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Work-Family Conflict as a Cause for Turnover Intentions in the Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

In this research, we analyze the relationship between work-family conflicts and the aspirations of highly educated workers to leave the hospitality business. The goal of this study was to examine how work-family conflict, lack of organizational support, and a lack of workplace flexibility affected the decision to quit among college-educated men and women in the hotel sector. Two hundred and forty-seven people from all across the globe participated in the study. The findings reveal that work-family conflict and organizational support may account for a substantial proportion of the observed variation in exit intentions among highly educated workers. This research also indicated that unhappiness with workplace flexibility and a lack of organizational support were two of the main causes of work-family conflict for women, whereas a lack of organizational support was the main cause for males. In addition, with respect to women, the research has revealed that organizational support has a moderating influence on the association between workplace flexibility and work- family conflict. This research demonstrates that keeping highly educated employees may be aided by fostering a positive work environment and providing the option of flexible work hours.

Keywords: turnover intentions; work-family conflict; workplace flexibility; organizational support; gender

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest problems in the hotel sector is keeping skilled workers. Highly educated workers are those who have completed a Bachelor's or Master's degree program at an accredited institution of higher learning (see, for instance, Hoque (1999a, 1999b), Reijnders (2003), and Blomme (2006)). Graduates in this field often begin their careers as assistant supervisors, a position typically held for three years. Most people are promoted to the middle management level after those three years. The most capable of them will be promoted to positions of more responsibility, such as general manager of a hotel or chain of hotels. Retaining highly educated individuals is difficult, according to two large-scale studies conducted among hotel sector workers (Walsh and Taylor, 2007; Blomme et al., 2008). More women than males quit the hotel sector at a certain age, according to these surveys. About two-thirds of male and female graduates who entered the business immediately after graduation are now employed there. However, in the age bracket 32-44 years, substantially more women than males have left the hotel industry: 61 per cent compared with 47 per cent (Blomme et al, 2008). Higher staffing costs (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000; Hillmer et al, 2005), a dwindling of the company's implicit knowledge base (Coff, 1997), a weakening of organizational competencies (Walton, 1985; Lado and Wilson, 1994; Blomme, 2003), and a corresponding loss of competitive advantage are all effects of high turnover rates among highly educated employees. Since women make up a sizable portion of the workforce (Riley, 1991; Charlesworth, 1994; Deery and Iverson, 1996), keeping highly educated employees (see also Hoque, 1999a, b; Walsh and Taylor, 2007) appears to be a major challenge for the hospitality industry. There are two elements to exiting the hotel business that are worth exploring. The first reason is that firms in the hospitality sector are losing highly educated workers. The second factor has to do with why people with advanced degrees quit the hotel business. Using the idea of turnover intention as a foundation, this study will investigate the factors that motivate workers in the hospitality industry to quit their current positions.

Hotels, restaurants, casinos, and tourism are all part of what is often called "the hospitality industry" (Brotherton and Wood, 2008). Global and worldwide hotel chains are what we mean when we talk about the hospitality business here (see Yu, 2008). Even if working in the hospitality business necessitates more feminine traits, it nevertheless displays male-coded value systems including long hours, public recognition, and career advancement. Working in the hotel sector means long days and nights, little job security, plenty of teamwork, and unpredictable schedules. Empirical study conducted by Deery and Shaw (1999) revealed mostly male organizational ideals in the hotel sector, particularly among management and personnel, which may explain why the aforementioned working circumstances persist.One way of investigating the reasons why employees – especially women - leave thehospitality industry is to view the problemfrom the perspective of occupational stress. Occupational stress is the transactional process in which stressors, events or properties of events encountered by individuals cause strain among individuals which will lead to outcomes at both an individual and organiza- tional level (Cooper *et al*, 2001, p. 14). Strainsare the individual's psychological, physical and behavioural responses to

stressors (Beehr and Franz, 1987; Beehr, 1998) and occur when environmental demands or constraints are perceived by a person as exceeding his or her resources or capacities (Lazarus and Folkman,1984). Scholars have found different stressors. For example, Parasuraman and Alutto (1984) suggest that there are three general categories of stressors: contextual, role-related and personal stressors. Summers *et al* (1995) havealso identified the following stressors: personal characteristics, structural organizational char- acteristics, procedural organizational charac- teristics and role characteristics. Cummins' (1990) review of the literature suggests that the most common causes for strain are role conflict and ambiguity, work overload, under-utilization of skills, lack of participation and resource inadequacy.

