

Balancing Work and Family Life Conflict through Human Resource Management

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***Abstract:** Changes in workforce demography have brought the issue of work-family conflict (WFC) within the research paradigm. Western countries have given more emphasis on WFC issues. Recently researchers of Asian developing countries are also showing their interest in studying WFC, its antecedents and outcomes. However, In Bangladesh, study on WFC is very limited. The present paper aims at accumulating scattered research findings on WFC so that employer and employees of Bangladesh can have a better idea of addressing WFC with possible remedial strategies. Moreover, the paper proposes a new dimension of research area: getting employee outcomes through managing WFC by Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in the organizations of Bangladesh. A model relating HRM and WFC to get positive employee outcomes is presented and related hypotheses are formed to support WFC policy making for the organizations of Bangladesh. More studies on this area are thereby, sought from the local researchers. Thus, WFC from the developing country perspective is added.*

***Keywords:** Work-Family Conflict, HRM, Employee Outcomes, Bangladesh*

Introduction:

The growing trend of women's involvement in the workforce has increased the number of dual income families in Bangladesh (Ali, 2010). This emergent trend simultaneously increases a concern for both male and female employees to achieve work-life balance as female assume more family responsibilities and male are supposed to share home chores in Bangladesh. In the context of Bangladesh culture, female family role is more emphasized than female work role. On the other hand, male are also expected to accept family responsibility along with their usual earning responsibility. Hence, currently the organizations of Bangladesh are in a position to study and develop strategy in managing their employees having both work role and family role. Moreover, considering employee work and family life balance issues in Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies to attract, retain and motivate limited skilled workforce may act as a source of competitive advantage for the Bangladeshi organizations as well.

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The interaction between work and family has come into the scene due to increased participation of women in jobs (Ahmad, 2008). The interface between work and family is consistently viewed as work family conflict (WFC) because these two domains share a common life in individual. Therefore, WFC means an inter role conflict arising from work and family interrelated roles (Aslam, Shumaila, Azhar & Sadaqat, 2011). Families in which both husband and wife work, are more likely to create even more important conflicts between work and family (Livingston & Judge, 2008). Both women taking job responsibility and men being involved in family duties feel the massive pressure to balance their extended family and job commitment. Employees with WFC are confronting important and invasive experiences having adverse consequences, such as stress and mental health problem (Hammed, 2008), job dissatisfaction (Noor, 2004); withdrawal behaviour at work (Hammer, Bauer & Grandey, 2003) and work and family life dissatisfaction (Ford, Heinen & Langkamer, 2007).

Therefore, WFC challenges organizations to develop policies and practices enabling employees to cope up with their dual roles (Poelmans, 2001). Grant-Vallone and Enshar (2001) find contemporary organizations are addressing work and family issues as a fundamental business concern. It has become so critical that researchers are studying organizational strategies considering organizational supports, family policies and innovative HRM policies to balance both male and female employees' work family conflict. Special focus is given on HRM issues as HRM is responsible for employee decisions in the organization. Flexible parental leave legislation, child care, older care, flexible time are the new issues in HRM policies to support dual career families to manage their work life with family responsibilities. Companies are increasingly adopting family-supportive programs to engage and retain employees (Richman et al., 2008) and to build a committed workforce (Halpern, 2005).

Research studies on WFC are largely based on Anglo-Saxon data. Due to its importance, research attempts to look at WFC in other cultures are also emerging. Examples include China (Ling & Poweli, 2001), Japan (Fujimoto, Kotani & Suzuki, 2008), Hong Kong (Lo, Stone & Ng, 2003), Malaysia (Noor, 2002, 2004); Iran (Namayandeh, Yaacob & Juhari, 2010); India (Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007) and Pakistan (Nadeem & Abbas, 2009). In this line, it is very much surprising not to have that much research support on the WFC in Bangladesh. Study on WFC in Bangladesh is very limited. A single study on WFC in Bangladesh by Alam, Sattar & Chaudhury (2011) can be mentioned. The present study will contribute to address WFC in the organizations of Bangladesh. Moreover, this study also aims at extending HRM literature through addressing organization HRM policies supporting to reduce employee WFC and to get consequent positive employee outcomes.

