Work Family Boundary Management in Indian Context

Abstract

Work family (WF) research in India is scarce; however, as India becomes more industrialized, concerns about work life balance are growing. Existing research on WF dynamics in India is predominantly quantitative and usually conducted using scales developed in the West, which limits our understanding. Further, WF studies so far have over-emphasized the scarcity perspective, so that enrichment and boundary management remain under researched particularly in the Indian context. The current thesis is aimed at bridging these gaps to gain in depth understanding of work family interface in Indian context. Three studies were designed to meet this goal.

Study 1 addresses the above concerns through an emic study investigating idiosyncratic factors of the Indian context. A qualitative, exploratory study of the WF interface was conducted with 50 professional men and women in the private and public sectors and in a large and a small city in India. The findings reveal an idiosyncratic combination of high family centrality, traditional gender roles, high work and family demands with work construed as a means to support family, a dense web of social support/obligations, and role integration viewed as natural and organic. This combination resulted, perhaps surprisingly for Westerners, in the interviewees feeling “happily exhausted”, that is reporting low work-family conflict because they accepted spillover well, and high work-family enrichment. Nuances across globalized whereabouts and across the public and private industry sector are discussed.
Study 2 concerned operationalization and construction of a measurement tool on cultural dimension of Diffusion/Specificity. While the importance of this construct in understanding WF interface has been underscored avidly, no measurement tool for the same has been reported so far. Diffusion can be understood as implicit acculturations that impact the way we negotiate our relationships. Diffusion, theorized as a latent construct, is manifested in the exchange of power, obligations and knowledge within relationships such that, for example, power that we hold as a virtue of either identity (professional or personal) seeps into the other domain and so on. A robust measure of diffuse orientation was constructed over a span of four phases. Phase 1 explains item development and refinement resulting from a qualitative study. Phase 2 was a pilot study (n=143) that ascertained the adequacy of chosen items in measurement of the construct and refined the items further. In Phase 3, the scale was administered on 300 participants and Exploratory Factor Analyses was conducted to explore the factor structure and its alignment with the proposed model. Phase 4 (n=300) confirmed the a-priori factor structure, also demonstrating acceptable levels of discriminant validity. The diffuse orientation scale also demonstrated significant reliability (α = 0.77) exhibiting internal consistency. Positive correlations were observed with other related measures, therefore, the scale also displayed satisfactory levels of criterion related validity.

Study 3 attempts to integrate cultural (diffuse orientation), organizational (WF climate), individual (role centrality) and structural (globalization, industry sector) antecedents to study their impact on WF variables (WF conflict, WF enrichment and boundary management) to generate empirical evidence for the nature of WF interface in India. Data were collected from 586 participants working in different organization in India. Structural equation modelling was employed to test two models (WF and FW models) of WF interface. The data reveals that Indians construed work and family spheres as two synergizing domains, indicated by the fact that data shows negligible conflict and high enrichment despite high role
demands. WF climate reduced conflict as well as WF enrichment while it increased FW enrichment. Further, strong association was found between work centrality and WF enrichment. Structural variables significantly contributed to how Indians managed WF interface. The empirical findings bolster the findings from our qualitative study and maps the changes that contemporary India faces in the wake of globalization and industrialization.