One specific aspect of occupational stress iswork-family conflict. Work-family conflict can be described as a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domain are mutually incompatible (Bellavia and Frone, 2005, p. 115). Work-family conflict as a theme has become more important in the research on occupational stress (for example, Bellavia and Frone, 2005).This growing importance is caused by societal developments such as the increase in the number of women entering the paid labour force (Fielden and Cooper, 2002), the increasein the number of dual-earner couples (Desmaraisand Alksnis, 2005), and as a consequence higher numbers of work hours completed by bothpartners (Batt and Valcour, 2003; Madsen,2003). Work-family conflict occurs in two directions: family can interfere with work andwork can interfere with family. Interrole conflict will lead to poor work-family balance,which may cause work-family conflict (Stoeva*et al*, 2002; Bellavia and Frone, 2005).Work- family conflict is bi-directional, which means that both affect each other indirectly through distress (Goldsmith, 2007). Also work seems to have a disruptive effect on family life rather than the other way round (Eagle *et al*,1997; Eby *et al*, 2005; Geurts *et al*, 2005). During the past few years, the number of work-family conflicts or family-work conflictsin western countries has increased dramatically, primarily among women but nowadays amongmen, too (Van der Lippe *et al*, 2006). An impor-tant antecedent for work-family conflict is workplace flexibility (Swanberg *et al*, 2008). Reducing work-family conflict will lead to a good work-family balance (Brough *et al*, 2009). In the hospitality industry, especially for women, poor work-family balance is a reason to leave the hospitality industry (Walsh and Taylor, 2007; Blomme *et al*, 2008). Hoque (1999a, b) argues that long hours, low job secu- rity, a high need for coordination with others and shift work at irregular hours are reasons why women find it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between work and family, andthis may lead to employee turnover. In this research study we will define work-family conflict as the harmful physical and psycho-logical responses such as fatigue, feelings of frustration and physical health that occur in thefamily domain when the requirements of the work domain do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of a person (see, for example, Goldsmith, 2007).

Bearing in mind the importance of an under-standing of employee turnover and in particular the turnover of female employees, the focusof this research study is on work-family con- flict and its relation with the intention to leave.Furthermore, we will focus on the role of workplace flexibility and organizational support and how these affect the relation between work-family conflict and the intention to leave.

PRESENT STUDY

Employee turnover has become an important research topic over the last 20 years (Blau andBoal, 1989; Hochwarter *et al*, 1995). To explain employee turnover in the hospitality industry, scholars have used perspectives such as organ-izational commitment (Walsh and Taylor, 2007), and the psychological contract (Blomme *et al*, 2008). Although the relationship betweenoccupational stress in general and turnover hasbeen researched in the health industry (Bedeian *et al*, 1983), in universities (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999) and management execu- tives (Hochwarter *et al*, 1995), not many research studies have examined the relationship between work-family stress and turnover in the hospitality industry (Deery, 2008). Work- family conflicts affect outcomes in the work domain. Work-family conflict emerging from the work domain have been associated with lower job satisfaction (Ayree *et al*, 1999; Anderson *et al*, 2002), higher rates of absen- teeism (Burke and Greenglass, 1999; Anderson *et al*, 2002) and employee turnover (Henly *et al*,2006). Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relation between work-family conflict and the turnover intentions of employees work-ing in the hospitality industry.

Exposure to work stressors is likely to lead to higher levels of work-family conflict (Major*et al*, 2002; Stoeva *et al*, 2002). Important workstressors which are positively related to work-family conflict are jobs that have unpre-dictable scheduling requirements (Henly *et al*, 2006; Lambert and Waxman, 2005), non- traditional working hours, including evenings,nights and rotating shifts (Presser, 2003) and minimal control over work hours (Golden and Wiens-Tuers, 2005; Swanberg *et al*, 2005).These job characteristics seem to be applicableto jobs in the hospitality industry. Swanberg*et al* (2008) argue that workplace flexibility isan important variable which influences the relationship between the work stressors describedabove and work-family conflict. Hence, we could argue that an increase in workplace flex-ibility will result in lower work-family conflictresulting in a reduction in employee turnover. Furthermore, Henly *et al* (2006) argue thatworkplace flexibility may have a direct nega- tive influence on employee turnover. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative relationbetween workplace flexibility and turno-ver intention with work-family conflict asa mediator.

Another predictor of turnover intention is organizational support. Organizational support is the employees' feeling that their orga- nization favours or is committed to them (Eisenberger *et al*, 1986). Building on the ideathat employment is the exchange of effort and loyalty for material or social rewards (Etzioni, 1961), Eisenberger *et al* (1986) developed the organizational support theory, that is, a social exchange approach in which employee inferences concerning the support offered by the organization result in employee attitudes and behaviours favourable or unfa- vourable to the organization. Based on thereciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) employeesare expected to have a feeling of obligation which motivates them to repay the commit- ment by helping the organization to reach its goals and objectives (Shore and Shore, 1995; Wayne *et al*, 1997; Maertz *et al*, 2007). Because research studies among female exec- utives (Jawahar and Pega Hemmasi, 2006) and store sales people (Allen *et al*, 2003) havestressed that a lack of organizational support may lead to an increase in turnover intention, we argue the same relationship for the hospi- tality industry. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: There is a negative relation- ship between organizational support and the turnover intentions of employees working in the hospitality industry.

