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Work–Life Integration in Individuals, Organizations, and Communities – A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

By better understanding work–life theory and research, human resource development professionals can contribute to the strategic development of policies, practices, programs, and interventions that appear to alleviate or ameliorate demands fostering greater work–life integration. Integration is a solution representing a holistic strategy including effective and efficient coordination of efforts and energies among all stakeholders sharing interest and benefits from workers being able to fulfill their personal, work, family, and community obligations. This paper is discussing the problem of maintaining work-life balance and suggests some leverage points to be exploited to better HRD practices.

Keywords: work; family; community; integration

Introduction

Human resource professionals and organizational leaders are continually trying to discover value-added initiatives to strategically enhance the performance of their organizations and employees (Kearns, 2003). Some of the most important topics of research in human resources today revolve around specific policies, practices, programs, or strategic interventions that appear to influence this performance (e.g., Arthur & Cook, 2003; Cascio & Young, 2005; Galinsky & Johnson, 1998; Lobel & Kossek, 1996; Wallen, 2002). Although research in the work–life arena has been published for the last three decades in related fields (e.g., management, psychology, and family sciences), literature reporting human resource development's (HRD) role in work–life integration and the exploration and investigation of the relationship between HRD and the work–life domain is relatively new. In fact, we were able to locate only three HRD journal articles (i.e., Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002; Madsen, 2003; Polach, 2003) related to work–life and HRD. Yet it is clear that work–life issues should be an essential research and practice consideration of HRD scholars with regard to workplace performance at the individual, group, organizational, and community levels (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997).

As more employees are juggling family, work, and life demands, it continues to be important for HRD scholars to study the barriers and solutions associated with work–life challenges and their possible implications (e.g., performance, health/well-being, enrichment) for working adults in integrating the workplace, the home, and the community (e.g., Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998; Edwards &

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Rothbard, 2005; Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1997). By better understanding work–life theory, issues, challenges, and possible solutions, HRD professionals can strategically change the work culture, redesign work, implement training programs, and tailor career programs or assistance strategies enabling employees to be more engaged, productive, and fulfilled; to reach their full potential in their work/life roles; to contribute to their employers by being more competitive and profitable; and to influence the health and well-being of their respective communities (Bailyn, 1997; Christensen, 1997; Friedman & Johnson, 1997; Gutek, 1997; Kofodimos, 1995; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002).

Conceptual Framework for Work–Life Integration

Due to the shifting nature of balance between work and life responsibilities, Noor (2002) explained that research in the work–family arena has increased dramatically over the last two decades. The volume of research has been stimulated by increased global competition producing mergers, downsizing, and acquisitions; changes in government policies and regulations; family socioeconomic demographic changes; the increased complexity of work and family roles; the expansion of technology; the increased prevalence of dual income/career marriages; the expanded number of women entering the workforce; and increased level of occupational stress and its impact on employee health and wellness (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000).

The gateway for strategically developing research projects and creating interventions to address the work–life changes should be based and designed around appropriate and well-formulated theoretical frameworks (Kearns, 2003). Way (1991) purported that research and development efforts in work–family relationships will be most effective “if they are based upon carefully considered and well formulated theoretical and conceptual frameworks” (p. 1). However, Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) argued that work–family/work–life researchers have not based their predictions on a strong conceptual framework and that often theories are not even mentioned in the literature.

The work–family scholarship domain contains a number of different theoretical approaches that have been used by researchers and practitioners to explore and explain the links between work and family life (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Zedeck, 1992). These theoretical approaches are briefly defined as follows:

Spillover refers to the shared similar effects (e.g., affect, values, skills, behaviors) of work and family. Spillover experiences can be either positive or negative, but the experiences of work and family are identical - either both are positive or both are negative (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Grzywacz, 2000).

Compensation represents efforts to offset negative experiences in one domain (i.e., work or family) by increased efforts to seek positive experiences in the other domain (i.e., family or work). Efforts are pursued through one of two pathways. One pathway includes increased involvement in one domain (e.g., work) reciprocated by decreased involvement in the other domain (e.g., family). The other pathway includes pursuing the domain offering greater rewards and fulfillment at the expense of the domain that offers little return (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Resource drain refers to the transfer or shift of a limited amount of available resources (e.g., time, energy, attention) from one domain (i.e., family) to another (i.e., work) and thereby reducing the availability of the same resources for utilization in the domain originally owning the resource. When

the remaining or unused resources become insufficient, are depleted, or both, the potential for increased levels of stress, fatigue, and burnout ensues (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Frone, 2003).

