Maori Cultural Perspectives towards Work-Family Conflict: Does Te Kohanga Reo Help or Hinder Achieving Balance?

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This study explored the work-family-whanau responsibilities of Maori employees in the Waikato region and focused on the role that Te Kohanga Reo (TRK) (Maori childcare) plays in facilitating work-family balance for these employees. Due to TKR making greater demands on members than traditional childcare facilities, it was felt that TKR might actually intensify work-family conflict among members. Interviews were held with 24 Maori to discuss the role of traditional childcare in the lives of these employed Maori with small children. We found that while TKR makes additional demands on members this was an acceptable part of the kaupapa (program). Further, the TKR was able to provide additional resources to these workers which in effect aided their ability to balance work, family, and whanau commitments. Participants acknowledged that involvement in TKR can reduce their time-based conflict as it meets cultural and family needs. Further, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts were also to some extent reduced. While the participants acknowledged that the TKR can place additional demands upon them, it was felt this was easily outweighed by the beneficial nature of the TKR to the employee’s and their wider social networks. It is apparent that TKR program has done more than what was initially its core objective, which was to strengthen the Maori language and culture, as it also appears to provide support for the Maori working community in a variety of ways.

Keywords: work-family conflict, balance, Maori employees, Te Kohanga Reo, New Zealand

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Westman (2001) suggested there could be both a positive and negative spillover between work and family domains. However, the work-family conflict research has typically focused on employee difficulties in balancing their work and family commitments. What is poorly understood is whether Maori have any cultural aspects that make them more susceptible or impervious to work-family conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as “a form of inter role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (p. 77). Simplified, conflict between an individual’s work and home responsibilities has been labelled work-family conflict (Boles, Johnston & Hair, 1997; Burke, 1988). According to Frone, Barnes and Farrell (1994), work-family conflict reflects the overall goodness-of-fit between work and family life, and has been conceptualised as an important source of stress that can influence an individual’s well being. This phenomenon is important for Maori given the major role that family and in particular whanau (extended family) plays in Maori culture. While Western studies explore working parents with a ‘typical’ 2.5 children household, the typical Maori whanau may include a dozen children or more.
Boles et al. (1997) noted that work-family conflict results from trying to meet an overabundance of conflicting demands from work and family commitments. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have also suggested that work-family conflict is intensified when the work and family roles are salient or central to the individual’s self-concept, and when powerful negative sanctions for non-compliance with role demands are inevitable. For Maori, the whanau role is very important. As such, under the theories associated with work-family conflict, we would expect Maori to have potentially greater conflict from imbalance relating to interference of work into family and family into work. However, such an assertion has not been tested. For example, a male Maori employee with a large whanau might want to focus his time and energy upon his father-whanau role (salient family role), while his manager stresses work deadlines (salient work role) and threatens termination if the project fails (strong negative sanction). The result would see the Maori employee suffering intensified work-family conflict.

The balance of work and family commitments has been exacerbated by major demographic changes, including the increased participation rates of working women and working mothers (Milliken, Martins and Morgan, 1998), a rise in single-parent families (Morgan and Milliken, 1992), the growth of dual-career couples (Goodstein, 1994), and the enlargement in the elderly population (Goodstein, 1995). These changes have led Elloy (2001) to state, “the phenomenal increase in the number of married women in paid employment and the consequent emergence of the dual-career couple have raised the potential for stress and strain arising from the work and family spheres” (p. 122). Demographic research show that the potential for increased stress also applies to Maori. For example, 30% of Maori children under 5 years have parents who are both working. Of this 30%, 13% have both parents working fulltime while 17% has one parent working fulltime and the other working part-time (Statistics New Zealand, 1998). Gendall (1999) examined the findings of the Statistics New Zealand child care surveys and stated that Maori mothers were more likely to be working over 20 hours per week than European mothers (65% and 58% respectively), and thus have a greater need to balance work and family life.
Burley (1995) suggested these changes have stimulated research into the identification of potential stressors and conflicts, and how these affect couples’ marital well-being (Houseknecht, Vaughan, & Macke, 1984; Rice, 1979). It has also been suggested that the risk of conflict between work and family roles increases as individuals in dual-career situations have to balance the simultaneous, and conflicting, demands and pressures of two careers with those of the family (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Gupta & Jenkins, 1985; Lewis & Cooper, 1988). The increased financial benefits of two incomes can make this balancing act easier, through having greater financial resources to spend on alleviating pressures. These aspects are particularly important for Maori, who are consistently under employed and underpaid compared to Pakeha (Europeans) in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2001; 2002).

