



A model of work–life conflict and quality of employee–organization relationships (EORs): Transformational leadership, procedural justice, and family-supportive workplace initiatives

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ABSTRACT

This paper tested a new model of employee–organization relationships (EORs) by introducing types of work–life conflict as variables leading to EOR outcomes, and by investigating the possible effects of transformational leadership, procedural justice, and family-supportive workplace initiatives upon employees' perceptions of work–life conflict and relationships with their employers. Data were collected from a survey of 396 U.S. employees. Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) was adopted to address the multilevel structure of collected data. Time-based work–life conflict, individualized consideration, and procedural justice were found to be associated with quality of EORs significantly. Fair work–life policy-making procedures also significantly predicted perceived levels of work–life conflict.

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1. Introduction

Organization–public relationship (OPR) management has been widely used as a useful framework for public relations research, teaching, and practice (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001; Ledingham, 2003). Two extensively examined models of OPRs include (1) Broom, Casey, and Ritchey's (2000) model emphasizing perceptions, motives, needs, and behaviors as predictors of relationships and their consequences (p. 16), and (2) Grunig and Huang's (2000) model elaborating situational antecedents, relationship maintenance strategies, and relationship outcomes (p. 34). Nevertheless, the two models have not been extensively applied to employee publics (Freitag & Picherit-Duthler, 2004; McCown, 2007). One important research direction that has not been fully developed is new models of relationships integrating variables that can impact the development of relationships between organizations and their strategic employees (Kim, 2007).

Managing work–life conflict has become a critical and highly salient challenge for employees and employers in the 21st century (Ellin, 2003). Public relations researchers have recognized the significance of work–life conflict for organizations and revealed the conflict as a critical gap in scholarship (Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, & Sha, 2008). Aldoory et al. qualitatively examined public relations professionals' perceptions, narratives, and coping strategies. They called for studies that can quantify work–life conflict and further explore its potential contribution to public relations theory building.

Employees' immediate supervisors' supportive leadership behaviors may be one type of organizational responsiveness associated with work–life issues (Allen, 2001). Public relations scholars have suggested that leaders in effective organizations perform transformational leadership styles (Jin, 2010). Moreover, scholars have called for research examining the variables related to “managers' behaviors” that could potentially mitigate work–life conflict (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998,

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p. 119). “Any organizational attempts to improve [work–life] issues will be neutralized if employees’ supervisors are not supportive of them” (Judge & Colquitt, 2004, p. 397). Thus, it is important to investigate supportive transformational leadership behaviors of employees’ direct supervisors as a possible *non-content based* and *intangible structural* solution in the workplace.

Employees rely on their perceptions of organizational justice to infer the extent to which they should hold their organizations responsible for the outcomes they receive (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), for instance, their experiences of high levels of work–life conflict. Organizations with unfair procedures and policies probably contribute to the interference of work with nonwork life (Tepper, 2000). In addition, considerable research has documented the deleterious effects of unfairness on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, cooperativeness, citizenship behaviors, job performance, turnover, and stress (Schminke, Ambrose, & Cropanzano, 2000).

Family-supportive workplace initiatives have been examined as an important type of *content based and tangible* organizational responsiveness geared toward mitigating the negative consequences of high work–life conflict (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Frone, 2003). One of the most widely esteemed magazines, *Working Mother Magazine* has consistently used childcare (e.g., company sponsored full-time centers on/near site), flexibility (e.g., access to work at home/telecommuting), and personal leave (e.g., job-guaranteed weeks off for childbirth) as the top three criteria in its yearly ranking of 100 best companies to work for.

To address the aforementioned gaps and issues in public relations research, this study elaborates a model of employee–organization relationships (EORs) by introducing time-based and strain-based work–life conflict as variables leading to EOR outcomes, and by investigating the possible effects of transformational leadership, organizational procedural justice, and family-supportive workplace initiatives upon employees’ perceived work–life conflict and relationships with their employers.

2. Conceptualization

2.1. Quality of employee–organization relationships (EORs)

EORs is regarded as one type of organization–public relationships (OPRs). In an EOR, the behaviors of one party result in consequences upon the other in different states of the relationship (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001). Distinct from its antecedents and consequences, an EOR is dynamic and can be measured using perceptions of either or both parties regarding four “indicators representing the quality of [Employee–Organization] relationships” or “relationship outcomes¹”, i.e., satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality (Grunig & Huang, 2000, p. 42) at specific points of time.

2.2. Work–life conflict

Many employees find that the requirements from their work and the obligations from their personal life are very often incompatible and thus cause some degree of work–life conflict (Reynolds, 2005). Work–life conflict can be classified as time-based and strain-based. Time-based work–life conflict refers to the situation that time committed to duties in work makes it physically difficult for an individual to perform activities required by his or her nonwork roles (Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980). For instance, a scheduled business meeting may interfere with a child’s school event (Grant-Vallonea & Ensherb, 2001). As strain-based work–life conflict entails, employees, when being psychologically preoccupied with work, are unable to fully comply with those commitments in their non-work roles (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996). An example is when a social worker fails to rescue an abused woman from her dangerous marriage, he or she might go back home stressed out and become preoccupied with the frustration (Lambert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar, Jennings, & Baker, 2006).

2.3. Transformational leadership

Compatible with the essence of two-way symmetrical communication, transformational leadership emphasizes participative management, individual empowerment, negotiation, sharing of information and power in the workplace (Aldoory, 1998), and therefore can help organizations cultivate relationships with their employees. Transformational leadership is made up of the following four components/dimensions: (1) idealized influence (charisma), (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration² (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Chemers, 1997).

¹ According to Hon and Grunig (1999), satisfaction is how favorably one party feels toward the other when its expectations have been lived up to in the relationship. Trust refers to the degree of confidence that one party in an employee–organization relationship has in the other party and one’s willingness to be open to the other. Commitment reflects the degree to which each party realizes that the particular employee–organization relationship is worth spending energies to cultivate. Finally, control mutuality denotes the extent to which the parties in an employee–organization relationship agree on who is authorized to exercise control over others.

² According to Chemers (1997), idealized influence (charisma) indicates that followers perceive their leaders as trustworthy, capable of establishing a vision, and able to motivate them to accomplish the vision. With inspirational motivation, leaders can transcend self-interests and goals of individuals and achieve their high commitment toward a highly inspiring common vision. Being intellectually stimulating, transformational leaders not only encourage

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