A Qualitative Study on Work-Family Conflict, Social Support and Response Mechanisms of Individuals Working in Multi-National Corporations

Anjni Anand and Veena Vohra

INTRODUCTION

India, as a country, has witnessed some dynamic changes in the social and economic environment in the last two decades. The opening up of the economy as a result of economic reforms saw the coming in of multi-national corporations in a big way. This affected the lifestyle of people and more importantly, the nature of jobs changed substantially. Multi-national corporations brought with them a work culture that was highly challenging and, at the same time, highly rewarding. This opened up a plethora of opportunities for young and middle-aged job seekers. The rewards associated with working in a challenging work environment were so attractive that an increasing majority of people preferred working in such an envi-

A. Anand (✉)
Department of Commerce, Delhi University, New Delhi, Delhi, India

V. Vohra
Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
e-mail: veena.vohra@nmims.edu

ronment. Another change that was simultaneously brewing in the socio-cultural environment was an increasing number of women joining the workforce. More and more women were getting degrees in higher education and seeking jobs in these multi-national corporations. Women in India had a presence in the job market earlier too, especially in the rural sectors, but growth in employment opportunities from the mid-nineties onward saw an increase in female participation in the workforce.

So, not only was the nature of jobs becoming more challenging and more demanding of one's time and attention, but the natural distinction that existed in work roles of men being breadwinners and women taking care of the family and raising children was also becoming blurred. The social fabric of the society saw the disintegration of the joint family system, as people were moving out to newer towns and cities, either by choice, in search of better job opportunities, or compelled by the requirements of their job. These changes created a dynamic environment, which caught the attention of researchers exploring the consequences of these socio-economic changes on the general welfare level of the employees and their families.

One of the consequences of the aforementioned changes was observed as the occurrence of inter-role conflict. Kahn et al. (1964) defined role conflict as the 'simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make difficult compliance with the other'. A specific form of role conflict, termed work-family conflict, arises when an individual's two most significant life domains–work and family– compete with each other for time and attention. 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 role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family role and vice versa.

This chapter is an attempt at understanding work-family conflict experienced by those working in multi-national corporations. Internationally, especially in the Western economies, there has been ample research exploring the various causes and consequences of the conflict. Comparatively, there has been lesser research in other cultures of the world and in India. Previous research has, however, established the existence of the conflict, and those working in different types of professions have admitted to experiencing work-family conflict, irrespective of gender. Taking the previous research on work-family conflict further, the present chapter attempts to

understand the role of social support from the family and work domains in helping balance the multiple role demands and the coping strategies that people adopt to help them manage work and family demands. Work is increasingly being conducted in teams in organizations, which, on one hand, creates an inter-dependency to a certain extent among the members of the team and, on the other hand, facilitates co-operation amongst them. This, along with the attitude of team leaders and the overall organizational culture, constitutes the social support that an individual expects and seeks from his/her work environment. At the level of the family, the main source of social support is spousal support and secondly, parental support, which can help couples (especially dual-career couples) manage the increasing demands of their work roles. Another aspect of work-family conflict that this chapter attempts to explore is the response mechanism of the individuals when they experience this inter-role conflict. The response mechanism can range from passive acceptance to aggression in behavior; it can lead to quitting one's job and to varied mental and physical health problems. Coping strategies, adjustments and expectations from work and family are the major focus of this chapter.

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

People working in any type of profession may experience work-family conflict if the work and family domains create simultaneous pressures of time and attention on an individual, which given the time constraint and individual capacity cannot be effectively satisfied by the person. It can take the form of time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and/or behaviour-based conflict. *Time-based conflict*, as identified by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), is consistent with the excessive work time and schedule conflict dimensions identified by Pleck et al. (1980) and role overload identified by Kahn et al. (1964). *Strain-based conflict* is consistent with fatigue and irritability, identified by Pleck et al. (1980), and exists when strain in one role affects one's performance in another role. *Behavior-based conflict* arises when the behavior expected in the performance of a particular role is inconsistent with that required for another role.

A theory that has been widely used by researchers to explain work-family conflict is the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll 1989). The COR model proposes that individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources. Stress is a reaction to an environment in which there is the threat of a loss of resources, an actual loss of resources or a lack of

expected gain in resources. Resources include objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies. Researchers have also used *identity theory* to explain how work-family conflict affects individuals and causes health-related problems in them (Burke and Greenglass 1999). Identity theory is associated with the image that an individual creates for self, in work or family domains. Frequent work-family conflict acts as an impediment to successfully meeting family or work-role requirements and undermines a person's ability to construct and maintain a positive self-image in the given field (Frone et al. 1997).

The outcomes of work-family conflict have been studied by researchers in terms of work-related outcomes, non-work-related outcomes and stress-related or domain-unspecific outcomes. In their meta-analysis, Allen et al. (2000) classified work-related outcomes as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to turnover, absenteeism, job performance, career satisfaction and career success. Non-work-related outcomes were categorized as life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, family satisfaction, family performance and leisure satisfaction. Stress-related outcomes were general psychological strain, somatic symptoms, depression, substance abuse, burnout, work-related stress and family-related stress.

Carlson and Kacmar (2000) emphasized life roles as an important antecedent to work-family conflict. Life roles are the system of values an individual holds regarding the work and family domains based on what the individual believes to be important to, central to or a priority in his or her life. For example, if a single, working mother values time with her children but is forced to spend more time than she likes at work in order to support her children, work-family conflict may arise.

Researchers have found that work-family conflict experienced by individuals has increased in recent times due to a rise in the number of dual-earner couples. In the last 30–40 years, women have achieved increasingly higher educational levels and have progressively entered professional occupations in greater numbers. As a case in point, women's participation in the workforce in India has been low, but it has been is growing at a rate of 5.6% annually since 1991 (for urban females), compared to a growth rate of 2% for rural females and 3% for urban males (Report published in Business Standard on July 30, 2015). Although there are many rewards and satisfaction associated with the two-career lifestyle, members of two-career relationships are susceptible to considerable pressure and stress arising from the inter-play of their own work/family roles and those of their partners (Greenhaus et al. 1989).

There is added stress in the case of dual-earner couples as the pressures of work and family responsibilities increase, and balancing these responsibilities becomes a greater challenge for both partners. However, in the research conducted by Greenhaus et al. (1989), the impact of gender on work-family conflict was not substantial. A similar research was carried out by Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) on a sample of dual-earner couples in Finland. There were no gender differences in the experience of either work-to-family conflict or family-to-work conflict. Data was obtained from 501 employees working in four organizations and results showed that work-to-family conflict was more prevalent than family-to-work conflict for both genders. Family-to-work conflict was better explained by family-level factors and impacted family well-being. Work-to-family conflict was explained by work domain factors and affected occupational well-being.

