

Work and Nonwork Boundary Integration through a Person-Environment Fit Lens: The Introduction of Work-Nonwork Boundary Fit

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Introduction

Over the last decades, work-life balance and integrating work and non-work domains gained a lot of interest. The growing interest in the reconciliation of work and family domains can be attributed to some societal and technological changes. First, changes in the division of labor and the allocation of family responsibilities occurred over the past several years (Marks, 2006). The disappearing of traditional single-earner households – due to an increase of women in the labor market - and the raise of dual-career couples and single-parent households implies a shift in responsibilities for work, household and childcare (Byron, 2005). Consequently, both male and female employees have significant family responsibilities in addition to their work responsibilities (Allen, 2001). Due to these changes employees need to juggle the competing demands of both work and nonwork domains. Second, new communication technologies (e.g. smartphones) allow for an increased availability for work and non-work purposes (Peters, den Dulk, & Van der Lippe, 2009) and blur the boundaries between work and family domains (Schieman & Young, 2013). Together, these phenomena made that work can become increasingly blurred with nonwork domains (Ammons, 2013), which makes the reconciliation of work and nonwork domains a major challenge.

In response to this challenge, organizations have redesigned their ways of working in order to meet employee demands in today's diverse workforce (Allen, 2001). First, organizations offer work-life policies intended to ease the combination of work and family domains (e.g. flexible work schedules, telecommuting and childcare onsite). Second, new ways of working (e.g. telework) enable employees to work when and where they prefer, supported by electronic communication. The goal of new ways of working is to improve organizations' efficiency and competitive advantage through allowing flexibility in the way work is done and through empowering employees (Peters, Poutsma, van der Heijden, Bakker, Bruijn, 2014). Both work-life policies and new ways of working intent to (a) ease the reconciliation of work and nonwork domains, (b) reduce work-family conflict and (c) lead to favorable organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, low turnover intention, and an increase in performance (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Peters et al., 2014). New ways of working and work-life policies increase employees' availability and enable work to interrupt with family and family to interrupt with work. Consequently, flexibility and permeability between work and family domains increases, promoting an integration of both domains (Derks, Bakker, Peters, & van Wingerden, 2016). Hence, an increasing number of employees blend their work and nonwork domains (Kossek et al., 2012). Integration entails some positive consequences as it eases the transition between different domains (Ashford, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), is associated with positive spillover (Bulger, Matthews, & Hoffman, 2007; Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009) and is related to organizational commitment (Kirchmeyer, 1995). Yet,

integrating both roles is not always beneficial as it leads to role blurring (Allen, Cho, & Meier, 2014; Ashford et al., 2000) and hinders psychological detachment which is important for recovery and health (Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011). More important, studies which examined the relationship between integration and work-family conflict show that integration of work and nonwork roles is related to more work-family conflict (Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006; Schieman & Young, 2013). In sum, employees and organizations intent to ease the combination of work and nonwork domains but exacerbate rather than reduce the work-family conflict (Olsen-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

Insights from boundary theory can explain these contradicting results as it refers to how individuals draw the line between work and family roles in order to achieve work-family balance (Allen et al., 2014). Research on boundary preferences shows that individuals differ in the way their prefer to separate or integrate work and nonwork domains (e.g. Kreiner, 2006; Kossek et al., 2012). Segmentation refers to keeping the different domains cognitively, physically, or behaviorally separated from one another, whereas integration refers to merging and blending various aspects of work and home (Kreiner, 2006). Due to the availability of new ways of working and work-life practices, employees are encouraged to integrate work and nonwork domains. Yet, not all employees desire integration. Remarkably, few studies incorporated the interaction between individual boundary preference and environmental boundary supplies (e.g. Chen, Powell, & Greenhaus, 2009; Kreiner, 2006), which may account for the contradicting research findings. Thus, a person-environment fit approach that examines the congruence between preference and supplies may be a particular relevant lens for understanding the work-family interface. Despite the wealth of research on both the work-family interface and the person-environment fit approach, few attempts have been made to integrate these approaches.

