Family-Friendly Policy and Work-Family Conflict Mitigation: The Role of Work-Family Boundary Negotiation

Hooi-Ching Khor[1*], Azura Abdullah Effendi[2]
[1]*Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, 31900 Kampar, Perak, Malaysia*
[2]*School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Gelugor, Penang, Malaysia*

*Authors' Email Address: *[1]khorhc@utar.edu.my, [2]azura_e@usm.my*

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

The family-friendly policy is impossible to fit all working individuals. The circumstance has been revealed in work-family literature which relationship between the policy use and the work-family conflict mitigation has been found inconsistent. Little focus is given in the past studies to ensure the human resource policy is truly useful in meeting individuals' needs. Work, family or both work and family life could be important to individuals. The distinctive life centrality requires individuals to negotiate with the significant others who influence their work and family life arrangements to access and use the preferred and needed family-friendly policy. Boundary management practices seem to be useful for working individuals to reduce work-family conflict. This conceptual paper aims to propose work-family boundary negotiation to buffer the relationship of family-friendly policy use and work-family conflict. Boundary theory is the underlying theory embedded to explain the phenomena. Boundary negotiation style that could be employed for accessing the policy and managing work-family boundary effectively is identified. Future directions and implications for research on negotiation in dealing with the work-family issue are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Past research has shown that individuals attempted varying tactics for harmonious work and family life interface. In early research, cognitive (i.e., change and reinforce others' expectation concerning their roles or change their expectations on their current roles held) and behavioral (i.e., strive to meet all work and family role expectations) adjustments are among the tactics individuals employ to reduce the sense of work-family conflict (Hall, 1972; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Kreiner et al. (2009) have discovered several tactics individuals utilize to manage work and family boundaries at some degree of segmentation or integration, include temporal, physical, behavioral and communicative tactics in their qualitative study. Owing to the growing of dual-earner family and the virtue workplace resulted from the digital technology work environment, organization management design family-friendly policy to favor the employees. Firms offer work schedule flexibility (i.e., flextime, part-time, flexible shift arrangement, and compressed workweek), paid leave (i.e., paid parental leave, maternity leave, and childcare leave), childcare and elderly care services and subsidies, and work from home to

ease employees' work-family life arrangements (French & Shockley, 2020; Kim & Parish, 2020; Oishi et al., 2015; Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004; Shockley & Allen, 2010).

Despite various human resource policies have been established to favor employees' work-family life arrangements, however, the family-friendly policies designed are not necessarily fit everyone, the policies accessibility is not inherently granted, and the access obstruction by supervisor and difficulty circumstances face hinder one from benefits the policies. The use of the policy requires one to make the request but the request may not necessarily be fulfilled in the first place (Berg et al., 2013; Hammer et al., 2009). The development and the implementation of family-friendly policies per se found ineffective owing to its inconsistency in remedying the work-family conflict experienced in the literature (Allen et al., 2013; Beutell & O'Hare, 2018; French & Shockley, 2020). Availability and accessibility of family-friendly policies are not necessarily could help individuals to reduce work-family conflict (Kim & Parish, 2020). Individuals may not be beneficial from the policies as not all have the opportunity to access those policies (Kim & Parish, 2020). Even though individuals manage to access the flexibility policy, however, the access of the flexibility policy may rather intensing than easing the work-family conflict as their spouse or family members expect them to devote more time for the family demand (French & Shockley, 2020; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Although individuals could work at home and carry out their family life responsibilities under flexibility policy, the work-family conflict experience remains as they still carry equal or excessive workload as they work at the workplace (Abendroth & Reimann, 2018; Brannen, 2005). These imply that work-family boundary is not inherently and completely emerged from the development and even the implementation of family-friendly policy merely to avoid intrusion of work to a family domain and vice versa, and in turn, to ease work-family conflict experiences. It seems further attempts are required to reach optimal arrangements in work and family life domains.

