Work-Family Conflict and Turnover Intention: Exploring the moderation effects of perceived work-family support

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The influence of perceived employer family support on the work-family conflict/job-outcomes relationship, is poorly understood. This study of 100 New Zealand local government employees tested work-family conflict as a predictor of turnover intention, and explored the moderator effects of perceived work-family support, which measures the extent employees see their employer providing policies and programmes supportive of families. Direct associations were found between two types of conflict (work-family and family-work) and turnover intention. However, perceived work-family support held no significant interaction effects. Hence, employee perceptions of how supportive their employer is towards work-family aspects had no effect on whether employees are encouraged to leave their organisation when conflict levels from the home and office increase. Implications are that conflict from the office and home does increase turnover intentions, and that perceived work-family support has little effect on these relationships.

Despite the proliferation of international literature exploring the job-related outcomes of work-family conflict (e.g. job satisfaction, Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), few outcomes are known in New Zealand, despite New Zealand having similar demographic changes as the United States (Pringle & Tudhope, 1997). Further, the influence of family-friendly employer policies and programmes on conflict outcomes is poorly understood. Consequently, this paper explores work-family and family-work conflict as a predictor of turnover intention, and tests the moderating effect of perceived work-family support from employers on these relationships.

In the past decade, the focus on work-family conflict studies has shifted from work to family conflict to include family to work conflict. Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1997) stated there is a methodological flaw in studies that measure work-family conflict from a single-direction focus. Additionally, Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) suggested early work-family conflict research relied on assessing only the intrusion from the workplace to the home. Recent studies have addressed this limitation, and supported work-family conflict to be a bi-directional construct representing two distinct types of conflict (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992). In light of these findings, this paper seeks to examine the effects of conflict bi-directionally, with work-family conflict (WFC) representing workplace issues intruding into the home (e.g. taking work home) and family-work conflict (FWC) representing home issues entering the workplace (e.g. dealing with childcare issues at work).

The proposition that work-family conflict can encourage employees to consider leaving their organisation is well supported. In fact, turnover intention is one of the most studied job related outcomes in the work-family conflict literature (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Cohen, 1997; Good, Page, & Young, 1996; Maertz, 1999; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001). Despite this interest, few studies have sought to explore turnover intention associated with conflict in New Zealand. Cohen (1997) asserted work-family conflict could cause employees to quit their job, and his claim has been supported (Good, Sisler, & Gentry, 1988). Therefore, employees experiencing greater conflict in the workplace that intrudes into the home (WFC) become encouraged to seek employment elsewhere, perhaps in search of a 'less stressful' workplace.

Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) argued that non-work factors (e.g. family) might also influence turnover intentions. Their statement suggests that employees experiencing conflict from the home in the workplace (FWC) may also seek employment elsewhere. In this context, employees may be looking to reduce their working hours, or rearrange their work schedule, so family issues do not impact on their work. While WFC has had clear links with turnover, studies exploring FWC have

been mixed. For example, Anderson et al. (2002) found WFC predicted turnover intentions, but not FWC, while Shaffer et al. (2001) found both WFC and FWC related to turnover intentions. In spite of these mixed results, there is still little research on non-work influences of turnover intention, and hence this paper explores conflict from both directions to further the understanding of these predictors of turnover intention.

Hypothesis 1. *WFC will be positively related to turnover intention.*

Hypothesis 2. *FWC will be positively related to turnover intention.*

Moderating Effects

Kossek and Ozeki (1998) maintained there is little research to link employer-provided family support programmes with conflict levels. While recent turnover studies have explored work and family attitudes as moderators (e.g. affective and family commitment, Shaffer et al., 2001), there has been no exploration of attitudes towards work-family programmes as a moderator. Perceived support for work-family support programmes provided by employers (such as paid parental leave, flexible work practices, domestic leave) has been found to reduce turnover intention. Grover and Crooker (1995) found employees were more attached to organisations that offered work-family support programmes, regardless of the extent to which they benefited themselves. However, the influence of work-family support on the relationships between work-family conflict and turnover intentions remains unclear.