Social Support

Hobfoll and Stokes (1988) defined social support as 'social interactions or relationships that provide individuals with actual assistance or with a feeling of attachment to a person or a group that is perceived as caring or loving'. In one of the earliest definitions of social support, Cobb (1976) described it as 'information that leads a person to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued and a member of the network of mutual obligation'. Researchers have used Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) psychosocial model of stress and coping as an underlying framework to explain the role of perceived available support in assisting employees to cope with stressors such as work-family conflict. A situation that is being assessed by an individual can be categorized as irrelevant, benign-positive or stressful. Once a situation has been assessed as stressful, the individual then appraises what coping response can reduce the level of stress. Support mobilization is a part of this coping strategy, and the perception that adequate support resources are available helps in developing further coping strategies at a personal level, such as problem-focused coping.

The linkage between social support and work-family conflict can be explained through role theory and resource drain theory. *Role theory* implies that both work and family domains entail multiple roles where numerous demands are placed on the individual (Kahn et al. 1964). In an attempt to meet various work and family role expectations, many individuals succumb to role pressures. *Resource drain theory* views resources such

as time, attention and energy as finite; thus role stressors in any domain take away from this finite resource available to an individual. This is akin to the COR Theory (Hobfoll 1989), which states that loss (actual or potential) of one's resources causes stress.

Workplace social support sources are mainly identified as supervisor support and co-worker support. However, Allen (2001) has cited that organizational support is very critical for the uptake of family-friendly policies offered to the employees. Non-work social support includes support from family and friends. Social support from work sources figures more importantly in the occupational stress process than does support from non-work-related sources. In organizational sciences, social support from family has received less attention than work-related sources of social support. In studies that have examined non-work social support, social support from family and friends is more strongly associated with general health and well-being and weakly associated with work-related strains (Adam et al. 1996).

Thomas and Ganster (1995) defined a family-supportive work environment as being composed of family-supportive policies and family-supportive supervisors. Family-supportive policies refer to those policies that make everyday management of family responsibilities easier (and are over and above the insurance and health-care benefits offered by the organization). These policies include child care, elder -care, flexi-time, and care for sick children, telecommuting, job sharing and family leave. A supportive supervisor is seen as one who empathizes with an employee's desire to seek balance between work and family responsibilities. In addition to supportive practices and supportive supervisors, Allen (2001) emphasized the importance of an overall supportive organizational culture and top management support for the uptake of work-life balance policies. Allen (2001) emphasized that implementation of family-friendly policies may not have the effect intended if employees do not perceive the environment of the organization as hospitable to their efforts to seek balance between their work and non-work lives. In the absence of a supportive organizational culture, employees worry that taking advantage of the family-friendly policies will jeopardize their careers (Fierman 1994; Maitland 1998; Morris 1997).

An important source of social support in the workplace is co-worker support. The interactions that an individual employee has with his/her immediate co-workers is perhaps the maximum. The importance of co-worker social support in the workplace is magnified by the trend of flatter organiza-

tional structures, team-based work and more lateral workplace interactions (Chiaburu and Harrison 2008). *Social embeddedness theory* gives the rationale and theoretical support to co-worker support. Spousal support plays a very critical role, especially in the case of dual-earner couples as it helps them prioritize their duties and plan their family responsibilities well. In collectivist nations, social support from family includes not just spousal support but also support from parents and children (Spector and Allen 2007). A job is seen as a provider to the family and professional growth is seen as a matter of pride (even if it involves more job involvement and devoting more hours to work). The family is willing to cooperate and adjust in order to provide maximum support to the breadwinner to help them grow professionally (Yang et al. 2007). An important area in which dual-earner couples look out for external support is with regard to child care. If there is a reliable childcare support available, then it provides a psychological relief to the parents, and they are able to concentrate better in their jobs.

Response Mechanism

How do people respond to situations that cause work-family conflict? The attitude of people and the response mechanism adopted by them can be guided by individual personality traits or by the general disposition of people belonging to a certain culture. Reid and Ramarajan (2016) explored the possible reactions of employees to stress arising due to working in high-intensity workplaces, under a constant pressure to live up to the image of an 'ideal worker'. The authors identified three strategies that employees relied on to respond to the stress arising at the workplace. The first strategy is of 'accepting', and 43% of the respondents belonged to this category. These respondents accepted the pressures of the work environment, prioritizing work over non-work life. If the work is highly satisfying and rewarding, then this type of strategy can give psychological satisfaction to the 'acceptors', but on the flip side, people who belong to this category set higher expectations for those who may not accept the idea of prioritizing work over non-work life.

A second strategy is of 'passing', adopted by 27% of the respondents, in which the employees indulged in non-work activities—but under the organization's radar. These employees manipulated their work time in such a way that they could indulge in non-work activities during work time and yet not make the same evident. This may include working on projects that allow one to work from home and not really travel (as others may think) or

use work-related travel time to indulge in personal hobbies. The researchers found that although this may work in the short term, sustaining the same in the long run may become difficult as colleagues may get an idea of what 'passers' are indulging in.

A third strategy is 'revealing', adopted by 30% of the respondents. These are the employees who would openly talk about their personal life and would demand for structural changes in their work, like schedule flexibility or any other type of accommodation. Approximately half of the women and a little more than a quarter of men belonged to the category of 'revealers'. These employees usually suffered on the promotion front and were not the first chosen for pay raises or promotions. By making their preferences for a flexible work schedule and leave provisions known, the revealers make it clear that they do not prioritize work over family and do not typically fit into the definition of an 'ideal worker'. The present study is an attempt at exploring how much work-family conflict people working in corporations experience, the way in which this affects their non-work life, health and well-being, the role of social support in helping them achieve a better balance between work and family roles and the response mechanism or strategy adopted by them.

The Study

The study design was purposively qualitative in nature as in-depth information was sought from the respondents about how much work-family conflict they experience and how do they make adjustments in their personal and professional lives to manage the conflict. Such information was not possible through a survey-based questionnaire approach. In-depth interviews with select candidates was considered as the most appropriate technique for gathering information. For the purpose of the study, employees working in multi-national corporations were contacted. Prior to this, the human resource managers of certain select organizations were contacted and informed about the aim of the study via email. After the initial exchange of emails, two organizations agreed to support the study and shared the contact details of some of their employees who were based in Delhi. There was some consideration regarding the selection of the candidates for the interview. As a lot of work is carried out in teams, we felt it was important to have team leaders/supervisors as well as team members as a part of the study sample. We also felt it important to have both male and female respondents as gender difference in response and

adjustment mechanisms can then be understood better. The employees were then contacted, by email first and later on by telephone to discuss the details of the study, the aim, purpose and the information sought. Interview time and venue were fixed with each of the 12 individuals who agreed to participate in the study. Confidentiality of the interview was assured to the participants and permission was sought from them for recording the interviews (with the aim of listening to them repeatedly to draw themes and inferences). The respondents were sent a list of three questions for which responses were mainly desired, so that they could prepare for the interview and have a fair idea of the topics to be discussed during it.