Enrichment is defined as the degree that experiences, resulting from either instrumental pathways (i.e., skills, abilities, values) or affective pathways (i.e., moods), in one domain (e.g., work) positively enhance the quality of life in the other domain (e.g., family) (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001).

Congruence involves the similarity between work and family by attributing the similarity to a third variable, like genetic factors or personality, which affects both domains. Congruence is very similar to spillover, except through congruence the similarity is mediated through the third variable. In contrast, spillover is a direct influence between work and family (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Inter role conflict refers to the mutual incompatibility between work and family roles. The etiology of conflict originates from time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based sources (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Segmentation refers to the complete compartmentalization or fragmentation of work and family systems (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Segmentation includes a line of demarcation separating the world of work from family—and family from work (Clark, 2000; Kanter, 1977; Pleck, 1977).

Facilitation refers to the extent to which participation in one domain fosters enhanced engagement or processes in another domain. Facilitation includes skills, experiences, resources, and knowledge interacting with individual and contextual circumstances that are portable and contribute to increased levels of organization and development (Grzywacz, 2002).

Within these theoretical approaches, the relationships existing between work constructs and family constructs are often treated by researchers and practitioners as separate and conceptually distinct (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This body of research and practice has tended to exclusively focus on the domains of work and family and, as a result, has not incorporated broader contexts, like community, into the methodological and intervention designs of the study (Voydanoff, 2005). Recently, however, scholarly trends have started to shift as researchers and practitioners have begun to enlarge their focus and recognize that other contexts, like community, serve as an interactive backdrop influencing (e.g., mediating, moderating) important effects that shape our awareness and understanding of how workplaces and families function (Voydanoff, 2005). This shift suggests that a different theoretical paradigm is necessary.

Literature Review on Work-life integration

Our review of the work–life literature suggests that a ninth theoretical approach, called integration, is useful in incorporating other contexts, like community, into the study of work and family. Integration represents a holistic strategy including effective and efficient coordination of efforts and energies among all stakeholders sharing interest and benefits from workers able to fulfill and transition between their personal, work, family, and community obligations (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001; Clark, 2000; Sutton & Noe, 2005). Concerning the importance of studying the interface between work and family issues in an embedded context like community, Voydanoff (2005) noted, “ .. *Understanding how communities may both help and hinder the efforts of work organizations, families, and individuals to enhance work–family integration provides the necessary foundation for designing work, community, and family policies and programs that increase families to meet the needs of their members. (p. 583).*” Integration includes a healthy system of flexible (i.e., malleability) and permeable boundaries that facilitates and encourages equal attentiveness and connection with priorities and valued activities originating in the work–life, family–life, and community–life domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Bailyn et al., 2001; Christensen, 1997; Clark, 2000). Integration is a healthy boundary mid-point between segmentation (i.e., detachment) and enmeshment (i.e., boundary diffuseness or ambiguity; Chesley, Moen, & Shore, 2001; Minuchin, 1974).

As an expansion of the “corporate–community–family” model proposed by Googins (1997) and others (e.g., Bailyn et al., 2001; Voydanoff, 2005), integration is the theoretical mechanism most akin to our own conceptualization of self interacting within a meso-systemic framework including work, family, and community as represented by the circle presented in Figure 1. A description of the leverage points is forthcoming.

