Work and Non-work Dichotomy: The Influence of Inter-Role Conflict on Quality of Life of Managers in Klang Valley, Malaysia

Dr. Izhairi Ismail, International Islamic University Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The focus of the current study is to evaluate the associations between both work and non-work-domain variables and inter-role conflict. Specifically; the work domain variables such as, work role conflict, work role ambiguity and work time commitment and the non-work domain variables; such as family conflict, family time commitment and leisure involvement were expected to influence the degree of inter-role conflict. Inter-role conflict, in turn was explored in relations to quality of life. The spillover theory provided justifications for most of the connections among variables in this study. Questionnaire surveys were self-administered to a sample of three hundred and fifty male and female managers living and working in the city of Kuala Lumpur and in the area of Klang Valley, Malaysia. The managers were married and had at least one child living in the same home. Descriptive results and correlations were analysed using SPSS (Version 11) and Path Analysis was conducted using LISREL 8.52 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2002). Findings revealed that work role ambiguity, leisure involvement and family time commitment were significantly related to inter-role conflict. Contradictory to expectations, work role conflict and family conflict were negatively and significantly affiliated with inter-role conflict. The same connection involving work time commitment was not significant. As anticipated, inter-role conflict was negatively and significantly related to quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

Quality of life has been defined and assessed in many ways. For instance, it was insinuated that quality of life indicators go beyond immediate workplace concerns, such as, overall life satisfaction; health; satisfaction with family, free time, and marriage (Quinn & Shepard, 1974 and Quinn & Staines, 1979). According to Rice, McFarlin, Hunt and Near (1985), the perceived quality of life is a set of affective beliefs directed toward the totality of one’s life (overall perceived quality of life) or toward specific domains of life (perceived quality of work life or perceived quality of family life). Other researchers also described quality of life as subjective well-being (see Diener, 1984, Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin; 1985; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999 and Parasuraman, Greenhaus & Granrose, 1992).

In Malaysia, much of the research on the topic of quality of life tended to focus on issues of health quality of life (see Mubarak, Baba, Chin & Hoe, 2003; Baka, Chinha, Awang & Krishnan, 2000 and Hasanah & Razali, 2002). Apart from the extensive study on well-being of women in Malaysia conducted by Noor (1995, 1997, 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2004), there has been no other systematic examination and empirical studies on life quality of employed individuals in general, and managers in particular. Thus, the present study attempt to fill-in the research gap in this area by focusing the study into (1) testing the nature of linkages between work- and non-work-variables and inter-role conflict, and (2) evaluating the relationship between inter-role conflict and quality of life.

REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Quality of Life and Inter-role Conflict

Review of literatures in the area of quality of life detected a phenomenon that often alter the degree of a person’s life satisfaction; known as inter-role conflict. Specifically, inter-role conflict refers to the role pressures from the work and family domain that are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Researchers have documented that the incidents of inter-role conflict erode the individuals’ life satisfaction (O’Driscoll, Ilgen & Hildreth,
1992; Judge, Boudreau & Bretz, 1994 and Aryee, Fields & Luk, 1999). Other affiliations are disclosed between inter-role conflict and aspects of quality of life, such as job-, family- and marital-satisfaction (Aryee, 1992; Rice, Frone & McFarlin, 1992 and Kim & Ling, 2001); well-being, such as physical symptomatology and emotional affect (Paden & Buehler, 1995); emotional distress and emotional exhaustion (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993; Guelzow, Bird & Koball, 1991 and Senecal, Vallerand & Guay, 2001) and mood states of individuals (Williams & Alliger, 1994). Therefore, it is anticipated that the greater the experience of inter-role conflict, the lower will be the quality of life.

H1: Inter-role conflict is negatively related to quality of life.

Work Role Conflict

Work role conflict is defined as the extent to which a person experiences incompatible role pressures within the work domain (Kopelman, Greenhaus & Connoly, 1983). Evidences consistently recorded positive associations between work role conflict and psychological strain, life stress and turnover intentions (Parasuraman et al., 1992; and O’Driscoll & Beehr, 2000) and inter-role conflict (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991 and Wallace, 1999). Thus, it is expected that managers with high level of work role conflict to report high level of inter-role conflict.

H2: Work Role Conflict is positively related to Inter-role Conflict.

Work Role Ambiguity

Work Role ambiguity has been described as the situation where an individual does not have clear direction about the expectations of his or her role in the job or organization (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970). Role ambiguity has been connected with various job and life outcomes, such as decreasing level of job performance (Fried, Ben-David & Tiesg, 1998 and Singh, 1993), reducing job satisfaction and non-work satisfaction (Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997; O’Driscoll & Beehr, 2000; and Kousteelious, Theodorakis & Goulimaris, 2004); declining marital and sexual satisfaction (Barling & MacEwen (1992) and increasing work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985 and Aryee, 1992). Thus, it is predicted that greater degree of work role ambiguity will lead to high level inter-role conflict.

