Applying Industrial–Organizational Psychology to Help Organizations and Individuals Balance Work and Family

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We agree with Kossek, Baltes, and Matthews' (2011) contention that ''work–family researchers have not made a significant impact in improving the lives of employees relative to the amount of research that has been conducted.'' We also largely agree with their assessment of the reasons for this gap. However, we offer modified paths for addressing the problem.

First, we contend that an additional reason that work–family research to date has not had the desired impact is that it has neglected to fully tap what industrial–organizational (I–O) psychology has to offer. An additional path to improving the work and family lives of employees is the better integration of theory, research, and best practices from I–O psychology into work–family research and practice. There are a host of human resource practices for which I–O psychology offers arguably the best tools available. Job analysis, performance assessment, training, who does it better than us? Yet, work–family researchers rarely bring this knowledge and these tools to bear on the problem of work–family conflict (Major & Cleveland, 2007).

Second, as an alternative elaboration of Paths 1 and 3, we propose that the real ''sweet spot'' on the work–family intervention lever is leadership. Regarding Path 1, it is not as though there is a dearth of research on policy and practice implementation (e.g., Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999). Perhaps, instead, the research has moved in a different direction with good reason: If our point of focus is policy, the boundary conditions (many discussed by Kossek et al.) are so numerous and vast that research in this area is unlikely to yield consistent, significant findings that can inform practice. As Kossek et al. acknowledge, the practical reality is that, even between departments within organizations, departures from organization-wide work–family policy usage and culture are the norm. Drawing from the literature, we argue that the focus needs to be more micro level than policy. In addition to empowering the individual, as suggested by Path 3, organizations need to empower supervisors to facilitate work–family balance. As we illustrate, I–O psychologists can draw from leadership theory and research to address work–family issues.

Applying Fundamental I–O Practices

I–O psychology contributes to the state of the art in personnel practices and, as any first-year graduate student could tell you, they all begin with job analysis. Thus, a reasonable first step in equipping organizations

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and supervisors to address work–family conflict is to provide them with information regarding the nature of the work–family conflict that is likely to occur for particular jobs and job tasks (Major & Cleveland, 2007). With another colleague, we developed and tested Work–Life Job Analysis, (WLJA; Morganson, Major, & Bauer, 2010), a tool based on task analysis and a classic German-developed job analysis procedure to enforce legal standards for industrial safety and quality of work–life. The tool was effectively used to analyze tenure-track faculty positions.

Kossek et al. are correct in their contention that individual differences and boundary management preferences are important to applying work–life initiatives; however, we caution scientist–practitioners not to overlook the evidence that certain positions are susceptible to conflict independent of incumbent characteristics. Indeed, work characteristics explain nearly half of the variance in work–family conflict between occupations (Dierdorff & Ellington, 2008). By identifying consensus among subject-matter experts regarding the components of a position that hinder and facilitate work–family balance, the results of WLJA can be used to summarize the work–family demands of a position so that individuals can determine (via realistic job preview) the extent to which their own personal attributes and boundary management styles match (or mismatch) a position (Morganson et al., 2010). The implications could be large scale if, for example, the work–family demands of positions were added to O*NET and used for vocational guidance purposes (Morganson et al., 2010).

Training is a staple strategy for changing behavior in organizations. Despite numerous recommendations for supervisory work–family training in the literature (e.g., Lobel & Kossek, 1996; Major & Lauzun, 2010), little empirical research has been conducted on the topic (Thompson, Beauvais, & Allen, 2006). A recent exception is the quasi-experimental supervisory training study conducted by Hammer,

Kossek, Anger, Bodner, and Zimmerman (2011). Supervisors were trained to engage in family-supportive supervisory behaviors. Training effectiveness (i.e., reaction, learning, behavior, and results criteria) was evaluated using a pretest–posttest with control group design. Additional work of this type is greatly needed. Findings from the *2008 National Study of Employers* show that 50% of employers are training supervisors to respond to the work–family needs of employees (Galinsky, Bond, & Sakai, 2008). I–O research could have a profound impact by informing the training already being done and encouraging the other 50% of employers to conduct supervisory work–family training.

