NEW WAYS OF WORKING AND THEIR EFFECTS: A PERSONAL ISSUE OR A CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CONCERN?

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Abstract: A seminal work on work-family issues and social responsibility begins with the question: who is responsible for the health and well-being of employees and their families. This question seems especially relevant considering recent workplace changes (e.g., increased flexibility), which are mostly characterized by blurring boundaries between work and private lives. Although no straightforward answer can be given to the question at hand, it may be especially relevant to understand recent workplace changes affecting the way people work and, in turn, how they affect their physical/mental health and well-being. In addition, it may be relevant to discuss not only relations between new ways of working and their effects, but also to stress possible interventions at individual and organizational levels. In this paper, we develop a theoretical model for understanding new ways of working, the processes they foster and the outcomes they lead to. We propose an antecedents-processes-outcomes model where, for instance, increased job flexibility leads to work-family integration, which may potentially have negative outcomes in terms of one’s health. Furthermore, we propose several measures at the individual, organizational, as well as the societal levels, which may all be relevant in targeting the negative effects of new ways of working.

Keywords: New ways of working, work-family integration, health, well-being, theoretical model, social responsibility

SODOBNI NAČINI DELA IN NJIHOVI UČINKI: OSEBNA TEŽAVA ALI ZADEVA DRUŽBENE ODGOVORNOSTI PODJETIJ?


Ključne besede: Sodobni način dela, meja med delom in zasebnim življenjem, zdravje in subjektivno blagostanje, teoretični model
1 Introduction

Social responsibility (more precisely, corporate social responsibility) is a salient issue for many successful organizations, which strive to go beyond mere compliance to legal obligations and strive to invest more into human resources, the environment, and different stakeholders (European Commission, 2001). However, an important issue which increasingly affects employees and society in general has to date been neglected in that regard.

In the past years, scholars have increasingly recognized the changing nature of the way people work, including changes in work regulation and work organization, technological advancements, and a shift from manufacturing to service (e.g., Näswall, Hellgren & Sverke, 2008). Expressions such as “new way of working”, “boundary-less work” or “work without boundaries” are used by authors almost interchangeably to describe the new working life, which is characterized by blurred boundaries between work and other life domains (e.g., Allvin, 2008). Although different lines of research provide somewhat different distinctive features of new ways of work, there seems to be most agreement on flexibility in terms of time, space, and work organization (Allvin, 2008; Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson & Lundberg, 2011; Korunka & Kubicek, 2013; ten Brummelhuis, Bakker, Hetland & Keulemans, 2012). In other terms, nowadays employees have increased autonomy with regard to their action and flexibility regarding working time (e.g., flextime) and working location (e.g., flex-place). In their studies among different samples (mostly knowledge workers), Allvin et al. (2011) found that:

“Work or work-related activities were performed at any given time and any given place. There was no particular work order in the forms of manuals, specific work tasks, defined results, or fixed goals. In other words, there was no direct guidance as to what needed to be done and how (p. 38).«

Another feature of the work environment seems to have emerged particularly in the past decade. Technological acceleration processes, societal and organizational changes lead to a diminishing life time of employees’ knowledge (e.g., Korunka & Kubicek, 2013). Knowledge demands, which are characterized by the need for continuing learning, seem to be increasingly present in contemporary work environments. In other terms, knowledge demands in the pressure placed upon the employee and arising from changes in jobs and organizations (Loon & Casimir, 2008). Employees need to adapt to new work practices, to changing social relations at work and to new action expectations. Allvin et al. (2010) state that special technical knowledge is not as important as the ability to learn and to adapt.

A third feature of new ways of working seems to be present in today’s organizations and seems crucial especially when linked to individuals’ physical/mental health and well-being. Employees increasingly face “the experience of having to work faster and to fit in more and more” (Brannen, 2005, p. 115). Work intensification is generally characterized by higher work pace and tighter deadlines as well as shorter break/respite periods (Korunka & Kubicek, 2013). It is highly related to the use of information technology at work which enables the employee to stay in touch with work and to be more efficient (Ulferts, Korunka & Kubicek, 2013). In fact, data show that one of the newest work-related technologies – smart-phones – have become the integral part of the work life for a higher percentage of employees over the past years (Agger, 2011). Such developments are also reflected in representative surveys. For instance, European Working Conditions Survey (2007, 2010) reported that pace of work and work intensity are at a high level and, in general, have been substantially increasing in the past decades (although they remained somewhat stable since 2005).