A reason why work-family support programmes might have some influence on the work-family conflict-turnover intentions relationship is that support programmes are often depicted as allowing greater balance between work and family responsibilities (Pringle & Tudhope, 1997). The present study explores perceived work-family support as a measure of the extent employees agree with their employer providing work-family support. This measure based on Grover (1991), tests whether agreement with organisational offerings of work-family support to help employees balance their work and family demands has an interaction

effect. Consequently, employees who feel their employer supports them by offering work-family support programmes may enjoy a buffering effect, where the link between work-family conflict and turnover intentions is reduced. Given the organisation in this study offers six work-family support programmes focusing on both family and work domains, the interaction effect is hypothesised bi-directionally.

Hypothesis 3. *The relationship between WFC and turnover intention will be reduced when there is high perceived work-family support.*

Hypothesis 4. *The relationship between FWC and turnover intention will be reduced when there is high perceived work-family support.*

Method

Sample and Procedures

Data were collected from a local government organisation in New Zealand, with employees spread around a medium sized New Zealand city. From 206 questionnaires distributed, a total of 100 participants responded to both surveys sent through the organisation's Intranet (48.5% response rate). Two surveys were administered with a one-week time lag to reduce the possibility of common method variance. Survey one contained demographic variables and the work-family conflict measure. Survey two contained the turnover intention item and the moderator (perceived work-family support). The participants ranged in age from 22 to 63 years, with an average age of 41.7 years old (SD=10). On average, respondents were married (77%) and female (69%). Average tenure was nine years (SD=8.3), with 73% blue collar and 27% white collar workers. The organisation offers six work-family support programmes including paid parental leave (six weeks full pay), flexible work practices (e.g. flexitime, telecommuting, and job sharing), domestic leave (five days for care of sick dependent), a before and after school room, study leave (paid time off during work for study), and an employee assistance program (free counseling service). While New Zealand now legislates for paid parental

leave, this did not come into force until July 2002. Data collection was completed before the legislation was passed.

Measures

Work-family conflict was measured using the 14-item Inventory of Work-Family Conflict (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2000), with statements divided equally between work and family interference. Anchors were 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Sample statements included "On the job, I have so much work to do that it takes away from my personal interests" (WFC), and "My family takes up time I would like to spend working" (FWC). This work-family conflict measure is a modification of an earlier scale by Kopelman, Greenhhaus, and Connolly (1983). Cronbach's alphas for these scales were .89 for WFC, and .72 for FWC.

Turnover intention was measured using a single item scale used by Grover & Crooker (1995), "I am confident that I will get a new job with another employer in the next 12 months" (coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

Perceived work-family support was measured using a nine-item scale, coded 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree, based on Grover's scale (1991) but adapted to reflect multiple work-family support programmes. A sample statement is "Those who choose not to have children should support those who choose to have children through work-family programmes". Five questions were reverse coded. Higher scores indicate employees agree that work-family support programmes should be offered and funded by their employer. This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .88. Exploratory factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) was conducted, and all nine items loaded onto a single component with an eigenvalue greater than one (4.71).

There are a number of demographic factors that have been found to influence employee work-family conflict levels (e.g. gender, Frone, 2000). To eliminate the effect these variables have on the conflict-turnover intention relationships, the following variables were controlled for: gender

(Fu & Shaffer, 2001), marital status (Fu & Shaffer, 2001), family size as total number of children (Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & O'Brien, 2001), and working hours (Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002).

