

Juxtaposing Types of Family-Work Conflict Between Malaysian and Western Employees

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Abstract: *In comparison to work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflict (FWC) has not been examined heavily, particularly the types of family-work conflict, that is., time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based. Even though many antecedents for FWC originated from family domain, due to spillover and crossover effect, organization will also suffer the negative consequences of FWC. Thus, by understanding the specific types of the family-work conflict, more specific interventions can be undertaken by organizations. The aim of this study is to advance the understanding of family-work conflict types in Eastern culture by comparing it with ten Western studies that utilized the same measure i.e. family-work conflict scale by Carlson, Kacmar and William [1]. Descriptive statistics and one sample t test in SPSS version 23 were used to analyze the data. In general, behaviour-based FWC is higher than time and strain-based FWC. Malaysian employees scored significantly higher FWC than did other Western studies. Male Malaysian respondents particularly, scored highest in all three dimensions of FWC than did the Westerners. Thus, culture dimensions such as collectivist and polychronic time orientation as well as support for child and elder care and social problems may shed some lights on understanding this interesting finding.*

Keywords: *Family-work conflict, Time-based, Strain-based, Behavior-based, Malaysia*

I. INTRODUCTION

Work life balance (WLB) view as a lack of conflict or interference between work and family roles, that is, low levels of inter role conflict (negative interaction between work and family) and high level of inter role facilitation (positive interaction of work and family [2]). This definition has been used to categorize WLB into negative and positive interaction between work and family. The negative interaction between work and family interface is also known as work-family conflict, work interference with family and negative spill over. Work-family conflict remains a key

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factor for many employees, a challenge with current research is that scholars often methodologically and theoretically confound all forms of non-work conflict in the work-family measure [3].

The most quoted definition of WFC is by Greenhaus and Beutell which was defined Work Family Conflict as: A form of inter role conflict, in which the demands of work and family roles are incompatible in some respect, so that participation in one role is more difficult because of participation in the other's role [4, p. 77].

This conflict is bidirectional, that is, work can interfere with family matters (Work Family Conflict – WFC) and also family can interfere with work (Family Work Conflict - FWC). Greenhaus and Beutell [4] further divided this conflict into three (3) types, which are: time-based (time pressure, lack of time for family, leisure etc.), strain-based (anxiety, fatigue, tension) and behaviour-based (incompatible behavioural expectations between work and home life). Carlson, Kacmar and William [1] further developed the three types of WFC and FWC into 18 items scale which has been used to measure work family conflict (WFC) and family work conflict (FWC) globally including Malaysia (see [5], [6]).

In comparison to work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflict (FWC) has not been examined heavily, particularly the three types of family-work conflict, time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based. Even though many antecedents for FWC originated from family domain, due to spillover and crossover effect, organization will also suffer the negative consequences of FWC. Thus, by understanding the specific types of the family-work conflict, more specific interventions can be undertaken by organizations.

Kelloway, Gottlieb and Barham [7] in their six-month longitudinal survey data suggested that strain-based FWC is an antecedents to stress and turnover intentions. Strain-based emerged as an outcome of stress. Time-based usually related to household chores and caring activity for children and / or elderly. Therefore, number of children, age of the youngest child, and family size (including older relatives) are the possible antecedents of time-based conflict. Strain-based include lack of spousal support, husband-wife dissimilarity in career orientation, in family roles, and in attitudes towards a wife's employment status. Behaviour-based include family-role ambiguity, intra-family role conflict, and high family role involvement [8]. Thus, the aim of this study is to advance the understanding of family-work conflict types in Eastern culture by comparing it with ten Western studies that utilized the same measure i.e.

family-work conflict scale by Carlson, Kacmar and Williams [1].

