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Chapter 12
Flexibility Enactment Theory:
Implications of Flexibility Type, Control, and Boundary Management for Work and Family Effectiveness

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“ I don’t really have ...walls around either of them (work and family). If something big is going on, one tends to **bleed** over into the other.”

“SARAH,” Infocom employee who often teleworks

A general tenet of the work-family scholarship is that individuals who are employed in workplaces that are designed as if work and family are separate spheres will experience higher work-family role conflict, unless employer adopt policies to provide greater flexibility to support integration between work and home (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998; Kanter, 1977). Flextime, telecommuting, and other flexibility policies are proliferating to “help” employees blend work and family roles to reduce conflicts (Golden, 2001). National surveys show that 84% of major employers have adopted flexible schedules and nearly two-thirds (64%) offer telecommuting (Alliance of Work/Life Professionals, 2001) with these policies most available to professionals (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000).

Yet as the opening quotation suggests, even with access to flexible work arrangements, managing boundaries between work and home remains a significant challenge for many individuals (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). The purpose of this chapter is to theoretically unpack a widely used construct in the work-family field: flexibility. Our main arguments are that there may be “good” and “bad” forms of flexibility, and that the type of flexibility enacted and how individuals manage and experience boundaries matters for positive outcomes.

Our assumptions are that work family research would be enhanced if more studies shift focus away from viewing formal access to and use of flexibility as a panacea, framing it as a dichotomous variable (one either has it or doesn’t) that is usually always positive, and under-differentiating the effects of different types of flexibility. Research on alternative work arrangements has under-examined the way in which access to flexibility is a necessary but insufficient condition for reducing work-family conflict and enhancing well-being. We contend that

what matters most for effectiveness in the synthesis of work and family roles are the conditions under which flexibility is enacted. This perspective is consistent with Rapoport and colleagues (2002) argument that the research should shift from a focus on formal policy to informal and change processes.

Flexibility Enactment

We develop the concept of *flexibility enactment*, which is the type of use and the way boundaries are psychologically managed, and identify the conditions under which flexibility promotes positive work-life outcomes. Our main thesis is that the type of flexibility used and how the individual psychologically experiences flexibility matters most for work and family well-being. A focus on flexibility enactment acknowledges that variation exists in the way that flexibility is employed, the degree to which access and use of flexibility practices promote individual autonomy and job control, and in how individuals' psychologically experience managing boundaries between work and home. Our chapter argues that that different individuals will experience varied outcomes of flexibility, even after taking into account, the constraints of their families and jobs. Although conventional wisdom might strongly suggest that some people are well-suited to working in a highly flexible environment and others are not at all (MacDermid, 2004), the boundary limits to our chapter are to focus our discussion on flexibility types and boundary management. This focus is due to space limitations and our belief that certain structuring of flexibility and boundaries between work and family may create strong situations that are more likely to lead to positive or negative outcomes than to individual differences.

In this chapter, we draw on insights gleaned from an empirical study we conducted involving interviews with over 300 professional knowledge workers from two Fortune 500 firms who had varying access to flexibility in the location (e.g. teleworking, telecommuting), personal

autonomy, and timing and regularity of work, and a subset of their supervisors (Eaton, Lautsch, & Kossek, 2003; Kossek, 2002; Kossek, Lautsch, Eaton & Van Vanden Bosch, 2004).

Figure 1 depicts aspects of the constructs capturing flexibility enactment we develop. It refers to 1) the type of flexibility used (i.e., formality, individual job control/autonomy, irregularity, mobility, and portability volume), and 2) one's boundary management strategy. An individual's boundary management strategy does not involve a dichotomy between segmentation and integration as some of the work-family literature to date has implied, but rather combinations of various types of boundaries (e.g. temporal, mental, physical, behavioral). We identify predictors and outcomes of the different ways in which individuals manage the boundaries and borders between work and home.

Our figure also notes the importance of considering positive and well as negative effects from flexibility use for various work and family attitudes and behaviors. In other words, in the short run, some kinds of boundaries and flexibility such as high mobility and high integration may be beneficial for work outcomes since one has greater accessibility to work, but over the long run may negatively affect personal well-being or family outcomes by resulting in increased work to family conflict. We hope our chapter will encourage more research that are derived from assumptions of mixed effects from flexibility.