Analysis

To examine the direct effects of WFC and FWC on turnover intention (Hypotheses 1 and 2), and the potential moderating effects of perceived work-family support (Hypotheses 3 and 4), separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with turnover intention as the criterion variable. In Step 1, control variables were entered (gender, marital status, number of children, and total hours worked). In Step 2, predictor variables were entered separately (WFC then FWC). The potential moderating variable (perceived work-family support) was entered in Step 3. Lastly, the interaction variable (WFC multiplied by perceived work-family support then repeated for FWC) was entered separately at Step 4. In line with current practice (Martins, Eddleson, & Veiga, 2002), Aiken and West's (1991) centering procedure was used where predictor and moderator variables (and the interactions) are z-scored. Consistent with Cohen and Cohen (1983) recommendations, regression coefficients for the control effects were obtained from Step 1 in each analysis. Coefficients for the predictor effects were obtained from Step 2, coefficients for the moderator effects were obtained from Step 3, and coefficients for the interaction terms were obtained from Step 4.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 1, with items means and SDs reported for the three scales.

Table 1 shows the mean scores for WFC (2.6) and FWC (2.0) are below the mid-point (3), while turnover intention (mean 2.2) is also below the mid-point (3). These indicated that on average, employees in this organisation had low levels of conflict and low levels of turnover intention. Turnover intention was significantly correlated with WFC (r =.27, p< .01), but not with FWC (r =.18). WFC was significantly correlated with FWC (r =.70, p<.01), and hours worked (r =.23, p< .05). The results of the hierarchical regressions for WFC and FWC are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

WFC was significantly associated with turnover intention (β =.49, p< .001), and accounted for 22% (p< .001) of the turnover intention variance. This supported Hypothesis 1. Likewise, FWC was significantly related to turnover intention (β =.30, p< .05), although it accounted for a more modest 8% (p< .05) of the turnover intention variance. This finding supported Hypothesis 2. Perceived work-family support was found to have no significant interaction effects towards either WFC or FWC. Consequently, there was no support for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Perceived work-family support

To provide a clearer interpretation of the perceived work-family support measure further analyses were conducted. Independent samples t-tests highlighted no differences in this attitude as a result of gender, marital status, parental status, managerial status, and work-family programmes users/non-users (results not shown). Further exploration of work-family support programme users did produce a significant difference. Users of family

specific support programmes (e.g. paid parental leave, domestic leave, and the before and after school room) are more likely to score higher on perceived work-family support (t = 2.241, p< .05) than non-users. There was no difference among users of specific work support programmes.

Discussion

A focus of this paper was to explore conflict arising from both home and work as a predictor of turnover intention from a sample of New Zealand employees. Employees with greater WFC and FWC were found to predict higher turnover intentions. Thus, employees within this local government organisation are more likely to consider quitting when conflict levels increase. These findings support the distinction of examining conflict originating in the home (FWC) and the office (WFC) separately, and an important finding was that while both conflict types predicted turnover intentions, WFC accounted for a much larger proportion of the variance (22%) than FWC (8%). Thus, conflict from the workplace entering the home is more likely to encourage employees to consider leaving their job.

While perceived work-family support was explored as a buffer of the conflict-turnover intention relationship, the interaction effects were not supported. Thus, respondents perceived their employers as being supportive of family-friendly programmes were no less likely to consider leaving the organisation than employees who seen as unsupportive of these programmes. As respondents perceived their workplace to be family friendly are more likely to be users of the family-related work-family support pro-

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables (N=100)	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Family size	2.35	1.1	—				
2. Hours worked	40.3	5.3	-.02	—			
3. WFC (1= low, 5=high)	2.6	.91	-.09	.23*	—		
4. FWC (1= low, 5=high)	2.0	.61	-.17	.11	.70**	—	
5. Perceived work-family support (1= Low, 7=high)	4.9	1.1	-.06	-.12	.01	-.06	—
6. Turnover intention (1= low, 5=high)	2.2	1.3	-.11	-.04	.27**	.18	-.01

*p< .05, **p< .01

grammes, this indicates that use of family specific programmes had little influence on the conflict-turnover relationship. This is important because calls for determining the effect of supportive work-family practices on the outcomes of work-family conflict have been made (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). These findings indicate that further evidence is still required. The finding also indicates that while employees might be supportive of work-family support programmes offered by their organisation, this attitude has little effect on turnover intentions, at least in the present study.