II. METHODOLOGY/MATERIALS

Western studies were found by using database such as Science Direct and Business Source Complete. Keywords entered were “family-work conflict measure” and “Carlson”. A total of ten articles were found, and one article, Lapierre et al. [8] reported mean score of WFC and FWC for five countries. A total of 10 studies were utilised to compare with a Malaysian study. Four studies represented the United States [1], [8] [10], [11], [13], two from Australia and New Zealand [8], [16], and one from Canada [8], and Finland [8]. Data on Malaysian study was collected from 506 respondents in three public and private sector in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Family-Work Conflict was assessed with an instrument developed by Carlson, Kacmar and Williams [1]. Total of 9 items with 3 questions for each dimension of conflict i.e. time-based, strain-based and behavior-based. It is scored on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The items are averaged, and higher scores indicating more family-work conflict.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1 presents mean, standard deviation, and one sample t-test results of Malaysian and 10 Western studies. Only two western studies reported multi dimensionality of FWC based on gender (Study 2 and Study 3). As in Table 1, the overall mean of FWC, Malaysian employees scored 2.55 and Western employees scored in between 1.90 to 2.35, meaning Malaysians scored the highest. In short, a coherent trend across the culture emerge, i.e., behaviour-based FWC is higher than time and strain-based FWC. Malaysian employees scored higher FWC than did other Western studies. Male Malaysian respondents particularly, scored highest in all three dimensions of FWC than did the Westerns. Culture dimensions of Malaysia such as collectivist, polychronic time orientation, traditional gender role ideology as well as current social problems may shed some lights on understanding this interesting finding.

IV. DISCUSSION

Firstly, in Asian culture, which is usually characterized by polychronic time orientation (doing multiple tasks at one time), work and family boundary is less clear cut, rather work and social life are interweave [21]. In contrast, boundary between work and non-work (family and leisure) in the Western culture is distinct [21]. Because of the elasticity of the work and family boundary, employee feel comfortable to address family issues at the workplace. For instance, Hassan, Dollard and Winfield [5] reported that all six organisations in their study give access to family calls. Therefore, as workplace is viewed as a safe haven to raise family issues, coupled with paternalistic nature of the organization [22], employees feel secure to bring up family issues at work, which may then, resulted in higher score in report of FWC compared to western studies.

Secondly, Malaysia is a collectivist community and, thus a relationship-oriented. As family is the most important in-group for collectivist [23], whatever happen in / to the

family affects the individual. Moreover, family, for collectivist, is not only the immediate, but include the extended – aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, nephews etc. As the number of member of the in-group is big, many more family issues may occur, more visits to family and more functions to attend, which can be time and energy consuming, which, in turn, may contribute to FWC. For collectivist, personal happiness comes second [23]. Thus, caring for family and friends is identified as the most important social aspect that affecting women’s occupational health in Malaysia [24] which may lead to strain-based FWC.

Thirdly, as Malaysia progress economically, social problems such as drugs abuse, robbery, juvenile, divorce, traffic accidents are also in the rise [25]. For instance, there is a 332 percent increase in traffic accidents in Sarawak from 1990 to 2000 [25]. Juvenile crime rate increased from 0.51 percent in 1990 to 0.65 in 2002 [26]. Divorce rate among Muslims in Sarawak increase 25.9% from 3,995 cases (1997) to 5,393 cases (2007), which is comparable to the country’s divorce rate. A recent data provided by the Department of Statistics Malaysia [27], the criminal index ratio per 100,000 population recorded is 230.7 and 440 cases of drug addicts in Sarawak [28]. In addition to this, although the same phenomenon occurs in western developed country, the stress for family in collectivist society is more profound. The stress is due to group-oriented nature of the society. When a family member is involved in social problems the whole family will lose ‘face’ or feel ashamed. The family is seen as violating the group norms. Therefore, the group will talk bad or reject them, or the family themselves perceived other people are talking bad about them, thus distancing themselves from the group. Either way it is a stressful experience, which cause strain-based FWC.