Rationale of the Study

The importance or centrality of the family as an institution and an increase in dual-earner families are creating two simultaneous but opposite types of social pressures causing a dilemma: a pressure to work and a pressure to take care of one's family. As Bangladesh is also experiencing the same phenomenon, the present study focuses on studying WFC along with the identification of its antecedents and outcomes so that organizations in Bangladesh can develop HRM policy initiatives to reduce WFC of their employees. The proposed HRM (HRM) model of the current paper is a theoretical base to reduce WFC of the employees of the Bangladeshi organizations.

Research on this topic is especially important because several current circumstances are intensifying WFC in the organizations of Bangladesh. First, more female are joining into the labor force (Hossain & Tisdell, 2005) causing radical transition from traditional to dual-earner families in Bangladesh. Second, longer working hours is making combining work and family more difficult for dual income families (Alam et al., 2011). Third, the family as an important institution in Bangladesh culture is continuously generating a particular pressure to create and look after a family (Crozier & Davies, 2006). Fourth, companies in Bangladesh have not adopted family-friendly policies (Hossain, Sarker & Afroze, 2012; Alam et al, 2011). The increased number of dual income families with no organizational support for balancing work and family role is creating simultaneous pressures on the researchers and managers to explore WFC issues in Bangladesh. Considering the prevalent workforce demography and employee expectations, organizations of Bangladesh must need to admit the pressing problem of WFC as well as devise solutions to this dilemma.

Alam et al (2011) investigate the work-family conflict (WFC) of women managers in Dhaka. The study reveals longer working hours affect work family balance directly and children are the worst victims of this WFC. Newaz, Ali and Akhter (2007) identify WFC is one of the main reasons of turnover problem in banking sector. Along with other policy recommendations the authors suggest to introduce policies to reduce WFC that will ultimately reduce employee turnover in banking sector. Hossain et al., (2012) have a strong urge for the RMG industry management to design and implement policies to make a balance for work and life of its employees that will minimize the current labor unrest in the RMG industry. These research examples provide the evidences of the importance of examining WFC issue in the context of Bangladesh. The present paper focuses on review of available WFC literature so that a sound theoretical base can be developed for policy making on WFC of the Bangladeshi organizations. Based on the review, a proposed HRM model is suggested and related hypotheses are formed to be considered by the Bangladeshi organizations for reduced WFC and to get positive employee outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the antecedents that cause WFC
- To identify the dysfunctional consequences of WFC
- To construct a HRM model to reduce WFC

Research Methodology

In the current study, recent literature on WFC are reviewed to conceptualize WFC and to identify its antecedents and consequences. Additionally, research findings on possible solutions to WFC through HRM are also noted from the existing WFC literature. To collect the literature, two types of search are done. First, literature on WFC are looked for by using different key terms like, WFC, work family interface, work life balance, work/family demands, work family role system and supportive policies to address WFC. Second, all the citations of the most relevant papers (Ahmad, 2008; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Livingston & Judge, 2008; Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrin. These discussions will facilitate to develop knowledge in the broad areas of WFC and HRM practices to reduce WFC. The purpose here is to propose a model showing HRM practices as strategy for reducing WFC the result of which will be increased employee satisfaction, commitment and retention.

Literature Review:

Work Family Conflict

Pleck (1977) examined how an individual functioning in either area (family and work) affects the involvement in other sphere. Male work role and family role and female work role and family role are intricated in the work-family role system. Hence, problems in any one system have consequential influence on the other one as well. Namayandeh et al (2010) refer this scenario namely, work interference with family (WIF). Therefore, WFC is defined as a state of affairs where the work and family domains interfere with one another to such a degree that the one is influencing negatively the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In dual career family WFC is often assumed to affect both male and female with increased levels of stress and conflict as they run for work and family responsibilities (Bakker, Demerouti & Dollard, 2008; Livingston & Judge, 2008).

