Title: Introducing family engagement in organizational practices for attaining the common good

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores a possibility through which employees and their families can be engaged in building work-family policies. A conceptual framework is proposed to amalgamate representatives from work and family domains of an employee develop work-family policies. While researchers have established that work-family policies positively relate to employees' well-being and organizational performance, there is ample research to indicate their improper implementation. It is expected that engaging all the relevant stakeholders in developing work-family policies will facilitate its better execution. The framework demonstrates that family engagements may vary from being information sharing to being participative. The paper also presents the levels at which family engagement may happen in organizations. Future research direction and implications are also discussed.

KEYWORDS

Family engagement, work-family policies, family supportive organizations, interventions to improve family engagement

Work-family policies are an essential area of human resource management which is receiving increasing attention from policymakers, researchers, organizations,, employees and their families globally. At micro level, work-family policies are identified as an important source for employees' wellbeing, higher motivation and commitment, job-life satisfaction, better quality of life, reduced turnover intentions (Bae & Yang, 2017; Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Moen et al., 2016; Moen et al., 2017; Saltzstein, Ting, and Saltzstein, 2001). At macro level, work-family policies are positively associated with the value of a firm, employer branding, and business performance (Berkery, Morley, Tiernan, Purtill, and Parry, 2017; Butts, Casper, and Yang, 2013; Kotey, 2017).

Work-family policies are recognized as matter of priority yet several studies have claimed them to be unimpactful if there is poor supervisor-support, co-worker backlash, lack of top-leaders involvement, unfavourable work-family culture, mismatch between the family requirements and policies offered, lack of awareness of work-family entitlements (Anderson, Coffey, Byerly, and 2002; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kossek, Baltes, and Matthews, 2011; Kodz, Harper, and Dench, 2002; Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton, 2006; Kossek, Pichleer, Bodner, and Hammer, 2011; Wayne & Casper, 2016). There is a gap between availability and usability of work-family policies (Sánchez-Vidal, Cegarra-Leiva, and Cegarra-Navarro, 2012). Lack of involvement and support from the stakeholders (supervisors, leaders, co-workers, family members) is one of the critical reasons for the

gap between formulation and implementation of work-family policies (Eaton, 2003; Kossek, 2005; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Therefore, work-family policies in insolation may not be sufficient to facilitate a balanced lifestyle of employees, and there is a need to make a system level change which can provide built-in support from all the stakeholders and improve usability or effectiveness of the policies in mitigating employees' work-family challenges.

This study aims to propose a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that suggests strategy through which organizations may attain support from all the stakeholders in the formulation of work-family policies thus ensuring better implementation and enhanced effectiveness. The model is based on participative leadership approach. The participative theory of leadership view participation in decision making as a means to gain cooperation, morale, expand employees' influence, and full use of employees' abilities (Bendix 1956, Gress, 1974). Thus, a participative approach in the formulation of work-family policies can elicit support, and responsible behavior from all the immediate stakeholders in one's family, and workplace.

[Insert Figure 1]

While research points to the importance of supervisor/management support (Straub, 2012) and co-worker support (McMullan, Lapierre, and Li, 2018), little is known about the process through which, organizations could team-up with employees' family to build an effective policy formulation and implementation system. By engaging employees' families, it refers to a partnership among management, employees and employees' families for ensuring that policies formulated for the betterment of individuals are in sync with wants, needs, and preferences of the beneficiaries. The objective is that organization's policymakers (representative from HR, supervisors/line-managers) and a representative from every family (anyone family member nominated by the employee) work in active partnership (while this naturally involves employees, as it is all about them, for the sake of simplicity focus is kept on organization and employees' families) at various levels across the organization for better employee and family well-being. It is important to point here that while the proposed framework refers to engagement of all the stakeholders in formulating work-family policies, it highlights the aspect of family

engagement. It is followed because already leaders, managers, and HR representatives are part of the policy-making process and there is a need to explore the role of the family precisely.

Engaging employees' families in the process of policymaking will not only tap actual needs of employees, but this collaborative approach between the employees' families and organization will also increase a sense of responsibility and support towards one another. Work-family policies prepared through shared leadership between organizations and employees' families may lead to better implementation of the policies at the organizational level, more appreciation of the policies at the family level, and better management of work-family responsibilities by the employee as all the concern parties become more active, informed, and influential.

Cultural context plays a vital role in work-family research (Putnik, Houkes, Jansen, Nijhuis, and Kant, 2018) and formulation of work-family policies (Stehle & Erwee, 2007). When explored from cultural perspective engaging employees' families is all the more crucial for India and other Asian counties which, are described as collectivistic/ universalism societies. While individualistic societies value self-reliance, independence, autonomy and personal achievement, collectivistic societies give more weight to family cohesion, cooperation, solidarity, and conformity (Bochner, 1994; Hassan, Dollard, and Winefield, 2010, Jeffrey, Yang, Hawkins, and Ferris, 2004, Powell, Francesco, and Ling, 2009).

