

HOTEL EMPLOYEES' WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT (WFC) AT DIFFERENT JOB LEVELS AND AMONG DEPARTMENTS: A STUDY IN EGYPTIAN HOTELS

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ABSTRACT

The hotel industry is well-known as one in which employees have to make sacrifices in their family life. Thus, hospitality labor often faces work-family conflict (WFC); a serious human resources issue that has received considerable attention in recent research. Therefore, the current study attempts to synthesize pertinent WFC literature, particularly in the hotel industry, as well as to investigate WFC at different job levels and among hotel departments. The current study is considered a first step in understanding the situation of WFC for hotel labor in Egyptian hotels. It highlights the need to make way for research concerning WFC to provide opportunities for employees for work environment with minor WFC.

Keywords: Work family conflict, job levels, back and front of the house departments, and Egyptian hotels.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Work-family conflict (WFC) has been examined quite often in human resources management. Numerous studies show that the magnitude of this employment issue will continue to grow. As employees attempt to balance work demands and family responsibilities, organizations will have to decide to what extent they will go to minimize this conflict.

The hotel industry is well-known for its long working hours, unpredictability in work routine, frequency of working weekends or rotating shifts and heavy workloads, which are direct precursors to WFC. (Ghiselli et al., 2001; Deery and Jago, 2009; McNamara et al., 2011; and Lee et al., 2011) Cleveland et al (2007) and Mulvaney (2007) considered factors like emphasis on face time, multitasking and geographic mobility to move up in the ranks as factors associated with WFC in the hospitality industry). In countries with fluctuating economy, like the current situation in a number of Arab countries due to political transformations and revolutions, restructuring and downsizing add to the hard work conditions of hotels. (Zalaky, 2011) From another point of view, the hotel industry was described as "a friendly work environment", where employees can enjoy being a member of the family, where stress due to family roles can be negotiated at the workplace. (Namasivayam and Mount, 2004; and Burke et al, 2011) After all a body of research advised how the hotel industry, in particular, need to recognize new strategies to overcome work stressors; it is also argued that the enactment of family-friendly policies and their translation into day-to-day operations enable hotel organizations to gain competitive advantage. (Smyrnios et al., 2003; Karatepe et al., 2008; Karatepe and Uludag, 2008; Wong and Ko, 2009; Xiao and O'Neill, 2010; Karatepe et al., 2011; and Blomme, 2010)

Literature recognizes two distinct types of conflict; work-family conflict (WFC) as opposed to family-work conflict (FWC). WFC occurs when a person's work life interferes with family life, FWC occurs when family life interferes with work life. (Frye and Breugh, 2004; Warner and Hausdorf, 2009; Cavazos-Garza, 2011; and Zhao et al., 2011) The examination of WFC was chosen as the primary area of study because a growing body of research suggests that workers compromise family commitments for work obligations more often than the reverse. (Namasivayam and Zhao, 2007; Karatepe et al., 2008; Thein et al., 2010; and Burke et al., 2011) However, studies on a number of Eastern countries, including Nigeria, Jordan, Turkey, India and China, found that FWC was not of less significance than WFC. (Namasivayam and Zhao, 2007; Karatepe and Magaji, 2008; Cavazos-Garza, 2011 and

Anafarta, 2011) These findings argue for more situational and cultural influences in investigating work relation to family life; cultural orientation towards families in these societies may account for the attribution of FWC.

Literature also distinguished three types of WFC: time-based, strain-based and behavior-based conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when being required to work extra time without notice in a way that disables meeting family responsibilities, strain-based conflict suggests that strain experienced in one role interferes with the participation in the other role, and behavior-based conflict that occurs when specific behaviors required in one role are incompatible with behavioral expectation in another role. (Carlson et al., 2000; Smyrniotis et al., 2003; Anafarta, 2011; and Casper et al., 2011)

Former studies claim that people are recently caught between the demands of work and family, especially considering that family life is traditional and still highly valued in Eastern "collectivist" society. In collectivist societies, people focus on the family's welfare; work is seen not as a means of enhancing the self, but as a means of supporting the family (Lu et al, 2010; Burke et al, 2011; and Cavazos-Garza, 2011). It is also argued that the family support network helps alleviating WFC by providing support and help in time of need, especially child care from grandparents, where in other societies such help may not be readily available unless purchased. This is opposed to Western "individualistic" societies, where people focus on achievements at work; in other words, they live to work, regarding personal accomplishments as prerequisite for the meaning in life and personal happiness. (Hill et al., 2004; Thein et al., 2010; Harris and Giuffre, 2010; and Lu et al., 2010). Yet few studies discussed collectivism culture outside Asian countries. (Hill et al., 2004; Hsieh and Lin, 2010; Lu et al, 2010; and Casper et al., 2011)

