Understanding How Individuals Use Boundary Management Tactics to Manage Work-Life Interference

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today’s fast paced organizational life requires many employees to constantly deal with life and work balance. We present a model of how the use of boundary management tactics can affect life satisfaction. We suggest how individual differences (i.e., gender, age, and culture) affect the use of these tactics to manage work-life conflicts. In addition, low life satisfaction creates a feedback loop and presents individuals with an opportunity to recalibrate by choosing additional or different boundary management strategies. The practical implications from this research for managers are a tool to discuss and tailor individualized solutions for employees, resulting in greater work-life satisfaction and productivity.

Keywords: Boundary management tactics, Work-life interference, Gender, Age, Cultural differences

INTRODUCTION

The dizzying speed of change in how we compete globally continues to blur our work-life roles. Technology continues to change the how, when, and where we work. Global workforces increase the business need to work nontraditional work hours to adjust for different time zones. Demographic changes of dual income earners and aging populations continue to strain the role of caregiving responsibilities. Generational attitudes about how to allocate work and leisure time have changed. Now, the economic recession has increased financial insecurity and individuals are trying to manage increased workloads and intensified time pressures as they try to do more with less. In today’s competitive global business climate, common boundaries between work time and leisure time are not clear.

Work-Life Research

In the last three decades, work–family conflict has been extensively studied. Work-family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict in which the role demands of one domain (work or family) conflict with the role demands from another domain (family or work) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Early research (1980-1990) focused on understanding the source of work-life conflict. Work-family conflict can be time-based, strain-based, or behavior-based (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict occurs when the role pressures from different domains compete simultaneously for the individual's time. Strain-based conflict occurs when the strain experienced in one role domain interferes with effective performance of role behaviors in the other domain. Behavior-based conflict is when the necessary behavior demanded in one role conflicts with the behavior expectations of the other role(s). During the past decade (1990-2000), research began to build on the directionality of the conflict—work into the family domain (WIF) and family into the work domain (FIW) (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Most of the work during this period focused on the negative consequences or “spillover” in each direction which include workplace issues of employee health, productivity, absenteeism, turnover, organizational citizenship, and satisfaction (Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Kossek, Noe & DeMarr, 1999; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). The U.S. Department of Labor and the Families and Work Institute’s National Changing Studies of the Workforce (Aumann & Galinsky, 2008) contributed to the findings of the negative impact of work-life conflict on individuals with a rising number of workers reporting high blood pressure, lack of exercise, emotional exhaustion, sleeplessness, and clinical depression. In the late 1990s, the terminology of “family” broadened to terms such as “life,” “nonwork,” and “home” to include single men and women and married couples without children.