H3: Work Role Ambiguity is positively related to Inter-role Conflict.

Work Time Commitment

Work time is an important factor in work domain based on the conception that personal resources are scarce, hence time involvement in work domain will rob off time available for non-work activities (Kirchmeyer, 1992 and Wallace, 1999). Work time commitment is also connected with other family factors such as family characteristics and life-cycle stage (Rothausen, 1999; Higgins & Duxbury, 1994 and Aldous, Mulligan & Bjarnason, 1998); quality of life (Judge & Watanabe, 1993; O’Driscoll et al., 1992 and Moen & Yu, 2000) and inter-role conflict (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991; Moen & Yu, 2000 and Kim & Ling, 2001). Therefore, it is expected that the more hours spent and committed at work, the greater will be the degree of inter-role conflict experienced by managers.

H4: Work Time Commitment is positively related to Inter-role Conflict.

Family Conflict

Family conflict is defined as the extent to which a person experiences incompatible role pressures within the family domain (Kopelman et al., 1983). It is a part of family stressor which may include negative circumstances such as parental overload, children’s misbehaviour, degree of tension in the family and amount of role juggling (Frone et al., 1992; Williams & Alliger, 1994 and Rothausen, 1999) and dissatisfaction with home division of labour (Kluwer & Heesink, 1996 and Rogers & Amato, 2000). Family conflict has also been established to result in various negative life outcomes; for instance, psychiatric symptoms (Nelson & Hughes, 1993), stress (Elloy, 2001 and Voydanoff ,1999); and inter-role conflict (Kopelman et al., 1983 and Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). Hence, managers experiencing high level of family conflict are foreseen to report high degree inter-role conflict.

H5: Family Conflict is positively related to Inter-role Conflict.
Family Time Commitment

The scarcity model (Marks, 1977 and Kirchmeyer, 1992) rationalises the positive connection between hours worked and inter-role conflict (Frone et al., 1992). Nevertheless, researches in a collectivist society unveiled the existence of a family centrality, rather than a work centrality in their studies (Aryee, 1992; Aryee et al., 1999; and Kim & Ling. 2001). For instance, in a comparative study between Hong Kong Chinese employees and American employees, Aryee et al. (1999) discovered that high family involvement did not alter the level of family-work conflict for Hong Kong samples. Thus, spending quality time with family members may be associated with positive effects to Malaysian managers.

H6: Family Time Commitment is negatively related to Inter-role Conflict.

Leisure Involvement

Leisure represents explosive “letting off steam” and excessive attempts to make up for the deprivations experienced at work (Wilensky, 1960); a non-obligatory activity (Harrington & Dawson, 1995) and fulfilling individual needs rather than in return for monetary rewards as in work activities (Kabanoff, 1980). Although the lack of research on the interrelationships between leisure activities and inter-role conflict is conspicuous, equally important is the piecemeal nature in which leisure has been studied. For instance, Goff, Fick & Oppliger (1997) reported that commitment in serious leisure was positively related to leisure-family conflict. Though many studies did not relate the effects of leisure commitment to inter-role directly, much research linked leisure to negative spillover in family (Orthner & Mancini, 1990 and Fick & Goff, 1996). As such, greater involvement in leisure may likely to limit the time available in work sphere, thus can possibly result in higher level of inter-role conflict.

H7: Leisure Involvement is positively related to Inter-role Conflict.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The type of theoretical frameworks that informs the research within the work-non-work paradigm has been dominated by the spillover theory (Kando & Summers, 1971; Piotrkowski, 1978; Champoux, 1978; and Staines, 1980). The spillover theory posits that there is a similarity between what occurs in the work environment and what occurs in the family environment. Applying the theory, many researchers concluded that problems and conflict at work (home) can drain and preoccupy the individual, making it difficult for him or her to participate adequately in family (work) life (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). Because of the tendency of these problems to brim over to the other domain, they result in increase in psychological and physical strain and consequently increase the degree of inter-role conflict and ultimately reduce the perceived level of quality of life of individuals.

Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework of Quality of Life
SAMPLE AND PROCEDURES

Questionnaires were distributed to 350 married managers working in the Klang Valley and the city of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; who have at least one child residing in the same home. The usable data comprised of 192 respondents, yielding a response rate of approximately 55%. Managers were selected in this study because occupational levels have been established to influence work-family balance (Hills, Hawkins, Ferris & Weizman, 2001). In particular, managers have been known to work long hours (Kirkcaldy et. al., 1997 and Burke, 2000), and reported higher role strain than non-managers (O’Neil & Greenberger, 1994).

