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The Transfer of Work Experiences into Family Life: An Introductory Study of Workers in Self-Managed Work Teams*

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ABSTRACT

By using survey data from a study currently taking place at a Boeing facility, this research explores the effects that work skills have on people's family lives. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Past studies emphasizing the importance of a supportive supervisor and positive relationships with family were supported as was the concept of "isomorphism" or similarity of behavior patterning at work and at home. Past studies regarding gender differences were not supported.

Important social changes are occurring in both the home and the work place. There is also much discussion regarding the "breakdown of the family" (1992 presidential campaign; Popenoe, 1988; Skolnick & Skolnick, 1989). Conse-

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quently, any way we can find to strengthen the family is helpful. Classically, families have been credited with the important function of socializing children. To this function, modern sociologists add the importance of providing a setting for emotional expression which is often otherwise repressed in American society (Lasch, 1976).

Past research reveals that elements of people's work lives "spill over" into their family lives (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1980; Pleck, 1985). Often this spillover is negative (e.g., stress, and hours spent away from the family) which adds to the weakening of the family. In an effort to strengthen their families, people are giving more priority to their families over their work (Wolcott, 1990). Employers are responding with policies that support family responsibility (e.g., child care, flexitime). But the positive effects from work to the family (or work spillover) are not limited to these. A new management style being adopted by organizations across the United States (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992; Yeatts, Beyerlein, & Thibodeaux, 1991) may be having a positive influence on the family as well. This management style, referred to as self-managed or self-directed work teams, trains employees in listening skills, communication, and cooperation—all important interpersonal skills which can have positive impacts on family life (Keating, Delmar, & Johnson, 1989).

The purpose of this research is to investigate whether the skills learned with the implementation of self-managed work teams has an effect on people's family lives. Since self-managed work teams emphasize communication and other relational skills, we expect to see positive spillover into a worker's family life. If this hypothesis is supported, the implications are that work in self-managed work teams can actually strengthen the family (and society) by enhancing family functions of:

1. Socialization—Socializing children and resocializing adults with good listening, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills. If people are taking these skills home from work, we can expect there to be further spillover of these same skills into society.

2. Emotional expression—Repression is continually cited as a cause of emotional problems in people (Corsini, 1984). If self-managed work teams actually facilitate expression of emotion, we can expect families to be healthier. Again, healthy families provide healthy members of society (Lewis, 1980).

Provided below is a review of previous research which has examined the effects of work on the family. This is followed by a review of noted changes both in the family and in the work place, particularly with the emergence of self-managed work teams. Finally, data collected from Boeing employees are examined to

identify the relationship between self-managed work teams and the employee's family life. The implications of this exploratory research for sociological practitioners are discussed.

General Findings about the Effects of Work on Family

Much has been written on family and on work. However, it has only been since Kanter's 1977 work, *Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy*, that research has focused specifically on the spillover of work into family life. An overview of the findings shows that some studies have been rather obvious. For instance, Small and Riley (1990) questioned male executives and their wives and found that the amount of time spent at work had a negative relationship with the amount of time spent with family. Similarly, Wolcott (1990) found that large amounts of time spent at work had a negative effect on family life (see also Aldous, 1969). And Keating et al. (1989) stresses the importance of good communication in families, particularly when time spent together is limited.

Other research has provided more informative results. Pleck (1985) addresses the problems of work on family life more specifically, finding that causes of conflict and stress are associated with long, irregular, rigid working hours, travel away from home, and "spillover" of fatigue, preoccupation, and irritability from work. These views were expressed both by working parents and by wives of working husbands (also Wolcott, 1990). Also, Pleck (1977) describes gender differences in the effects of work: For women, family demands are allowed to intrude upon the work role (though women are found to pay for this with inferior jobs and lower pay [Blau & Winkler, 1989]). For men, work demands are allowed to intrude on the family. He concludes that the entire work/role system needs to change, allowing more flexibility in expectations for both sexes.

In a study by Burke et al. (1980), wives reported that greater occupational demands on their husbands brought them less marital and life satisfaction, decreased social participation, and increased psychosomatic symptoms and negative feelings. Some studies have even linked occupational stress with health and mortality, finding that married women's life expectancies and causes of death were associated with the occupational mortality risks of their husbands (Fletcher, 1988).