Fourthly, in line with economic growth in Malaysia, percentage of women in labour force participation has also intensified (53.7% 2014 to 55.7% in 2018) [27], [29]. Having a dual earner families are quite common in Malaysian. Thus, higher behaviour-based FWC for Malaysian male employees, can be explained by a gradual change of gender role ideology which currently emerging in Malaysia. According to a collectivist view, men are seen as the leader in the family and his primary role as the breadwinner plays a significant financial provider in the family. A new paradigm shift in Malaysia is urging men to be more participative in the home-to assist in household chores and childcare through popular media, motivational talk, parenting seminars and courses [26]. Getting into the household activities and child care required new skills and attitude. This is a challenging task because men have no role model to emulate. Older generation of men and women has strongly believed in strict division of labour between a task of men and women. In olden days, society disapproved men who helped around the house and if they do, they will be perceived as ‘weak’ and ‘being controlled’ by the wife. Thus, crossing over from work to family boundary and vice versa is difficult for younger generation of menfolk, which may lead to behaviour-based FWC.

V. CONCLUSION

Although antecedents of FWC may originate from the family domain, due to spillover and crossover effect, organizations may suffer the consequences. Thus, it suggested for organizations to provide family friendly policies initiatives such as childcare services, scholarship for excellent employee’s children, family supportive culture to assist employees.

In sum, this study presents preliminary evidence that types of family-work conflict in Malaysia, an Asian country with Eastern culture, is experienced in different ways from the

Western culture. In general, Malaysians employees significantly experienced more time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based FWC compared to Western employees. Cultural dimensions of Malaysians such collectivist, polychronic time orientation, traditional gender role ideology may be the reasons for these findings. Thus, it is important for organizations to assist the family domain of the employees, so that employees can be effective and efficient parents and children too.

Table 1: Malaysian and Western studies on the multidimensional perspective of FWC

Author (Year) Sample	Time-Based						Strain-Based						Behaviour-Based						M	SD
	M		SD		t	M		SD		t	M		SD		t					
	M	F	M	F		M	F	M	F		M	F	M	F						
1. Hassan [22], Malaysia	506 public and private sectors	2.57	2.43	.71	.69	-	2.40	2.30	.75	.72	-	2.90	2.68	.65	.67	-	2.55	.57		
2. Carlson, Kacmar and William [1], USA	222 full-time employees. 83 male 139 female	1.77	2.01	NA	NA	18.46(M) 8.44(F)	1.71	1.93	NA	NA	14.83(M) 7.33(F)	2.36	2.65	NA	NA	13.28(M) .76ns(F)	2.07	NA		
3. Herst [16] Australia and New Zealand	392 full-time employees	2.14	1.94	0.99	0.91	9.95(M) 9.86(F)	1.64	1.60	0.80	0.77	16.34(M) 13.78(F)	2.54	2.59	1.04	1.04	8.83(M) 2.03(F)	2.07	NA		
4. Carlson, Derr, and Wadsworth [11], USA	247 Executives	1.99		0.71		16.02	1.82		0.77		15.73	2.53		0.80		8.73	2.11	NA		
5. Rotondo, Carlson, and Kincaid [13], USA	173 employees	1.94		0.90		17.55	1.87		0.80		14.27	NA		NA		NA	1.90	NA		
6. Lapierre et al. [8], Australia	Business school's alumni	2.31		0.82		6.21	2.06		0.81		8.72	2.62		0.82		5.81	2.33	NA		
7. Lapierre et al. [8], Canada	Business school's alumni	2.31		0.82		6.21	2.06		0.81		8.72	2.62		0.82		5.81	2.35	NA		
8. Lapierre et al. [8], New Zealand	Business school's alumni	2.35		0.72		4.99	1.96		0.71		11.64	2.58		0.81		7.11	2.30	NA		
9. Lapierre et al. [8], USA	Business school's alumni	2.35		0.72		4.99	1.96		0.71		11.64	2.58		0.81		7.11	2.43	NA		
10. Lapierre et al. [8], Finland	Business school's alumni	2.25		0.85		8.05	1.83		0.72		15.44	2.75		0.78		1.60ns	2.27	NA		
11. Bruck et al. [10], USA	160 married hospital employees	2.27		0.88		7.44	2.09		0.79		7.84	2.62		0.84		5.82	2.33	0.59		



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