Another driver of work-family conflict is care-giving demands. Kossek, Colquitt, and Noe (2001) stated that “during their careers, most employees will make caregiving decisions” (p. 29). Importantly, these authors noted these care-giving decisions can focus upon different types of dependents, which can include both children and the elderly. Barnett (1998) has suggested that the role of caregiver is part of most employees’ range of roles, and managing dependent caregiving has been called the “unexpected career” (Aneshensel, Pearl, Mullan, Zarit, & Whitlatch, 1995). This is important for Maori because whanau can be widely inclusive and may include parents and even grandparents. Consequently, Maori employees are more likely to have wide ranging family structures, including two to three generations of family, which is more likely to provide additional strain on working members.

INCORPORATING COMMUNITY IN ANALYSING WORK AND FAMILY

Researchers have suggested that understanding work, community and family domains would be enriched by incorporating community into the analysis of work and family (Voyandoff 2001). The structure of a community is made up of networks, these networks occur in community service organisations, churches, schools and neighbourhoods. Community support includes formal volunteering and informal help exchanged among members of a network or provided to a community member in need (Voyandoff, 2001). This aspect is important for Maori, particularly those that are
involved with Te Kohanga Reo (TRK) (Maori childcare). It identifies that the elements to consider in regards to balancing work and family extend beyond the direct effects on work and family by the practices of TKR. It is also the network created within a TKR, by the participant members and their parents (and whanau), which in turn, can influence work and family balance through the informal help exchanged within the network (Voyandoff, 2001). This view supports previous research that has examined the role of social support networks in reducing work family conflict (Burke, 1988; Greenhaus, Bedian & Mossholder, 1987; Etzion, 1984; Roskies & Lazarus, 1980; Cobb, 1976). Supportive social networks have been found to be associated with lower stress levels (Cobb, 1976). Studies carried out by Carlson and Perrewe (1999) found that in addition to lowering stress levels, social support networks also reduced perceived time demands and thus indirectly decrease work and family conflict. Researching work family and community together is of particular relevance when researching within the Maori community. This is because the Maori concept of family (whanau) moves seamlessly from the immediate family to the wider or extended family network (hapu) and the tribe (iwi). The community then, in many instances is made up of the extended family. Therefore, in the Maori context the distinctions between family, cultural and social support disappear (Robinson & Williams, 2001).

**MAORI COMMUNITY**

The nature of community relationships and networks are holistic and integrated, and within the Maori community they are considered of primary importance. As a result, family, tribal or community networks may take priority over functional contracts with specified agencies (Robinson & Williams, 2001). Membership in Maori networks and associations are not formal, rather they are based on an exchange of obligations within the network. The conditions of belonging to a network within Maori community are verbal, implicit and obligation driven, in comparison to European society where conditions might tend to be more rule driven and specified in nature. The obligation for Maori is driven by cultural norms and values, which suggests that one should act in a certain way. This sense of obligation underpins a Maori concept of voluntary activity. Traditional Maori values that encourage active participation within social networks include tautoko (proving support), manaaki (care for visitors) and awhi (care for others) (Douglas, 1997). A Maori concept of community is based on a
collective strength (kotahitanga), which includes the strengthening and supporting of community
groups. Maori view people within the community as interdependent (Henare, 1988). Finally, with
regards to conflicts, Maori community emphasises the importance of the extended family and iwi in
dealing with family problems (Atkins, 1990).

**CONFlict SOURCES**

Greenhaus and colleagues suggest there are a variety of pressures that can produce work-family
conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2000) and these pressures can
be categorised according to three major sources: (1) time-based, (2) strain-based, and (3) behaviour
based.

1. **Time-Based Conflict.** Greenhaus et al. (2000) stated that “time-based conflict is a common type of
work-family conflict” (p. 290), which is consistent with excessive work time and schedule conflict
dimensions (Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980) and role overload (Khan, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, &
Rosenthal, 1964). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) maintained that a number of roles can compete for an
employee’s limited time, and that time spent on activities within one role (e.g. work) cannot normally
be devoted to activities within another role (e.g. whanau). Consequently, an employee whose work
role takes up time otherwise committed to their whanau role, means they will generally be unable to
satisfy both roles in the same timeframe. Hence, whanau aspects may lead to time-based conflict.