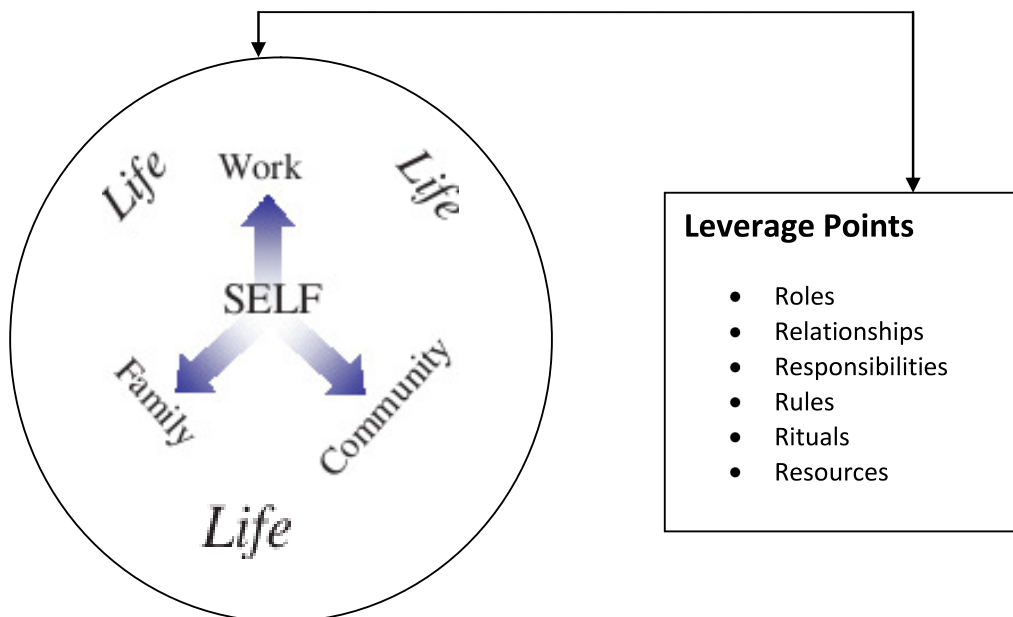


Figure 1: Work-Life Balancing and Leverage Points

Kanter (1977) spoke about the myth between separate worlds of work and family life. Within this traditional framework, work is assumed to revolve around a “breadwinner–homemaker model” with a default solution expecting the “ideal worker” to accept a “forced compartmentalization” and subordinate all non work elements and activities to the demands of the job (Bailyn et al., 2001). This myopically constructed structure of functioning—completely biased in favor of work, under rigid circumstances—leaves the worker stressed, pressured, and squeezed with long hours; unable to meet caregiving needs; under financial pressures; unhealthy; and conflicted and/or demoralized and failing to meet a holistic psychological contract that requires one to attend to other life-related demands beyond work (e.g., Bailyn et al., 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Within this framework, organizational leaders have not believed it was their shared responsibility to “deal with” the other domains. As Friedman, Christensen, and DeGroot (1998) and Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) noted, the zero-sum game of competing priorities caused work and family to become enemies.

In contrast, integration is about a contemporary work model that reframes the traditional work–life debate into one that expects a system of key stake-holders from the spheres of work and family, with the addition of community as an active partner, to recognize, reexamine, and reorganize previously held assumptions and expectations about work and family to generate system-sensitive solutions that are holistic, healthy, and productive to all parties (Googins, 1997; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Voydanoff, 2001, 2005). Within this meso-systemic framework, solutions voiced by the key stakeholders to address the activities and priorities associated with work, family, and community are equally valued (Bailyn et al., 2001; Voydanoff, 2005). The collaboration among key stakeholders, which also includes community, creates the opportunity and shared responsibility of generating holistic solutions capable of yielding greater and healthier returns than would be generated from isolated or parts of the entire system (Googins, 1997). Expanding Rapoport et al.’s (2002) concept of a “dual agenda” into a “triple-agenda,” integration provides the opportunity for equitable living where both men and women can achieve their full potential as they function in more effective workplaces, families, and communities and where the needs of work, family, and community life rather than gendered and outmoded assumptions—determine what, where, and how it gets done. Integration is described as a triciprocal relationship between three spheres (i.e., work, family, community) with bidirectional influences (i.e., positive, negative) operating between each of them that can be considered additive, mediating, or moderating in influence.

Returning to Figure 1, with self at the core center, the integrated life permits an individual to dedicate primary attention and lend focus to any one of the three domains (work, family, or community) for a necessary period (e.g., hour, day, month), whereas the remaining domains within the system become secondary foci—temporarily. As integrated individuals living within a holistic system of support, individuals are never expected to permanently lose sight of the “greater whole” (M.L. Morris and V. J. Stout, personal communication, May 19, 2003). Integrated individuals have greater opportunity for coherence, unity, fulfillment, happiness, maturity, health, and wellness because integrated individuals are never expected to “pretend” that sacrificing meaningful and highly valued components in the rest of their life is realistic (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). As the individual’s line of sight is focused on a primary domain (e.g., work), which is usually temporary, integrated individuals never lose site of the other domains (e.g., family, community), which are always viewed in the background or backdrop.

Defining Work, Family, and Community

The definitional overlap of work, family, and community is noted in the literature (e.g., Marchese, Bassham, & Ryan, 2002) and is most likely caused because the three domains share common

characteristics (e.g., territory, relational, history). Voydanoff (2002) cautioned, however, that some definitions involving these concepts (i.e., “community”) are too broad to be considered valuable and meaningful.

