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UDK: 005.57:373.3/5.011.3-051
005.57:378.011.3-051
Original research paper

IDENTIFICATION OF WORK-FAMILY BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STYLES: TWO-STEP CLUSTER ANALYSIS AMONG TEACHERS IN PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Abstract:

The aim of this exploratory study was to identify work-family management boundary profiles on the base of four work-family boundary flexibility dimensions and two types of work-family transitions employed for demarcation/distinction between these two domains. The sample consisted of 143 participants (female=99, mean age=42.50±9.74 years), teachers at university, secondary and primary schools in Macedonian context.

Two-step cluster analysis revealed two clusters. Participants in the in the first cluster scored below average on work flexibility ability and on average considering work flexibility willingness, above the average on family flexibility willingness and relatively higher on family flexibility ability and showed very low frequency of transitions from work to family domain, and occasional family-to-work transitions. Participants clustered in the second subgroup showed high ability and willingness to flex work, scored relatively high on family flexibility willingness, expressed strong ability to flex family boundary domain, with occasional moves from work to family domain and more frequent transitions from family to work.

Further analyses performed to explore characteristics of both clusters showed that 82.7% of secondary school teachers and 87.5% of primary school teachers were grouped in cluster 1, while most of the university teachers (81.8%) tend to the cluster 2. Equal percentage of male (50%) and female (50%) study participants were distributed across clusters, however cluster 2 consisted predominantly (80.2%) of female participants. Participants in two clusters were found to differ in job satisfaction and family-to-work conflict, whereas differences in regard to life satisfaction, work-to-family conflict, age and number of children were not registered.

It could be concluded that cluster/profile 1 was characterized with moderated control over work boundaries, whereas cluster 2 implied to reactive profile with pliable and permeable boundaries of work and family domains.

Keywords: boundary management profiles, work-family flexibility, work-family permeability, two-step cluster analysis

Introduction

According to boundary theory people tend to create and maintain cognitive, physical and/or behavioural boundaries between various life domains, such as work and family (Ashforth et al., 2000). Boundaries differ in flexibility as a degree to which they are elastic or pliable, as well as in permeability that denoted to psychological and/or behavioural transitions across roles. More specifically, flexibility implied that roles can be performed at any place or time, whereas inflexibility of the boundaries may restrict the execution of the role (in work, family or another life domain). Permeable boundaries are characterized with opportunity to transit between roles (to make or accept private phone calls while at work or vice versa), but impermeable boundaries prevent transition from one role to another (Ashford et al., 2000). Clark (2000) in her work/family border theory have described two additional characteristics of work and non-work boundaries i.e., blending which occurs when the area near the border is not exclusive of one domain (e.g. when the person accept phone call from work while preparing her/his child for school), and border strength which may be weak when borders are flexible and permeable, while borders that do not permit blending of work and non-work domains are sought to be strong.

Matthews and Barness-Farrell (2010) provided additional definition of the flexibility of work-family boundaries as an opportunity to move between these two domains, as well as, readiness to engage in transitions from one to another domain. Accordingly, they explained these two distinct aspects as flexibility ability and flexibility willingness. Further, the authors suggested more concrete definition of boundary permeability, not as a possibility of the individuals to involve in a role from one domain while they are present in another domain, but as a frequency by which individuals actually move from one to another domain, i.e., frequency with which domains came into mutual contact labelled as an inter-domain transitions (Matthews and Barness-Farrell, 2010).

Boundary management

As was cited in Ashford et al. (2000), people may manage boundaries of work, family and other life domains differently, i.e., ranging from strongly expressed segmentation (meaning high contrast in role identities, inflexibility and impermeability of role boundaries) to high integration (that is, low contrast in role identities, flexible and permeable role boundaries). However, these characteristics of boundary segmentation/integration may not be expressed at the same level for work and family (or non-work) domains, as family domain could be more flexible than work domain, or work domain could be more permeable in comparison to family domain (Allen et al., 2014). Further, segmentation/integration of boundary roles may be seen as an individual's preference to merge work and family roles or preference to retain the roles detached (Allen, 2013), unlike the degree to which the individuals actually keep

work and family domains separate which refers to segmentation/integration enactment (Allen et al., 2014).