The present article further claims that new ways of working have the potential to redefine boundaries between work and family or private life. By forcing individuals to higher work-family integration (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000), they affect the quality of individuals’ private and family life and, in turn, their health and well-being. Several authors agree with these assumptions. Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, and Hannum (2012), for instance, note that

“recent work-life trends have caused work and family subsystems to increasingly overlap (p. 114).”

Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) state that

“the workplace is no longer necessarily a discrete physical location […] Today, technology has brought profound changes to the ways people work, with boundary-less organizations, virtual workplaces, and the potential for constant wireless connection to one’s work (p. 704).”

Based on the previous deliberation, the aim of this conceptual paper is to develop a theoretical model explaining the mechanisms relating new ways of working to adverse health outcomes and poor well-being. In the antecedents-processes-outcomes model, we first integrate several findings on the new ways of working with work-family integration/segmentation. By drawing on border and boundary theories (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000), we provide several propositions regarding the relations between new ways of working and work-family...
integration/segmentation. Second, we review the literature on the outcomes of work-family integration/segmentation in terms of health and well-being. Based on the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), we develop another set of propositions relating work-family integration and negative health and well-being outcomes. Several empirical studies on new ways of working and work-family integration were included in order to build a stronger case for the propositions of the theoretical model. In the next step, however, we first describe border and boundary theory explaining work-family integration and how it occurs. Next, we proceed with the effort-recovery model which proposes how adverse effects may occur as a result of work-family integration.

1.1 Border and boundary theory
Both border (Clark, 2000) and boundary theories (Ashforth et al., 2000) have provided a definition of work-family integration by assuming that work and family domains are demarcated by borders or boundaries, which can be physical (i.e., office at work), temporal (i.e., work hours, “family time”), and psychological/mental (i.e., thinking patterns, behavior patterns, emotions) (Clark, 2000). Moreover, both theories propose that work and family are separate domains in which individuals take over different roles. Another central assumption states that people make daily transitions between both roles, including entering one role and exiting the other. Boundaries can, therefore, be defined as whatever delimits the scope of one role (Ashforth et al., 2000). Flexibility and permeability can explain how people make role transitions and set boundaries. The first refers to the amount to which a border or boundary can be extended. The latter, on the other hand, is the degree to which one role allows elements from the other role to enter (Clark, 2000). Highly inflexible and impermeable boundaries make role transitions highly unlikely, thus being linked to role segmentation. Flexible and permeable role boundaries are associated with role integration. Authors use the term segmentation-integration continuum to explain how individuals manage or demarcate boundaries between the two roles (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Kossek et al., 2012).

1.2 Effort-recovery model
The effort-recovery model (Geurts, Kompier, Roxburgh, & Houtman, 2003; Meijman & Mulder, 1998), which derives from the industrial organizational (IO) psychology, can provide insights on how work-family integration can have adverse effects. The model posits that job demands require constant physical or mental effort and are, therefore, taxing employees’ energy levels. Consequently, recovery needs to take place after work in order to restore one’s depleted psychobiological systems. If recovery after work is sufficient, employees will start the next work rested and prepared to handle new job demands. However, if employees cannot fully recover in their off-job time, their psycho-biological systems will be stimulated again, before they are fully replenished. As a result, additional effort will be needed to cope with job demands during work time increasing the need for recovery off the job. A person captured in this energy-depleting cycle is likely to experience everyday job demands as even greater. During the effort-recovery process, therefore, off-job activities and recovery opportunities can be crucial (Rook & Zijlstra, 2008; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). If work demands are too excessive and if work continuously creeps into the private/family domain (i.e., work-family integration), recovery will not take place and detrimental effects for health and well-being can occur in a long run. Therefore, it may be crucial that one is able to segment work and family life as well as to set clear boundaries. More precisely, Amsted and Semmer (2009) describe the benefit on work-family segmentation and state that:

“The advantage of such a strategy may be seen in an enhanced ability to detach from work psychologically. Psychological detachment from work is highly relevant for recovery to occur […]. For most people, there is a physical distance between work and family, which may facilitate psychological detachment. However, a certain degree of active psychological segmentation is likely to represent the best strategy to achieve detachment from work. Thus, active segmentation seems to be crucial for the recovery process (p. 131).”

