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Is Work-Family Balance Possible?

Dawn Carlson, PhD, K. Michele Kacmar, PhD, Joseph G. Grzywacz, PhD, Bennett Tepper, PhD, and Dwayne Whitten, DBA

Do you have a balanced work and family life? For many, this question is difficult to answer because the definition of “balance” varies. Regardless of the definition, it is clear that the demands of work can impact an individual’s quality of life and detract from time spent with family and friends.



Real estate professionals frequently experience this tension as they tailor work schedules around what is most convenient for clients. Often times, client meetings occur at the expense of nights and weekends. The daily “wear and tear” of an irregular work schedule can have a negative effect on productivity at work and the amount of energy left for family activities.

In recent years, work-family balance has emerged as a topic of increasing interest, but remains largely underdeveloped in terms of quantifying its effect on employees and organizations. It is becoming more apparent, though, that individual employees’ work-family balance can influence the overall productivity of a company (Lazar et al. 2010).

Our study demonstrates a relationship between work-family balance and organizational citizenship behavior (unsolicited positive behaviors beyond one’s normal job requirements), as well as positive affect (positive emotions) displayed in the workplace. Our work applies to the real estate industry in areas such as supervisor actions, workplace activities, and actions that propel organizational performance.

Background

Historically, studies on work-family balance have focused on the absence of work-family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Older studies suggest that if an individual is not experiencing a significant amount of negative interaction between work and family activities, he has obtained a reasonable work-family balance. More recent studies imply that work-family balance is actually the indirect mixture of work-family conflict as well as work-family enrichment, the ability of one role to improve the experience in another role (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Grzywacz and Carlson 2007). Thus, the modern definition of work-family balance is defined as *the combination of conflict and enrichment, where an individual experiences more enrichment than conflict* (Frone 2003).

To examine work-family balance, we focused on how *organizational citizenship behavior* (OCB) and *positive affect* (positive emotions) shape perceptions and behaviors related to work-family balance.

OCBs are shown to increase the effectiveness of a company as well as contribute to employee performance. These behaviors are linked more closely with the attitudes of an employee because they describe deliberate actions taken that are not job requirements. An example of an OCB would be an agent noticing trash in the company parking lot on her way to a client call. An agent not displaying OCBs might leave the trash clean up to the custodial service, while an agent displaying OCB might recognize the impact of a “trashy parking lot” on the perception of her company, leading her to pick up the trash and throw it away.

When studying employee engagement and work place motivation, theory suggests that value is added to an organization when positive emotions are associated with the way people interact with their physical and social world (Fredrickson 1998; 2001). An agent who experiences positive interactions with his or her office environment is more likely to perform behaviors that reflect an engaged attitude in work activities. In fact, other studies have shown that autonomy has contributed to positive growth in worker engagement and employee retention (de Lang, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, and Bongers 2003).

Lastly, the positive display of emotions is shown in our study to be the method through which work-family balance increases organizational citizenship behaviors. Others studies have been conducted that show that those who exhibit work-family balance are more resilient to daily stressors (Grzywacz, Butler, and Almeida 2008). The positive emotions that are observable to others in a company are the most likely to create a positive spiral of engagement that ultimately benefits an organization (Fredrickson 1998; 2001).

Our Study

We surveyed 75 supervisors and 205 subordinate employees from a broad range of organizations. All candidates were college graduates from two business schools in the southern U.S. Participants completed a questionnaire concerning work-family balance, positive affect in the workplace, as well as organizational citizenship behavior.

We found that when greater work-family balance was achieved, supervisors reported a larger number of citizenship behaviors performed by employees as well as positive affect demonstrated by those performing the behaviors. When employees were found to have a greater amount of work-family balance, they also carried a more positive attitude in the workplace and were more apt to perform duties outside of their typical job functions.