Kossek and Lautsch (2012) have defined boundary management styles as the approach individuals use to demarcate boundaries and to regulate attendance of work and family domains. On the basis of following three characteristics cross-role interruption behaviours (work to non-work domain and non-work to work domain), identity centrality of work and family roles, and perceived boundary control, Kossek et al. (2012) reported on six boundary management profiles among employees on a managerial position. Namely, applied cluster analysis identified 6 clusters of individuals manifesting various patterns of work-family boundary management: job/work warriors cluster consisted of work-centric individuals, with low boundary control, and asymmetrical interruption activities where work interrupt non-work domain, but not the reverse; reactors referred to dual-centric integrators with low control over the boundaries, but high symmetry of cross-role interruption actions; family guardians were study participants with family-centric identity, asymmetrical interruption of non-work domain to work domain, but not vice versa); fusion lovers consisted of dual-centric integrators with tendency to high interruptions in both directions; cluster of dividers denoted to dual-centric separators demonstrating low cross-role interruption actions; non-work-eclectics was the last cluster of individuals who reported high identity with other life domains and high symmetry of cross-role interruptions (Kossek et al., 2012). Capitano et al. (2017) taking into consideration work, home and military role salience in a sample of marine reservists found that role identity salience in one life domain contribute to preference of permeability of another domains, i.e. individuals with greater role identity salience in one domain were motivated to perform that role in other life domains considering.

Bulger et al. (2007) in their study conducted on a sample of workers in various organizations applied two-step cluster analysis and identified four clusters implying to different boundary management styles. That is, cluster 1 consisted of individuals with high work-family integration expressing higher permeability of work and family domains, as well as higher ability and willingness to flex boundaries of these domains; individuals in the second cluster reported higher ability and willingness to flex work domain, higher ability to flex family domain, and lower permeability of the boundaries of both domains, and accordingly were given neutral place on the segmentation/integration continuum; individuals in cluster three were placed in the middle of the segmentation/integration continuum showing average tendency to flex and transit between the two domains; cluster four consisted of individuals who were close to the segmentation end of the continuum scoring higher on work boundary permeability, as well as, ability and willingness to flex work domain, but lower on permeability, and ability and willingness to flex non-work domain. Considering study findings, authors have assumed that boundary management not necessarily denotes segmenting or integrating both domains at the same

time, but that segmentation and/or integration behaviours are characteristic for each domain separately.

Recent research on work-non-work boundary management during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed new insight into mandatory work from home practices and work-family/life boundary management. Besides positive aspects of work-from-home during the pandemic, i.e., flexible work arrangements, more autonomy, and better work-life balance, weaknesses such as distractions and blur of work-life roles were registered, as well (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). Kossek et al. (2020) have stated that remote work could facilitate management of work-family domains particularly among women in academia, but also might contribute to interruptions, process loss due to frequent switch from one task to another, extended work availability which consequently might be harmful for health and family and may lead to burnout. Another study conducted among academics showed that work from home as a mandatory way of working during the pandemic led to increased permeability with frequent transitions between work and home roles, but reduced flexibility of work and home domain boundaries (Adisa et al., 2022).

Aim of the present study

The aim of this exploratory study was to identify work-family management boundary profiles on the base of four work-family boundary flexibility dimensions, and two types of work-family transitions, employed for demarcation/distinction between these two domains.

Namely, following variables were investigated to recognize how teachers manage their roles in work and family domains: a) *work flexibility ability*, and b) *family flexibility ability* indicating the degree to which an employee's perceive they are able to move freely between work-family and family-work domains, respectively, c) *work flexibility willingness*, and d) *family flexibility willingness* denoted as the degree to which an employee is motivated to move between work-to-family and family-to-work domains (Matthews & Barness-Farrell, 2010); e) *work-to-family transition*, and f) *family-to-work transition* stated in terms of number of cognitive and physical moves from work to family domain, and from family to work domain, respectively (Matthews et al. 2010). In addition, identified clusters of boundary management were compared in regard to sex, age, number of children, work position, work and life satisfaction, as well as work-family conflict.

Method

Sample and procedure

The sample consisted of 143 participants (female=99, mean age=42.50±9.74 years), teachers at university (n=44), secondary (n=75) and primary schools (n=24) in the Republic of N. Macedonia, all full time employed. Of them, 111 (70.60%) reported they have been married. Considering the number

of children, 58.7% reported having 2 children, 20.3% and 15.4% informed on 1 and no child, respectively, while 1 participant reported having 3 children.

Study participants were explained that their participation in the study is voluntary and anonymous, that their responses will stay confidential and used in research purposes only. Questionnaires were completed for approximately 15 minutes.

Measures

Measure of boundary flexibility of work and family domains (Matthews et al., 2010) was used to assess work flexibility ability (4 items), work flexibility willingness (4 items), family flexibility ability (5 items), and family flexibility willingness (6 items) as characteristics of the flexibility of work and family borders. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree with higher score indicating strongly expressed ability and willingness to flex work and family domain, respectively.

