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Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Work-Family Conflict Among University Foodservice Managers

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of role ambiguity, role conflict and work schedule on university foodservice managers’ perception of work-family conflict. It also assessed work-family conflict’s influence on university foodservice managers’ turnover intention. The results indicated that as role ambiguity and work hours worked per week increased the level of work-family conflict increased, and role ambiguity was the strongest contributor to work-family conflict. Some role conflict has a negative influence on, but too many roles can be detrimental. Work-family conflict explained about 14% of turnover intention among university foodservice managers.

Keywords: Role ambiguity, role conflict, work-family conflict

INTRODUCTION
The college and university foodservice segment has been experiencing the challenges of high turnover and labor shortage (King, 2002). The average annual management turnover rate in foodservice operations are from 40% to 50% (Perlik, 2003). The foodservice industry is characterized by excessive work hours, which is found to be related to managers’ intention to leave (Berta, 2004; Crandall, Emenheiser, & Jones, 1995). Work-family conflict occurs when some responsibilities from work and family are not compatible or interfere with each other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and such conflict effects will have a negative influence on an employee’s work situation, such as lower overall job satisfaction (Boles & Babin, 1996), and greater possibility to leave a position (Good, Sisler, & Gentry, 1988). Several reports revealed that restaurant managers quit the jobs not because they were dissatisfied, but because the amount of time required by the jobs prevented them from being with their families and friends (Berta, 2004; Parsa, Self, Njite, & King, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW
Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 77). Netemeyer et al. (1996) pointed out that work-family conflict was different from family-work conflict. Netemeyer et al. (1996) define work-family conflict as a type of inter-role conflict, wherein some responsibilities from the work...
and family areas are not compatible and negatively influence the employee's family responsibilities. In addition to the bi-directional nature of conflict, researchers have begun to consider the different forms of work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Three different forms of work-family conflict have been identified and defined as time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. According to Greenhaus & Beutell (1985), time-based conflict occurs when time contributed to one role inhibit participation in another role; strained-based conflict states that a trained experience in one role intrudes into and intervenes with participation in another role; and behavior-based conflict happens when certain behaviors required in one role are incompatible with behavioral expectation in another role. Studies indicate that work-family conflict influences a number of outcomes including psychological distress, job satisfaction, organization commitment, and ultimately, turnover (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Aryee, Luk, & Stone, 1998; Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001; Kinnunen, Geurts, & Mauno, 2004; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Furthermore, conflict between work and family roles alters employee’s perceptions of the quality of work life and the quality of family life (Scandura & Lankau, 1997). In addition, work-family conflict has been shown to affect employees’ work-related behaviors such as absenteeism, tardiness, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and turnover (Aryee, Luk, & Stone, 1998; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). In the hospitality industry, work-family conflict has been one of the major causes for turnover of both the management level and lower-income employees (Boles & Babin, 1996; Namasiavayam & Mount, 2004; Stalcup, 1997). Good, Page and Young (1996) found that work-family conflict has a direct effect on entry-level managers’ intent to leave, regardless of satisfaction or commitment levels. Much of this is due to long hours and low pay. Hypothesis One: Work-family conflict is positively related to university foodservice managers’ turnover intention;

**Role conflict**

According to Spector (1997), “role conflict exists when people experience incompatible demands about their functions and responsibilities” (p. 39). Role conflict can arise when one’s job-related role interferes with his/her family or personal life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). There are discrepancies regarding the impacts on multiple roles. According to Greenberger & O’Neil (1993), involvement in excessive roles resulted in role strains, role conflicts, and led to negative impacts on mental and physical health. Some researchers have argued that the increased role obligations that required time devotion and participation may result in various forms of psychological conflict if each role cannot be adequately fulfilled (Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988; J. Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994). Studies also found that role conflict, role ambiguity, and time demands were directly and positively related to work-family conflict (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987b). However, according to “enhancement theory”, researchers further proved by empirical examination that role accumulation is beneficial for both men and women in terms of buffering, social support, opportunities to experience success, and increasing sources of reference (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Studies also provided empirical evidence that women who juggle multiple roles are less depressed than other women, employed women are less distressed than non-employed women (Crosby, 1991), and men have multiple roles reported fewer physiological symptoms of distress than men who have fewer roles (Gore & Mangione, 1983). Nevertheless, empirical evidence has also shown that when roles are excessive and numerous, psychological stress may occur (Bekker, deJong, Zijestra, & vanLandeghem, 2000). Hypothesis Two: Role conflict is positively related to university foodservice managers’ work-family conflict;