Research has identified numerous negative consequences of work-family conflict stressors for organizations, for employees and for employees' families. To begin with, several studies related WFC to poor physical health, longitudinal connection to higher levels of depression and to the incidence of hypertension. (Barens and Fieldes, 2000; Marchese et al., 2002; Hosking and Western, 2008; and Zhao et al., 2009) There has been also considerable research on the behavioral consequences of WFC, like high levels of absenteeism, low productivity, job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, anxiety and work stress. (Karatepe and Magaji, 2008; Blomme et al., 2010; Cavazos-Garza, 2011; and Lee et al., 2011) Moreover, WFC has been linked to psychological distress, marital strain, forgoing/delaying childbearing, decreased life satisfaction and poor morale. (Hill et al., 2004; Harris and Giuffre, 2010; Zhao et al, 2011; and Shockley & Singla, 2011)

Basically, WFC reflects a complex interplay of factors at the individual, work group and organizational levels. Factors related to WFC include work nature at different hotel departments, job control at different organizational levels, work overload, supervisor support and organization support. These issues can be combined in many ways to elucidate WFC. (Warner and Hausdorf, 2009) Aiming to reveal the kind of relationship between jobs at different organizational level, i.e. managerial, supervisory and entry level and WFC, as well as the kind of relationship between jobs at different hotel departments, i.e. front-of-the-house and back-of-the-house and WFC, the current study puts a number of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Jobs at different organizational levels are positively related to WFC.

Hypothesis 1/a: Jobs at managerial level are positively related to WFC.

Hypothesis 1/b: Jobs at supervisory level are positively related to WFC.

Hypothesis 1/c: Jobs at entry level are positively related to WFC.

Hypothesis 2: Jobs at different hotel departments are positively related to WFC.

Hypothesis 2/a: Jobs at front-of-the-house departments are positively related to WFC.

Hypothesis 2/b: Jobs at back-of-the-house departments are positively related to WFC.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH SAMPLING

Stratified sampling (Bryman, 2004:169) was applied by coordinating with hotel human resources (HR) managers that questionnaire distribution reaches equal proportions of employees within the three job levels (managers, supervisors, entry level employees) among front and back of-the-house departments. The data were collected during the period of time from May to August 2011 in 5-stars hotels in Alexandria. From a total of 90

managers, only 30 provided the required data; as for supervisors, from a total of 215 only 72 presented valid responses. One hundred and fifty entry level employees out of 676 participated in the research. Questionnaires were sent to eight (HR) managers in the five-star hotels of Alexandria.