Researchers (Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996; Lu, Gilmour, Kao & Huang, 2006; Spector et al., 2004) see work-family conflict as a form of interrole conflict in which the demands of one role hinder to meet the demands in the other role. This conflict exists when: (a) time devoted to the requirements of one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another; (b) strain from participation in one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another; and (c) specific behaviors required by one role make it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 76). Furthermore, Netemeyer et al (1996) suggested two more distinct forms of work-family conflict: work-to-family and family-to-work conflict (Byron, 2005; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). Work-to-family conflict is “interrole conflicts in which the general demands of time devoted to, and strain created by the job, interfere with performing family-related responsibilities” (Netemeyer et al., 1996, p. 401). Family-to-work conflict refers to the reverse. Thus, Ahmad (2008) has conceptualized WFC broadly as a construct with dual direction (work-to-family and family-to-work), multiple forms (time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based) and specific to multiple life roles (e.g., spouse, parental, elder care, home care, and leisure).

The present study focuses on WFC with direction from work to family of dual earners of a family (family where both husband and wife have dual roles). The situation can be best depicted as dual men with dual roles in a single family. As the present aim is to help organizations develop HRM policies to minimize WFC of both male and female employees, one direction of conflict from work to family is considered.

WFC is also explained using the conservation of resources theory (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner & Hammer, 2011). For example, job demands can threaten one’s resources (time, energy and effort) to be employed in family demand (Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Another theory used in explaining WFC is “expansionist hypothesis/theory” (Tsai, 2008) which states multiple role occupancy has beneficial effects such as “adding” the worker role is beneficial to women, and “adding” family roles is beneficial for men. This expansionist perspective views work-family interaction positively which predicts a positive correlation between work and family roles. Researchers have found that if employees can make a balance between their roles and activities they will have lower strain and depression and high sense of self-esteem (Marks & MacDermid, 1996).

Antecedents of WFC

Namayandeh et al (2010) find low support received from husband, family members/relatives and supervisor might increase perceived conflict between work and family. Major et al (2002) find work overload and increased work time are positively related with WFC. In a recent review, Rimi and Rubel (2013) identify researchers’

emphasis on role stressors (role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload) as workplace factors responsible for WFC. Yildirim & Aycan (2008) find work overload and irregular work schedules are the significant predictors of work-to-family conflict. Job that requires coordination from others, use of technology to do work at home and job insecurity are also held responsible for WFC (Batt & Valcour, 2003). Job demand (more time and emotion for job) is also an important predictor of WFC (Bakker et al 2008).

Workplace characteristics can also contribute to higher levels of WFC. Researchers have found that the number of hours worked per week, the amount and frequency of overtime required, an inflexible work schedule, unsupportive supervisor, and an inhospitable organizational culture for balancing work and family all increase the likelihood of WFC (Anderson, Coffey & Byerly, 2002; Tsai, 2008; Fujimoto et al., 2008; Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger & Mannon, 2009). From a meta-analytic review of studies from Asian and Western cultures, Byron (2005) has found that work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict have shared antecedents (e.g. job stress and family stress) as well as unique antecedents (e.g. work variables on work-to-family conflict and family variables on family-to-work conflict).

Ahmad (2008) develops a comprehensive model on predictors of work-family conflict which suggests the predictors could be job-related (job type, work time commitment, job involvement, role overload, job flexibility), family-related (number of children, life-cycle stage, family involvement, child care arrangements) and individual-related (life role values, gender role orientation, locus of control, perfectionism). Zhang and Liu (2011) review antecedents of WFC from the aspects of individual, work and family. Antecedents include the effects of individual factors like demographic and personality variables, the influences of work variables like work stress, family friendly programs and impacts of family variables like family demands and spousal interactions.