For most, the definition of family is highly controversial and complex. However, we consider family as all related people in a family household, which consist of a minimum of two members related by blood, adoption, marriage/ remarriage, and a householder who owns or rents the residence (e.g., U.S.Census Bureau, 1995). Family is about people who share something relationally (e.g., attachment), mentally (e.g., respect, rapport), spiritually (e.g., values, beliefs), psychologically (e.g., closeness, intimacy), physically (e.g., care, sup-port), and economically (e.g., financial resources) with one another. Families come in various structures (e.g., intact, blended, binuclear), qualities (e.g.healthy, vibrant, dysfunctional), and systems (e.g., open, closed, chaotic) across the life cycle developmentally (e.g., married couple with no children, married with teenagers) (e.g., Olson & DeFrain, 1997; Strong, Devault, Sayad, & Cohen, 2001).

Work is defined as an “instrument activity intended to provide goods and services to support life” (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000, p. 179). Edwards and Rothbard (2000) argued that “work typically entails members in a market or employing organization that compensates the worker for his or her contributions” (p. 179). They noted that although work may provide intrinsic rewards, its primary goal is extrinsic. Work plays a fundamental role in adulthood, significantly affecting self-concept and well-being.

Community is defined as a geographically bound space often identified as a place to work and live and have most basic human needs like health, safety, and well-being met (Mattesich & Monsey, 1997; Nelson, Ramsey, & Verner, 1960; Orbst & White, 2004). Voydanoff (2002) noted six interrelated aspects of community that operate on different levels of analysis. Those aspects are (a) community social organization (i.e., local territories like neighborhoods), (b) social networks (i.e., links among a defined set of people like coworkers, kin, friends, and neighbors), (c) social capital (i.e., resources inherent and stemming from social organization and networks), (d) formal volunteering and informal helping (i.e., pro bono time and resources devoted to helping others),

(e) sense of community (i.e., sense of belonging, mattering, shared history), and (f) community satisfaction (i.e., subjective evaluation of the services, safety, attractiveness, and participation).

Creating Integrated Solutions for Work, Family, and Community

In creating integrated and healthy solutions for work, family, and community, HRD professionals should attempt to implement a holistic system of change strategies involving key stakeholders representing the spheres of work, family, and community (Bailyn et al., 2001; Voydanoff, 2005). This holistic system of change strategies should be capable of helping individuals establish (i.e., put in place), enrich (i.e., improve and make better), maintain (i.e., kept as is) healthy responses, and/or eliminate (i.e., extinguish) unhealthy responses (Langdon, 1999) to the work, family, and community challenges they face. Holistic change strategies are essential because the breadth, depth, and scope of an individual’s life experiences must be considered to fully understand and appreciate the demands originating from work, family, and community.

Together, stakeholders need to focus on generating solutions utilizing “high-impact leverage points” directed at initiating and fostering growth-oriented change to the demanding domains of work, family, and/or community (Stokols, 1996, p. 290). Similar to the advice given by Bailyn and her colleagues,

detailing specific solutions and potential forms of interventions, is beyond the scope of this article. However, regarding interventions, Quick, Quick, Nelson, and Hurrell (1997) noted “individuals differ in the strategies they prefer, that are most useful for them, and that are most effective in achieving the results they seek” (p. 207). Instead, our intent is to briefly offer a number of overlapping areas and subsequent leverage points of change (six “Rs”; see Figure 1) that are worthy of scholarship consideration in initiating a research agenda and/or developing interventions promoting healthy integration in work, family, and community (Voydanoff, 2002, 2005): role demands, relationship demands, responsibilities, rules, rituals, and resources. With each of these six intervention areas, scholars should give special attention to issues related to gender, personality (e.g., attitudes), and the developmental life cycles associates with family and employment (e.g., Aldous, 1978; Duvall & Miller, 1985; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994; Hochschild, 1989).

The first leverage point area involves holistic interventions that address role demands within the domains of work, family, and community. Roles are culturally defined behavioral expectations that an individual is expected to fulfill. To address role demands to promote healthy integration across the domains of work, family, and community, HRD professionals will need to consider, develop, and implement interventions that include (a) examining how work, family, and community roles are viewed as influenced by gender and other socialization factors; (b) determining what aspects of work, family, and community roles are gratifying, satisfying, and fulfilling; (c) exploring how work, family, and community roles are designed and sustained over time; (d) assessing the stressful impact of role accumulation and role accountability; (e) determining if individuals possess appropriate levels of compatibility, fit, and competence in their respective roles; (f) verifying if appropriate levels of communication exist enabling individuals to have a clear sense of direction about the roles they are attempting to fulfill; (g) determining the amount of conflict and/or enrichment work, family, and community roles foster for individuals; (h) assessing the level of ease individuals experience as they transition between work, family, and community roles; (i) determining if individuals are able to share their roles with others in an equitable manner; and (j) determining what work, family, and community roles are salient and important to individuals (e.g., Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979; Epstein, Bishop, & Baldwin, 1982; Voydanoff, 2001).