In order to best understand work-family conflict experienced by those working in teams, the questions were kept simple and detailed answers to only three questions were sought:

1. How much work-family conflict do you experience?
2. How do social support factors in work and family domain reduce or improve your performance in organizations?
3. How do you normally respond to the simultaneous pressures of work and family?

In addition to these three broad questions, other relevant questions were also asked during the course of the interviews. The purpose was to further probe the interviewees and get more information that could add to the richness of the responses generated. Wherever it was felt necessary, the respondents was asked to elaborate upon any statement made by them or any instance narrated by them. Interviews were converted into transcripts, which facilitated the task of drawing codes from the responses of the candidates.

Themes Associated with Experiencing Work-Family Conflict

Role Demands, Role Salience

Working in corporations and being a part of a team were both quoted as 'challenging' and 'demanding' and created a perception of 'too many role demands' for the respondents. The theme emerged out of various sub-themes (see Fig. 6.1) that dealt with the multiple role demands and importance of both work and family roles for an individual.
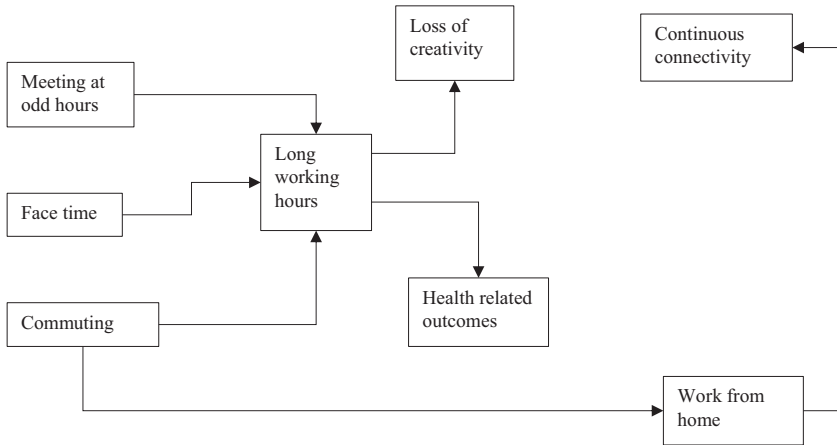
Fig. 6.1 Work environment

Sub-themes: Long working hours, commuting time = unproductive, travel out of town, meetings at odd hours, formal vs. informal style of working, work-from-home provision, child-care and adult-care responsibilities suffer, health-related outcomes (physical and mental well-being suffers), high work pressure = loss of creativity, parenthood = increased responsibility, connectivity to job, face time (Fig. 6.1).

When asked about the work-family conflict they faced, the respondents said that such conflict has become a part of their lives due to the nature of their jobs. The work environment was cited as 'highly demanding' by most. Usual daily working hours exceeded eight hours (which is the number of daily working hours on papers), and adding to it the time spent on travelling, made it a 12–13 hour work day for some of them. Travel time was regarded as 'unproductive', which only added to the total work time without enabling them to do anything constructive. These respondents felt that the organization should seriously consider a 'work-from-home option' as it will enable employees to use this unproductive travel time more constructively and reduce the stress associated with commuting long distances during rush hours.

A common problem associated with not being able to avail of work-from-home or flexi-time provisions (which were offered by some of the participating organizations) was 'holding meetings at odd hours'. This appeared to be a common problem as a majority of the respondents said

that meetings were mostly conducted 'early morning' or 'late evening', making it difficult for them to either come in late or leave early. Being at work for long hours and commuting long distances to and from work is 'physically exhausting', 'leaving little time for family or personal interest and hobbies' as well as no time for any exercise or fitness program. The *boundary theory* (Ashforth et al. 2000) gives an explanation for this. According to the theory, when individuals face role overload, they engage in inter-domain transition of resources, where they behaviorally or cognitively transfer resources (time, energy) from one role (the 'accommodating role') to the other role (the 'overload' role). In the present study, the accommodating role is the 'family role', from which resources are easily shifted to the 'work' role, which is the more demanding role.

Too much to do and as cited earlier, non-clarity of expectations from bosses and management, creates an ambiguous work environment where 'everyone is in a haste to complete the task as new tasks can come up at any time', leaving little scope for being 'creative'. The employees said that 'broad goal-setting' by the superiors, followed by 'creative freedom' to the team members will help them to do the job better. It will help promoting 'out-of-the-box thinking', rather than mechanically performing the job. Formal rules and procedures also delay task completion and there is always more emphasis on formal meetings and discussions rather than an informal work environment. As one respondent said 'I end up writing mails to the person sitting on the adjacent desk, rather than walking over and talking to him about the issue'. With internet and mobile connectivity, one is within reach 24/7 and can be contacted at any time for work-related issues. Weekends are not really free, and neither is vacation time—family boundaries are more permeable. 'Face time' is important and one cannot afford to stay away from workplace for a long time. It is important to be noticed by the boss and the management, else performance evaluation suffers later on. This feeling adds to the already existing role demands.

As mentioned previously, the ideal worker syndrome and the acceptance of the same creates problems for those who may not strictly fall in the category of 'acceptors'. They may face unnecessary pressures of having to be available round-the-clock, due to unreasonable standards set by the acceptors of the definition of the ideal worker. The research found that people did not think too highly about 'acceptors' as mentors because they were all the time too occupied with their job to play the role of a mentor, coach or guide.

Family-role salience cannot be ignored—it is especially true for women professionals and somewhat true for male professionals. Male employees reported 'feeling guilty' for not being able to give adequate attention to their spouses and children. Female employees, on the other hand, reported quitting jobs due to parental responsibilities and coming back after a gap. Male respondents said that their spouses had shifted from a corporate job to a 'more accommodating job', like consultant or any other form of self-employment, which gives them more flexibility regarding working hours. This 'adjustment' was necessary in the face of rising responsibilities of children and elders in the family.

Reducing Ambiguity in Roles and Expectations

The respondents felt that the work-family conflict that they face is not just due to the actual conflict between work and family role demands but more due to the ambiguity regarding the role demands and timeline expectations that they face in work and family domains. Making conscious efforts to set expectations right with respect to those around (both at work and in the family) is seen as a way of reducing the conflict.

Sub-themes: Realistic expectation setting—with family and with colleagues and superiors, reduce last-moment surprises, temporary and continuous disturbances, clarity in role demands and timeline expectations (Fig. 6.2).