Consequences of WFC

The affective experiences and behaviors at work and off-work settings have important implications for individuals' psychological well-being (Ilies, Schwind, Wagner, Johnson, DeRue&Ilgen, 2007). Work-family experiences, especially work-family conflict, contribute to poor physical health (Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006). In terms of emotions, the two most commonly measured signs of psychological distress stemming from work-family conflict are anxiety and depressed mood (Grimshaw, 1999, p. 219 as cited in Tsai, 2008). Work-family conflict has been shown to be related to negative work outcomes such as job dissatisfaction, job burnout, and turnover (Howard, Donofrio & Boles 2004), as well as to outcomes related to psychological distress, and work and family dissatisfaction (Major, et al 2002; Ford et al., 2007). Individuals who experience

work-family conflict have been found to incur increased health risks, inadequate performance in family roles (e.g., marital partner and parent), reduced family and life satisfaction, and poor marital adjustment and mental health (Boles, Wood & Johnson, 2003); employee well-being (Moreno-Jimenez et al, 2009); negative social interaction with family (Ilies et al 2007). Baskerville Watkins et al. (2012) find that when employee faces WFC, family member can influence his or her withdrawal decision and job search behaviour. Considering the magnitude of the effects of WFC on employees, contemporary organizations as well as researchers are exploring the supportive strategies to reduce these effects.

Supportive Strategies for WFC

In order to reduce dissatisfaction and stress resulted from work-family conflict among employees, many supportive strategies can be identified from the previous researches. Work place helps employees to coordinate between work family roles by:

1. Organizational or work culture: supportive and friendly culture facilitates to balance both work and family life of their employees (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Pedersen et al., 2009).
2. Supervisor support: Positive behavior from supervisor can reduce work pressure on family and family pressure on work (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Yildirim & Aycan 2008)and;
3. Family friendly benefits: formal benefits provided to employees will help them to coordinate between work-family responsibilities to lower work-family role strain (Brough, Michael &Kalliath, 2005).

Haddock, Zimmerman and Ziemba (2006) identify supportive practices including flexible work scheduling, non-traditional work hours, professional/job autonomy, working from home, supportive supervisors, supportive colleagues and supervisees, and the ability to set firm boundaries around work to reduce WFC. Pedersen et al (2009) study family-friendly benefits related to childcare; such as, flexible time use, family leave, ability to care for sick children on demand, on-site childcare for young and school-aged children, and women's permission to breastfeed at work. Lapierre et al (2008) find employees working in a family-supportive environment experience lower levels of WFC. Reduced WFC then translates into greater job and family satisfaction, followed by greater overall life satisfaction. Grandey, Cordeiro, and Michael (2007) point out that those working long hours in the family-supportive work environment have lower WFC than those working long hours in an unsupportive environment.

Kreiner (2006), Edwards and Rothbard (2000) present psychological tactics such as segmentation (the suppression of behavior, thoughts, and feelings from one domain while participating in another), compensation (intensive involvement in one domain to counteract negative outcomes in the other), accommodation (limited psychological involvement in one domain to accommodate the demands of the other), and boundary management (methods of developing and navigating borders between work and family domains) as methods of coping with WFC. Batt and Valcour (2003) study the effect of HRM policies on WFC. The study shows that the most effective organizational responses to WFC and to employee attachment with the organization are those that combine work-family policies with other HRM practices, including work redesign and commitment-enhancing incentives. Kreiner (2006) and Li and Cong-Wei (2010) analyze person-organization fit to reduce WFC.

Researchers have tested the impact of work and family benefits which comprise of flexible schedules, childcare assistance, parental leave, childcare information and older care on employee attraction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and retention in the organization (Anderson et al., 2002; Anafarta, 2011; Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010). WFC is caused by factors from both the work and home situations (Aslam et al., 2011). Warner & Hausdorf (2009) further says that the most significant determinant of work-family conflict is found in the work domain. Therefore, it is critical for employers to become aware of practices that can be implemented in order to reduce employees' WFC to build a satisfied, committed workforce to be retained in the organization.

Proposed Model for Bangladesh

This paper provides a general understanding on WFC with its antecedents and consequences. From this review, organization and employees may have a better awareness of the sources of conflict with probable solution strategies. Organizations can design HRM practices to reduce WFC by introducing person-organization fit in selection process; counseling and advice program to increase employee knowledge on their personal strategies to reduce WFC; flexible job design, flexible work hour to help employees accommodate both job and family responsibilities, family supportive facilities (child care, older care, parental leave, family medical coverage and physical facilities). Based on the role theory, organization should acknowledge WFC of their employees and must be proactive in taking supportive measures. On the other hand, organization's policies recognize the expansionist theory by supporting all employees in performing their extended work and family responsibilities for their benefits. Therefore, blending role theory and expansionist theory, organization must devise supportive HRM practices to tackle WFC challenges. In this respect, organization should remember these HRM should be accepted as employee perceived HRM practices for their positive outcomes