A second leverage point area involves creating holistic solutions that address relationship demands within the domains of work, family, and community. Relationships are connections, affiliations, and associations between two or more people. Areas of potential intervention to address relationship demands and promote healthy integration across the domains of work, family, and community include (a) assessing relational strength, quality, and health; (b) examining the influence of status and power within relationships; (c) determining the levels of flexibility and permeability between relationships; (d) assessing how boundaries, space, and distance are regulated among relationships; (e) determining how personality interacts with and influences relationships; (f) assessing levels of leadership; (g) examining levels of involvement, engagement, and collaboration within relationships; (h) assessing dimensions of social support within relationships; and (i) determining the influence of diversity within relationships (Quick et al., 1997).

The third leverage point area involves holistic interventions that bolster capacity for managing responsibilities associated with role and relationship demands. Responsibility is the individual’s assumption of tasks and assignments. Areas of potential intervention to address responsibility demands and promote healthy integration across the domains of work, family, and community include (a) assessing the levels of flexibility and degree of balance between work, family, and community responsibilities; (b) evaluating the levels of stimulation within work, family, and community

responsibilities; (c) determining degree of repetitiveness associated with responsibilities; (d) monitoring the quantity and pace of responsibilities; (e) clarifying lines of authority, accountability, and control; (f) providing appropriate levels of reinforcement and rewards; and (g) assessing the levels of centralization versus decentralization associated with work, family, and community responsibilities (Quick et al., 1997).

The fourth leverage point area involves generating holistic solutions that are sensitive and responsive to the rules that govern action within the operating environments of work, family, and community. Rules are codified characteristic responses of thought that shape and govern the direction of action and behavior. Areas of potential intervention associated with rules capable of promoting healthy integration across the domains of work, family, and community include (a) verifying that formal versus informal communication channels of rules (e.g., written vs. unwritten) exist; (b) assessing the degree of acceptance and consensus about rules; (c) determining the sources and types of values, norms, or belief systems associated with the rule structure; (d) developing and implementing an effective communication system of policies and procedures; (e) establishing clear priorities about rules; and (f) establishing clear cultural mechanisms for creating, enforcing, and changing rules (e.g., Strong et al., 2001).

A fifth leverage point area of intervention gives special holistic consideration to the rituals germane to work, family, and community. Rituals are highly structured and fixed patterns of meaningfully prescribed action and behavior. Areas of potential intervention associated with rituals capable of promoting healthy integration across the domains of work, family, and community include (a) assessing the frequency of repetition among work, family, and community rituals; (b) determining degree of restrictions and regulations on improvisation of work, family, and community rituals; (c) discovering the time and place of ritual performance within work, family, and community settings; (d) learning the symbolic meaning of words and actions affiliated with rituals; (e) examining communication channels and forms of expression of rituals; and (f) determining the rites of passage among work, family, and community rituals (e.g., Auslander, 2002, 2003).

Resources represent a final leverage point area of intervention salient to enriching and integrating work, family, and community. Resources are described as the existing or expanded cognitive, economic, psychological, and/or physiological abilities or capacities to prevent a life event or transition from becoming a crisis (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Areas of potential intervention associated with resources capable of promoting healthy integration across the domains of work, family, and community include (a) assessing the levels of awareness, dependency, and satisfaction with work, family, and community resources; (b) determining the perceptions of abundance, adequacy, accessibility, affordability of work, family, and community resources; (c) examining the frequency of utilization among work, family, and community resources; (d) discovering what methods are used to secure resources; (e) assessing the levels of conversion and portability of resources; (f) monitoring the levels of resilience and hardiness produced by work, family, and community resources; and (g) discovering the rates of consumption and replenishment of work, family, and community resources (e.g., Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Quick et al., 1997; Voydanoff, 2005).

Concluding Summary

Work-life balance is considered to be an important issue for corporate world, because if they are able to proper work-life balance amongst employees, then they can rip out various benefits like lesser

stress, few turn over problems and increase in quality of work at the workplace. But it is very hard to maintain the work-life balance amongst employees as they are more prone to social and cultural incomings, hence as suggested by various scholars in their empirical work, one can design an approach which addresses various issues affecting work-life balance by using various intervention techniques like R's discussed as leveraging points. Further HRD researcher can conduct the research on the issue of how family life can affect the performance of employee at work place; another area can be on how social changes affect the work life balance amongst the employees.

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