An important factor identified by the respondents that helped them achieve work-family balance and led to imbalance when it was lacking is 'setting expectations right'. This referred to their expectations from fam-
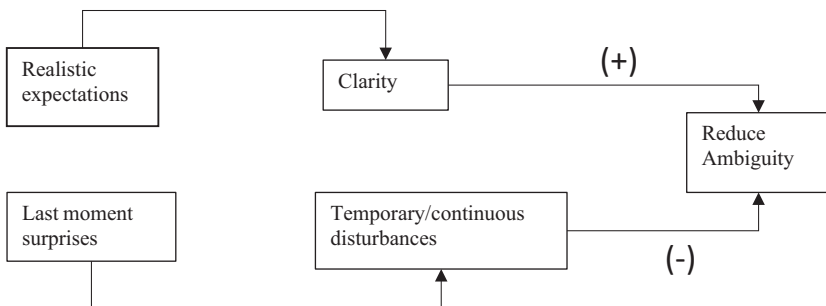

Fig. 6.2 Managing expectations

ily, the expectations of family members from them and expectations of the organization and the superiors. Clear expectations helps remove any kind of uncertainty and prevents last-moment rushes of any sort. Respondents said that clearly specifying their work schedule, travel plans and so on and having a clear knowledge of the spouse's work schedule and work demands helps in making plans in advance so that last-moment 'surprises' and 'rushes' are avoided. It helps in finding parental support, especially for child-care purposes, and results in better schedule management. Most respondents said that they learnt this the hard way.

Even with respect to the organization, getting a clear idea of what is expected from them was cited as very important by the respondents. Some of them claimed that 'lack of clear deliverables' leads to 'performance-expectation gap', which is quite stressful. Most often, they claimed that they were given tasks and targets to attain without any reality check, which disturbed them mentally. Individual Key Result Areas (KRAs) are specified at the beginning of the year only and many times the actual expectations are so different from these KRAs that it creates an environment of uncertainty for employees wherein they feel that the leader's role is most important. 'Clear communication' and a 'sense of direction' can only flow from the leader to the members in a top-down approach. With a clear idea of tasks to be performed, the relation between task performance and results and evaluation criteria will eliminate all forms of role-related ambiguity.

Some sudden expectations can always arise, both at family and at the workplace, which can upset any previous plan. But these were cited as 'temporary disturbances' by the respondents that can be accommodated. What is more troublesome is a continued atmosphere of unexpected demands wherein work-life 'balance' goes for a 'complete toss'.

Themes Associated with Social Support

Social Support from Family

An attempt was made to understand how family domain factors affect performance in the work domain and the responses showed that there are various ways in which members of immediate and extended family extend their support, which makes managing work and family roles easier.

Sub themes: Spousal support is very critical, parents—most important in child-care responsibilities, amount of support = f (work-role awareness), helps develop bond with co-workers, time spent at job = f

(supportive family environment), staying away from family adds to stress, continuous work pressure = decline in support from family.

Social support from family is one of the most important reasons cited by the respondents for helping them focus on their work-role demands and perform effectively in a challenging work environment. Male respondents cited spousal support as most critical whereas female respondents cited parental support (own parents or husband's parents) as the most important source of family social support. Female respondents (with children) credited family support as the reason for being able to put in long hours at work. For dual-earner couples, parental support was considered the most 'safe' and 'reliable' option as far as child care was concerned. Some respondents even told that the family contributed towards developing better relations with co-workers by organizing/being a part of get-togethers with colleagues. This even helped develop a better understanding of each other's family background that may not otherwise be possible in a formal work environment (Fig. 6.3).

Male respondents said that they are able to give the required time and attention to temporary pressures arising at work with support from family (with spousal support as most critical). However, when work demands require one to work overtime on a regular basis and ignore family responsibilities too often, it becomes a cause of distress even for the family members. Mathews and Wayne (2014), in their longitudinal study examining the relation between role overload and work-family conflict, mention the supportive role played by family, which makes adjustments given the heavy demands and pressures associated with the job of the 'breadwinner'. The researchers call this adjustment 'episodic coping mechanisms', which help
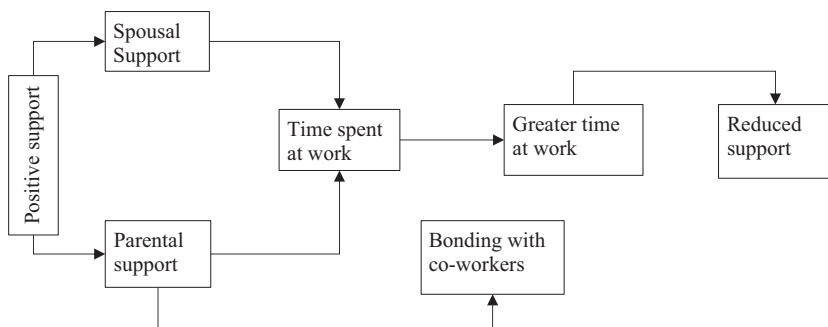

Fig. 6.3 Family support

alleviate the problem in the short run but also cause stress and strain to the providers of supportive behavior.

'Family support' and 'psychological relief 'of staying with family was something that was missed by the respondent (unmarried) who was away from the family, who reported that he had to make a lot of adjustments when staying alone. One of the male respondents who was staying away from the family said that he was 'completely relaxed mentally' when it comes to the issue of the security of wife and children, as they were staying with his parents and were able to get a protective environment. This, he called, was a 'blessing in disguise' for him as he can give undivided attention to his work.

Adams et al. (1996) conceptualized two forms of spousal support—instrumental and emotional support—and empirically tested them. Emotional support includes empathetic understanding and listening, affirmation of affection, and advice and genuine concern for the welfare of the partner. Instrumental support is the tangible help from a partner, such as with household chores and child care. Both these forms of support are associated with lower work-family conflict (Aryee et al. 1999). As mentioned in Aycan and Eskin's (2005) research on exploring the impact of child, spousal and organizational support on work-family conflict, instrumental support eases the burden of family demands and enables an individual to devote more time to work, whereas emotional spousal support enhances feelings of self-efficacy both at work and at home (Parasuraman et al. 1996). Spousal support was found to be strongly related to psychological well-being and marital satisfaction and emerged as the most significant support for women (for men, organizational support helped reduce work-family conflict more effectively). The findings of the present study associate spousal support as the most significant source of non-work support for men. Women associated family support to supportive parents and in-laws who helped in managing household chores and child-care responsibilities.

Co-Worker Support

Working in teams leads to task inter-dependency and creates bond of mutual trust and co-operation among the team members. The various facets of the relationship between team members is summed up in this theme.

Sub-themes: Inter-dependency in task completion, generally co-operative, pressure to perform and prove oneself, male colleagues less understanding (gender differences).