through minimizing their WFC. Employee perceptions should be measured in introducing supportive HRM practices. Because employee perceptions on HRM influences their acceptance of HRM as positive and employee oriented to generate employee satisfaction, commitment and retention (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008). Research review shows that organizations employ employee friendly practices or strategies to attract and satisfy them for their increased commitment and retention in the organization. In line with these arguments, the following HRM model is proposed to be empirically tested in the Bangladesh context.

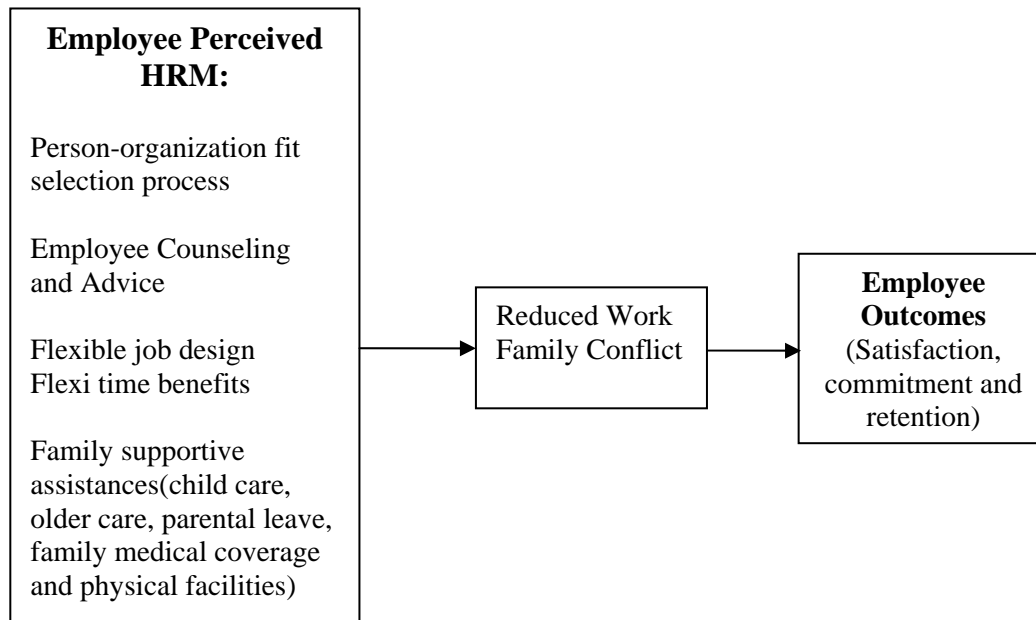


Figure 1: HRM Model to Address WFC for employee satisfaction, commitment and retention.

Proposition 1: Employee perceived HRM can reduce WFC and increase employee outcomes.

Proposition 2: Employee's acceptance of available HRM for reducing WFC can enhance employee satisfaction, commitment and retention in the organization.

This model contributes to the existing HRM literature as research investigating the purported effects of HRM on WFC is still scarce and inconclusive (Giardini & Kabst, 2008).

Conclusion:

Alam et al (2011) note the situation of WFC has grown severe in recent times in Bangladesh. Therefore, to conduct study on WFC in Bangladesh is a need of time. The contributions of this study will be a foundation step to guide Bangladeshi organizations in their WFC policy making to improve the outcomes of the employees through extending organizational HRM supports to them. The present study proposes a HRM model that is considered to be supportive to get reduced WFC and increased satisfaction, commitment and retention of employees. Thus, a theoretical relationship between HRM and WFC is delineated based on existing literature. Therefore, the present authors expect empirical investigation of this model to test its applicability in the context of Bangladesh. Local researchers should come forward to suggest more on how to minimize WFC in the organizations based on local characteristics. Hence, the present authors feel a stronger need for more and more theoretical and empirical research on WFC in Bangladesh.

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