Internal consistency coefficients ranged from 0.86 for family flexibility willingness subscale to 0.74 of work flexibility ability subscale (Matthews et al., 2010). Cronbach alpha reliability of the work flexibility ability, work flexibility willingness, family flexibility ability, and family flexibility willingness subscales registered on this study sample were $\alpha=0.85$, $\alpha=0.83$, $\alpha=0.76$, and $\alpha=0.89$, respectively.

Work-family transitions scale (Matthews et al., 2010) was administered to measure frequency of transitions between work and family domains. The scale consisted of 11 items (6 items aimed to assess work-to-family transitions and 5 items intended to evaluate number of transitions from family to work domain). Study participants were asked to rate their responses on a 6-point Likert scale from 0-never to 5-five or more days per week. Higher score indicated more frequent transition from one domain to another. Cronbach alpha reliability of work-to family and family-to work transitions reported by the authors was .78 and .75, respectively. Internal consistency coefficients found in this study were $\alpha=0.85$ for work-to-family transitions and $\alpha=0.59$ for family-to-work transitions.

Work-family conflict scale (Grzywacz et al., 2006) was used to assess frequency of experiencing work-family conflict, i.e., work interference with family (3 items), and family interference with work (3 items). The responses were given on a 6-point scale from 0-never to 5-five or more days per week. As reported by the authors of the scale, Cronbach alpha reliability was .93 for work interference with family and .88 for family interference with work. The maximum single value across each three item set was used to create our work interference with family and family interference with work variables that were used in all analyses. In this study, Cronbach alpha reliability of work-family conflict was found to be $\alpha=0.87$, while its value for family-to-work conflict was $\alpha=0.79$.

Life satisfaction was measured with widely used *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985) consisted of 5 statements scored on a 7-point Likert

scale from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree. Higher score indicated highly expressed satisfaction with life in general. Reported Chronbach alpha reliability was 0.87, while the value of this coefficient registered in the current study was 0.78.

Data analysis

All study variables were described using mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score. Two-step cluster analysis was applied to identify boundary management styles among study participants. This type of cluster analysis does not require pre-defined number of clusters which is desirable feature in the clustering (Chiu et al., 2001) and was found to have advantages over widely used k-means clustering and hierarchical clustering (Bacher, 2004). Accordingly, in the first, pre-clustering step, study participants were grouped into sub-clusters on the base of Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion. All variables in the analysis were continuous, and its scores were standardized (transformed in z scores). In the second step the clusters were automatically identified. To further describe the identified clusters/boundary management patterns, cluster membership was explored in regard to sex, age, job position, number of children, as well as job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and work-family conflict performing nonparametric tests (chi-square and Mann-Whitney test).

Results

Two-step cluster analysis identified two clusters, that is, two work-family boundary management patterns. Descriptive statistics of the cluster membership are presented in table 1. As seen, it was revealed that participants in the first cluster scored below average on work flexibility ability and on average considering work flexibility willingness, above the average on family flexibility willingness and relatively higher on family flexibility ability. They reported very low frequency of transitions from work to family domain, and occasional family-to-work transitions. Participants clustered in the second subgroup showed high ability and willingness to flex work, they scored relatively high on family flexibility willingness, expressed strong ability to flex family boundary domain, with occasional moves from work to family domain and slightly more frequent transitions from family to work.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and test of difference of cluster membership

Variables		N	M	SD	F
WFA	Cluster 1	91	2.41	.93	171.003***
	Cluster 2	52	4.79	1.24	
	combined	143	3.27	1.56	
WFW	Cluster 1	91	3.07	1.22	96.427***
	Cluster 2	52	5.10	1.14	
	combined	143	3.81	1.54	

FFA	Cluster 1	91	4.88	1.14	8.871**
	Cluster 2	52	5.45	1.01	
	combined	143	5.09	1.12	
FFW	Cluster 1	91	4.14	1.34	1.448
	Cluster 2	52	4.42	1.31	
	combined	143	4.25	1.33	
WFT	Cluster 1	91	.53	.40	110.105***
	Cluster 2	52	1.68	.90	
	combined	143	.95	.84	
FWT	Cluster 1	91	1.63	.61	19.122***
	Cluster 2	52	2.15	.81	
	combined	143	1.82	.73	

Note: WFA-work flexibility ability, WFW-work flexibility willingness, FFA-family flexibility ability, FFW-family flexibility willingness, WFT-work-to-family transitions, FWT-family-to-work transitions

One-way ANOVA was performed to explore differences in cluster membership. The results (table 1) demonstrated that two clusters differ significantly in both work ability flexibility ($F(1,141)=171, p<.001$) and work flexibility willingness ($F(1,141)=96.43, p<.001$), as well as family flexibility ability ($F(1,141)=8.88, p<.01$), transitions from work to family ($F(1,141)=110.11, p<.001$) and family to work domain ($F(1,141)=19.12, p<.001$). Significant differences regarding family flexibility were not registered ($F(1,141) = 2.57, p>.05$).