**Role Ambiguity**
As defined by Spector (1997), "role ambiguity is the degree of certainty the employee has about what his or her functions and responsibilities are" (p. 39). According to classical theory, every position in a structured organization should have a specified set of tasks or position responsibilities, and role ambiguity reflects the degree of employees’ uncertainty regarding the appropriate actions in performing job functions (Miles, 1976). Due to uncertain role expectation, employees hesitate to make decisions and will have to meet the expectations by the trial and error process (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Therefore, role ambiguity results in the following situation: “…a person will be dissatisfied with his role, experience anxiety, distort reality, and thus perform less effectively” (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970, p. 151). Role conflict and role ambiguity were the two major components of job-related role stresses (C. D. Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Considering the limited findings, in order to understand the relationship between work stresses and work-family conflict it is necessary to consider both role conflict and ambiguity in the unity of work-family domain (Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987a; Williams & Alliger, 1994).

Hypothesis Three: Role ambiguity is positively related to university foodservice managers’ work-family conflict;

Work Schedule

It is believed that the amount of time spent at work directly reduced the amount of time available for nonwork activities in terms of time-based strain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 1988). Work hours have been one of the important indicators to study work spillover into family life (Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987a). Milkie and Peltola (1999) find that work demands such as work hours devoted per week influence role balance. Further research found, in a study of physicians, that greater scheduling flexibility at work is positively associated with well-being (Hecht, 2001). However, studies also discovered that the number of hours worked do not necessarily translate into feelings of work spillover and that the number of hours worked is not very important in mediating effects on work spillover and life satisfaction (Moen & Yu, 1999; Wallace, 1997). In order to understand work spillover, and further to investigate work-family conflict, it is necessary to study work-related factors of which hours worked, motivators and pressures are the most relevant variables (Greenhaus, 1988; Wallace, 1997). Furthermore, flexible working hours caused a significant increase in job satisfaction (Orpen, 1981), and work scheduling is the main remedy for balancing work and family activities (Finn, 2000).

Hypothesis Four: Work-schedule influence university foodservice managers’ perception on work-family conflict;

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional survey research design to answer the proposed research questions. The population for this study was college and university foodservice managers. The sample consisted of the individuals who were listed as members of the National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS). Their positions include various types of managerial roles as general manager, director, assistant director, foodservice manager, purchasing manager, and so on. This is considered to be well represented across job classifications and can serve the research purpose regarding the characteristics of the target population’s organizational role.

This research used a self-administrated questionnaire, consisting of four sections: Section one had 19 questions that were related to work-family Conflict (WFC) adapted from Carlson et al.’s (2000) study. Section two was used to identify employees’ intention to leave the current job/organization and four items were adapted from Mitchel (1981). Section three contained 14 questions that assessed the role conflict and role ambiguity constructs adapted from Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970). This scale had been extensively used in...
management and organizational research (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981; Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988; Boles & Babin, 1996). Section four was designed to collect information regarding respondents’ demographic characteristics and job characteristics. This research employed a mixed methodology with 2,567 questionnaires sent electronically and a printed questionnaire was created in the exact format of the web-based survey and was mailed to the members of the sample with no email address (308). There were 392 web-based and 65 mailed survey returned a total response rate of 15.4% (n=442) combined from both survey methods.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Of the 442 respondents, 50.9% were male, while 49.1% were female. The majority of the respondents were aged between 35 and 54 (75.4%). 74.5% of the respondents completed college education (including 2-year and 4-year college), and 17.1% of the respondents received master or doctorate degree education. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian/White (94.4%). Over half of the respondents’ annual household income ranged from $50,001 to over $80,000 (58.1%).