Kanter (1989) refers to the "myth" of separate worlds: the work world and the family world. The myth continues with the understanding that there is no intersec-

tion of these two worlds except for the fact that they are continually in competition for a person's loyalties. Kanter concluded that, for a while, the corporation won and whole families worked for the preservation of the father as a good worker. However, with the continual increase of (married) women in the work place, the family can no longer cater to one person's career.

In earlier work, Kanter (1977) discussed the influence of social class on how work affected family life. Basically, Kanter looked at professionals and non-professionals. Professionals had the tendency for "absorption," where their jobs were more emotionally demanding and time consuming. However, non professionals suffered more from inflexibility in their work schedules. For both classes, Kanter found that women felt ambivalence and conflict because of wanting to mother full-time and wanting to work.

Yogman and Brazelton (1986), discuss the effects of work on parents and children by specifically addressing differences between mothers and fathers. The questions in the study were general, asking whether the jobs had a positive or negative general effect on spouses and children. Their historical overview said that in the past, studies were biased toward gender norms and stereotypes which caused discrimination against women.

Corporate Response to Family Issues

Industry has become aware of some of the negative influences work has on the family and has taken the initiative to correct the problems. However, many companies have been resistant to addressing and implementing solutions for the conflict between work and family. For some, it has taken having international competition and pressure to survive with changing demographics to address this crucial issue (Sussman, 1990).

For instance, Wolcott (1990) outlines what companies and governments have been doing in industrialized nations. In order to meet the needs of workers and their families (and ultimately, to meet the companies' own needs for a strong work force), companies and government agencies are learning to provide child care, parental leave, and reduced work time in order to have better work productivity. Wolcott also addresses gender issues in careers and the work place, pointing to the need for change in business because of women's growing share of the work force. In the U.S., corporate policies regarding family issues have become so important that the absence of corporate policy increases negative attitudes among employees (Googins & Burden, 1987).

However, Cramer and Pearce (1990) have recently used IBM as an example for asserting that the supervisor's role is more important than company policies in dealing with family issues at work. Having a supervisor who is understanding, particularly with issues concerning child care, was of paramount importance.

Perhaps this realization plus America's incessant need to institutionalize and organize has led to the appearance of work and family managers, directors, and counselors which Martinez (1990) sees as evidence of the trend of "work and family concern" for the 90s. Hall (1989) also sees this as a trend for the 90s but is one of the few to address the fact that the intersection of work and family is an issue for fathers as well as mothers.

This trend where organizations are interested in addressing the issue of family is new. Traditionally, the "common" understanding (provided by theorists such as Marx) has been that the family exists in order to strengthen the worker for *his* job. And, of course, businesses today are far from altruistic. "Industry and business have a tendency to equate the availability of jobs and wages as their major contribution to assisting workers with families" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 35). However, businesses are starting to realize the positive value of being supportive of families on their work force. This family orientation helps reduce absenteeism and indirectly increases productivity.

Structural Work Elements and Their Effects on Family Life

In Daniels and Moos's (1988) article, "Exosystem Influences on Family and Child Functioning," the effects of the father's work environment on his family are examined. Unfortunately, the study does not do the same for mothers. The study found that positive work relationships were associated with positive family relationships and fewer child adjustment problems.

Building on the work of Rapoport and Rapoport (1965), which focused on the critical role of work tasks, Aldous (1969) concentrates on the structural characteristics of the occupation that affect the man's marital and parental functioning. Aldous begins by outlining the fact that participation in the job market is central to the man's participation in the family. Aldous notes that the crucial child-bearing and rearing years are also the crucial career development years, which often causes work-family conflict. Secondly, "relative salience" is discussed with the notion that some high-skill jobs actually compete with and override the importance of the family. Men in these professions may, for instance, neglect their families until they

are unhappy in their job and then use the family's unhappiness with the situation as an excuse for seeking another job when, indeed, it is because of their own unhappiness. Also, job satisfaction parallels marital satisfaction. "Overlap" of family and work peers or work place also aids in the man fulfilling his family role.

In *Class and Conformity*, Kohn (1977) investigated the relationship of the structure of people's work to their family values. Kohn used indicators of self-direction including lack of supervision, the amount of work spent working with other people and ideas, and work variety. Kohn noted, "Men who work under occupational conditions that facilitate the exercise of self-direction are likely to value self-direction for their children; men who work under occupational conditions that inhibit or preclude the exercise of self-direction are likely to value conformity" (p. 151).

