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Where is the missing piece of the work-family conflict? The work-[pet]family conflict

Abstract

The importance of work-family conflict has been recognized for both personal and organizational outcomes. However, so far, the inclusion of pets under the umbrella of work-family conflict has been largely ignored. Considering the increasing relevance of pets for modern families it is time to define a new concept that is rising: the work-pet-family conflict. This theoretical manuscript seeks to explain the rise of work-[pet]family conflict and to define it. It also highlights how work-[pet]family conflict should be studied in the future and its importance to deepen the understating of the intersection between pets and organizational practices.

Keywords: pets; human-animal interactions; pet-friendly practices; work-[pet]family conflict.

Introduction

“The love for all living creatures is the most noble attribute of man.” - Charles Darwin

Work-family conflict has been recognized as one of the biggest concerns for both families and organizations (e.g., Byron, 2005) as it has been proven to be a crucial predictor of health impairments (e.g., stress), decreases in the quality of interpersonal relationships, lower performance rates, and organizational identification and in the long run increases in turnover rates (e.g., Fellows et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2019). For that

reason, many researchers have devoted efforts to improving the understating of the role that work-family conflict has on both work and personal life (see Michel et al., 2011).

Work-family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict that creates tension with family or personal life goals and tends to occur when the energy, time, or behavioral job demands collates with personal life duties or responsibilities (Kossek & Lee, 2017). Due to its broadness, it impacts work-related outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and motivation, organizational identification, and turnover), family-related outcomes (e.g., marital and family satisfaction), and personal outcomes that may include both physical (e.g., eating and exercise behaviors or physical symptoms) and mental health (e.g., stress, depressive or anxiety symptoms, life satisfaction, happiness).

Despite the wide range of studies that explored work-family conflict there is still a missing piece in the work-family conflict puzzle: the inclusion of pets. Pets are increasingly receiving attention from scholars as they have recognized their importance for numerous family and personal outcomes (e.g., happiness or mental health; Junça-Silva, 2023). Further, recently a call for studies has been made by Kelemen and colleagues (2020) who emphasized the need for investigating the intersection of pets and organizational life. Similarly, Pina e Cunha et al. (2019), in their theoretical work, suggested that dogs could be an indicator of organizational diversity as pet-friendly practices could enhance employees' well-being and performance. Further, Hannah and Robertson (2017) highlighted that pets had a limited presence in organization theory. All in all, this limits the comprehension of how pets may affect organizational life and thereby their inclusion in strategic management.

As such, guided by the fact that the number of families with pets has significantly increased (Bowen et al., 2020) and that the social representation of them is changing (Junça-Silva, 2022a), this study aims to demonstrate that pets are a relevant

piece of work-family conflict and that such piece is missing in the literature. There is the need to incorporate pets under the umbrella of work-family conflict because it would represent accurately the way employees experience work-family conflict and how it influences personal and organizational outcomes. Consequently, this paper seeks to define work-[pet]family conflict, illustrate a future research agenda and highlight how it could be integrated into the organizational literature.

The construct of work-family conflict

The recent societal and work trends such as increased use of technology, cross-national work, and dual-earner couple households, have pointed out that work-family conflict is a prominent societal concern (Duxbury et al., 1994; French & Johnson, 2016; Shockley et al., 2017). Furthermore, its relevance has been strongly recognized by researchers and practitioners (e.g., Allen et al., 2000) due to its negative impact on several outcomes, such as happiness, job satisfaction, turnover, or absenteeism (Byron, 2005).

Work-family conflict occurs when work interferes with family life (Frone et al., 1997). This construct has its roots in conflict theory; accordingly, the theory suggests that work and family domains are somewhat incompatible due to their different norms, responsibilities, and activities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Further, the incompatible norms, responsibilities, and activities of both work and family domains interfere with each other provoking a negative spillover of one domain to the other (Byron, 2005).

Spillover has been frequently used as an umbrella term to explain the effect of experiences in one domain (e.g., work) on another one (e.g., family; Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020). However, even though some researchers used the term spillover to refer to work-family conflict (e.g., Wayne et al., 2017) it might not completely cover the entire

process of work-family conflict. Spillover is a process in which some experiences or events occurring in one domain (e.g., affect at work) influences similar experiences in other domains (e.g., affect experienced in the family domain) (DeBaylo & Michel, 2022). Yet, the work-family conflict goes beyond that because it implies not only a transference of mood or affect but a conflict between the work and the family roles provoking pressure and triggering incompatibility between both (e.g., having to work late and failing to help the kids with homework) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Hence, the key difference between spillover and conflict relies on the fact that when conflict exists it will decrease the individual's performance in one role, at the cost of a good performance in the other role.