Most respondents said that there is an environment of co-operation among the members of the team and most often others are willing to extend help and support required by a particular member. At the same time, it is also true that there is a heavy pressure to complete one's own task and then leave, which when done by any member adds to the task burden on others. Most team jobs involve inter-dependency, which makes it difficult for any one person to be away from the job due to family considerations. Pressure to prove oneself eats into the 'co-operative behaviours of individuals'. Relationship among team members is 'mutual' and based on a 'give-and-take' relationship—the only role of the leader is to ensure that everything is clearly communicated. Even where an employee requires any special consideration, the same should be openly discussed with all so as to avoid misunderstandings. Female respondents reported that male colleagues were less understanding of their need for time-related adjustments, but among female colleagues, they got all possible help and support. Each member has a unique role to perform and is not completely replaceable, which can cause problems when one is working on tight schedules. Generation gap among members and between leader and member also causes disturbances at times.

The importance of co-worker support is magnified due to an increasing number of organizations adopting a flatter structure and preferring team-based work (Chiaburu and Harrison 2008). This leads to more lateral transactions, which makes supportive behavior from co-workers even more significant. Some studies have been able to associate perceived co-worker support to a reduction in work-family conflict, whereas others have found no relation between the two (Major et al. 2005; Frone et al. 1997).

Organizational Support

The interviewees were asked about their expectations regarding organizational support that they actually received and the changes in organizational policies that will help them attain better work-life balance. The responses were coded and grouped together in the theme of organizational support.

Sub-themes: Policies only on papers, immediate superior = culture, work-life balance = f (empathetic boss), no interaction with top management.

The respondents felt that they have no direct communication with the top management, and they do they look at the top management for any kind of support. Most of them felt that they have only little knowledge of the actual policies. They only knew as much as was communicated to them by their immediate superior. Organizational support, for them, translated into supportive line managers. A team's happiness depends on how empathetic and understanding leaders they have. For leaves or any need to work from home, the approval of immediate superior only matters. Those who were dis-satisfied with the leader/bosses reported an unfriendly and non-co-operative work environment. For the leaders, however, the situation was trickier as they looked at top management support for their individual level work-family issues. They faced greater difficulty in getting support. Policies on paper may never get translated into practice—what trickles down to individual employees are the policies that their bosses communicate to them. Research on various sources of workplace social support and work-family conflict conducted in the West has emphasized the significance of perceived organizational support, as a supportive organizational culture trickles down in the form of supportive supervisors and supportive colleagues (Allen 2001). As one of the respondents who had worked abroad for a few years said, 'policies on paper are the rule … once they are put on paper, the employees get to know of them and can avail of them. This does not happen here. … an employee knows only as much as is communicated to him by his line manager. … nobody knows the written policies, nor do they bother to find it out … they only have a vague idea of the employee benefit policies. For them, as long as their line manager listens to them and understands their problem, they are happy. If he doesn't, they accept it as their fate'.

Role of Leaders/Supervisors

Leaders/supervisors/line managers are the first point of contact for employees when they expect any kind of support from the organization in the form of flexible work schedule, leave or any other accommodation.

Sub-themes: Transparency, clearly defined performance standards, empathetic leadership, trust and cohesiveness building, understanding

personal background of team members, regular performance feedbacks, clear communication.

A leader's role is very critical when it comes to team performance—this view was upheld by both leaders as well as team members. Leaders can help build a cohesive team and can create a feeling of mutual trust among the team members—which is very important as only when do co-workers have a feeling of trust are they willing to help and co-operate with each other and extend support to each other. Leaders can ensure this by, firstly, indulging in open, two-way communication with the members, secondly, by adopting common yardstick of performance for all and thirdly, by being empathetic. 'Empathetic' leadership style was the most preferred style by members and most successful as reported by the leaders. Respondents who were leaders said that they encourage their team members to speak up and communicate openly with them as well as with others so as to avoid any kind of misunderstanding. Communicating with team members also helps them understand the ethos, culture and background of the members, which sensitizes them to the needs of individual members (Fig. 6.4).

Team members showed their concern regarding performance evaluations. The targets are generally set for the team as a whole, which the team may or may not be able to attain. They expect the leader to update them regularly about performance evaluations and not give them a shock or surprise only at the end of the year. The leader is also expected to mentor and coach the team members for improving the overall performance of the team. This task is not just challenging but also creates a lot of pressure of time on leaders, as they have to take time out of their schedule for coaching
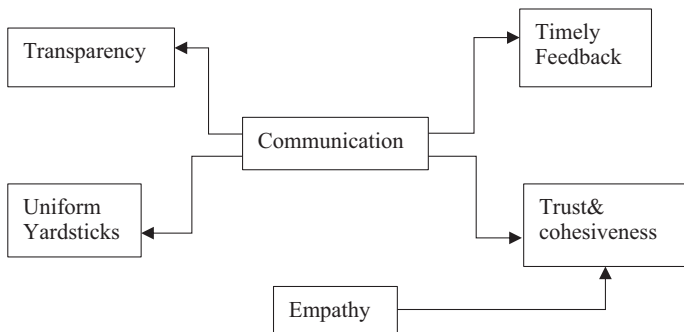

Fig. 6.4 Transparency effects

and mentoring team members. At times, it leads to a feeling of frustration for leaders, as one of the leader respondents said 'I feel I am running a training center here. ... I train them, coach them and guide them to improve performance and after learning the technique from me, they quit the job and join another organization. ... I have to start off once again with a new member'. However, the importance of mentoring as a source of workplace social support cannot be ignored and Carlson and Kacmar (2001) found that mentoring significantly helps reduce work-family conflict (especially in the direction of family to work). Kram (1985) mentions two functions that a mentor can perform that can help their subordinates. First is 'career development', which involves coaching, giving exposure and visibility, helping in accomplishing challenging tasks and protection. Second, the mentor can be a source of psychological support by offering counselling, friendship and serving as a role model. Both these behaviors of the mentor can help in improving the competence of the subordinates and in developing a feeling of belongingness towards the organization.

Leaders and members alike emphasized 'empathetic leadership style'. The team members expect the leader to be understanding of their non-work life too. From the leader's perspective, his role is extremely challenging as he is not just expected to be empathetic and understanding, but is also held responsible for the team performance and is answerable to the management. Wherever individual members are not able to perform or deliver as expected, the leader has to pitch in and take charge, else the whole team suffers. The leaders responded that they are the ones who find it most difficult to take leave and pass on their charge/responsibilities to someone else.

As far as team camaraderie is concerned, the overall work environment also has a role to play. As the respondents said, based on their previous work experience, there are organizations where the work culture is such that the teams bond together over regular dinners and get-togethers. In organizations that do not have such a work culture, the spirit of 'oneness' may vary from one team to another depending upon the role of team leader.

Communication

The theme emerged out of numerous codes that emphasized the importance of clear, two-way communication in the workplace, which creates actual as well as perceived role and expectation clarity.

Sub-themes: Two-way communication, creates awareness of work roles, spousal support = f (communication), listening to team members and co-workers, effective communication = psychological support (Fig. 6.5).