Cultural differences are also the reason for the difference in self-conceptions (Markus & Kitayam, 1991; Triandis, 2018). For a collectivistic society like India, the self is defined relative to others, is concerned with belongingness, dependency, empathy, and reciprocity (Kagitcibasi, 2017; Neisser & Jopling, 1997). It is believed that Indian employees work to meet their family responsibilities and attain social security, unlike western societies where an individual intention to work is to fulfill needs of self (Annor, 2016; Skillman, 1999). As per theories of motivation 'actions are determined by one's need'. In collectivist societies 'family' holds a special place and motivation to work primarily comes from fulfilling the family responsibility. Therefore, it is important for multinationals to look into the provision of engaging employees' families at the workplace. On the contrary few studies have highlighted through Western societies are considered as more career oriented and Eastern societies are

considered more family oriented (Chadda & Deb, 2013; Gupta, Levenburg, Moore, Motwani, and Schwarz, 2009; Hofstede, 2001) still in West corporations and government pay more attention to work-family needs of individuals (Chandra, 2012; Yang, Chen, Choi, and Zou, 2000). This study takes an ecological perspective and encourages policymakers to take steps that may improve work-family policy formulation and implementation in a holistic way.

OBJECTIVE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework aims to extend research on work-family policy formulation, implementation, usability in several ways. Firstly, the proposed model may extend current research on strategies for engaging employees' families in formulating work-family policies. The model demonstrates horizontally three range (sharing information-consultative-participative), and vertically three levels (individual-organizational design-governance) at which employees' family may be engaged in work-family policy formulation. It gives a perspective on how representatives from family and organizations can work together for an ecological development. Further, focus on engaging employees' families provides an avenue for multinationals to act '*Glocal*,' as it gives power in the hand of family members thus answering collectivist country's cultural need to involve families at the workplace and thus may help organizations gain competitive advantage.

Second, India is witnessing fast changing work-family interface owing to several factors such as advancements in technologies which keep individuals active beyond usual working hours, a shift from joint to the nuclear family system, an increase of dual career couples, increased career aspirations, and desire of better lifestyle. These factors are well known to complicate the work-family interface (Lyness & Erkovan, 2016; Masterson & Hoobler, 2015; Miano, Salerno, Merenda, and Ciulla, 2015). Besides, there are several past studies that have pointed that a troublesome work-family interface can lead to stress, depression, deterioration in physical health, turnover intention, and poor job satisfaction in Asian countries (Foley, Han-Yue, and Lui, 2005; Ng, Fosh, and Naylor, 2002; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011; Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, and Cooper, 2008; Spector, Allen, and Poelmans, 2007). Therefore, in a quest for the positive work-family interface, it is significant to identify factors that may enable a more balanced and enriching life. Though much has been emphasized on benefits of the positive work-family

interface, this line of research is in its embryonic stage of development both theoretically and empirically, particularly in Asian context (Mishra et al. 2017; Shaffer, Joplin, and Hsu, 2011). The proposed model explains the process of enhancing enriching experiences in both work and family lives in Asian societies.

Third, the model expands on theoretical perspectives and approaches [Social-exchange theory (Blau, 1964); Systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1969); and Family ecology theory (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993)] anchored in research on work-family policies.

Fourth, the paper concludes by highlighting implications of the multidimensional model for the development of interventions and policies. It also provides future research directions that may be required to apply the model and thus enhances engagement.

ENGAGING EMPLOYEES AND FAMILIES IN FORMULATING WORK-FAMILY POLICIES

The family systems theory suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit. This viewpoint is especially relevant in collectivistic societies where family members are part of in-group and family needs are given priority over self (Triandis, 2018). Since family members are one of the beneficiaries of work-family policies, it is vital to include them in its formulation. In this paper engaging employees' families refer to collaboration between organizations and employees' families and the degree to which organizations attempt to incorporate recommendations of employees' families in the formulation of work-family policies. There is a large body of research which has explored how engaging families can be beneficial, such as, hospitals have found that patient's recovery is faster if their families are aptly engaged in the treatment (Lindblad et al., 2017), similarly schools have found that children perform better if their parents/families are engaged in the learning process (Schaub, 2015). This study examines the possibility of engaging employees' families at the workplace.