Further analyses performed to investigate characteristics of both clusters showed that 82.7% of secondary school teachers and 87.5% of primary school teachers were grouped in cluster 1, while most of the university teachers (81.8%) tend to the cluster 2 ($\chi^2(1, N=143) = 56.93, p<.001$). Equal percentage of male (50%) and female (50%) study participants were distributed across clusters, however cluster 2 consisted predominantly (80.2%) of female participants ($\chi^2(1, N=143) = 14.19, p<.001$) (from the aspect of sex, higher proportion of men were distributed in cluster 1, whereas most of the women tended to cluster 2). Number of children and cluster membership did not relate significantly ($\chi^2(2, N=135) = .02, p>.05$). Participants in two clusters were found to differ in job satisfaction ($U=1779, z=-2.65, p<.01$), and family-to-work conflict ($U=1402, z=-3.35, p<.01$), differences in regard to life satisfaction ($U=2165, z=-.64, p>.05$), work-to-family conflict ($U=1969, z=-1.39, p>.05$), and age ($U=2156.5, z=-.27, p>.05$) were not registered.

Discussion

This exploratory study aimed to present initial finding on work-family boundary management styles among teachers in university, secondary and primary education. In addition, characteristics in regards to job position, sex,

age, and number of children, work satisfaction, life satisfaction, and work-family conflict of identified clusters were investigated.

Two-step cluster analysis revealed two clusters/profiles of boundary management. Cluster 1 was characterized with moderated control over work-family boundaries, whereas cluster 2 implied to reactive profile with pliable and permeable boundaries of work and family domains. Following the descriptions of management styles identified in previous studies and given in the text above, it could be assumed that individuals in the cluster 1 tend to the mid-point in the work-family separation/integration continuum, whereas individuals in the cluster two inclined to the integration part in this continuum. They showed stronger ability to flex both work and family/private life domain boundaries, and reported higher motivation to flex work domain in order to meet family responsibilities in comparison to individuals in the first cluster.

Further findings revealed more expressed family-to-work conflict among study participants in the cluster 2. In regard to this, higher readiness to flex work role and more frequent work-to-family transitions among participants in cluster 2 if compared to their colleagues in cluster 1, might be seen as a possible explanation for reporting higher interference of family with work. More specifically, participants who preferred integration of family with work and who actually moves from work to family domain more frequently, experienced higher degree of family-to-work conflict which is in line with Kossek et al. (2006) finding. However, the preference to integrate work with family along with actual family-to-work transitions, were not accompanied with experience of work-to family conflict. Study conducted by Carlson et al. (2015) showed that family-to-work boundary management transitions correlated to greater levels of work-family conflict. In addition, Derks et al. (2016) have reported that more frequent use of smartphones for job related activities during off-job time was related to reduced work-family conflict which in turns led to better family role performance among integrators.

Further, this study finding might be seen in light to the conclusion that segmentation/integration approach operated differently in work and family domains (Bulger et al., 2007). Recent study on boundary management preferences and boundary management behaviour revealed that work-nonwork and non-work-work segmentation behaviour were differently related to well-being and that boundary management preferences mediated this relationship (Reinke et al., 2022). In addition, boundary management preferences were the strongest predictor of individuals' boundary management actions (Palm et al., 2020; Reinke et al., 2022). Kossek and Lautsch (2012) assumed that organizational work-family climate play direct role in boundary management styles and moderated their relationship to work-family conflict.

Besides greater family-to-work conflict, participants in cluster 2 reported significantly stronger work satisfaction in comparison to participants in cluster 1, but differences in life satisfaction were not found. In addition, cluster 2 was predominantly consisted of university teachers. Their work might

be considered as more autonomous and more flexible than work of teachers in secondary and primary schools, and consequently to contribute to work satisfaction along with perceived job control and motivation to flex between work-family domains. Similarly, Daniel & Sonnentag (2016) study revealed that perceived flexibility suppliers, permeability preference were associated with job satisfaction, while work-to-family enrichment mediated this relationship.

This study presented preliminary findings on work-family boundary management profiles among teachers identified using two-step cluster analysis. However, the results were obtained on a relatively small convenient sample, so future studies should be conducted using bigger sample. It could be useful to compare management boundary profiles across various professions. Also, future studies should be focused on management boundaries profiles, particularly work-family integration enactment, and well-being (e.g., Wepfer et al., 2018). Hirschi et al. (2022) suggested to employ action regulation to better understand work-family boundary management, while Allen & French (2023), among others research topics on work-family issues, recommended exploration of remote work and boundary management, as well as management of work and family in real time.

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