Married managers were chosen because married individuals were more likely to experience inter-role conflict that unmarried people (Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977 and Cooke & Rousseau, 1984) and parenthood demands, particularly in a dual-career couples are more severe than in non-parents situation (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979, Cooke & Rousseau, 1984 and Rothausen, 1999). Additionally, married men and women have also been reported to constitute the highest percentage of people who are very satisfied with their life as a whole compared to other categories of people such as single, widowed, divorced and separated (Andrews & Whitey, 1976; Inglehart & Rabier, 1986 and Veenhoven, 1991).

The purposive sampling procedure was conducted, whereby respondents who fulfil the requirements were chosen based on personal contact. Specifically, managers were identified through the contact person in the organization. Only managers who indicated their willingness to participate in the study were given the questionnaires. They were also asked to recommend and forward the questionnaire packages to other managers who possess the selected criteria, preferably the opposite sex.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF MEASURES

The measurements for all the constructs were adapted and modified from the existing scale in the organisational behaviour literature. All constructs were measured in a six-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha values for all the variables were above 0.70, indicating all constructs had acceptable internal reliability (see Table I). The validity of the scale was measured by Confirmatory Factor Analysis using Lisrel 8.52 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2002). Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used as indicators; for instance, value of GFI > 0.90 and value of RMSEA < 0.10 were acceptable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998 and Diamantopolous & Siguaw, 2000). In this study, all the values of GFI and RMSEA of the variables were acceptable, with the exception of Leisure Involvement (RMSEA > 0.1). Nonetheless, items were not dropped because GFI of Leisure Involvement indicated an acceptable value (GFI = 0.97). Table I presents the construct measurements and the results of reliability and validity tests for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Adapted from:</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Reliability (Alpha)</th>
<th>Validity (GFI)</th>
<th>Validity (RMSEA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WRC</td>
<td>Kopelman, Greenhaus &amp; Connoly (1983)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRA</td>
<td>Rizzo, House &amp; Lirzman (1970)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMC</td>
<td>Kopelman, Greenhaus &amp; Connoly (1983)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Harrington &amp; Dawson (1995)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTCON</td>
<td>Bohen &amp; Viveros-Long (1981)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QOL</td>
<td>Diener, Emmons, Larsen &amp; Griffin (1985)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WRC = Work Role Conflict; WRA = Work Role Ambiguity; FAMC = Family Conflict; LI = Leisure Involvement; INTCON = Inter-role Conflict; QOL = Quality of Life.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS

The descriptive statistics indicated that 72.4% of the respondents were males and 27.6% females; with 69.8% Malays, 16.7% Chinese, 9.4% Indians and 4.2% others. Also, 42.2% of the respondents worked in the public-sector and 57.8% worked in the private-sector; with 66.1% of them in the category of senior manager and 33.9% in the category of junior manager. Approximately 16.1% of respondents had diploma, 42.7% had a bachelor’s degree and 34.9% had a postgraduate degree. Data also indicated that 84.9% of the respondents had working spouses. Work time commitment and family time commitment were measured based on time spent at work and quality time spent with family members (including child-care) per week. Approximately one-third of the managers in this study spent between 40 to 49 hours per week at work and 34.4% spent 50 hours or more per week at work. Despite long hours work, more than half of them managed to devote over 15 hours per week with their family members. The mean, standard deviation and correlation matrix of the variables were presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlations among Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. WRC</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. WRA</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. FAMC</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. LI</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.409**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. INTCON</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>0.399**</td>
<td>-0.332*</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. QOL</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < 0.05;  ** p < 0.01

Referring to Table 2, the managers generally reported moderate levels of inter-role conflict (mean = 3.10, SD = 0.82). They experienced marginally higher quality of life (mean = 3.35, SD = 1.58). Managers also reported moderate levels of work role conflict (mean = 3.47, SD = 0.96) and work role ambiguity (mean = 3.49, SD = 0.99), but higher levels of family conflict (mean = 4.59, SD = 0.81) and leisure involvement (mean = 4.01, SD = 1.06).

THE PATH ANALYSIS

Work role conflict, work role ambiguity, work time commitment, family conflict, leisure involvement and family time commitment were classified as exogenous variables, and they were linked to an endogenous variable, inter-role conflict. Simultaneously, inter-role was connected to an endogenous variable, quality of life. The correlation matrix was entered as the input matrix in the Lisrel program. The Lisrel model was evaluated by (1) the t-tests of specific path coefficients to ascertain whether each of the hypothesised relationships was confirmed and (2) the goodness-of-fit tests examining the extent to which the model is consistent with the data (see Table 3).