To sum up, border (Clark, 2000) and boundary theories (Ashforth et al., 2000) as well as the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) provide a theoretical background for how work-family integration occurs and what possible effects it may have. In this paper, it is emphasized that new ways of working are particularly related to work-family integration which may, due to poor recovery, have detrimental effects in terms of health and well-being.

2 A theoretical model for studying new ways of working
Based on the literature on new ways of working, the border (Clark, 2000) and boundary theories (Ashforth et al., 2000) as well as the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), an antecedents-processes-outcomes model has been developed including several propositions for studying the role of new ways of working. Besides being theoretically driven, the propositions are grounded on previous research findings examining new ways of working as
well as work-family integration and its effects. The model also includes several variables which are likely to moderate the described process. However, possible moderators are only briefly mentioned, detailed propositions regarding the moderators are not developed. The following sections include the prepositions of the theoretical model, which is depicted in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Antecedents-processes-outcomes model of new ways of working.](image)

2.1 The impact of new ways of working

This paper argues that new ways of working have a great potential to blur the boundaries between work and family and are, therefore, closely linked to work-family integration. Most studies on new ways of working examined the role of autonomy or flexibility in relation to work-family integration. Ten Brummelhuis et al. (2010), for instance, note that flexible work arrangements are associated with blurred boundaries between work and family. Flexibility regarding time and location of work is often related to longer work hours, work during weekend and leisure time and a more frequent use of electronic communication during family time (e.g., e-mail). In fact, flexibility is related to blurred physical boundaries, as often work is not carried out only in office at work, but also at home. Flexibility is also linked to blurred temporal boundaries, as work time is often extended and encompasses also family and leisure time. Brannen (2005), for instance, speculates that it “seems that more autonomy employees are given over organizing their work time in work seems to mean that they are spending longer and longer at work or working (p. 155).”

Flexible work arrangements also seem to foster an “always on” culture, which is colloquially used as an indicator of being constantly connected and also being unable to “switch off” from work. Similarly, Allvin et al. (2010) state that deregulation of traditional work rules means that employees work too much and too long as well as almost everywhere. In other terms, flexible work, which is often considered as a motivational and beneficial job characteristic (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), becomes a new demand for employees. However, formal flexible work arrangements (e.g., flexible schedule, telework) should be separated from psychological experiences of control over the work situation (which is likely to have beneficial effects). If flexible work is something one can choose for him- or herself, it is more likely to be viewed in a positive way compared to flexible work which is demanded or desired by employers (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006) (see Figure 1: the role of moderator variables). Nevertheless, based on the empirical finding and theoretical notions, it can be proposed that:

**Proposition 1:** Flexibility at work will be positively related to work-family integration.

In contrast to flexibility, the relation between knowledge demands and work-family integration may be less clear. However, considering that knowledge demands encompass the demand to acquire new knowledge and skills (e.g., social competence), renew competencies and adjust to new work-related expectations, it can be speculated the employees face a time shortage and, in turn, have to fulfill the requirements of the new demands also outside regular work hours. This also corresponds with employers’ attitudes toward employee training. According to the statistics of
Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SOR S, 2009), for instance, employers feel reluctant toward training during regular work hours. In fact, 80% of all employee trainings are implemented partially or exclusively after hours. Based on the above, it can be proposed that:

**Proposition 2:** Knowledge demands will be positively related to work-family integration.

Work intensification, which is closely related to the two previous new job characteristics, is supposedly most common among different occupations. Given that break periods are shorted, the general work pace is accelerating and the number of services performed or clients processed is increasing (e.g., number of patients among physicians and nurses; Kubicek, Korunka & Ulferts, 2013), employees actually have to perform more tasks in the same time period as before. This, however, is only possible if one works longer hours (and takes time away from family activities or respite periods after work) or with a higher effort. However, not only the temporal boundary may be blurred as result of work intensification. As employees are also increasingly under stress and pressure, they may have problems mentally detaching from work and tend to ruminate about work also after work and in the evening. Based on this, it is assumed that:

**Proposition 3:** Work intensification will be positively related to work-family integration.

2.2 Outcomes of work-family integration

In general, literature on work-family integration is rather scarce. Most conclusions are, therefore, based on research on recovery processes and psychological detachment. As Amsted & Semmer (2010) noted, psychological detachment from work is highly related to work-family segmentation, findings from the field can be transferred also to work-family integration. Given that psychological detachment is defined as an “individual’s sense of being away from the work situation” (Sonnentag, 2012, p. 114), there is, in fact, notable overlap between detachment and mental disengagement from work during off-hours and work-family segmentation (especially with respect to psychological/mental boundaries; Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag & Mojza, 2011).