This chapter is derived from the identification of several gaps in the literature. First, variation may exist in the extent and nature of flexibility used such as in the formality, location, control, volume, or regularity of flexible work that could have differing implications for work and family outcomes. We believe work family research generally under-examines the reality that employees 1) often use different and multiple forms and amounts of flexibility, 2) usually do not experience flexibility in the same way or as an all or nothing phenomenon, and 3) having access to flexibility does not necessarily capture their use. More research to date has examined the

availability of formal flexible work arrangement policies (e.g., telecommuting, flextime) than the consequences of use or the way that flexibility is practiced on the job. We believe that the work family literature has under- considered informal flexibility and that job design measures need to be updated to account for this job characteristic.

An under-studied recent change is the increase in many professionals' access to informal flexibility in terms of how their jobs are designed instead or in addition to a formal HR policy. Greater numbers of employees are taking their work home or are working while traveling on planes, visiting the customer or commuting in cars or trains, and they may not all (or mostly) be formally teleworking or using other formal flexibility policies. Some may be working flexibly different hours each week, while others flex at the same time each week. We develop constructs to conceptualize variation in the nature and degree in which flexibility is practiced and implications for work-family outcomes.

Additionally, more research is needed on how employees enact boundaries as linking mechanism between work and family. In recent years, there has been considerable study of the conflicts that individuals face in managing their work and family lives, but limited research has examined how people differ in their preferences for managing work and family boundaries or their feelings of control over job flexibility. While some theoretical and qualitative work has been conducted on the blending of work and family boundaries (cf. Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), more theory is needed on the correlates of an individual's boundary management strategy defined as the principles one uses to organize and separate role demands and expectations into specific realms of home (i.e., dependent care giving) and work (i.e., doing one's job) (Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr, 1999). Given our movement toward a virtual workplace where increasing numbers of individuals have access to work at any hour of the day, we theorize correlates of an individual's

boundary management strategy and examine linkages between perceptions of control over flexibility and work-family outcomes.

A recent review of the telework literature notes that “how people telework” has been overlooked with most employees working away from the office part-time rather than full-time (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). We believe there is considerable variability in the enactment of flexibility policies as the preferences of individual supervisors regarding how to best manage changes associated with policy use differ (Eaton, 2003; Glass & Fujimoto, 1995). For example, one manager may state that teleworkers must be in the office on set days while another allows more flexibility, and another may only offer policies that allow for lower role commitment on the job if one takes advantage of the policies. A study of three types of flexible work schedules including flextime found that supervisors are more likely to provide more work-life flexibility to top performers and only if not too many workers in the same work group use the policy at the same time (Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). Using a sample of MBA students, Rau and Hyland (2002) noted differences in hypothesized influences on conflict and turnover intentions between vignettes of telecommuting and flextime arrangements. These results indicate that not all types of flexibility may relate to work-family outcomes similarly. We theorize differing effects of various flexibility types: formality, personal job autonomy, volume, regularity, and mobility.

Formality: Divergence between supervisors’ performance ratings and users’ self-reported attitudes. Formality is defined as the degree to which permission to use of flexibility is formalized by established organizational practices or procedures. The more that an individual uses formal flexibility policies that publicly acknowledge the asking of permission from supervisors or the human resource department to work flexibly, and/or establishes ritualized use of nonstandard work times or locations, the higher one’s use of formal flexibility. It well documented that conventional stereotypes of workers on alternative schedules are that they are less committed (Williams, 2000).

It is perfectly reasonable to assume supervisors might share these biases and assume that workers who formally acknowledge they need to use flexibility policies are not ideal workers who can work any where or time at the beck and call of their firms. Studies also show that supervisors have resistance to flexibility programs as there is a prevailing belief that they create more work for them, and make their job of managing and coordinating more difficult (Eaton, Kossek, & Lautsch, 2003; Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). It can be a burdensome for supervisors to keep track of all the different arrangements when the number of workers in flexible arrangements starts to rise. There also may be a supervisory fear that higher formal access to flexibility will make flexibility be viewed as an entitlement, and individuals will be unwilling to work certain times when unexpected demands arise.