2. **Strain-Based Conflict.** Greenhaus et al. (2000) stated that “strain-based conflict exists when the
strain produced within one role affects experiences in another” (p. 291). This is also known as
spillover, where “stress experienced in one domain of life results in stress in another domain for the
same individual” (Westman, 2001, p. 717). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) the “roles are
incompatible in the sense that the strain created by one makes it difficult to comply with the demands
of another” (p. 80). Employees who experience work role conflict or ambiguity, and who are exposed
to extensive emotional demands, whose workplace is constantly changing or the work is boring and
repetitive, are likely to experience work-family conflict (Greenhaus et al., 2000). It has been suggested
that these stressful conditions can produce a “negative emotional spillover” from work to non-work
(Evans & Bartolome, 1980). Greenhaus et al. (2000) suggested that many sources of strain can occur
within the family role too, and employees who experience problems with partners and dependents might find these stressors impacting upon their workplace. For example an employee with a large whanau who are all sick will most likely have a reduced focus upon their work, thus leading to family-work conflict. Again, the propensity for whanau to negatively influence strain-based conflict is apparent.

3. Behaviour-Based Conflict. Behaviour-based conflict is when behaviour that is effective and accepted in one role, becomes unacceptable and inappropriate in another role (Greenhaus et al., 2000). For example, individuals who are managers or supervisors might adopt a behavioural style that is inappropriate at home. For example, Schein (1973) noted that managers are expected to be objective, self-reliant, detached and aggressive at work, and Greenhaus et al. (2000) suggested that this may cause behaviour-based conflict because family members might expect these same managers and supervisors to be warm, nurturing and emotional at home. According to Greenhaus et al. (2000), “if people cannot shift gears when they enter different roles, they are likely to experience behavior-based conflict between the roles” (p. 292). Work-family conflict is intensified when the penalties for failing to comply with work or family roles are high (Greenhaus et al., 2000). For example, a boss who calls a meeting on Saturday might impose heavy penalties if the employee does not attend, for example, a warning towards employment termination. Alternatively, a partner who demands a weekend focused on whanau may also provide a strong penalty if the request is not adhered to, such as marital separation. If these two role pressure examples above occur simultaneously (e.g. on the same weekend), then the employee may inevitably suffer intensified work-family and family-work conflict.

**TE KOHANGA REO**

Te Kohanga Reo is childcare focused upon the cultural aspirations of Maori, and is defined as “a total immersion te reo Maori whanau (family) programme for mokopuna (young children) from birth to six years of age to be raised within its whanau Maori, where the language of communication will be Maori” (Kohanga Reo National Trust, 2005). Consequently, it is heavily embedded in traditional Maori values, and those who are members of TKR would typically be those Maori with strong cultural ties and beliefs. The first TKR opened in 1952, and within a year there were 107. Within three years
there were 337 and today there are 750, catering for 14,500 children (Peters & Peter, 1991). The current participation rate among Maori children is 45% (Kohanga Reo National Trust, 2005). The idea for TKR came from a hui held in 1980, where Maori leaders were bought together with help from the Department of Maori Affairs, with the purpose of the meeting being to consider the future of the Maori language which was thought to be close to extinction (Spolsky, 1990).

A feature of TKR is the close relationship between parents, children and the TKR itself. Within a Maori context, this forms part of the wider ‘whanau’ meaning that demands can be placed upon the TKR and similarly, it can make demands of parents. Part of this whanau concept includes a lot of “hands-on functions” at the TKR, such as helping teacher in the classroom, fund raising, doing repairs etc. It is estimated, that of the 4,000 people currently being used to run TKR around New Zealand, approximately 90% are whanau volunteers (Lean, 1997). While this creates a strong link between members and the TKR, it could also provide strong time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based demands. Thus, spending more time at the TKR might lead to increased work-family and family-work conflict, and these additional roles may create additional strain where the family role (through the TKR) is negatively impacting upon the work role. Finally, behavior-based conflict may arise due to conflicting roles of a TKR member (whanau orientation) and the behaviours expected of employed people. For example, repeatedly leaving work early to assume a fundamental family role at the Te Kohanga Reo might lead to problems from conflicting behaviours. At this stage, there has not been any study based on employed Maori that explores the role that TKR might have on various dimensions of work-family conflict. Consequently, this paper is exploratory in nature and investigating the relationships between TKR and the work-family-whanau roles of employed Maori. Our fundamental research question is: What influence does TKR have on employed Maori regarding their work-family balance, and does TKR intensify or buffer the conflict of working Maori.