Study Objectives

The goal of our PhD project is to apply a person-environment fit lens to the work-family interface. We believe that integration (or segmentation) is not detrimental or beneficial in itself, but the perceived fit between an individual's boundary preference and the opportunities offered by the work and nonwork domains is. We build on this reasoning and introduce the concept of '*Work-Nonwork Boundary Fit*' (WNWBF). Thus, high congruence (i.e. fit) between boundary preferences and work and nonwork supplies permits individuals to establish their desired combination of work and nonwork roles, which we believe results in positive outcomes for both individual and organization, as it allows employees to manifest their work personalities, helps them to fulfill their goals (Su, Murdock, & Rounds, 2015) and positively influences employees' attitudes towards the organization (Boon et al., 2011). When the work and nonwork domains provide too little or too much opportunities (i.e. misfit), strain increases (e.g. stress) as supplies exceed or fall short of needs (Edwards, 2005).

Scholars recognized that work and family domains are intertwined and constantly interacting with each other (Allen et al., 2014), yet an interactionist perspective is largely missing. Our research will enrich the work-family literature and boundary theory as we want to grasp the complexity of the work-family interface by acknowledging individual differences in segmentation and integration preference and consider the congruence. Moreover, we will broaden the family domain to the nonwork domain, as we consider all other life domains (e.g. home and leisure domain) and their

influence on perceived work-nonwork boundary fit. Moreover, an integration of work-family literature and person-environment fit enables us to move the fit-perspective beyond organizational boundaries. Jansen & Kristof-Brown (2006) already acknowledged the profound influence of nonwork aspects to employees' functioning in the workplace, yet PE-fit scholars' attention is still limited to organizational boundaries and therefore studied fit or misfit is limited to the work domain (Boon et al., 2011). We argue for advancing the PE-fit approach to a domain-crossing concept, where experiences from the work domain may impact the family domain and experiences from the family domain may impact the work domain. Hence, we will study (a) work (i.e. person-organization fit) and nonwork (i.e. person-private context fit) domains as antecedents of the fit perception and (b) work- and nonwork related outcomes of work-nonwork boundary fit. At last, we will enhance our understanding of fit as a multidimensional construct by examining the interrelatedness of different fit dimensions. The different dimensions reflect partial dependencies between environmental aspects and when combined, these dimensions reflect an overall fit perception (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). The impact of each fit dimension is determined by the salience of that specific dimension. Salience is hereby defined as the extent to which one dimension is more prominent than another and is influenced by individual differences (e.g. personality), environmental differences (e.g. culture) and temporal stage of a person's work experience. As such, good fit with one salient dimension may compensate for the lack of fit with other less salient dimensions. However, we feel that the impact of one dimension on overall perceived PE fit remains unclear in today's fit research (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). We want to elaborate the idea of multifaceted fit by combining work-nonwork boundary fit with different types of fit (e.g. person-job) into one empirical study. This allows us to capture the role of work-nonwork boundary fit on the overall fit perception and study the interrelations between work-nonwork boundary fit and other fit dimensions.

In sum, we will introduce the concept of work-nonwork boundary fit as a moderating variable of the relationship between integration of work and nonwork domains and work- and nonwork-related outcomes. Hence, we consider fit to be a resource as it may decrease the negative effect of work and nonwork demands. Moreover, we will broaden the boundaries of person-environment fit and extend this approach to the nonwork context. We propose an interactionist perspective that (a) considers the influences of both work and nonwork domains as antecedents of work-nonwork boundary fit and (b) captures both the work and nonwork related outcomes. At last, we elaborate on the interrelatedness of the different fit dimensions and their influence on the overall fit perception.

We hope to gain some useful insights on our overall idea, our concept of work-nonwork boundary fit and our intended contributions to the fit-literature.

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