Proposition 1: Due to stereotypes regarding the negative effects of flexibility on the organization, supervisors are more likely to rate the performance of individuals who are users of formal flexibility lower on performance ratings than other employees who do not formally use flexibility policies.

Although we had quietly hoped that our pessimistic views of supervisors attitudes toward users would be disproved, even after controlling for many individual differences such as gender, family demographics, and job characteristics, our hierarchical regression analysis showed that formal users of flexibility had significantly lower supervisor performance ratings!

Much of the published literature on teleworking relies only on self-report data from users of the policies, which tends to have a positive bias supporting use, as employees have a vested interest in not losing access to flexibility (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Our negative findings may have been strengthened by the fact we measured actual formal access to teleworking based on personnel records confirming the granting of organizational permission to telework and the provision of technical capability to regularly work offsite, which was in contrast to most of the published research on teleworking. Although we measured formal use as a dichotomous variable,

since that was how the companies in our study measured use, we wish to note that it may be that the effects of flexibility cannot be fully captured dichotomously, but rather as a continuous variable. There may be a sensitivity level where the amount of flexibility matters. In addition, individual differences in caregiving and job demands and motivational influences such as good supervision and clear performance standards may moderate the effects of flexibility; mere access to formal programs may not tap into these other influences. Certainly, we are not suggesting that theories consider formal access unimportant. If policies are not available, most individuals will not be able to access flexibility at all. What we are suggesting is that theories need to not assume that formal access or use is necessarily sufficient to ensure positive work and family outcomes.

Despite supervisory biases against using formal flexibility, we theorized that greater access to formal work life supports will affect organizational membership behaviors such as retention and career stability. Kossek and Nichol (1992) found that nurses were much less likely to turnover if they had formal employer support for family such as on site child care. Further, there is an established literature on the existence of positive relationships between the availability or use of formal organizational supports for family and employee attitudes (Ozeki, 2003) such as loyalty and organizational commitment (Allen, 2001; Grover & Crooker, 1995, Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001). Indeed, research consistently shows a positive relationship between the existence or use of flexibility policies and lower intention to turnover, and preparedness to move to a new job (Rau & Hyland, 2002; Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

Proposition 2: Formal access to flexibility (e.g. telework) will positively relate to favorable *employee work retention attitudes* such as lower intention to turnover or prepare for career mobility.

We indeed did find in our empirical study (Kossek, et al., 2004) that formal access to flexibility (e.g., telework) was positively related to favorable employee work retention attitudes such

as lower intention to turnover or prepare for a career change. We surmised although that employees are motivated to perform basic job requirements by a host of factors that may not necessarily be related to employer support of work and family, the availability and use of formal flexibility may be an attractive job characteristic that enables a company or a profession to retain individuals. It is a way of differentiating a job or career from others in the marketplace.

Research on whether there is a positive relationship between formal access to telework and lower work-family conflict is inconclusive. While some research is positive (Duxbury, Higgins & Neufeld, 1998; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001), other studies are not. Hill, Miller, Weiner, and Cuihan (1998) find no difference in levels of work-family conflict experienced by professionals who were required to work under a “virtual office plan” that reduced office space while giving them electronic supports to work from anywhere (often at home), compared to those who worked in company offices. Allen (2001) finds that greater *use* of work-family policies providing flexibility such as telecommuting, flextime and compressed weeks is related to less work-family conflict, while mere *availability* was not. Eaton (2003) also finds that usability of work-family policies --that employees feel free to use actually them-- is what is critical for positive outcomes not mere availability. Notwithstanding some notable exceptions (e.g., Eaton, 2003, Grover & Crocker, 1995; Lambert, 2000), some work family studies confound access and use. Given the mixed results on work-family conflict, we theorized and found:

P3 Formal access to telework is insufficient in and of itself to affect work to family and family to work conflict.