THE STUDY

TKR in the Waikato (Tainui) region was the focus of the present study. Two hui (meetings) were held with approximately a dozen members of the Te Kohanga Reo at each hui. In line with kaupapa Maori
research methodologies (Smith, 1999), hui venues were the TKR themselves, and kai (food) and a koha (donation to the TKR) was provided by the researchers. In following with Maori protocol, a brief but formal whakatau (welcome) was made, with the participants and researchers introduced. Following suggestions by Smith (1999), the researchers outlined their research aims and highlighted the mutual benefits for researchers and participants. The group interviews were conducted following a set script addressing the major points covered in this paper. The process was tape-recorded and additional notes were taken by the authors. It was felt the most viable approach to the discursive study of work-family conflict and TKR was through narratives (Reissman, 1993). Brown (1990) suggested that gathering and interpreting narratives can serve as an opportunity for uncovering organizational values, and this should readily apply towards the role of TKR and work-family issues, and narrative studies have also been useful in illuminating employees’ behaviour (Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). A research assistant familiar with analysing narratives initially analysed the responses along with the two authors separately and the three analyses were reviewed and refined together.

RESULTS

Overall, the respondents were in general agreement to the major themes explored – perhaps not surprising given the nature of the data collection (meeting), although the authors did try to stimulate debate and interest in fringe areas to discover whether there were any conflicting views. The group predominately stayed within the bounds of work-family conflict but also added further cultural insights into these areas. Typically, comments from one would spark further interest and excitement from others respondents, rather than opposition. Highlights from the comments are presented below and confirm the author’s assertions that while Maori are influenced by many of the typical work-family conflict aspects, they have unique cultural aspects, predominately whanau and the TKR, which both alleviates and exacerbates the facets of work-family conflict.

There was much agreement between respondents that time-based conflict is a reality of juggling work and family. They readily acknowledged that the family role can be harder for Maori due to large whanau size – some with many children of their own, but some with sibling’s children included
leading to much larger sized families. It was widely acknowledged that the TKR played a vital role in the lives of these Maori employees, predominately in keeping the Maori traditions and language alive. For many employees, the concept of supporting their Maori communities and community initiatives played a part in their support of TKR. Further, there was universal agreement that while the TKR can place heavy time-demands upon them all, it was simply considered “being part of this whanau” and given their total belief and endorsement of the TKR, these demands were not a problem, and instead a valued family member who “equally gives as takes”.

This view on the demands on time was again raised when it was stated that TKR meets their needs to contribute to their culture and community, and that the provision of the volunteer help system met that need for them while allowing them to also spend time with their children. Thus their ‘other role’ which is being an active member of their Maori community is able to be effectively balanced with family responsibilities, and thus time spent on TKR actually reduced time-based conflict as the needs of both roles were met simultaneously. It was generally agreed that time-based conflict though not always reduced could be managed better through using the TKR, thereby reducing any strain which otherwise might result. This aspect was repeatedly acknowledged, where people could ring up and say they were running late and going to be later than the normal closing hours. As such, their “whanau” (the TKR) would stay open for them, and in return, they’d happily spend their own time in repaying this commitment to them. This shows a support structure which allows time demands to be made and taken by members, to the overall benefit of the Te Kohanga Reo and its members. Participants agreed that the flexibility of TKR in terms of times and who they would accept made it easier to balance work and family roles. For those with very young children, TKR was still a viable option, as any stress that normally would arise in regards to leaving very young children in care was reduced as TKR workers were considered whanau, and thus part of their wider family.

Similarly to the time-based demands, strain-based demands were acknowledged, again indicating that the larger family sizes can seriously strain peoples working roles. However, it was again accredited that the TKR was able to alleviate these strains at times, and this was then made up through having a
positive reinforced Maori education model for their children. Respondents felt this was a positive trade-off for working. For those working part time, they agreed that TKR was able to alleviate strain arising from other roles, particularly for those that are currently studying (e.g. at university). Behavior-based demands were not found amongst respondents at all. When pressed further, respondents were proud to state they were Maori and utilising the TKR was to ensure their own culture survived – and as such, the work role was secondary in nature. Other comments supporting this centred on the fact that because TKR was a kaupapa Maori environment (embedded in Maori cultural values) it was one of the few places apart from their own homes where behaviour-based conflict was not an issue. Compared to the work place or public schools that are not kaupapa Maori, some felt pressured to conform their behaviors to fit to that particular context and that specifically created behaviour-based conflict for them. In contrast, they found the TKR provided a respite from demands based on behavior.