Effective communication both at work and in family has been cited by almost all respondents as an important tool in achieving balance. Communication with family members makes them aware of the work role demands and ensures a better understanding of the nature of job. It also helps develop a more co-operative attitude towards the partner in case of dual-earner couples. In addition to creating better awareness and understanding, effective two-way communication between partners provides a great source of psychological support and many times helps provide guidance too.

Similarly, effective two-way channels of communication in the workplace also help in reducing job ambiguity, clear doubts and misunderstanding and help build a more cohesive team. Communication with colleagues and co-workers helps them identify the adjustment mechanism adopted by others and how others have been successful at balancing their work and family demands. The respondents (comprising both leaders and members) said that the leader's role is critical to ensure effective communication. It helps the leader develop a clearer understanding of the personal background of the team members, their issues and concerns and expectations. By communicating with the members of his team, the leader is able to get a good idea about their culture, ethos and personal background, which helps him develop a suitable strategy to deal with them, extract their best performance and also help them with family-level issues. Respondents who were members said that a leader 'listening' to their problems was more important than the leader actually being able to do anything. It creates a
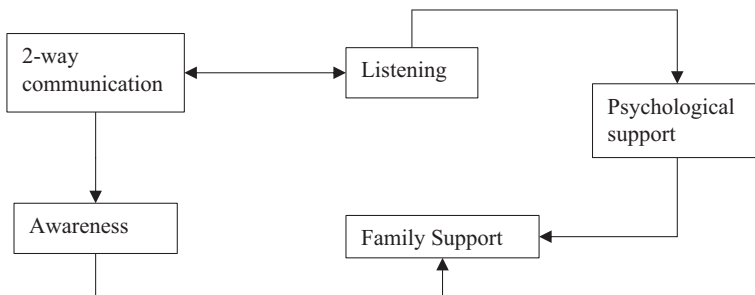

Fig. 6.5 Bi-directional communication

'perception' of supportive superiors, which provides some kind of psychological relief to team members. By encouraging two-way communication, the leaders give an opportunity to the members to come out with their concerns as well as get a platform to share their own concerns.

The importance of effective communication was emphasized by Nissen et al. (2003) in their study, which specifically focused on communication between couples as a means of reducing work-family conflict. The importance of communication has not been explored much and the researchers felt that having sufficient knowledge of each other's work-role demands and also about tasks in the family domain that require attention can help reduce role conflict and help couples plan their schedules better. Effective communication can ensure better task planning and will significantly reduce 'time-based conflict' (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Guterman (in Muchinsky et al. 1998, 263) mentioned a few of the demands for balancing work and family life as:

- Quality communication, spending enough time on intimate discussions about themselves as individuals and their relationships.
- Setting priorities with regard to time spent on work, managing the home, child care, leisure and other activities.
- Clarifying values, for example, work values such as challenge, growth, opportunity, security, recognition, power and prestige, and life values concerning hobbies, leisure, continued learning, religion and being part of society.
- Examining roles and their respective relative weights, such as the roles of provider, nurturer, homemaker and bill payer.
- Managing stress by identifying the sources, attempting to reduce the sources, examining one's responses to stress and taking the responsibility to manage one's own stress.

One of the most important findings of the study by Nissen et al. (2003) was that male partners experienced more conflict than their female partners if they did not have adequate information regarding the female partner's job. This is consistent with Thomas and Ganster's (1995) findings that spouses who had knowledge regarding their spouses' jobs experienced lesser conflict in their marriages. Adequate communication between partners can help resolve this problem as it will lead to both partners having good knowledge about each other's job, which can make them more understanding, supportive and empathetic.

THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH RESPONSE
AND ADJUSTMENT MECHANISMS

Conflict Resolution

As one respondent said 'accepting the conflict is important if we want to resolve it and despite changing organizations, I have realized that no matter where you work, work-family conflict will always be there'. The theme deals with recognizing the conflict, accepting the same and trying to find ways to resolve it.

Sub-themes: Evolutionary process, ongoing process, age and experience matters, solution-oriented approach, recognizing salience of both work an family roles, identify demand patterns, standardize work procedures (Fig. 6.6).

The respondents felt that dealing with work and family-role demands and pressures and trying to develop a 'strategy' to help ensure 'balance' is a continuously evolving process. The respondents felt that as they progress with life and gain experience, they learn ways of managing their different role demands. Most of them said that it was their 'over-enthusiasm' to perform at their job in the initial stages of their career that they had to correct later on, after getting married and having children. Initial years at work witnessed performing more than the actual role responsibilities, taking over more tasks in the 'eagerness' to prove oneself. This needed correction later on, with increased family-role responsibilities. Attaining balance is a 'desirable state' and every individual 'naturally' attempts to attain balance. This starts with the 'acceptance of work-family conflict' and the 'inevitability' of it in almost all types of jobs. The 'acceptance' of the problem can only lead to a 'solution-oriented approach'. The interviewees said that they learn coping strategy from each other. Both work and family
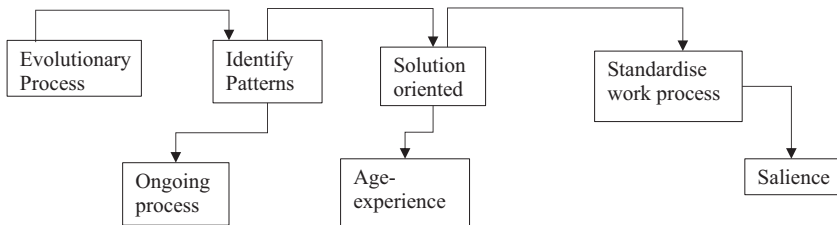

Fig. 6.6 Conflict resolution: evolutionary process

roles were cited as 'salient' by male and female respondents. Organizations were 'demanding' and nature of work in multi-national companies is such that it requires one to put in long working hours. Identifying patterns of demand and standardizing routine jobs help in reducing the time and attention that one has to give to each aspect of the job and helps the employee focus on more challenging tasks.

In the challenging corporate world, workers who prioritize work over family life and are willing to dedicate long hours to work are called 'ideal workers' (Bailyn and Harrington 2004; Rapoport and Rapoport 1969, 61). They are considered more eligible for promotions. In their research on work-like balance and career advancement potential, Lyness and Judiesch (2008) explored the higher possibility of career advancement for those managers who were able to balance their multiple role demands better, contribute more towards work-role demands and took lesser leaves and time off from work for personal (family) reasons. Their research hypothesis were based on the 'gendered culture theory', according to which, organizations give promotions to employees who focus on task accomplishment and do not let family or personal matters interfere in their work life (Acker 1990 for Gendered culture theory). In a previous research by Lyness and Judiesch (2008), the researchers found that managers who often took leaves of absence for family/personal reasons received fewer subsequent promotions than managers who did not.