Work-family conflict includes three categories: time, strain, and behavior (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). First, time-based conflict exists when time devoted to one role creates incompatibility to perform the other role; for instance, having to work at night may limit the time needed to dedicate to family activities. Second, strain-based conflict occurs when experienced strain in one role interferes and shapes behaviors in the other role; for instance, when a demanding workday triggers higher levels of distress that leave the individual emotionally exhausted to be involved in family activities. At last, behavior-based conflict is defined as the conflict between required behaviors in different roles that are incompatible and, as such, the option for one role will frustrate expectations from the other role (Carlson et al., 2000); for instance, when employees have to accomplish their goals and it implies the abdication of familiar activities.

Even though this three-typology is more used by researchers, other authors suggested a new form of work-family conflict, the energy-based conflict (Adams et al., 1996; Greenhaus et al., 2006). Adams et al. (1996) suggested that energy was a crucial resource that when spent to perform one role, could lead to decreased levels to perform

the other role. Hence, when employees spend too much energy to perform one role, it can deplete the needed energy to perform the other roles. Although some scholars defend that energy is a different subset of work-family conflict, most researchers consider that time and energy-based conflict are combined in the same subset (Grandey et al., 2005). So, the most consensual typology is the three-dimensional one.

Work-family conflict has changed over time (Allen et al., 2020; Byron, 2005; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Yet, to date, no work has included pets in the umbrella term of work-family conflict which limits its understanding and how it may impact employees' lives. Indeed, without including all the family members one may not be capturing accurately the existing conflict between work roles and familiar ones. Therefore, we believe it is evident that there is a need to expand the conceptualization of work-life conflict to fit more closely to the reality of modern families, as well as to be more representative of conflict experienced by employees.

Evidence for work-[pet]family conflict

Companion animals, or pets, are an integrated part of modern life (Kelemen et al., 2020). Indeed, modern families have changed how pets are represented as they tend to consider them as cherished family members, friends, and even pillars of emotional support (Junça-Silva, 2023). These changes were also repercussed in the way families treat their pets, as they tend to fully include them in their daily routines – and not only in the home domain. All in all, pets are increasingly playing an important role in employees' work-family dynamics (Kelemen et al., 2020).

The integration of pets in organizational life has given its first steps recently as some scholars emphasized their importance in employees' daily lives (Pina-Cunha et al.,

2019). For instance, the pet-effect hypothesis advocated by Herzog (2011) argues that the presence of a pet may buffer against the experience of negative affect and enhance the intensity of positive affective experiences. As a result, organizations started to recognize them as valuable resources able to shape their employees' behaviors and attitudes (Junça-Silva, 2023a, b; Sousa et al., 2022). Indeed, pet-friendly workplaces or pet-friendly practices are becoming increasingly adopted by organizations all over the world (Sousa et al., 2022; Wells & Perrine, 2001). These practices aim to influence employees' work behavior (e.g., performance) and their health, and improve employer branding as it positively shapes the organization's image which in turn supports talent recruitment and retention, reduces absenteeism and at the same time improves productivity (Linacre, 2016; Wilkin et al., 2016).

Moreover, some studies have shown that pet owners tend to report high concerns with their pets throughout the workday, particularly when they have to leave them for many hours alone (Wilkin et al., 2016). Further, pet owners often describe these concerns as distractors from work and predictors of distress (Wells & Perrine, 2001). This may explain why pet owners are at the top of the list of those who prefer to telework (Junça-Silva, 2022a); as explained by Junça-Silva (2023) telework is a pet-friendly practice that reduces daily concerns with pets, improves employees' concentration on their tasks and supports their work-life balance. Hence, pet-friendly practices may be a well-suited strategy to enhance talent acquisition and retention, improve employee productivity and health as well as reduce their experienced work-life conflict (Pina-Cunha et al., 2019; Wilkin et al., 2016).

Even though pets are becoming more present in employees' lives and intersecting organizational daily routines, work-family conflict research has lagged behind these social trends. Hence, given this growing reality and its impact on

organizational and employees' lives it makes important to delineate a new concept that incorporates the inclusion of pets under the umbrella of work-family conflict – that is, the work-[pet]family conflict.

Work-[pet]family conflict occurs when work interferes with pet-family life or pet responsibilities. For instance, when employees have to work late and leave their pets home alone for many hours without taking them to assure their physiological needs. Work-[pet]family conflict also incorporates the three dimensions proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985): time, strain, and behavior. Time-based conflict occurs when the time dedicated to one role (e.g., work) will limit and impair the time needed to pet-family roles. For instance, when one is working and cannot take the pet to the veterinary when needed. Strain-based conflict is experienced when negative affect triggered by work hassles or job demands interfere with emotional availability to perform pet-family roles. For instance, when employees experience higher levels of distress at work that leaves them fatigued to be involved with their pets when they get home. Finally, behavior-based conflict occurs when one needed behavior on one domain limits employees' behaviors on another domain. For instance, when employees have to travel for work duties and at the same time have to leave their pets in hotels or alternatively with other family relatives (e.g., a brother or a sister).