Participants concurred that their commitment to TKR as both a parent and volunteer, extended beyond the advantages discussed in terms of reducing demands and strain. To Tautoko and support initiatives within their respective communities is part of Maori culture and values. Many respondents agreed that they would often support initiatives without receiving any direct benefit from it. They all agree that support is reciprocal in nature, that whatever you put in you get out of it, so although benefit may not arise directly from participation within the community network it will be available when needed. One of the participants stated that she also found that it was not only the flexibility of TKR itself but also the tautoko (support) of her friends who utilised the services of TKR that assisted her in balancing family, work and other roles. She provided the example where childcare services were provided outside of the normal operating hours of the TKR. Other participants soon added their agreement and their own anecdotes of being able to rely on their friends from TKR when support was required. Some commented that even knowing that this was an option whether utilised or not, significantly reduced strain related to working, having a partner working, or commitments to other roles. This giving is seen as reciprocal in nature, so if someone receives that form of support it is expected that they will also be willing to give it.
DISCUSSION

The participants noted that traditional Maori values were identified as being evident in the kaupapa and running of TKR, especially those relating to tautoko, whakawhanaungatanga and awhi. These values were mentioned when discussing the supportive nature and flexibility of TKR, and of the networks that it creates among the parents that utilise its services. Atkins (1990) recognised the importance of the extended family and iwi in dealing with family problems. Although no specific examples were mentioned of this, participants did state that their involvement in TKR had helped to reinforce their own connections and networks with hapu and iwi members thus making it easier for them to utilise these networks when required, which contributes to reducing strain related to family concerns. The results of the study in regards to time-based conflict did show that this was one of the more common types of conflict felt by participants. This supports Greenhaus et al. (2000) who identified time-based conflict as a common conflict type experienced by working families. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) maintained that a number of roles could compete for an employee’s time. The volunteer aspect of TKR can be seen as yet another role that families are having to spend their time on, normally the additional time requirements of such a role would further exasperate any time-based conflict being experienced by working individuals. It is important to note however that the participants identified that this is not the case because volunteering time at TKR meant that at the same time, workers could spend time with their young children and supporting wider hapu and iwi networks. The time-based conflict that would normally be felt by such a demanding role being added to their weekly schedule is to a great extent alleviated.

Other findings that supported the reduction of time-based demands were the flexibility of the service; especially with the hours that the service could be utilised, which were typically longer than other childcare services. The effects of TKR on strain-based demands were similarly identified as to those regarding time-based demands, in that even though participants acknowledged the existence of these types of demands, the strain of these demands were diminished due to the perception that the benefits of being involved in TKR outweighed the conflict that additional strain-based demands placed on them. Finally, behaviour-based conflict was not found in the present study, however this research
defined behavior-based conflict as being based on the roles between TKR and the home. It could be assumed that given the various childcare options parents would not put their children in TKR, if the kaupapa of TKR, was not in line with their own personal beliefs. This could explain the lack of behavior-based conflict in the present study. However, further research could look into behaviour-based conflict between the TKR and other roles, particularly that of the workplace. In particular, if behaviors associated with the TKR was accepted and reinforced then this may become an issue if that behaviour is less acceptable in the workplace. For example, spending additional time on the TKR might be counter-productive to an organisation that encourages long working hours. As such, this could cause greater behaviour-based conflict in the workplace. Clearly, further research into this dimension of work-family conflict is needed.

CONCLUSION

In summation, although TKR requires much more in terms of time commitment from those utilising their services, rather than elevate the various stressors that can lead to work family conflict, it in fact reduced them, or provided sufficient benefits to participants so as to make any extra commitment acceptable to them. The flexible nature of the service and the kaupapa environment were two of the key factors that reduced the conflict identified within the literature. It would seem that there are aspects of the Maori culture, namely the strong community networks that make them more impervious to work-family conflict. It is apparent that TKR program has done more than what was initially its core objective, which was to strengthen the Maori language and culture. It provides support for the Maori community in a variety of ways, one of them being assisting Maori working families in balancing their work and whanau (family) commitments.
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