It was found that work role conflict (t = -6.30, p < 0.05), work role ambiguity (t = 5.42, p < 0.05), family conflict (t = -5.10, p < 0.05), leisure involvement (t = 4.06, p < 0.05) and family time commitment (t = -4.12, p < 0.05) were significantly related to inter-role conflict. Nonetheless, the relationships between work role conflict and inter-role conflict (t = -6.30, p < 0.05) and between family conflict and inter-role conflict (t = -5.10, p < 0.05) were negative instead of positive. Also, work time commitment was not significantly associated with inter-role conflict (t = 0.46, p > 0.05). As expected, inter-role conflict was also significantly and negatively related to quality of life (t = -4.34, p < 0.05).
Table 3: Summary of Path Analysis and Goodness of Fit Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Standardized parameter estimates</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1:</td>
<td>INTCON → QOL</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>-4.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2:</td>
<td>WRC → INTCON</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-6.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3:</td>
<td>WRA → INTCON</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>5.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4:</td>
<td>WTC → INTCON</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5:</td>
<td>FAMC → INTCON</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>-5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6:</td>
<td>LI → INTCON</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>4.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7:</td>
<td>FTC → INTCON</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>-4.12*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goodness of Fit Statistics:

| Minimum Fit Function Chi-Square | 6.86 (p = 0.33) |
| Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) | 0.026 |
| Normed Fit Index (NFI) | 0.97 |
| Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) | 0.98 |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI) | 1.00 |
| Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) | 0.99 |

N=192; t-value >1.943 or < -1.943 significant at 0.05 level (1-tailed); df = 6
S = Supported; NS = Not Supported

Table 3 also shows the overall goodness of fit results. The findings indicated that the data fit the model adequately, with GFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.026, NFI = 0.97 and CFI = 1.00 (see Hair et al., 1998 and Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). Additionally, the results recorded that the χ² was significant (df = 6, N = 192) = 6.86, p = 0.33 (p > 0.05).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The connections between work role ambiguity, leisure involvement, family time and inter-role conflict and between inter-role conflict and quality of life were as anticipated. Nonetheless, it was puzzling that work role conflict was not positively connected to inter-role conflict. However, despite most researchers’ discovery of positive relationships between work role conflict and inter-role conflict (Kopelman et al., 1983; Higgins et. al., 1992 and Aryee, 1992), other researchers such as Siegall & Cummings (1995) asserted that individuals might not view the work role conflict as role stress, thus the presence of conflict did not always require coping, and as such conflict did not always lead to strain and inter-role conflict.

The positive relationship between work time commitment and inter-role conflict was also not substantiated. Despite consistent number of researchers associated long work hours with higher inter-role conflict (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979; Judge et al., 1994 and Kim & Ling, 2001), other researchers had also pointed out contradictory findings. For instance, Gutek et al. (1991), Wallace (1999) and Moen and Yu (2000) discovered that the impact of the actual number of hours worked was not important in contributing inter-role conflict. The data in this study indicated that nearly 34% of the managers worked from 40 to 49 hours a week; and over 34% managers worked more than 50 hours a week. Despite high work time commitment, the managers did not view the situation as interrupting their non-work life. One possible reason could be that working long hours was associated with doing a good job and being successful in their chosen vocation. They might contemplate long hours work as a motivator to advance their career or as a symbol of their commitment to being good managers.

Another surprising results recorded from this study was the contradictory associations between family conflict and inter-role conflict. Regardless, on the basis of the arguments of family centrality in the Asian society (Aryee, 1992; Aryee et al, 1999 and Kim & Ling, 2001), a possible explanation to the finding hinges on the fact that since the Malaysian respondents have high family importance in general, they may tend to block the feelings of conflict in their non-work domains from influencing the level of inter-role conflict. (see segmentation theory by Wilenski, 1960). Moreover, evidences in the study of stress and coping strategies in Malaysia performed by Ungku Noorulkamar (1995)
revealed that the Malays used more of both ‘escape strategies’ and ‘symptom-management strategies’, which insinuated that in the event of stressful situations, the Malays were likely to show escapist and avoidance behaviour. Since the Malays constituted a large proportion of the respondents (69.8%), the effect of the family conflict on inter-role conflict was probably buffered by the ‘escapist’ behaviour.

The study has numerous weaknesses, such as occupational constraints, geographical limitations and purposive sampling process. The sample is tilted in the direction of senior managers (66.1%); and 44.3% of the managers had salary ranging from RM5000 to RM8000 per month, while 12.5% earned from RM8001 to RM10000 per month. Approximately 43% had a bachelor’s degree and 34.9% had postgraduate degree. Generally, these managers had already established their careers and were financially stable, hence it is not clear how overall results apply to other individuals in Malaysia such as non-managers and blue-collar workers. In conclusion, the results demonstrate the utility of investigating both work and non-work spheres simultaneously in obtaining a deeper understanding of the factors that alter the inter-role conflict and quality of life. Future research should focus on bi-directional nature and moderating effects of work and non-work variables on the paths towards quality of life.

REFERENCES