First, empirical evidence suggest that psychological detachment is crucial in terms of preserved physical and mental health. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have shown that employees who are more detached from work during off-job hours experience less emotional exhaustion/burnout and have a better sleep quality (e.g., Hahn et al., 2011; Sonnentag, 2012). Furthermore, diary studies have found that on days when employees are better detached, they also experience less fatigue in the evening as well as the morning after (e.g., Sonnentag, 2012). Additionally, employees who are better detached have fewer health complaints and exhibit less depressive symptoms (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Based on this, drawing clear boundaries between work and family/private life (i.e., work-family segmentation) is likely to be associated with more positive outcomes. Work-family integration, which could also be operationalized using work-related activities carried out after work as an indicator, is likely to have negative outcomes in terms of health (Demerouti, Bakker, Geurts, & Taris, 2009). Therefore, it can be assumed that:

**Proposition 4:** Work-family integration will be negatively related to physical/mental health.

Previous research also points to various linkages between work-family integration and well-being. If again inferences are drawn from recovery research, it can be concluded that detachment is related to higher life satisfaction and to positive mood states, such as being cheerful or content (e.g., Sonnentag, 2012). In addition, employees who are better detached are more likely to show higher levels of vigor and work engagement in general (e.g. Demerouti et al., 2009). Studies have also shown that work-family integration may be positively related to work-family conflict (i.e., work activities interfere with family activities). However, clear boundaries may also prevent positive outcomes (i.e., lead to lower work-family enrichment; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Again, the relation between work-family integration and health/well-being is likely to be moderated by actual employee preferences for segmentation/integration or the individual boundary management style (i.e., “fusion lovers”, “dividers”; Kossek et al., 2012) and the amount of control over boundaries (see moderators in Figure 1). Nevertheless, it can generally be assumed that:

**Proposition 5:** Work-family integration will be negatively related to well-being.

3 Discussion

A theoretical model including two theoretical perspectives as well as various empirical studies has been proposed in order to link new ways of working to work-family integration which, in turn, has potentially negative effects on one’s health and well-being. Although positive outcomes of work-family integration can be found, it is generally
assumed that new ways of working related to flexibility, knowledge demands, and work intensification all require additional mental and/or physical effort. Therefore, detachment from work needs to take place in order to replenish one’s energy reservoirs. In case of high work-family integration, however, detachment and recovery never fully take place. Therefore, negative (e.g., burnout, health impairment, low life satisfaction) rather than positive outcomes can be expected. The theoretical model as such, however, should be tested in future studies.

3.1 Implications for practice
In the light of potential negative consequences, new ways of working seriously need to be taken into account when trying to preserve employee health and well-being. Several individual as well as organization-based measures can be implemented in organizations in order to deal with this issue. The first measures should focus on employee training and stress management programs (e.g., Hahn et al., 2011), which are likely to have beneficial effects. However, individual-based measures are likely to have rather short-term effects (e.g., Le Blanc & Schaufeli, 2008). Organization-based measures (e.g., actual worksite changes such as job redesign) and a combined approach of both types of measures is likely to be more beneficial, as actual causes of negative outcomes in terms of health and well-being are being targeted.

However, discussing changes on individual level or implementing simple worksite solutions seem not to suffice in the light of new ways of working. For instance, simple family-friendly policies and benefits may also have downsides, as they often do not really help the employee to balance work and family, but simply accommodate the employee to the existing norms and values of the organization. In fact, they may even perpetuate the “ideal worker” stereotype which includes being always available and ready to place the work role ahead of family and private life (Kossek, Lewis & Hammer, 2010). In fact, new ways of working along with high levels of flexibility and autonomy, knowledge demands and work intensification are deeply rooted in the logic of international markets and supposedly help organizations to be better adapted, more flexible, and to have a competitive advantage. As shown by the proposed theoretical model, new ways of working, however, may have several detrimental downsides in terms of employee health and well-being. Attempts toward (corporate) social responsibility should, therefore, include measures at the level of values and norms regarding the place of work in life, such as raising public awareness (e.g., about positive aspects of reconciling work and family), training managers to be role models of healthy and family-promoting lifestyles, and looking for alternative business solutions.

References