After considering the effects of individual differences such as gender and job characteristics, and using a control group of users and nonusers, we found that formal access to telework does not significantly reduce work-to-family and family-to-work conflict. It is a null effect. We advise researchers to try to not only rely on self-report data of use, or only measure access to

policies. Our research suggests that formal access has more symbolic than tangible effects or some other unmeasured variables such as job design, workload, personal control over flexibility and family caregiving demands, supportive supervision and work cultures may matter more for the reduction of work family conflict than access alone. More research is needed that not only documents the public relations benefits of flexibility access but also measures how well these policies are actually working to benefit employees and their families.

Job autonomy/control: Personal control over where, when and how one works may be the most critical flexibility construct for assessing employee well-being. Parker, Wall and Cordery (2001) note that developments in work and job design theory have not kept pace with changes in organizational practices related to the variation in the experience of autonomy while teleworking. For example, telework professionals such as information technology consultants who work from home might have high autonomy, whereas other teleworkers such as telemarketers might have jobs that are designed to be quite tightly controlled, even though both employees have access to telework (Feldman & Gainey, 1997). Research has long demonstrated the importance of personal autonomy for well-being (Parker et al., 2001).

Some literature reviews have noted that one problem with early work-family conflict research is that few studies measured whether the use of policies such as flexibility actually reduced conflict or improved personal effectiveness (cf. Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; 1999). Given the changing nature of work in which technological changes have made it easier for professionals to be accessible to work around the clock, we believe that an under-investigated variable is the degree to which individuals can control their flexibility: the degree to which they have personal autonomy over where, when, and how they work.

Previous research on telework has focused more on formal access to telework than on the degree of autonomy one has over their flexibility. For example, a company may offer formal work-

family policies, but despite the organizational rhetoric regarding human resource management progressivism, they may not necessarily benefit employees in the way they are stated on paper (Still & Strang, 2003). The rhetoric of work-family friendly flexibility policies may not always match their reality (Avery & Zabel, 2001): they may not necessarily give employees greater autonomy over their flexibility.

When we looked at traditional measures of autonomy in job design, we did not see measures of control over the location and flexible scheduling of work being fully captured as basic elements of job design in widely used measures such as the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), which measure personal job autonomy in how the work is done at the workplace and some degrees of interdependence. We theorized that individual autonomy over where and when one worked is a key aspect of job autonomy that should be assessed to update measures of autonomy within work environments in which the job can increasingly be done portably or away from the main workplace at different times of the day. We propose this construct, personal job flexibility autonomy, and believe positively relates to work and family outcomes. We believe that the more individuals perceive they had control over flexibility, the more they would experience lower work-family conflict, and lower intention to turnover or change careers.

P4 Personal job flexibility autonomy, defined as control over where, when, and how one works is positively related to lower one's work family conflict, intention to turnover, and career movement preparedness.

Of all of the flexibility enactment measures in our study, personal job autonomy, was strongest predictor of "good flexibility" outcomes. Those who had higher personal job flexibility control had lower work-family conflict, better work attitudes such as lower intention to turnover, low career movement preparation. What was surprising was they did not necessarily get higher performance ratings, suggesting some supervisor resistance to personal autonomy or that this is

not what matters for good ratings, other factors are more important, such as how one manages boundaries that matter.

Portable work volume: Are there any downsides to being able to carry around our work?

Most previous research has not measured the volume or proportion of work done portably or away from the office. Some studies on teleworking have assumed a full-time at home arrangement, although recent research suggests that this is more the exception than the rule (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). We believe the richness in the variation in the nature of place flexibility has not been fully captured in most previous studies. “Telework” and “telecommuting” are too constricting terms, as they do not fully portray all aspects of the job that employees might do away from the main work location.

We suggest the term “portable work,” which we define as “work you can take with you,” might better capture all the work employees might be doing in enacting their flexibility in time and place. Portable work includes not only telework, which has been defined as working outside of the workplace and communicating by means of communications or computer-based technology (Bailey & Kurland, 2002), but also any other job-related work the employee conducts away from the office such as phone calls, writing, doing analytic work without telecommunications, face-to-face meetings etc. These later tasks are still clearly “work,” but they often do not rely on wired technology. We believe that the act of working away from the office location is what needs to be captured in theory regardless of whether one is using telecommunications. Portable work extends to any kind of work an individual can conduct away from a workplace setting (although it may also be conducted in groups), and without large-scale capital investment. Tasks like grading term papers for a university professor are portable, for example, as are manual tasks such as sewing, clerical tasks such as word processing, service tasks such as phone answering, and creative tasks such as writing or computer programming. Work that is dependent on being in a particular place at

a particular time, such as direct patient care in nursing, or active firefighting, is by definition not portable.