Changes in the Work Place

Both work and family are changing in our society. With the recession during the past decade and increasing international competition, companies have been forced to consider change in order to survive. One of these changes has been a move toward self-managed work teams (Yeatts, et al., 1990). Work place innovations such as the self-managed work team can take into account personal and family needs of workers because they focus on individual skills, interests, and needs of workers. (Axel, 1985).

An important element that would relate directly to looking at differences in work spillover in self-managed work teams versus traditional work is what Aldous calls "isomorphism" or similarity of behavior patterning. Specifically, she notes that men whose occupations are equalitarian in leadership style tend to reflect the same in their family life. Similarly, men heavily involved with interpersonal relations on the job have high expectations for the companionship aspect of their marriages. Those men in upper middle-class professions or management expect their spouse to be willing to listen and provide support yet worry that they are too aggressive in non-work situations. Husbands who have strong decision-making responsibilities at work continue these at home and tend to have strong expectations of their sons (less concern is given daughters).

In contrast with Aldous (1969), Mills and Chusmir (1988) found that the conflict resolution skills used by managers at home were different (and better) than the ones they used at work.

Another article that can relate to differences that may exist between self-managed work teams and traditional work examines differences between women and men in patriarchal, hierarchical work organizations (Pittman & Orthner, 1988). Women were found to have more stress with the work/family interface. Also, Greenglass, Pantory, and Burke (1988) found that women suffered more work/family role conflict and stress, suggesting that there is a greater interdependence between work and family spheres for women than for men.

Changes in the Family

Axel (1985) touches upon two crucial elements regarding work spillover into the family: the changing structure of the family and the changing family values. Changes in the American family structure include: couples are more likely to live together without being married, marriages and births are occurring later, the marriages are less likely to be lifelong, fewer babies are being born, children are more likely to have working mothers and to be raised by only one natural parent, and older adults are more likely to be alone and/or dependent on relatives who are in their most productive working years. It is hard to pinpoint the causes for the change in structure. However, influencers include the growing number of women in the work force and the fact that they are staying in the work force longer and are obtaining better jobs. The pluralism in society is pushing into place new values including less defined separate roles for men and women.

Considerations for Applying Work Spillover Research to Self-Managed Work Teams

With the changes in our society, it becomes necessary to study the effects of work on family in a new light. The research question for this study is: Does the type of work spillover depend on the structure of the work itself? Here, specifically, people involved with self-managed work teams have been surveyed and their answers compared to the findings cited earlier. As Yogman and Brazelton note (1986, p. 93), "Sigmund Freud is said to have defined maturity in adulthood as the capacity to love and to work." Following this assertion, one would expect to find the effects of self-managed work teams to have a positive influence on the family's ability to raise children to maturity because of the relational aspects of the work structure.

Method

A survey instrument was developed using existing literature as a basis for scales to measure various concepts in the work environment. The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 400 workers at Boeing Electronics in Corinth, Texas. This facility is a greenfield plant of a wholly owned subsidiary of a large, national manufacturing firm which has been in operation since 1987. Participants answered the survey on a voluntary basis, and all results were kept anonymous. The survey instrument consisted primarily of responses on a 7-point Likert scale; some open-ended questions were provided. The responses were coded and the data were originally entered into SPSSpc. Recoding for reversed indicators was performed. Also, reliability tests were conducted to analyze the appropriateness of the indicators for the desired job characteristics.[1] The researchers also used personal interviews for clarification of some of the responses. Roughly one-half of the employees are classified as production payroll, which includes production and quality control associates and material coordinators. The remainder are classified as support payroll and includes all the engineering, administrative, systems, and finance personnel. Responses were received from 313 employees (78% return rate).

Analysis was done to examine how the effects of work experiences such as team work and cooperation have been carried over into the employees' family life. The question asked of the employees was:

> "Have you found that your work team skills have 'spilled over' to your family life? If yes, please describe."

Responses were coded into 36 categories and then collapsed into the categories of positive, neutral, and negative for analysis.