A major mechanism for ensuring desired behavior at work is to hold individuals accountable for it via performance assessment. This too has been recommended as a mechanism for ensuring that supervisors attend to employees' work–family needs (Major & Cleveland, 2007; Major & Lauzun, 2010). According to the *2008 National Study of Employers*, 62% of employers consider how well supervisors ''manage flexible work arrangements'' when assessing supervisory performance and making compensation decisions (Galinsky et al., 2008, p. 27). Although managing flexible work arrangements is only one type of work–family supportive behavior, these findings suggest that employers understand the power that performance appraisal has in encouraging supervisors to support work and family. A particularly useful approach to enforcing accountability for family-friendly practice is 360-degree feedback. The assumption behind 360-degree feedback is that different sources (e.g., supervisors, subordinates, peers) provide different, unique perspectives regarding a target's behavior. Supervisors can provide subordinates with feedback on balancing work–family demands. Peers, who are likely to experience similar conflicts, can provide a complementary perspective. In addition, subordinates are ideally suited to provide supervisors with upward feedback to encourage family-supportive supervisor

behavior. Use of multisource feedback impacts feedback acceptance (Facteau, Facteau, Schoel, Russell, & Poteet, 1998) and can improve behavior over time (Smither, London, & Reilly, 2005). We need to study the effectiveness of such programs and conduct research to test additional ways in which supervisor's family-supportive behavior can be incorporated into performance assessment.

Leadership Focus: An Alternative Elaboration for Paths 1 and 3

Extant work–family research tells us that focusing on family-friendly policy is inadequate. Indeed, benefit availability alone has only a small effect on employee job attitudes and experiences (Allen, 2001). Workers' experiences of work–family outcomes are more strongly and directly related to the supervisor and the organization perceptions that he or she fosters. Enactment of family-supportive policy is typically at the discretion of the supervisor (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Thus, we recommend drawing from the leadership literature to address work–family conflict.

Efforts to bridge the leadership and work–family literatures have already begun. Major and Cleveland (2007) described how leader–member exchange (LMX) theory could be particularly applicable to addressing work–family issues. Introducing LMX into a cross-level model of cultural and interpersonal supports for work–family, Major, Fletcher, Davis, and Germano (2008) demonstrated that, in addition to having its own negative relationship with work–family conflict (operationalized in this case as work interference with family), LMX also had an indirect relationship with conflict through its positive relationship with coworker support. In addition, results showed that once LMX and coworker support were accounted for, work–family culture no longer had a significant relationship with work–family conflict, demonstrating that relational supports have primacy over organization-level supports. This research

provides further support for the notion that micro-level intervention is likely to have more of an impact than a macro level approach (e.g., focusing on policy).

Research at the intersection of leadership and work–family issues suggests that in addition to empowering individuals to implement work–family balance (as suggested by Path 3), supervisors need to be empowered. In a qualitative organizational case study with colleagues, we found that the most frequently cited reason that frontline supervisors were unable to accommodate subordinate work–family balance requests was that they lacked authority (Lauzun, Morganson, Major, & Green, 2010).

We recently used LMX as the theoretical framework for a model of work–family coping (Major & Morganson, 2011), a topic that has received relatively little attention in the work–family literature (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). This model uses LMX to describe strategies for empowering the individual employee to address work–family conflict, which is consistent with Kossek et al.'s Path 3. Moreover, it recognizes the relational aspects of work–family coping and likewise describes how the supervisor may be empowered and/or constrained by the organization in aiding the employee's efforts to not only remedy work–family conflict but also to prevent it. It is notable that the application of leadership theory provides a framework for more thoroughly investigating the role of the leader–follower relationship in work–family coping and also provides insight into *preventive coping*, a critical gap in work–family research (Thompson, Poelmans, Allen, & Andreassi, 2007). In addition to moving work–family research in a direction more likely to benefit organizations and the individuals that comprise them, the integration of the work–family and leadership literatures contributes to leadership theory and research, in particular by suggesting a set of work–family oriented criteria for evaluating leader performance.

As good scientist–practitioners, we must always be mindful of how research can be implemented in practice. In order to have the greatest positive work–family impact, work–family research must not start at square one nor should it go in directions that have already been tested. Rather, we need to fully utilize the knowledge that I–O psychology has bequeathed to us.

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