Work-family Conflict

In order to identify the factors underlying the set of 19 items used to assess college/university foodservice managers’ work-family conflict and to discover patterns from collected data, exploratory factor analysis was performed. Barlett’s test of sphericity statistically tests and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) test were performed in order to see if the data were appropriate for common factor analysis. The Barlett test was significant at .000, and the KMO-MSA overall value was above .80, indicating that data were suitable for factor analysis. Principal component factor analysis with orthogonal VARIMAX rotation was performed in order to obtain the underlying dimensions. Items with factor loading of .40 or higher were retained as recommended by Hair et al. (1998). The 19 items yielded 4 factors. All 4 factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the cumulative percentage of variance explained in the 4 factors solution was 69.6%, a clean and interpretable solution. The Cronbach’s Alphas for the 4 factors ranged from .84 to .92 and were above the generally agreed lower limit of .60 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The first factor of work-family conflict was labeled as “Behavioral Interference from Dual Direction” which accounted for 23.29% of the total variance with a reliability coefficient of .91. The second factor was labeled as “Time and Strain Interference from Family” which explained 17.82% of the total variance with a reliability coefficient of .84. The third factor labeled as “Time Interference from Work” accounted for 15.58% of the variance with a reliability coefficient of .92. The final factor labeled as “Strain Interference from Work” which explained 12.88% of the total variance with a reliability coefficient of .84.

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

The Role conflict and role ambiguity items were analyzed together in order to verify that they were two distinct dimensions. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) was .91, and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant at .000, indicating that data were suitable for factor analysis. The 14 items, after conducting principle component factor analysis with orthogonal VARIMAX rotation, were aggregated into two factors: Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict. Items with factor loading of .40 or higher were retained. The two derived factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and the cumulative percentage of variance explained in the 2 factors solution was 57.4%. The Cronbach’s Alphas for the 2 factors were .90 and .84, well above the generally agreed lower limit of .60 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The first factor of interrole conflict was labeled as “Role Ambiguity” which accounted for 29.3% of the total variance with a reliability coefficient of .84. The other factor was labeled as “Role Conflict” which explained 28.31% of the
Multiple Regression

Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Work Schedule and Work-family Conflict

Regression was conducted to identify the determinant of work-family Conflict. Since the factor analysis generated four factors about work-family Conflict, the total value of the four factors was used as dependent variable. Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Work Schedule (Hours Worked at Night; Hours worked on Weekends) were used as independent variables. The result of regression analysis reveals that Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Work Schedule have significant relationship with work-family Conflict. The adjusted R Square of this model is .260, which indicates that 26% of the variation in university food service managers’ work-family Conflict was explained by the four variables. The significant F-ratio (F=36.787, p=.000) indicates that the results of the regression model could hardly occurred by chance. Thus, the goodness-of-fit of the model is satisfactory. Three out of the four variables (Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Hours Worked on Weekends) were significant independent variables that influenced university food service managers’ perception on work-family Conflict. However, one variable, Hours work between 6:00 pm to 6:00 am was not significant. The variable “Role Ambiguity” was the most important determinant of university food service managers’ work-family Conflict. It had the highest standardized coefficient value of .331, and the highest t-value of 6.479. Hours work on Weekend (beta=.202), and Role Conflict (beta=-.161), followed, in descending order of importance. Therefore, Hypothesis Three is supported, and Hypothesis Four is partially supported. An interesting finding is that Role Conflict was negatively related to university foodservice managers’ work-family Conflict. This is consistent with Barnett and Hyde’s (2001) findings that role accumulation is beneficial for both men and women in terms of buffering, social support, opportunities to experience success, and increasing sources of reference (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Therefore, Hypothesis Two is not supported.

