overload, role conflict, ambiguity, and job dissatisfaction
- Jobs that require coordination with others at work predict work-life conflict
- The more technology people use to communicate between their home and work, or to do work at home, the greater the work-life conflict

**Work Role Environment Predictors**
- Dimensions that can ease rather than produce work-life conflict are:
- Greater job security
- Supervisor social support
- Flexible schedules
- Organizational culture that encourages work-life balance
Outcomes of Work – Life Conflict

Individual Outcomes
- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Depression
- General psychological distress
- Medication use
- Drinking problems
- Substance dependence disorders
- Clinical mood disorders
- Clinical anxiety disorders
- Hypertension
- Obesity
- High cholesterol
- Poor eating habits
- Decreased exercise

Family Related Outcomes
- Lower family (life) satisfaction
- Decreased performance in the family (life) role
- Increased family (life) related absenteeism and tardiness
- Increased parenting overload
- Receipt of less emotional support and instrumental assistance from family members

Work Related Outcomes
- Low levels of job satisfaction
- Job distress
- Low levels of self-reported work performance
- Higher rates of absenteeism
- Low levels of organizational commitment
- Increased intent to find other work
- Greater need for work flexibility
Interventions For Work – Life Conflict

- Family (life) supportive workplace policy
- Organizational culture supporting the use of supportive policy
- Supportive managerial styles
- Stress management training
- Resist avoidant or resigned coping styles for stressors
- Use help-seeking or direct-action coping styles to manage stressors
- Seek out and benefit from support of colleagues, family members or friends in a specific domain (work, life)

Interventions For Work – Life Conflict

- Organizational systems of work – life integration such as:
  https://www.umsystem.edu/totalrewards/benefits/eap_training_programs
- Ecological – system assessments and associated intervention planning (reference attached ecological models)

References

References


*Note:* This is a summary, non-exhaustive list of references.