Cooper *et al* (2001) indicate that organiza- tional support has a positive effect on the levelof well-being and occupational stress in general.Organizational support may affect stressor- strain relationships in several ways. To begin with, some authors argue that there is a direct relationship between organizational support and work-family conflict, irrespective of the number or intensity of stressors people encounter(Fenlason and Beehr, 1994; Cropanzano *et al*,1997). Thomas and Ganster (1995) conducteda research study among 398 health professionalsand claim that a lack of organizational supportwill increase work-family conflict. The healthindustry and the hospitality industry may be characterized as service industries with jobs with unpredictable scheduling requirements,non-traditional working hours and minimal control over work hours. As such we could argue that organizational support will have a positive relation with work-family conflict as well. In addition, organizational support can act as a moderating variable between stressorsand work-family conflict. This is called the stress-buffering hypothesis, which indicates the difference in the relation between stressor andwork-family conflict depending on the level of organizational support a person uses. Researchstudies emphasize that organizational support acts as a moderating variable on the relation between stressor and occupational stress ingeneral (Fenlason and Beehr, 1994; Limm, 1996; Winnubst and Schabracq, 1996; Moyle and Parkes, 1999). As a consequence, we arguethat for work-family conflict as a particular typeof occupational stress, organizational support willact as a moderating variable on the relation between stressor and work-family conflict as well.Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4: There is a negative relation be-tween organizational support and the work-family conflict experienced by employees working in the hospitality industry.

Hypothesis 5: Organizational support is a moderator for the relation between workplace flexibility and the work-family conflict experienced by employees work-ing in the hospitality industry.

Although many of the work-related stressorswhich lead to work-family conflict are equallyfelt by men and women, some studies have shown that there are gender differences in the types of events that are defined as stressful (Burke and Nelson, 1998; Bowes-Sperry and Tata, 1999; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Coltrane, 2000; Galinsky *et al*, 2001). Scholarsargue that in many organizations success is defined as maximizing one's career potential shown by occupational achievement andadvancement (Pleck, 1977). Scholars argue that this is a male model of work, under the guise of a gender-neutral model of work (Hanappi- Egger, 2006). Men usually conform to conven-tional rules, arrangements and assumptions embedded within organizations, whereas women do not because they are frequentlysubject to the family and reproduction obliga- tions assumed by society and/or their partners (Harris, 1995; Lewis, 1996). Long hours and visibility are often seen as a measure of commit-ment (Hojgaard, 1997; Lewis, 1997) and acondition to achieve promotion (Mills, 1997; Hanappi-Egger, 2006). Furthermore, men are more likely than women to allow work to enter the family domain (Duxbury and Higgins, 1991), whereas women are more likely to allow their family role demands to affect theirwork role. The careers of men and womenalso seem to be different. Melamed (1995)developed and tested a gender-specific model of career successes. One observed difference is that women's careers are more likely to followa sequential, as opposed to a simultaneous pat-tern. Their careers develop in stages, comprisinga period of employment, sometimes a career interruption for biological and social reasons, then employment again. Some of the mostcommon reasons why women take a leaveof absence are pregnancy, maternity or child- rearing, and obviously, more women than men interrupt their careers for these reasons (Lyness and Thompson, 1997). It is likely that since women are working in a male-coded valuesystem, they will experience more work-family conflicts than men. The conflicts women encounter can produce dissatisfaction and distress within the work and family domains (Netemeyer *et al*, 1996; Frone *et al*, 1997), which may result in the woman quitting and transferring to an occupation in which more workplace flexibility can be provided. Scholars argue that women experience more conflicts than men (Williams and

Alliger, 1994; Hammer *et al*, 1997). Hence, although women demon- strate a high commitment in their work, they are more inclined than men to put family life first if they have difficulty balancing family life and their career. This, in turn, may lead women to quit their job. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 6: Gender is a moderator for the relation between workplace flexibility and work-family conflict for employees working in the hospitality industry.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research study show that work-family conflict in highly educated employees plays an important role in explaining turnover intentions within this group working in the hospitality industry. In turn, work-family conflict could be explained to a great extent by organizational support, and, for female employees in particular, by work-family stress. This latter effect could be buffered by high levels of organizational support.

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