The family-friendly policy has been researched over the decades and the important role of communicative tactic in the work-family interface has been manifested, however, lacking study on the mechanism derives from the communicative tactic that could be incorporated for the success of the family-friendly policy enactment that enables one to achieve the desired work and family living arrangements. There is also lacking the insight of how the desired boundary could be achieved in the lens of boundary management with the available and the accessible family-friendly policy as individuals vary in boundary preferences and work and family life responsibilities. Besides, lack of emphasis on how could organization work-family policies fit individuals' work-family life arrangement preferences to effectively mitigate work-family conflict and achieve better work-family balance. Furthermore, there is little attention on how individuals could make a change to ease of accessing and utilizing the work-family benefits offered by a company to help them to reduce their work-family conflict. Despite communicative tactic has been recognized as one of the important tactics to manage the work-family boundary, however, the extensive research on the tactic is limited.

Work-family boundary negotiation that could be employed is discussed. The work-family boundary negotiation style which is believed could be the potential solution and provide better insight into the aforementioned issues is proposed. Boundary theory is central to the discussion to explain the existence of the aforementioned phenomena. Future directions and implications for research on negotiation in dealing with the work-family issue are discussed. This paper extends the work-family conflict literature by integrating the individual (adoption of negotiation style) and organizational (family-friendly policy) factors to elicit the possible synergistic effect to alleviate work-family conflict. It provides the insight of the nature of negotiation styles and their differences which could explain how the negotiation styles make a difference in communication process dealing with work-family life arrangements and work-family boundary creation from the favorable and unfavorable negotiation. Besides, the important role of work-family boundary negotiation is articulated for individuals and firm management to realize the benefits of the family-friendly policy implementation. The insights invoke researchers to place attention on investigating further the phenomena of having the effective process of family-friendly policy enactment from the communication perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-family conflict is an inter role conflict between the work and family life domains in the bidirectional forms of *work-to-family conflict* (work interfere with family life), and *family-to-work conflict* (family interfere with work-life) (Netemeyer et al., 1996) wherein devotion of time and energy in one domain restrains one's involvement or performance in another life domain due to scarce resources possess (time-based and behavioral-based work-family conflict), and both conflicts involve negative psychological spillover between the life domains (strain-based work-family conflict) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work, family and personal factors could influence the individuals' work-family interface experiences (Ahmad, 2008; Koura et al., 2017; Michel et al., 2011).

Family-Friendly Policy, Work-Family Boundary Management and Work-Family Conflict

The family-friendly policy is cited as an organization's 'formal or informal set of terms and conditions which are designed to enable an employee to combine their family responsibilities with employment' (1998, p. 587). Family-friendly policy per se may not necessarily reduce work-family conflict (Beutell & O'Hare, 2018; Kossek et al., 2006) as the policy may not be enacted, utilization constraints existed (Beutell & O'Hare, 2018; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012), and lack of willingness of beneficiary to utilize them which may due to the fear of the negative impact on their career advancement and rewards (Hayman, 2009). Besides, the ineffectiveness of the established work-family policy could be derived from the incongruence with the employees' work-family boundary preference and their diverse needs (Beutell & O'Hare, 2018; McNamara et al., 2013; Shockley & Allen, 2010). The recent study depicted that individuals who experience greater work-family conflict when work and home boundaries are violated as the boundary violations hinder one from meeting the work goal and also resulted in greater negative effect (Hunter et al., 2017). Other studies have shown the utilization of the policy could result in greater expectation from role senders (i.e., family members) on a focal person to perform more family tasks such as carrying out household work and taking care of children and the elderly (Allen et al., 2013; French & Shockley, 2020; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Despite past research reported that family-friendly policy such as flexitime could help to release work-family conflict (Shockley & Allen, 2010), however, telework policy use that involving high integration of work-family boundaries has not been seen as a remedy for mitigating the work-family conflict in Kossek et al. (2006) and Abendroth and Reimann (2018) studies. Instead, the use of telework exerts greater family-to-work conflict experiences.