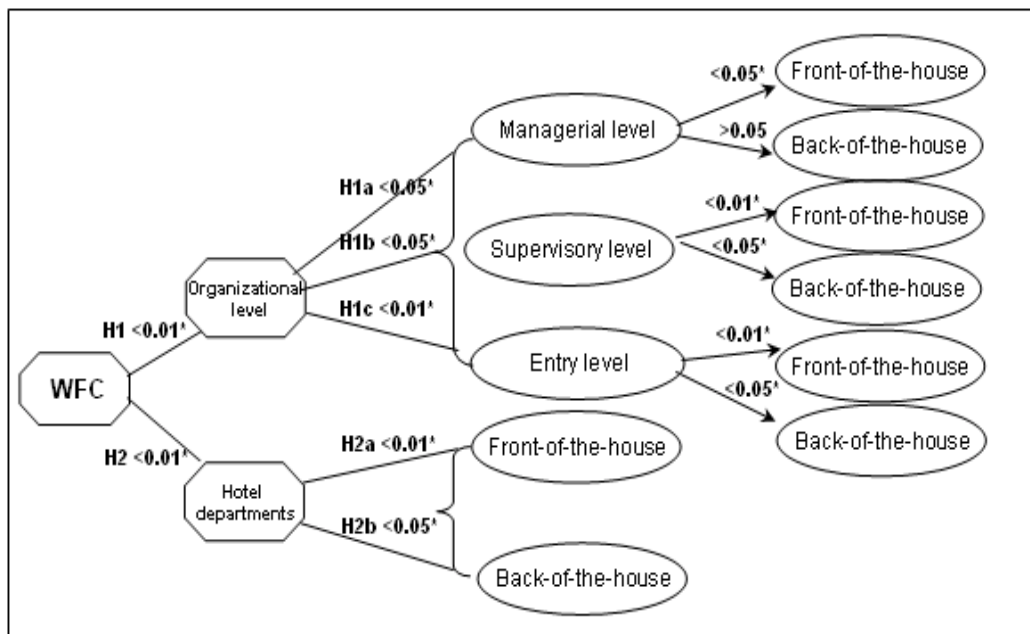
INSTRUMENT

Respondents were asked to identify their departments as well as their job level; then, to determine their opinion towards the agreement or disagreement with the ten instrument's statements (Appendix 1). The instrument statements were obtained from a number of relevant studies; the statements are put to measure the level of conflict an employee might face because of work interference with family life. Implicit in the instrument strain-based and time-based WFC is investigated. (Carlson et al., 2000; Smyrnios et al., 2003; Karatepe and Magaji, 2008; Karatepe et al, 2008; Wong and Ko, 2009; Blomme et al, 2010; Hsieh and Lin, 2010; and Zhao et al, 2011) English and Arabic versions were produced to meet different language skills of participants; the statements in the questionnaire were initially prepared in English and then translated into Arabic; to ensure that the statements were cross-linguistically comparable the instrument translation was reviewed by three faculty members of Alexandria University fluent in both languages. The internal reliability was $\alpha = 0.79$, which is considered acceptable. Participants provided their responses on a Likert scale anchored with 1=strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

The current study applied ANOVA test to measure the complex relationship between the above mentioned variables in addition to mean scores (μ), standard deviation (σ) and ($P \leq 0.05$).

HYPOTHESES TESTING AND DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to test the relationship between WFC and different job levels as well as the relationship between WFC and hotel departments as it is well established that WFC has a crucial influence on hotel industry workforce (Warner and Hausdorf, 2009; Lu at al, 2010; Cavazos-Garza, 2011; and Zhao et al, 2011).



$P \leq 0.01^*$ = highly significant; $P \leq 0.05^*$ = significant; $P > 0.05$ = not significant

Figure 1: WFC at different job levels and among departments as perceived by Egyptian hotel employees

The first Hypothesis predicted that there is a positive relation between jobs at different organizational levels and WFC. It is illustrated in figure 1 that jobs at different organizational levels were significantly and positively correlated with WFC ($p=0.05^*$).

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were also supported as jobs at managerial and supervisory levels are positively correlated with WFC ($p = 0.05^*$) and ($p = 0.05^*$) respectively. However, jobs at entry levels recorded highly significant relation with WFC ($p = 0.01^*$)

It is perceived that the amount of control employees have over their work environment can reduce the experience of work-related stress. (Warner and Hausdorf, 2009; and McNamara et al., 2011) At the same time, autocratic management style, traditionally adopted by hospitality managers, may contribute to workers' stress because of lack of consultation and communication, this justifies why entry level employees suffered greater WFC if compared to managers and supervisors. (McNamara et al, 2011) Yet, this theory contradicts with the study of Anafarta (2011), who revealed that supervisors usually face more work and family conflict because they are in the middle of everything; they have responsibilities to their boss, employees and guests, so they hardly have any control over the various inputs of their work environment. It is also interesting to note how this finding is supported by Cleveland et al. (2007), who argued that new entrants to the hotel industry have unrealistic expectations about their jobs will be like; thus suffering high levels of work stress and WFC at the beginning of their careers, if compared to senior employees who got used to irregular working conditions; entrants are also subject to WFC due to factors like low pay and scheduling conflicts. (Barnes and Fieldes, 2000; Wong and Ko, 2009; Xiao and O'Neill, 2010) Furthermore, on-call work or casuals is more common among entry-level jobs, thereby creating highly variable and irregular work hours with no control over the timing and the duration of such hours. (McNamara et al., 2011)

As for managers, although reported working relatively long hours, they enjoyed considerable flexibility and control in determining these hours. That is why time management skill is the most important for managers in order to eliminate WFC. (Anafarta, 2011; and Burke et al., 2011) Meanwhile, Mulvaney et al. (2007) revealed that managers face more WFC because of the long time they spend at work in attempt to be present as much as possible, regardless of the actual necessity of being there, thereby reinforcing the widespread norm in the hotel sector that managers must "pay their dues" to get ahead. Karatepe et al. (2011) argued how managers are more subject to work in politically charged work environments, thus being susceptible to work-related strain; moreover, Shaffer et al. (2001) discussed how frequent relocation contributed to managers' WFC. Generally, younger employees tend to experience more WFC than older ones because they have younger children; furthermore, older employees are more likely to have seniority and status at work, which in turn bring opportunities for more flexibility and lessens the likelihood of work stress. (Mulvaney et al., 2007)