Work-family Conflict and Turnover Intention

A second regression was conducted to identify the relationship between work-family Conflict and Turnover Intention. The result of regression analysis indicated that Work-family Conflict has significant relationship with Turnover Intention. The adjusted R Square for this model is .137, which indicates that 13.7% of the variation in university food service managers’ Turnover Intention was explained by the level of work-family Conflict. The significant F-ratio (F=71.08, p=.000) indicates that the results of the regression model could hardly occurred by chance. Thus, the goodness-of-fit of the model is satisfactory. However, work-family Conflict explained only 13.7% of Turnover Intention among university foodservice managers. This implies that additional variables, such as job satisfaction, may explain the remaining variability in this relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis One is supported.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationships between work scheduling (hours worked at night & hours worked on weekends), role conflict, role ambiguity, work-family conflict and intention to leave, among the college and university foodservice managers. The results reveal that about 26% of the variability in work-family Conflict is determined by Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Work Schedule, a statistically significant value. Role ambiguity is the most important determinant for work-family Conflict. These results were similar to Spector (1997) and may suggest that food service organizations need to clarify managers’ role, so that they are clear about their role expectations, and know what his or her functions and responsibilities are. This is important for foodservice managers, because their job is very demanding and requires making many
quick decisions. If the role is not clearly defined, university foodservice managers may hesitate to make decisions (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970), thus may affect the effective functioning of foodservice operations. This in turn will result in managers’ dissatisfaction with their roles. An interesting finding is that Role Conflict is negatively related to work-family Conflict, which implies that multiple roles are actually good for a better balance between work and life. This is important and encouraging for today’s managers who are facing multi-demands from various aspects of life. This finding is consistent with the assumptions of the “enhancement theory” and empirical findings under this assumption (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Crosby, 1991). This group of researchers believes that multiple roles are good for both men and women in terms of more social support and less depression and stress. However, it should be noted that there is a limit for the multiple roles that an employee could hold. When the roles are to excessive, psychological stress may occur (Bekker et al., 2000). How much is too much, however, should be individually specific.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Given this study used a convenience sample the results may not be applicable to all the university foodservice managers and since it was conducted in U.S. the findings may not be applicable to other culture settings. In addition, this study only studies role ambiguity, role conflict’s influence on employees’ work-family conflict and turnover intention. Other variables, such as personality traits may also influence individuals’ perceptions on work-family conflict were not included. Also, the perception on work-family conflict could be culturally specific. First, a future study might replicate this study with a different foodservice segment comparable results are found. A subsequent study might apply the same conceptual framework to different populations within the foodservice industry for various foodservice labor force comparison. Second, although the current model accounts for approximately 14% of the variability in intention to leave, it is important to acknowledge that there may be other factors that cause individuals quit or stay their jobs such as attitudinal variables, job satisfaction and commitment, size of the organization, fringe benefits, individual differences and job tenure. Finally, further study may test the moderating effects of demographic characteristics, such as gender and ethnic groups on those relationships. Karatepe and Baddar (2006) found that female employees experience greater Family-Work Conflict than their counterparts in the context of Jordan. However, this finding may not holding true in US where women are possess more equal roles and opportunity.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no one thing that has been identified in previous research or in this study that will eliminate work-family conflict. The challenge for managers is to create a work environment that is professional, has clear expectations, and most importantly includes training and professional development. The cost of turnover to an organization can be significant in terms of actual dollars spent to replace the individual, the potential for lost revenue; customer service which slips from the desired standard which in turn possibly diminishes returning customers. Steps taken to reduce work-family conflict can improve the quality of the workplace and improve the lives of managers and employees. In conclusion, the foodservice industry is suffering high turnover rate and lack of available labor force. The noncommercial foodservice industry is no exception.

REFERENCES


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