Boundary Theory

Boundary management could shape the work and family roles held and individuals could form the boundaries between roles held psychologically, physically as well as the time as boundaries keeper (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Individuals develop, maintain or change boundaries around a domain such as classify their role or others around them to conform such order (Ashforth et al., 2000). Boundaries vary to the degree of permeability and flexibility. Permeable boundaries allow crossing the boundary physically and psychologically or the boundary is open for influence. For instance, allow emotion or behaviour in one role domain spills over to another roles domain, and allow roles in one life domain to be performed in another life domain. In other words, permeable boundaries encourage the integration of work and family life. Impermeable boundaries on the other hand overtly separate the work and family life (high degree of segmentation) and discourage physical and psychological spillover between work and family life boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000). Flexibility encompasses role flexibility, the elasticity of role transition, and boundary flexibility in which roles are performed in different places and at a different time (Ashforth et al., 2000). Effective work-family boundary management is crucial as individuals whose boundaries shaped congruence with the

individuals' desired boundaries experience less work-family conflict (Bogaerts et al., 2018; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

Work-Family Boundary Preference, Environment-Person Fit and Work-Family Conflict

Individuals differ in roles or life values held, either work (greater work orientation over non-work), non-work (greater family orientation overwork), or dual centric (both work and non-work orientation) (Junker & van Dick, 2019; Robertson et al., 2019). Besides, preferences on work-family boundary management (i.e., work-family life segmentation or integration) are also found varies between individuals (Kreiner et al., 2009; Rothbard et al., 2005). The greater work-family life segmentation preference leads to greater actual work-family life segmentation, in turn, reduce negative spillover from work to family life (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). However, the impact of segmentation doesn't exist in a similar study (Derks et al., 2016). Although integrating work and family life is commonly perceived and found to be more likely exerts greater work-family conflict (Padhi & Pattnaik, 2017), Derks et al.'s (2016) study indicates the opposite outcome of integration. The inconsistent findings raise the interest of further investigation on the discrepancy phenomena and also investigate how the actual and the preference on work-family boundary could be compatible. The congruence between the work environment and the individuals' desired work-nonwork boundary helps to reduce work-life conflict (Bogaerts et al., 2018). The extent to which individuals' control over schedule flexibility fits their needs could enable them to reduce work-family conflict (Beutell & O'Hare, 2018). The destructive influence of long work hours on the work-family balance satisfaction could be mitigated when worker needs are congruence with the available flexible work options (McNamara et al., 2013). Work and family life management is more satisfied when ones' preferences and their spouses' expectations on the combination of work and family roles are matched which draw researchers' concern on the importance of communicating the expectations and initiating negotiation for better understanding (Junker & van Dick, 2019). Thus, negotiation has been taken place to close the aforementioned discrepancies.

Moderating Effect of Work-Family Boundary Negotiation

Kailasapathy and Metz's (2012) study revealed that subordinates are more likely than supervisors to initiate negotiation about the work-family life arrangements which involve exchange relationships at work. Self-regulation is needed when access to family-friendly policy to juggle work and family role responsibilities (French & Shockley, 2020). Individuals engage in negotiation to collaborate with their role partners at workplace, supervisor and coworkers for seeking integrative solutions, flexible work arrangements, coordinate work and work schedule leave arrangements and the use of work-family benefits, and negotiation with a spouse or other family members at home to achieve their desired work and family life arrangements (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Robertson et al., 2019; Ter Hoeven et al., 2017). For instance, negotiating overwork hour, tasks deadline, workload, taking leave, and taking time off for meeting non-work demand. The collaborative negotiations could help to reduce resentment and other negative discourse of those who cover up the tasks for those who are absent or on leave (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Besides, engagement in negotiation among couples about compromising the child care responsibilities, household division, career investment or career priority over family responsibilities, and job demands (Hart & Kelley, 2006). Negotiation with significant others at work for informal arrangements has been shown more important than the existence of work-family flexibility policies (Beutell & O'Hare, 2018).

In viewing of individuals' varying roles or life values, preferences and identity held, ideal work-family life combination could be yielded through exercising some power individuals have to negotiate (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Individuals engage negotiation as a tactic to reduce the discrepancy between preferred and actual work-family boundary and the work-family boundary violation (Kreiner et al., 2009). The intensity of work-family conflict resulted from the extended