Implications for Real Estate Professionals

Understanding how this research translates to the real estate industry is important, given the potential for an agent to lose control of work-life balance. Supervisors and managers play an integral role in the promotion of work-family balance in the work place. Consider an agent that is struggling to attract business. Traditionally, the agent's manager might suggest that she spend more time engaging in lead-generating activities to increase leads and, ultimately, closed deals. Instead of suggesting more work, though, try taking her out to lunch and investing time to better understand potential work-life issues she may be experiencing. The more you know about your agents, the better you can manage their wants and needs. Consider these questions to better understand your agents more holistically: *what is weighing on your mind most heavily at work right now? What motivates you and makes you feel most valued in our organization? What are your primary motivations for work: money, family, etc.?*



Another way to promote genuine work-family balance is to incentivize performance with rewards and events that encourage more family time. Instead of rewarding actions with a small pay bump, purchase a “family night” package for your employees that includes a gift card for dinner and a movie for the entire family. Also, work-sponsored events like picnics promote an informal environment to connect with peers and managers. Informal social events can enhance an employee's

positive perception of work and family interaction. *When was the last time you encouraged your employees to spend time with their family? Are there opportunities for your employees to bring family members to company-sponsored events?*

Lastly, the promotion of work-family balance might be as simple as publicly praising an agent in a team meeting after observing positive teamwork behaviors with peers. Such a compliment might develop positive feelings and encourage further activities that are outside of that individual's job description. By rewarding desired actions, positive momentum is gained and organizational citizenship behaviors are more likely to occur.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study demonstrates that work-family balance can be an important piece in the overall effectiveness and productivity of an organization. For those managers in the real estate profession who are looking for ways to promote more organizational citizenship behaviors through positive affect, we believe the above suggestions are only the start of many ways you further engage your agents. As the trajectory of work demands increase, the importance of work-

family balance also increases. By focusing on activities that promote balance between work and family, an organization is able to achieve a more productive and positive work environment.

Recommended Reading

Carlson, D.S., K.M. Kacmar, J.G. Gryzwacz, B. Tepper, and D. Whitten (2013), "Work-Family Balance and Supervisor Appraised Citizenship Behavior: The Link of Positive Affect," *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, 14(2), 87-106.

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Dr. Carlson (PhD – Florida State University) is the H.R. Gibson Chair in Management Development in the Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University. Her interests include work-family research and other workplace issues such as abusive bosses and working mothers. She has published over 50 articles in journals such as *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and *Journal of Applied Psychology*. In 2009, Carlson won both the Outstanding Professor in Scholarship and Distinguished Professor awards from Baylor University. She also was awarded the Elizabeth Moss Kanter Award for Excellence in Work-Family Research in 2008. In 2014, Carlson won the Brent Clum Outstanding Research award from Baylor University.

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Dr. Grzywacz (PhD – University of Wisconsin-Madison) is the Kaiser Family Endowed Chair of Family Risk and Resilience at Oklahoma State University. Dr. Grzywacz is an interdisciplinary social scientist whose research focuses on human health, both the absence of illness or morbidity and the presence of human thriving. The primary focus of his research program is the health-implications of everyday work and family life. With over 10 years of ongoing support from the National Institutes of Health, he has studied the structural and psychosocial aspects of work and family that pose direct health threats. This focus is illustrated by research studies focused on nonstandard work schedules, flexible workplaces, and specific worker populations like immigrant workers and the "low wage" or "precarious" workforce. His publication "Work,

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Dr. Tepper (PhD – University of Miami) is a Professor of Management and Human Resources at Ohio State University. His research interests focus on employee health and well-being and the performance of prosocial and antisocial work behaviors. Tepper's research has been published in *The Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and *Personnel Psychology*. He has served on several editorial boards and is now completing a term as associate editor of *The Academy of Management Journal*. He is a fellow of the Southern Management Association, American Psychological Association, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

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Dr. Whitten (DBA – Louisiana Tech University) is a Clinical Associate Professor and Mays Teaching Fellow in the Department of Information and Operations Management at Texas A&M University. Dr. Whitten joined Texas A&M in the fall of 2005. Previously, Dr. Whitten worked as a programmer/analyst with Arkansas Systems, Inc., and as the Microcomputer Coordinator at Ouachita Baptist University (OBU). He later taught at OBU and Baylor University. His primary research interests are in the areas of IT outsourcing, IT security, and enterprise resource planning/supply chain management. He currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in computer networking and project management. Dr. Whitten's research can be found in *Harvard Business Review*, *Decision Sciences*, *Journal of Operations Management*, *MIS Quarterly Executive*, among others. Dr. Whitten is a member of the Decision Sciences Institute, Association for Computing Machinery, and Association for Information Systems.

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