

When work and family are allies: a theory of work-family enrichment

Jeffrey Greenhaus & Gary Powell, *The Academy of Management Review*, 2006, 1, 72-92.

Key concept

- The work-family literature has been dominated by a conflict perspective. This derives from a 'scarcity hypothesis' that assumes a fixed amount of time and human energy, and thus conflict/stress for individuals who participate in multiple roles. Arguably, a more balanced approach is needed that recognises the benefits associated with combining work and family roles, i.e., of 'work-the family enrichment'.
- The paper reviews the literature on work-the family enrichment and proposes a model of the process by which such enrichment takes place.

Main points

- There are three ways by which individuals can benefit from participation in multiple roles ('role accumulation'):
 - an **additive** model, which proposes that work experiences and family experiences can have additive effects on well-being, e.g., where satisfaction with work and satisfaction with family contribute to happiness, life satisfaction and perceived quality of life;
 - a **buffering** model, which proposes that participation in both work and family roles can buffer individuals from distress in one of the two, e.g., where the relationship between stress at work and impaired well-being is attenuated for individuals who have satisfying, high-quality family lives; and
 - a **synergistic** model, which proposes that experiences in one role can produce benefits in the other, in terms of the transfer of positive experiences from one to the other, e.g., where participation in work roles create energy and/or skills that can be used as resources in the family role. (The effect is bidirectional, e.g., skills learned in the family role can enhance skill ability at work.)
- The paper argues that this third mechanism best captures the concept of work-family enrichment, defined as *the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other*.
- The proposed model of work-family enrichment is as follows:
 - **Inputs:** resources generated in Role A (including skills and perspectives; psychological and physical resources; social-capital resources; flexibility; and material resources) contribute to high performance in Role A and a consequent enhancement of mood/emotional level in Role A.
 - **Effects:** the enhancement of mood/emotional level in Role A contributes to improve performance in Role B, and the consequent enhancement of mood/emotional level in Role B.
 - **Moderators:** the relationships are moderated by the salience/importance of Role B and the perceived relevance of resources gained in Role A to Role B (i.e., if Role B is not particularly important, then the work-family enrichment will be minor).
- **Implications for organisational practice.** Organisations need to think holistically about the resources available/needed for both work and family roles, and manage such resources accordingly. As far as possible, the work-family relationship should be treated as an opportunity rather than as a problem.