availability after clock out from regular working hours will be attenuated when one has better boundary control (Cho et al., 2020). The cross-boundary expectation from others to be responsive for clock out communication leads to less boundary control (Park et al., 2020). One would possess greater control over their work-family boundary when management work-family support exists and less boundary expectation from others. Overloading communication occurs due to the continuous network connection anytime and elsewhere in a digital environment which blurring the work-family boundary as the boundary is more permeable (Mols & Pridmore, 2020; van Zoonen et al., 2020). Communication device used after regular work hours induce one's involvement in interaction with a supervisor about family (van Zoonen et al., 2020) and engaging the on-going boundary negotiation to be absent or present in the work and family life could safeguard one's privacy and freedom (Mols & Pridmore, 2020). Interaction with a supervisor about family demand is deemed to be effective in mitigating the unfavourable effect of communication device use after regular work hours on work-family conflict (van Zoonen et al., 2020). Furthermore, negotiation is needed as individuals may not necessarily receive the desired resources upon the request from others (Ho & Tekleab, 2016). Successful negotiation could bring change or modification on work-family life arrangements (Kreiner et al., 2009; Meiners, 2018). Thus, individuals are required to initiate negotiation to reach an ideal arrangement between work and family life. Engaging negotiation and renegotiation are to redefine the expectation from others to be mutually agreed with a new expectation to cope with conflicts (Hall, 1972). Such negotiation enables individuals to have better boundary control to reduce the work-family boundary intrusion and eventually alleviate work-family conflict experiences.

Effective communication is crucial in the negotiation process. Sense of dignity and empathetic understanding the other parties' interest and concern derived from the parties' willingness to listening to each other and meaningful relationship (Muasya, 2014). Various sources of social support at work (organization, supervisor and coworker) activate the family-friendly policy use and reducing work-family conflict through open and trustworthy communication (Schulz-Knappe & Ter Hoeven, 2020). The absence of such communication climate hinders supervisor and coworker support from taking effect. C*ooperative negotiation tactic*, a negotiation tactic that concerns others' interest, attempt to serve each other negotiators' interests and reaches mutual benefits (Livingston, 2014; Lu et al., 2012), could exert more emotional support and mitigates relationship burnout from spouse or partner with whom the individuals have negotiated (Livingston, 2014). *Competitive negotiation tactic*, a self interest-focused negotiation which other negotiators' interests are neglected (Livingston, 2014; Lu et al., 2012), on the other hand, seems to be more devastating as individuals experience more emotional exhaustion and relationship burnout (Livingston, 2014). Negotiators who adopt the tactic are obtaining less support from their spouse or partner regardless of the negotiators' gender. Cooperative negotiation demonstrates more integrative bargaining and directed towards problem-solving which all parties' concerns are taken care (Caputo et al., 2019; Halpert et al., 2010). The negotiation style exerts more cooperation, information exchange (i.e., needs, interest and preferences) and promotes open-minded discussion between negotiators to yield an ideal solution that mutually beneficial (Caputo et al., 2019; Halpert, et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2012). Based on Halpert et al.'s (2010) comprehensive study, negotiators seem to be more creative in seeking the possible options for achieving those challenging goals and tend to be more cooperative to achieve such goals. Negotiators tend to enter more cooperative negotiation process when they have past favorable interaction experiences and the past involvements in negotiation with the same negotiators. Integrative solutions which optimize the individual and joint outcomes could be reached from the cooperative negotiation process. On the other hand, individuals who employ competitive negotiation may engage threatening, deception, making a false promise to force other parties on concession to defend their interest as a gain for themselves and forgo others interest lead to their loss during the negotiation process (Caputo et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2012).

Cooperative negotiation such as problem-solving and compromising negotiation tactics encourages deep acting, an inner change which employees attempt to regulate their emotion to align with the required emotional display (Rutner & Riemenschneider, 2015). The deep acting is considered