Theoretical framework to explain work-[pet] family conflict

Even though the work-family conflict has its roots in role theory, resource theories and life-course approaches may explain it as well. The role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978) advocates that work-family conflict occurs when there is a perceived incompatibility of role demands between work and family and may be based on time, strain, or behavior (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Hence, role theory is focused on the perceived role conflict between different domains, work, and family. However, it is also

possible to include pets in the role theory as there may also occur a subjective role conflict between the work and the pet family domain.

From the conservation of resources perspective, individuals use coping strategies to protect their resources and avoid losses and when they fail to do it work-family conflict arouses as a source of distress (Hobfoll, 1989). The two central tenets of the conservation of resources theory are that (1) individuals seek to protect and acquire resources but (2) when they lose resources or perceive not gaining more resources, stress is triggered (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory also argues that resource loss has a stronger negative effect on employees when compared to resource gain (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Hence, from this perspective when employees exert effort to balance job demands and familiar ones, they may lose resources, such as time and energy, which can make them feel distressed by the experience of work-family conflict (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Likewise, when employees try to balance job demands and pet-family ones, if they lose resources to accomplish it, work-[pet]family conflict may arise in the form of distress. To sum up, conserving and acquiring resources is a coping strategy that protects employees from experienced work-family conflict (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Furthermore, the theory argues that employees exert effort to protect valuable resources such as relations with quality (even including pets). Hence, when employees fail to establish a balance between their job role and the pet-family role, they will likely experience work-[pet]family conflict.

Work-family conflict has also been explained by the life-course perspective (Elder, 1998). The life-course approach contributes to explain how work-family conflict is triggered as it suggests that historical, social, and family contexts influence how job and family lives are experienced (Kossek & Lee, 2017). On one hand, this approach suggests that there are differences between employees' generations; while, the eldest's

value the “unique” job on their life a work to have a career in one organization, youngsters value other aspects of their career, such as job security, organizational trust, flexibility, telework and emphasize work-family balance as a crucial benefit in their lives (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). For instance, younger generations – those who tend to have pets and consider them as family members (Sousa et al., 2022) – tend to seek flexible working arrangements as it promotes them the time to dedicate to their pet-family (e.g., avoiding leaving them for so many hours alone; Junça-Silva, 2023), which in turn, may reduce their work-[pet]family. On the other hand, the life-course perspective advocates that transition – the evolution of the family over time – suggests that different family stages have different family demands (Elder, 1998). These stages, in turn, will likely influence work-family conflict differently. For instance, pet owners who have to take care of older pets, pets with health-related needs, or pets with need of medication during the workday, will likely feel more stress or anxiety when they have to leave them alone for longer hours, when compared to employees who have healthy pets on their own. When this happens, stress occurs as a result of the work-[pet]family conflict. Hence, there may exist crucial (pet)family contexts that may be more likely trigger work-[pet]family conflict. All in all, both generation’ preferences and motivational needs as well as the family context will amplify or buffer the relationship between job demands and work[pet]-family conflict.

Overall, these three theoretical perspectives may thereby be used as suitable frameworks to explain the rise of work-[pet]family conflict. Even though they encompass specificities, they may contribute to a better understanding of this new concept.

A Future Research Agenda

Pets are increasingly being valued by modern families who see them as family members (Junça-Silva, 2023). Further, organizations are starting to recognize their importance and are delineating strategies to include them in their formal managerial strategies (Kelemen et al., 2020; Wilkins et al., 2016). However, to date, the inclusion of pets under the umbrella of work-family conflict has been ignored. As such, there are directions that should guide future studies on this topic. First, no form of measurement that includes work-pet-family has been posited. Thus, future studies should create, and validate a measure that would capture the experience of work-[pet] family conflict.

Considering the absence of knowledge regarding how employees experience the conflict between their job roles and their pet-family ones, future studies should focus on developing knowledge on this societal trend. Moreover, there should be a focus on both employee outcomes (including, for instance, stress, health, or well-being) but also organizational ones (including, for instance, productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism, or turnover rates).

At last, future studies should explore potential predictors of work-[pet]family conflict. Understanding which factors can stimulate this conflict would allow scholars and managers to an effective strategy delineation aimed to eliminate or reduce such factors.

Conclusions

In summary, pets appear to have a large impact on organizations and employees' lives and as such the concept of work-[pet]family conflict is of crucial importance when one wants to deeply understand the impact of the interference between work and pet-family roles. We expect that more studies on this topic arise, to help construe a clearer

understanding of the work-[pet]family conflict, its antecedents, and consequences.

Thus, improving the understanding of it, it will help organizations to delineate effective strategies to support their employees' work-[pe]family balance.

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