The second Hypothesis stated that jobs at different hotel departments are positively related to WFC. This is also supported by the results illustrated in figure 1 as jobs at different hotel departments were significantly and positively correlated WFC ($p = 0.05^*$). Jobs at front-of-the-house departments recorded highly significant correlation ($p = 0.01^*$) when compared to jobs at back-of-the-house departments ($p = 0.05^*$). Literature supports this finding by arguing how frontline jobs are more demanding because employees are required to assess and generate new solutions for unexpected customer complaints while keeping a cheerful manner during face-to-face and voice-to-voice interactions. They also have to manage their emotional display by faking happiness and suppressing negative emotions and fatigue when facing customers. (Karatepe et al., 2008; Wong and Ko, 2009; Zhao et al., 2009; and Karatepe et al., 2011) On the contrary, it is argued that the bad physical conditions (i.e. heat, humidity, noise and insufficient lighting) in back of the house operations like kitchen and laundry may increase exhaustion and work stress, thereby contributing to strain-based WFC. (Anderson, 2001; and Karatepe and Magaji, 2008)

It is also worth mentioning that back-of-the-house managerial positions were insignificant with WFC ($p > 0.05$), if particularly compared to their front-of-the-house counterparts ($p = 0.05^*$). This finding is supported by Cleveland et al., (2007) who reported that managers assigned to rooms division and food and beverage are being particularly challenged by long, nonstandard hours, including weekends and holidays. At the same time, managers in back of the house departments, like human resources, engineering and accounting tended to have a (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) schedule that are probably more compatible with life off the job, yet these positions are not viewed as typical pathways to becoming general manager if compared to the former positions. A view that is supported by Namasivayam and Mount (2004), Namasivayam and Zhao (2007), and Karatepe and Magaji (2008) who argued that rooms division and food service outlets are among the most stressful work environments for both managers and

employees on an equal basis. Apparently, there are clear work-family trade-offs in each occupational category and among departments.

Finally, it can be argued that individuals do not experience the world in the same way, personality and background characteristics provide a lens through which people perceive and react to situations around them, including how they perceive and experience the work and family interface. (Mulvaney et al., 2007)

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Generally, suffering economies, like the current situation in Egypt, increased levels of downsizing and unemployment, particularly within the tourism and hotel industry that were adversely affected after 25th January revolution. (Zalaky, 2011) This posed more stress on the Egyptian workforce to accept jobs with hard working conditions in order to earn their living; this was apparent from the findings of the current study.

Thus a number of strategies are recommended to reduce WFC and eliminate its adverse consequences; for instance, a very popular strategy is providing child care assistance; which can be realized in many forms, from providing information on child care centers to helping employees with child care expenses to even building an on-site day care center. Another strategy to reduce WFC is the compressed workweek, which is typically four 10-hours days. It gives the employee an open day in the week to take care of personal matters, including family demands. Yet such a strategy has to be carefully implemented to avoid employees' fatigue. Flexible work schedule can be also applicable to some jobs in the hotel industry, where it is possible for an employee to vary the time he/she begins and ends work. Another key factor is cultivating supportive organizational culture, which presents supervisory support for non-work demands.

As for further research, there is still a need to investigate FWC as opposed to WFC which can help drawing a broader picture of human resources issues in Egyptian hotel industry; there is also a need to investigate WFC within different hotel categories.

Demographic variables, like age, gender, level of education, social background and years of experience could be also considered in further research, as they were beyond the scope of this study.

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APPENDIX

| Instrument Statements measuring WFC | Likert Scale | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|
| | Strongly disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neutral (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly agree (5) |
| my work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like | | | | | |
| the time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities | | | | | |
| I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend in work | | | | | |
| sometimes I wish I wouldn't have to deal with irregular working-hours | | | | | |
| I am often required to work during the weekends and off-days | | | | | |
| when I get home from work I am often too tired to participate in family activities | | | | | |
| I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family | | | | | |
| due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy. | | | | | |
| job worries or problems distract me when I am at home | | | | | |
| I easily get irritated at minor things when I home back | | | | | |