We thought that individuals who engage in higher volumes of portable work would be more likely to develop positive work retention attitudes such as lower intention to turnover (Allen, Shore & Griffith, 2003) or change careers. This might be due to a perceived greater implementation of new ways of working to accommodate the changing composition of the workforce, higher perceived organizational support for family, and more signaling from the firm that it trusts its workers. We thought that since employees would be able to work at home when needed for family demands, they might experience lower work to family or family to work conflict.

P5 High volume of portable work will result in positive work retention attitudes and lower work family conflict.

In our study, we found that higher volume of portable work did significantly reduce preparedness to make career changes, but did not significantly affect turnover intentions. Future research should examine different effects of the amount of work done away from the office on job turnover, and career turnover. We found few studies that examine these differential predictors, yet we believe they are important for future research. Professionals like the career freedom to work away from the office, but may be less loyal to a particular job regardless of flexibility volume.

While the employer might reap more favorable employee attitudes from permitting high volumes of portable work, as in the case of formal access, future research needs to continue to investigate less positive outcomes related to work family conflict. While we found no positive effects on conflict from higher volumes of portable work in and of itself (as we will share later in this chapter, it was the type of boundary management strategy used that mattered not volume per se), some scholars go as far as to suggest that those in jobs with higher volumes of portable tasks will encounter higher work-family conflict. These individuals will find it more difficult to set limits

between work and family demands and may experience joint role overload. They may be seen as more available to interruptions from *both* work and family demands (Mirchandani, 1998). Rau (2003) notes that while a goal of flexible working arrangements is to make time less scarce and reduce work-family conflict, it is not clear, whether or under what circumstances increased flexibility in job spatial and temporal boundaries increases or decreases conflict and well-being. She observes that while higher flexibility can improve the ability to manage work and family demands, it could also result in increased role-blurring, which in turn could create confusion about which demands (work or family) should be attended to at any given time and actually could increase role conflict.

Schedule irregularity and place mobility: Is flux in time and place generally a “good thing” for employees? We conceptualize two other variables future research should use to capture flux in flexibility enactment and how it relates to work and family outcomes: schedule irregularity (i.e., frequent changes in daily working hours) and place mobility (e.g., working at multiple locations, such as at home, the office, a client’s office, and on the road).

Proposition 6 : Due to increased process losses and switching costs, individuals with high use of “bad types of flexibility” such as high place mobility and high schedule irregularity will have higher intention to turnover and higher work to family conflict.

Given the higher likely number of process losses and transaction costs (cf. Ashforth et al., 2000) resulting from shifting between varying work schedules and/or multiple places, we argue that contrary to the positive bias most literature on flexibility posits, flux aspects of flexibility negatively affect work and family outcomes. We found that those with more schedule irregularity and/or place mobility had higher intention to turnover, and higher work-family conflict. These adverse outcomes could be attributed to increased cognitive complexity and demands (Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002), more stress from the increased transaction and switching cost, and also the fact that increased schedule irregularity and place mobility could make it harder to arrange child care or

form consistent family plans. In one study examining factors that inhibited work and family well-being in dual career couples, irregular schedules were cited as the most significant negative influence (Moen & Yu, 1999). Higher mobility could make it more difficult to set aside places that are solely for family and personal space and not work, thereby also increasing the potential for role conflict. Building on our research, future studies need to further investigate how the type and degree of flexibility enacted on the job results in mixed relationships to work and family outcomes. We found that individuals in jobs with higher schedule irregularity and higher place mobility had higher turnover intentions and work family conflict. Building on our study, future research should examine how place mobility and schedule irregularity driven by professional work affects turnover and conflict.