In India established business professionals have identified the need for engaging employees' families, to quote a few: *"Families influence the employees, and their well-being affects the employee's*

work life" (Mr. Anil Sharma, Vice President - HR, ITC Group of Hotels, India as printed in Business Insider, 2015); In Ericcson, promotion letters are mailed to employees' parents. As stated by Mr. Sameer Khanna, VP, and Head - HR, Ericsson India "*It is much more satisfying when your family tells you about your promotion*" (Chaturvedi, A in Trainer's Digest, 2015). The concept of engaging families has been answered to some extent, such as medical reimbursement for family members, school quota, subsidized recreational facilities for family members, encouraging family members to contribute to the company magazine, career counseling services for children, inviting family members on Founder's Day celebration. However, this paper suggests there is a need to move beyond mere 'feel good' factor. In the cultural context where 'families' are so important that they drive individuals' need there is a possibility that organizations can strategize ways through which, engaging families can attain competitive advantage and directly impact the bottom line.

Despite the significance of engaging employees' families in finalization of work-family policies, it is understandable that organizations may find it difficult to formulate policies for each group. Therefore, it is suggested that organizations may conduct the process of engaging families in formulating work-family policies at the group level. The groups can be divided on the criteria that are known to influence work-family interface such as, marital status, parental status, gender, family structure- nuclear or joint, life stages (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Martins, Eddleston, and Veiga, 2002). Individuals in the same group, may relate more to the nature of work-family challenges of other's in the group (as all must be facing similar life situations) and thus empathize. Therefore, grouping individuals by similar characteristics may also be beneficial in promoting co-worker support.

As shown in Exhibit 1, our multidimensional framework includes three critical aspects of family engagement. First, engagement level ranges along a continuum, from information sharing to consultation to participative (as depicted horizontally in the figure). Each range will differ regarding degree and depth of collaboration between the representatives from family, and organizational representatives (assigned managers, or HR representatives). Second, engagement may occur at different levels, i.e., individual-organizational design-governance (as depicted vertically in the figure). Each level may operate at any of the three-engagement ranges. Third, need for interventions to support the framework. All three aspects are discussed below:

The range of engagement

The range of engagement characterizes the degree to which family is engaged in formulating work-family policies. The range of engaging employees' families in the formulation of work-family policies may vary from organizations being limited to information sharing with the employees and their families, to being consultative, to taking participative/shared leadership approach in work-family policy formation. At the lower end of the range (information sharing), employees and their families have limited power in the decision making as organizations define their plans and then allow employees and their families to choose a which suits them best. Here the engagement of employees' families is least as their engagement is limited to making choices from already set policies/benefits by the organizations.

In the middle range (consultation), organizations take a more consultative approach in which, they collect preferences of the employees and their families on the policies formulated by them. Here the level of engagement is more than the previous level as suggestions are considered and modifications are made in the policy structure. Though the decision making is still with the organization.

At the highest end of the range (participative/shared leadership), the process of formulating policies is through participation and shared leadership. Organizations conduct brainstorming sessions, and surveys with employees and their families before finalizing the work-family policies. Here the level of engagement is maximum as the participation of employees, their families and organization are equally valued. In the entire process of formulating policies, information flow is continuous, and bi-directional also the responsibility of arriving at a consensus is shared. To illustrate in the first state organizations may provide its preferred bucket list of work-family benefits such as teleworking, flexible hours, shared hours, counseling services, yoga and other recreational activities, to the employees and their families and then ask for their suggestions if any. Whereas, in the highest end state organizations may consider grouping their employees into life stages and then engage them from the beginning for formulating policies.

The levels of engagement

(i)   Micro Engagement: At this level organizations integrate employees and their family's needs, values, experiences, and perspectives about work-family policies and benefits.

Engagement at this level varies on a continuum from information sharing to participative, i.e., from just receiving information to actively participating in policy formation. conducting surveys to collect employees feedback on the pre-set plan. In the engagement at the participative end of the range, the decisions are taken mutually. Employees and their families partner with organizational leaders, and managers, in the planning of a work-family policy. For example, an employee may request information on risks and benefits associated with various medical policies. Organizations may help employees getting timely, understandable, and detailed information on various medical policies available. They then may discuss factors such as treatment preferences, values, and risk tolerance to mutually finalize on health policy. As discussed earlier, by certain similar characteristics different groups should be formed as it will be helpful in precisely answering needs of employees and attaining co-worker support.