a positive approach as the engagement of such behavior is less likely to cause the work exhaustion (Rutner & Riemenschneider, 2015). Both information exchange and mutual concession are communication approaches of role negotiation which have been appeared in integrative negotiations, a cooperative negotiation approach (Lu et al., 2012; Meiners, 2018). Mutual concessions at workplace allow a more flexible arrangement to accommodate the other life domain's demand. Adopting information exchange and mutual concessions in negotiation enable better task arrangements (Lu et al., 2012; Meiners, 2018). Based on the above literature, work-family boundary negotiation is expected to be able to close the gap of a discrepancy between the actual and the preferred work-family boundary resulted from the distinctive individuals' needs and preferences, life value, and identities held to improve the effect of family-friendly policy use on work-family conflict reduction. In viewing of the cooperative negotiation style generates relatively positive effect, gain mutual consensus and better problem solving as the open-minded discussion is embarked and cooperation is obtained, and information exchange between parties existed and mutual benefit is catered, it is believed that adopting cooperative negotiation style is more conducive to gain better outcomes of negotiation such as meeting individuals' goal of obtaining mutual understanding, redefine or adjust others' role expectations on one's work and family lives, gain support and conformance from significant others at work and home to their desired work-family boundaries arrangements and reinforce the desired work-family boundaries while having the access of family-friendly policy. Thus, cooperative negotiation style is more favorable than is competitive negotiation style to enhance the positive effect of family-friendly policy use to alleviate work-family conflict. Competitive negotiation style is expected to bring destructive effect on the relationship between family-friendly policy use and work-family conflict as the approach is hostile and less trustworthiness, withholding favorable relationship and creating negotiators' tension even frustration, thus, a consensus is difficult to be reached.

Proposition 1:	Work-family boundary negotiation moderates the relationship between family-friendly policy use and work-family conflict.
Proposition 1a:	Cooperative work-family boundary negotiation style strengthens the negative relationship between family-friendly policy use and work-family conflict.
Proposition 1b:	Competitive work-family boundary negotiation style weakens the negative relationship between family-friendly policy use and work-family conflict.

METHODOLOGY

Secondary data have been retrieved from EBSCOhost, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis and Sage databases. More than ten years of literature have been referred to and reviewed. Despite some older data have been employed, they are necessary as comprehensive view and descriptions structure the groundwork which is important to support the study. Work-family conflict, work-family interference, boundary management, negotiation, communication, work-family policy, family-friendly policy, flexible work scheduling and arrangements are the main keywords used for searching the related articles. The academic resources comprise of book chapters and academic journal articles that contain the empirical and qualitative cross-sectional studies across samples without any specific scope of sample groups as limited resources that related to the negotiation approaches in work-family conflict literature.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Human resource policies may favor individuals in work-family life arrangements but the benefits will be realized if individuals are willing to utilize them and benefits are granted by their supervisors (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Work-family boundary negotiation plays an important role to construct the desire work-family boundary to reduce work-family conflict. The tactics utilized by individuals are proven successfully reduce the work-family boundary violation and incongruence face which could

mitigate work-family conflict (Kreiner et al., 2009). Work-family boundary negotiation is predicted to buffering the effect of family-friendly policy on work-family conflict.

Organization management should allow a certain degree of intervention such as positive negotiation to identify each other expectations, needs and preferences to ensure the family-friendly policy is truly used and beneficial to their employees. Work-family boundary negotiation with family members is also important to enable individuals to access the organization's family-friendly policy to prevent resource depletion resulted from excessive family demands. The outcome of the negotiation will determine future negotiation. Therefore, cooperative negotiation styles are believed to encourage future negotiation and gain cooperation as the experience of negotiation is a win-win situation and mutually beneficial. It is more favorable compared to competitive tactics which risk one's opportunity to initiate future negotiation. Adoption of cooperative boundary negotiation style could generate favorable outcomes of negotiation that gain others' support on the access of family-friendly policy and have effective boundary control which is derived from the positive communication climate, mutual understanding and interest served that enable better coordination and task arrangements. Hence, cooperative negotiation is predicted to improve the effectiveness of family-friendly policy use to further reduce the work-family conflict experiences. Owing to the devastating characteristics of competitive boundary negotiation style that serve the self-interest and weak relationship with other negotiators, the effectiveness of family-friendly policy use to alleviate work-family conflict is weaken when competitive negotiation style is employed.

Work-family boundary negotiation styles should be carefully adopted by considering the cultural differences and apply the necessary style for a different circumstance. The negotiation tactics employed vary from the different cultural value held by individuals (Caputo et al., 2019). Greater power distance and masculinity, the negotiation tends to be more competitive, and masculinity less utilizes cooperative tactics while collectivism and uncertainty avoidance tend to be more cooperative in negotiation (Caputo et al., 2019). Thus, cultural values need to be considered when embarking work-family boundary negotiation study.

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