In a research published in the *Harvard Business Review* (June, 2016), where several employees in the United States were interviewed to find out about the image of an 'ideal worker', how important it is to be an ideal worker and what strategies do people use to maintain the image of an ideal worker, 43% responded 'acceptance' as the strategy. As the researchers reported 'in their quest to succeed on the job, 'acceptors' prioritize their work identities and sacrifice or significantly suppress other meaningful aspects of who they are'. Such a strategy might work if one is very passionate about one's job and enjoys being occupied with it. However, when job and job demands start clouding other aspects of one's life leaving little room for developing one's interests and creativity in other areas, it poses a serious career threat, especially where the individual might find himself/herself in a situation of losing the job (which has become a part of his/her identity).

Research evidence from other cultures also show a natural tendency to attain balance between work and non-work demands as it can have consequences on the career growth pattern of an employee. The respondents in

the current study also emphasized a natural movement towards attaining balance, a conscious effort towards attaining the same and reducing conflict, although this involved adjustments in the personal domain.

Cultural Differences and Collectivism

The theme covers the response mechanism of the respondents and how they make adjustments in their lives to help manage work-family conflict. It also covers the responses that deal with the relationship that respondents share with the top management and the cultural differences in these relationships in individualistic and collectivist cultures.

Sub-themes: Higher priority to job, sacrifices in non-work life, acceptance of job pressures as norm, overtime comes naturally, no direct communication with top management,˙ family willing to adjust for the professional growth of the breadwinner, work culture of home country prevails (Fig. 6.7).

When the respondents were asked about work-family conflict affecting their work life and personal life, they accepted the presence of the conflict but did not feel very strongly about it. The general attitude was of 'acceptance'—that all jobs require time and attention, 'your job is your bread and butter' and that 'adjustments at family level are normal'. The research literature, especially that focusing on cross-cultural research (Spector and Allen 2007; Aycan 2008; Haar et al. 2014), has categorically emphasized the significant differences between attitudes of employees coming from a collectivist culture as opposed to those belonging to an individualistic cul-
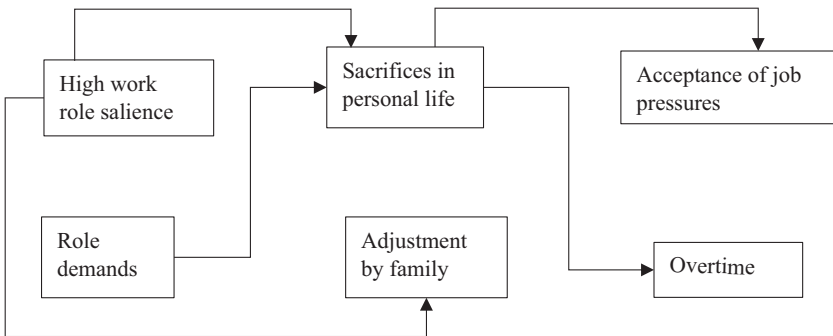

Fig. 6.7 Work priorities

ture. People in collectivist culture tend to give a lot of importance to their job and consider their job as a 'contributor to the family, rather than its competitor'. One of the respondents who has worked abroad (in the United States and Europe) reported that overtime pay is a matter of right there and even Indians working abroad claim the same. However, in India, they don't exercise this right and 'accept overtime as a part of the norm'. Work carries salience over family life. Work salience is even recognized by the family; they are willing to adjust and co-operate for the sake of growth in a job. In the cross-cultural study by Sector et al. (2004), the researchers tested for the association between working hours and work-family conflict to understand the difference between individualistic and collectivist cultures. A stronger relation between the variables was found in Anglo cultures as compared to collectivist cultures. The possible explanation for this as given by the researchers was that the Anglo economies tend to be stronger than collectivist economies and have a higher average household income. Collectivist nations are characterized by lower family incomes, huge population and vast unemployment—reasons that are enough to make a manager work longer hours to save his job. Added to this, the family support available in such cultures and the ease of availability of household help also make it possible to devote additional hours to work.

The employees have no direct contact with the top management and neither do they have a complete knowledge of all top management policies. Immediate superiors and line managers are the people who decide what policies can be availed of by the team members. There are lack of India-specific policies and most often the culture of the home country of the organization prevails.

Discussion

The study aimed at understanding how people respond to the work-family conflict that they face as a consequence of working in multi-national corporations. The objective was to understand the attitude of people towards work-family conflict and to get a general idea about role of social factors in helping people attain a better work-life balance. All the employees who were interviewed agreed to the presence of work-family conflict, although in varying degrees. Both male and female respondents reported conflict, which was mainly due to the nature of the job. Work environment, pressure of performance, stiff target setting and to some extent, role ambiguity, were cited as the work-related antecedents to work-family conflict.

Family-level factors like parenthood or presence of dependent adults were cited as factors that did increase the family-role responsibilities, but these were not reported as intervening with effective discharge of work-role responsibilities.

Researchers have categorized work-family conflict as work-to-family conflict (where work interferes in the effective discharge of family-related responsibilities) and family-to-work conflict (where family responsibilities make effective performance at job difficult). In the present study, the work-to-family conflict direction was more dominant and most respondents said that they sacrifice family time for work time and usually prioritize work over family. Social support from family was cited as very important by almost all respondents and they felt that family support was the factor that helped them devote long hours to work. While men cited spousal support as most significant, women cited parental support as most critical in helping them continue with their jobs, even post-motherhood. In cases where no parental support could be available, male respondents reported that the spouse had to either quit her job or move to a more convenient job (e.g., self-employment) that permitted more flexibility of work time.

The study aimed at understanding the general cultural environment of the country that helped in shaping the attitude of people towards work-family conflict. It emerged that as with other collectivist nations, in India too work is given a higher priority than family, especially by men (who are considered to be the main breadwinners of the family). Sacrifices made by the spouse or children or other members of the family is considered 'normal' and is looked upon as something that has to be done for a better, more secure future. Growth in a job is seen as prestigious and ensures greater economic stability for the entire family. Another attitude that emerged from the discussion was that of 'acceptance'—work-family conflict is accepted as a given and normal/natural consequence of working in a multi-national corporation, thus the thrust is on how to make adjustments in personal and work life to help manage this conflict more effectively. Due to little or negligible interaction with top management, there is little expectation of organizational support in helping employees reduce the work-family conflict that they experience. The emphasis is more on informal sources of support—from co-workers and from immediate superiors. Due to lateral interactions with co-workers, the attitude is of mutual co-operation, although some gender difference in attitude was reported by female respondents. With immediate superiors/line managers, open lines of communication with one's bosses helped in building an environ-

ment of trust and helped ensure maximum support and co-operation to everyone. The attitude of acceptance leads to lesser awareness of HR policies related to work-life balance and a lesser demanding attitude of the employees regarding the implementation of these policies.