(ii)   Organizational Design: At this level, engagement means amalgmating employees and their family's needs, values, experiences, and perspectives into the organizational design. On the continuum of information sharing range, it represents that organizations formulate a formal mechanism to select family representatives. The organizations may have a mechanism such as voting, yearly revolving of the members, to select these representatives from each group in an unbiased way. Organizations define the plan and policies and share it with family representatives to provide inputs and seek clarifications if any. On the consultative range, engagement refers to organizations engaging family representatives as a member of the family advisory council. As a member of the family advisory council, family representatives are engaged in designing and implementation of work-family policies. Even though the inputs are taken and incorporated before finalization of the work-family policies the main onus and decision making power still lies in the hand of organizations. Whereas towards the participative range it refers to organizations inviting representatives from employees' families to co-lead work-family committees. Family representatives in this stage are engaged meaningfully and hold a decision-making power. At this end of the

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continuum, representatives participate in finalizing plans, define priorities, and share leadership.

Need for interventions

The possible benefits that the proposed model may bring to the implementation and usability of work-family policies and holistic well-being of the employee demand special focus on such an initiative. Thus, it is important to introduce interventions for the practical working of the proposed framework. The proposed framework highlights three critical implications of introducing interventions to promote engagement. First, once empirical evidence confirms that family engagement improves impact and usability of work-family policies, then interventions should be designed to enhance teamwork and shared leadership between the key stakeholders. Second, interventions can be introduced to manage the factors such as domain knowledge of the family, launching feedback systems, training supervisors importance of family-engagement and shared leadership, which may impact family engagement. It may be that few highly motivated individuals may contribute without clear opportunities and invitations, many may need interventions to get engaged. Third, the proposed framework suggests various levels at which interventions can be introduced and a possibility that interventions introduced at one level may facilitate engagement at another level. For example, the intervention of providing adequate training to the family advisory council may also improve the quality of suggestions or contributions made by a family representative at the individual level.

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FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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The proposed framework demonstrates that engaging stakeholders can lead to an improved work-family interface and hence facilitate well-being and performance. However, it is required to empirically test the model to confirm what applies and—just as important—what does not apply in achieving and sustaining productive family engagement. Future researchers may focus on exploring factors or combinations of factors that may impact family engagement. It is also important to understand the linkage between different levels such as when an intervention is introduced to facilitate engagement efforts at one level then what support may be required at the other level or how does an intervention

introduce at one level may effect engagement outcomes at another level or which intervention may be most suitable to facilitate engagement at the highest end of the range? There are some other aspects that may need to be answered for the application of the model, such as what may be the most effective ways through which organizations and policymakers encourage families to engage? What changes may be required in organizations' culture, structure, and processes? What mechanism may be applied to select family representatives for family councils? How role and responsibilities may be distributed in family council? What may be an ideal way to collect feedback, and evaluate the working of the entire process? What may be various outcomes of family engagement and do they improve over time?

CONCLUSION

We must realize that for improving work-family wellbeing, we need stronger foundation. The proposed multidimensional model has strong foundational support from System theory and Ecological system theory. System perspective states that individuals are in constant interaction with their environment. These interactions may yield positive or negative experiences for the individual. Ecological system perspective gives a closer look into how an individual relate to his environment and assumes that if connection is positive then functioning improves. Taking support from both the theories the proposed multidimensional model brings together work and family: two important systems of an individual's life. It explains a possibility to collaborate efforts of members of work and family domains for employee's work- family well-being. The proposed model explains the process through which a feeling of trust, mutual respect, responsibility and acknowledgement can be simultaneously evoked between work and family members. There is a connection/bond established between members from work and family systems. As explained by social exchange theory the collaboration between the work and family members will be encouraged through the positive reciprocal relationship.

The proposed framework suggests a possibility to engage all the crucial stakeholders-employees, families, managers, HR personnel- and thus ensure their support during implementation. Support from all the stakeholders helps deal with issues of inequality, backlash, and stigma associated with work-family policies. It also justifies a means through which each employee enjoys work-family

policies that actually answers the work-family problem that s/he is facing, for example, a single may have different kinds of work-family issues when compared to a married couple or couple with young children, or a single mother hence may need different kinds of policies to address his/her challenges.

The main limitation of the model is that it is not tested. It may be noted that scare resources and insufficient desire of the management or family members may be the biggest hindrance to the application of the framework. It is possible that because of other priorities organizations may prefer to limit the family involvement at a superficial level, i.e., participation in organization's annual day or an opportunity to write for organization's policy, but that is not enough. We have reached a time when family engagement is need of the hour. It must be remembered that organizations in isolation may not be able to improve work-family quality of its employees rather it may be inappropriate to make organizations responsible for work-family stress that an individual goes through when there are other players involved in the entire dynamics of work-family interface. Organizations need to encourage family participation and increase awareness about the benefits of engagement. Family engagement will not only promote employees' wellbeing but may also improve job performance. Therefore, the pathway of attaining the common good involves working in partnership with employees and families.

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Figure 1: Framework for Employee and Family Engagement

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