Boundary Management Strategy: Is integration really always better? We believe theory and research on employee outcomes from flexibility would be enhanced if studies examine not only access to and use of flexibility, but also the psychological experience of flexibility pertaining to one's boundary management strategy. Little research has been conducted on the construct and correlates of boundary management strategies, in part because the concept is relatively new in the literature. We argue people psychologically enact a particular type of boundary management strategy that is partly shaped as a result of the structure of the job they are in and partly by individual differences. We did not examine individual predictors (e.g. gender, age) of one's boundary management strategy here since the focus of this chapter is on linkages between different types of flexibility and work and family outcomes. However, given the likely the asymmetric permeability of boundaries between work and family for men and women, it is critical that future studies examine individual differences in boundary management strategies.

Theoretical perspectives on how work and family roles can intersect range on a continuum from segmentation (work and family are highly distinct) to integration (work and family are highly

mixed; Nippert-Eng, 1996). The segmentation view holds that work and family roles are completely independent, and individuals can participate in one role without any influence on the other (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). This perspective emanates from traditional work and family structures that reflect eras when it was common to create boundaries to clearly separate work and family and also from blue-collar work experiences (Kanter, 1977; Nippert-Eng 1996). Usually, there was one breadwinning parent focused on the workplace (often the male) and one caregiving parent (often the female) focused on domestic life. Jobs were designed so there was no option to even attempt flexibility in the timing and location of work.

Today, job and family structures have evolved so that it is more common to blur work and family borders, especially in white-collar and 'knowledge' work that involves computer and communications technology (Apgar, 1998). A major factor is the changing nature of today's workforce, in which dual-earner families are the typical American family (Barnett, 2001). Fathers are increasingly involved in caregiving (Coltrane, 1996), and elder care demands are rising dramatically (Musselwhite, 1994). Given this shift in the contemporary nature of work and family structures, more recently, segmentation has been viewed as an intentional separation of work and family roles such that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of one role are actively suppressed from affecting the individual's performance in the other role (Greenhaus & Singh, 2003). In this sense, it is more of a personal preference, an effort to be truly "at home" when one is not working.

We believe there is some social choice in how individuals define boundaries, as do Ashforth and colleagues (2001). Kossek, Noe and DeMarr (1999) hold that a *boundary management strategy* is part of one's preferred approach to work-life role synthesis. Everyone has a preferred, even if implicit, approach for meshing work and family roles that reflects their values and the realities of their lives for organizing and separating role demands and expectations in the specific realms of home and work. This view is consistent with what Zedeck (1992) argued is at the

heart of the issue of work/family balance: the way individuals shape the scope and parameters of work and family activities, create personal meaning, and manage the relationships between families and employees in organizations. In order to organize their varying work and family roles, Nippert-Eng (1996) suggests that individuals construct mental and sometimes physical fences as a means of ordering their social, work and family environments. Through ethnographic interviews, she found that some of us are mainly integrators. We like to blend work and family roles, switching between baking cookies with the kids and downloading email. Also, some of us are separators - we prefer to keep work and nonwork separate, rarely working from home or on the weekends.

The access to flexibility over where and when one works provides a robust possibility for people to develop preferences for boundary management from segmentation to integration. Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1990) note that creating a position (establishing a role) in an organization is a starting point and not an ending point. Similarly, allowing individuals to self-manage the flexibility enactment is a starting point for the negotiation of role expectations and meanings, not an ending point. Many employers have moved professional work into the home and to other places and have allowed greater schedule flexibility without clearly negotiating role expectations. Most of this work-family role synthesis or figuring out how to combine and structure multiple roles is left up the employee (Kossek, Noe & DeMarr, 1999).

Noting that it is difficult today for growing numbers of employees to perform their jobs without interaction with the caregiving role and vice versa, many work-family theorists argue that greater integration between work and family roles is a way to balance work and family life and even to use one to catalyze positive effects in the other (Friedman et al., 1998; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). Yet recent theory runs counter to the prevailing belief that integration is generally a “good thing” for individuals. The increased process losses, role transitions, and

transactions costs associated with role switching may not necessarily lead to less conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Proposition 7: Individuals with a boundary management strategy higher on integration will experience higher family-to-work and work-to-family conflict.