Limitations

There are limitations that warrant caution when interpreting these results, such as the small sample size (n=100), the use of a single organisation, and self-report data. With 1.1% of New Zealand firms employing over 50 employees (New Zealand Statistics, 1998), this organisation is large (206 employees) by New Zealand standards. Likewise, Major et al. (2002) has noted that the use of self-reported data is typical in work-family conflict. Major et al. (2002) used Harman's one factor test to test for common method variance, and that approach was followed for the present study. This test requires all study variables be included in a global factor analysis (unrotated), and the production of a single component is likely due to common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The present data produced nine components, with the largest accounting for 23% of the variance. As a single dominating component did not emerge, this test indicates no evidence of common method variance.

Another limitation was the use of a single item measure for turnover intention. While single item measures have been used in the literature (Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Grover & Crooker, 1995), it limits the construct validity of the measure, and encourages a multi-item measure for turnover intention in future research. While it might be suggested this single item measure could contain measurement error and thus be unreliable, it did show expected patterns of relationships with other variables (e.g. a significant and negative relationship with job satisfaction, Pearson's correlation r = -.35, p< .01). Finally, it is worth noting the high correlation between the WFC and FWC measures (r =.70, p< .01). While these measures are significantly correlated (using one-tailed tests), they are not usually as high as reported here, for example, .34 (p< .01, Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2001). Despite this high correlation, the major differences in variance accounted by each conflict type indicate distinction between the two constructs. However,

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis for work-family conflict on turnover intention

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
		Turnover Intention		
Controls				
Gender	-.16	-.06	-.06	-.13
Marital Status	-.03	-.08	-.08	-.08
Family size	-.16	-.10	-.10	-.10
Total hours worked	-.08	-.15	-.14	-.1
Predictor				
Work-family conflict (WFC)		.49***	.49***	.43***
Moderators				
Perceived work-family support			.01	.04
Interactions				
WFC x Perceived work-family support				.22
R^2 change	.04	.22***	.00	.04
Total R^2	.04	.25	.25	.29
Adjusted R^2	.00	.19	.17	.20
F Statistic	.56	3.84**	3.14*	3.24**

* p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001
Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis for family-work conflict on turnover intention

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
		Turnover Intention		
Controls				
Gender	-.16	-.05	-.05	-.10
Marital Status	-.03	-.08	-.08	-.06
Family size	-.16	-.08	-.08	-.10
Total hours worked	-.08	-.06	-.06	-.07
Predictor				
Family-work conflict (FWC)		.30*	.30*	.27*
Moderators				
Perceived work-family support			.02	.00
Interactions				
FWC x Perceived work-family support				.14
R^2 change	.04	.08*	.00	.02
Total R^2	.04	.12	.12	.13
Adjusted R^2	.00	.04	.02	.02
F Statistic	.56	1.48	1.21	1.20

* p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001
Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.

this finding does encourage caution, and suggests the measure needs further refinement.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings support WFC and FWC predicting turnover intention. In addition, the lack of significant moderation effects indicated that employee attitudes about work-family support programmes has no effect on turnover intention, further compounding the lack of evidence of these programmes on work-family conflict outcomes. Despite this, employee attitudes towards work-family support programmes have been found to hold positive effects (e.g. Grover & Crocker, 1995). Hence, further studies that explore employee attitudes towards work-family support programmes (e.g. support, satisfaction) may be required to provide a clearer understanding of the effects of these programmes on work-family conflict outcomes. The present study provides an initial direction for this research. Overall, this paper shows similarities between New Zealand and international employees, and suggests new directions for work-family conflict moderation studies.

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