Conclusion

Studies on work-family conflict have mainly explored the causes and consequences of the conflict occurring in work and family domains. Taking this further, the present study is an attempt to understand what shapes the response mechanism of the employees working in high-pressure work environments. This has helped shed light on the cultural factors prevalent in the economy that shape the attitude of the people. The relative importance of work and family in the life of an individual, the preference accorded to each of these domains and the stress and strain arising out of the conflict are some of the variables that are influenced by the socio-cultural environment of the country, as the socio-cultural set-up affects the behavioral response of the people.

The study has given insights into the adjustment mechanisms that happen at the level of the family to help attain work-life balance and the hierarchical and lateral relationships existing at the work front. The lack of communication and interaction with top management creates a divide between them and the employees working at middle or lower levels of management, which causes gaps in expectations and creates an ambiguous environment for the employee, where he looks for support from line managers and co-workers. The quality of interactions with co-workers and line mangers define the quality of work environment and creates a perception of support and cooperation from them.

Adjustments at the level of the family results in one of the partners giving up a high-growth career to facilitate the career advancement of the other as without a continuous parental support dual-career couples find it difficult to balance the role requirements of job and family. Organizations need to take a note of this too as it leads to them losing out on quality employees due to the lack of adequate and appropriate family-friendly policies. The employees are either not aware of what actually exists on paper or are too hesitant to demand anything as a matter of right. Both these issues can be addressed by looking into work-family conflict with a little more sensitivity and encouraging two-way communication with employees.

REFERENCES

Adams, G. A., King, L. A., & King, D. W. (1996). Relationships of job and family involvement, family social support and work-family conflict with job and life satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*(4), 411–420.

Allen, T. D. (2001). Family-supportive work environments: The role of organisational perceptions. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 58*(3), 414–435.

Allen, T. D., Herst, D., Bruck, C. S., & Sutton, M. (2000). Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 5*(2), 278–308.

Aryee, S., Luk, V., Leung, A., & Lo, S. (1999). Role stressors, inter-role conflict and well-being: The moderating influence of spousal support and coping behaviours among employed parents in Hong Kong. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 54*, 259–278.

Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro-role transitions. *The Academy of Management Review, 25*(3), 472–491.

Aycan, Z. (2008). Cross-cultural approaches to work-family conflict. In K. Korabik & D. Lero (Eds.), *Handbook of work-family conflict* (pp. 359–371). London: Cambridge University Press.

Aycan, Z., & Eskin, M. (2005). Relative contributions of child-care, spousal support and organisational support in reducing work-family conflict for men and women: The case of Turkey. *Sex Roles, 53*(7), 453–471.

Bailyn, L., & Harrington, M. (2004). Redediging work for work-family integration. *Community, Work and Family, 7*(2), 197–208.

Burke, R. J., & Greenglass, E. R. (1999). Work-family conflict, spousal support and nursing staff well-being during organisational re-structuring. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 4*(4), 327–336.

Carlson, D. S., & Kacmar, K. M. (2000). Work-family conflict in organisations: Do life roles make a difference. *Journal of Management, 26*(5), 1031–1054.

Chiaburu, D. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2008). Do peers make the place? Conceptual synthesis and meta-analysis of co-worker effects on perceptions, attitudes, OCBs and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(5), 1082–1103.

Cobb, S. (1976). Social support as a moderator of life stress. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 38*(5), 300–314.

Fierman, J. (1994). Are companies less family-friendly. *Fortune Journal, 129*(6), 64–67.

Frone, M. R., Yardley, J. K., & Markel, K. S. (1997). Developing and testing an integrative model of the work-family interface. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 50*, 145–167.

Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review, 10*(1), 76–88.

Greenhaus, J. H., Parasuraman, S., & Granrose, C. S. (1989). Sources of work-family conflict among two-career couples. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 34*, 133–153.

Haar, J. M., Russo, M., Sune, A., & Ollier-Malaterre, A. (2014). Outcomes of work-life balance on job satisfaction, life satisfaction and mental health: A study across seven cultures. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 85*, 361–373.

Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualising stress. *American Psychologist, 44*, 513–524.

Hobfoll, S. E., & Stokes, J. P. (1988). The process and mechanics of social support. In S. Duck, D. F. Hay, S. E. Hobfoll, W. Ickes, & B. M. Montgomery (Eds.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research and interventions* (pp. 497–517). Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity.* Oxford, England: John Wiley.

Kinnunen, U., & Mauno, S. (1998). Antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict among employed women and men in Finland. *Human Relations Journal, 51*(2), 157–177.

Kram, K. E. (1985). Improving the mentoring process. *Training and Development Journal, 39*(4), 40–43.

Lazarus, R., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* New York: Springer.

Lyness, K. S., & Judiesch, M. K. (2008). Can managers have a life and a career? International and multi-source perspectives on work-life balance and career advancement potential. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(4), 789–805.

Maitland, A. (1998, May 7). When the culture is to stay late. *The Financial Times.*

Mathews, R. A., & Wayne, J. H. (2014). A longitudinal examination of role overload and work-family conflict: The mediating role of inter-domain transitions. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour, 35*, 72–91.

Morris, B. (1997). Is your family wrecking your career? *Fortune, 135*(5), 70–76.

Muchinsky, P. M., Kriek, H. J., & Schreuder, A. M. G. (1998). *Personnel psychology.* Johannesburg: Thomson.

Nissen, B. T., Vuuren, L. V., & Visser, D. (2003). Communication of job-related information and work-family conflict in dual-career couples. *Journal of Industrial Psychology, 29*(1), 18–25.

Parasuraman, S., Purohit, Y. S., Godshalk, V. M., & Beutell, N. J. (1996). Work and family variables, entrepreneurial career success, and psychological well-being. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 48*, 275–300.

Pleck, J. S., Staines, G. L., & Lang, L. (1980). Conflicts between work and family life. *Monthly Labour Review, 103*(3), 29–32.

Rapoport, R., & Rapoport, R. N. (1969). The dual-career family: A variant pattern and social change. *Human Relations Journal, 22*(1), 3–30.

Reid, E., & Ramarajan, L. (2016, June). Managing high-intensity workplace. *Harvard Business Review.*

Spector, P. E., & Allen, T. D. (2007). Cross-national differences in relationships of work demands, job satisfaction and turnover intentions with work-family conflict. *Personnel Psychology, 60*(4), 805–835.

Thomas, L. T., & Ganster, D. C. (1995). Impact of family-supportive work behaviours on work-family conflict and strain: A control perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80*(1), 6–15.

Yang, N., Chen, C. C., Choi, J., & Zou, Y. (2007). Sources of work-family conflict: A Sino-US comparison of the effects of work and family demands. *Academy of Management Journal, 43*(1), 113–123.