Our surprising results showed that having a boundary management strategy favoring integration was only related to significant negative effects for family to work conflict *but not* work to family. These findings suggest that integration strategies may more negatively affect family than work. Consistent with our formal access findings, we also predicted and found negative performance effects for those favoring an integration strategy. As we suspected, many supervisors do not see preferences for integration favorably, as many corporate cultures still value face time and segmentation (Major et al., 2002). More research is needed on how flexibility cultures affect employee well-being.

Future Research

Future empirical research is needed that draws on the flexibility enactment concepts developed here to improve research on flexible working arrangements (i.e., telecommuting, flextime) which to date shows mixed results in terms of productivity, work-family conflict, and other outcomes (Avery & Zabel, 2001; Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Such study would simultaneously examine the mixed effects of flexible work arrangements in the *same* study. More research is needed on whether flexible arrangements decrease (Mokhtarian, Bagley, & Saloman, 1998) or actually increase work-family conflict (Hill, et al., 1998), and on the effects of flexibility on employees' home lives (Ezra, 1996). There may also be additional dimensions to identify measures for in future research such as flexibility in how tasks are carried out (i.e., methodology), what tasks are carried out (i.e., content), and the speed and sequence in which tasks are carried out, etc.?

What is clear from this paper is that personal job autonomy is a powerful flexibility attribute that has highly beneficial effects for work and family outcomes.

It's the job stupid: Flexibility is not a countervailing panacea for poor job characteristics.

More work-family research is needed that does not examine the effect of flexibility use and access in isolation, but jointly with the effects of other key job characteristics, such as long hours and access to regular job performance feedback. It is well researched that long work hours relate to higher work-family conflict and worse work attitudes (cf. Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002), while results for performance effects are mixed. Some scholars see negative effects for performance due to role overload and burnout (Ozeki, 2003), while others find long work hours associated both with higher work-family conflict and higher performance (Brett & Stroh, 2003). Individuals who get little feedback on their performance will also have more adverse outcomes, due both to the greater ambiguity over how they are doing and lower morale (cf. Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001).

Improved methodologies are needed as reviews suggest that empirical studies sometimes lack methodological rigor by over-relying on same source or anecdotal data rather than on statistical analysis or control groups making it difficult to overcome a positive bias toward the effects of using formal flexibility in work-family programs (Gottlieb, Kellowy & Barham, 1998). Studies should be designed with control groups, and non same source data for assessing outcomes. Time diaries and beepers are needed that get better data than just self report Likert scales or recounts of schedules.

We also believe that more research is needed on the extent to which some of the flexibility enactment variables we propose such as what tasks are portable and how much of work is portable are to some extent socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1995), so that different people may view the same task as differentially portable. This can create conflicts both at home and work and is a fundamental yet under-examined issue embedded in the enactment of portable

work arrangements. Family members may wonder why a person is bringing work home or checking email at night. A supervisor may believe that most tasks of a particular job have to be conducted in the office while an employee believes differently.

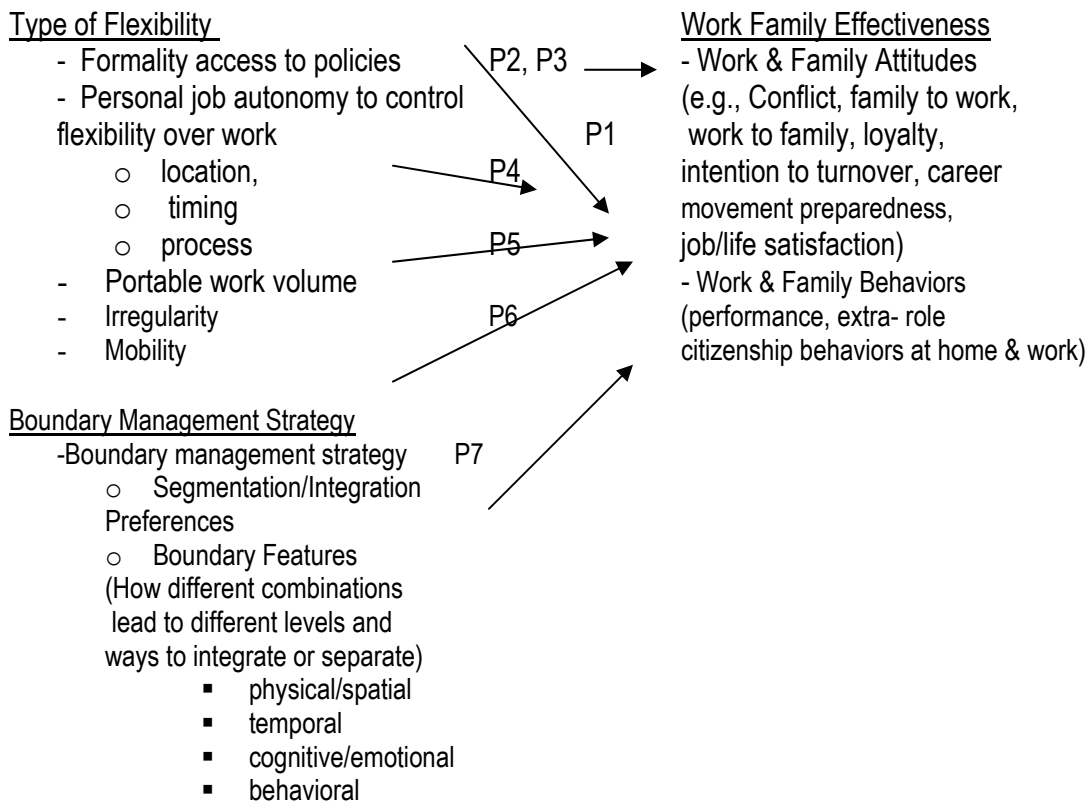
Future research should build on our research on the construct of boundary management strategy to further examine how people may shift rhythms over daily, weekly and lifespan changes and how they are associated with different formal flexibility policies and forms of flexibility enactment. As noted, the work-family literature places boundary management on a continuum from segmentation to integration, and there may be more complexity to this issue to investigate in future work. For example, if an employee is working at home with the door closed while his/her child is watching television; some could say he/she is physically integrating roles; he/she is working at home and is physically there, but is mentally segmenting as he/she is not interacting with his/her family. People cannot move work into the home without changing their social relationships. Future research should develop additional measures of the various aspects of boundaries noted in Figure 1 that are being integrated/separated – physical, mental, behavioral, temporal. This research should examine the implications of integrating on some parts of the boundary but not others and the waxing and waning of the process of boundary management. Research is needed on how different aspects of integration may also allow for greater permeability between roles. We need to increase our understanding of how when something good or bad is happening in one domain, it may be more difficult to buffer good or bad things entering the other life space.

Supervisors clearly need additional training on how to better manage and provide more effective support to employees in these transformational work arrangements. What we need is more research on the factors that influence the degree to which new ways of working and flexibility are accepted by supervisors, clients, and in corporate cultures. Our findings suggest that flexible work in time and place is still not fully embedded in work cultures for the management of

professional work. It appears separating work and family issues is still preferred by supervisors in assessing work performance. Although employers have formally adopted policies to support new ways of working, such as teleworking and working portably or away from the office, there is a cultural lag between adoption and cultural integration. Many firms have organizational cultures that value “face time” as an indicator of employee effectiveness (Rapoport, et al., 2002) and may hold ambivalent or even negative attitudes toward teleworking (Eaton et al., 2003). More research is needed on why employers are not reciprocating the social exchange of better worker attitudes in return for flexibility access.

Another limitation is that we measured flexibility enactment and boundary management at one period of the employee’s life. These phenomena may wax and wane over the course of one’s life span, job demands and career and family stages. Future research could follow a group of individuals longitudinally over changes in family and career structures. It is also difficult to unequivocally show causality between the positive relationship between a boundary management strategy higher on integration and family-to-work conflict, and future research should measure both of these variables at two points in time. Yet what is clear from our data is they are linked; we just don’t know if individuals with more family-to-work conflict are likely to adopt a boundary management strategy toward higher integration or whether such a strategy induces higher family-to-work conflict. Our sample is solely professional with similar kinds of work – future researchers would surely want to broaden the lens to look at more kinds of employees in a wider variety of jobs at all levels of organizations. We hope this chapter will prompt future empirical scholarly work on flexibility enactment to better understand the individual, family, and organizational conditions that lead to their effectiveness.

Figure 1 Flexibility Enactment



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