Additionally, the respondents were separated into two groups: those who responded positively to the work spillover question and those who responded negatively or did not respond at all. T-tests were then performed to identify differences in the groups with regard to their responses to the rest of the survey. The two-tailed probability was used to establish degree of significance in the differences in the means of the two groups.

Findings

The majority of respondents to the open-ended question reported positive effects of their work on their family life (Table 1).

Table 1
Employee Responses to the Question of Spillover of Skills into Family Life

Positive	Neutral	Negative
-listening skills	-minimal	-frustration
-working as a team	-discussing work issues	-stress
-trust	-chores	-alienation
-problem solving skills		-ill health
-better financial decisions		-financial strains
-communication		-family doesn't understand job
-sharing Boeing skills with family		
-respect		
-decision making skills		
-conflict resolution with kids		
-letting others talk		
-sharing problems		
-helps with things		
-increases motivation		
-takes more responsibility		
-organization		
-patience		
-brainstorming		
-confident		
-planning		
-cooperation		
-better person/ growth experience		
-independence		
-have a say in things		
-follow-up/ finish project		
-more analytical		

Of the 117 responses to this question, 91% were positive, 3% were neutral, and 6% were negative. The spillover of work experience into family life was most often reported to include listening and decision making. Employees reported taking these work skills home and not only practicing them but teaching them to their spouses and children. A statement that typified many responses was, "My home has gone from a dictatorship to a democracy." From this initial finding, it appears that the team oriented skills used in the self-managed work team did spill over into family life.

The most frequent responses were as follows:

1. listening skills (18% of responses)
2. working as a team (12%)
3. communication (9%)
4. problem solving skills (8%)

The majority of both women's and men's responses were positive, with women's most frequent responses being:

1. listening skills (16.7%)
2. working as a team (16.7%)

Men's most frequent responses were:

1. listening skills (15.8%)
2. problem solving skills (10.5%)
3. communication (10.5%)

Even though the majority of responses were positive, two functional teams stood out as particularly positive. The 38 respondents who identified themselves as part of "Materiel" provided 19 responses to the question of work spillover and all of the responses were positive. The 115 who identified themselves as part of "Manufacturing" provided 45 responses; 93% were positive, 4% were neutral, and 2% were negative. The type of work that is done in these two teams is more conducive to a self-managed work team environment than is the work of other functional teams at Boeing. The work in both "Materiel" and "Manufacturing" requires team members to depend on each other and work together to get the jobs done. Other teams do not require as much interaction.

There was a significant difference with many of the responses between those who responded positively to the work spillover question and those who did not respond positively or did not answer the question at all (see Table 2).

With regard to job characteristics, those persons who responded positively to the work spillover question also had a significantly higher mean score on task significance and feeling that their work team is like a close knit family.

When considering pay, this company has two structures for pay incentives. One is, "*p*ay *f*or *k*nowledge" (PFK), where a person is paid for the number of skills s/he learns. The other is an actual rating for performance: "*t*op, *o*utstanding, *g*ood, or *m*arginal" (TOGM) (see Staff, Table 2). Those who are in the pay for knowledge structure were more likely to have positive responses to the work spillover question. It is likely that these persons had little or no training or experience using listening, decision making, and problem solving skills prior to joining this company. Therefore, the impact of such training and experience was more evident to them.

Table 2
Comparisons of People Responding Positively Regarding Work Spillover with People Who Responded Negatively, Neutrally or Not at All

Characteristics	Responded Positively (N=67)	Nonpositive or No Response (N=219)
	Mean#	Mean#
Job Characteristics		
Skill variety	5.68	5.59
Task identity	5.03	4.96
Task significance	6.43	6.13*
Autonomy	5.57	5.31
Feedback from the job itself	5.51	5.24
Feedback from agents	4.80	4.53
Role conflict	4.70	4.58
Role ambiguity	5.06	5.00
Performance	.67	.45*
Staff (pfk=1/togm=2)	1.28	1.00**
Team like close knit family	4.73	3.85***
Psychological States		
Meaningfulness of the work	5.67	5.43
Responsibility for the work	6.03	5.87
Knowledge of results	5.31	5.39
Trust	5.96	5.38***
Resistance to change	4.94	4.64
Affective commitment	5.55	4.61***
Continuance commitment	4.61	4.72
Global stress	3.68	3.87
Cause of stress	2.79	2.84
Social support- team leader	5.16	4.61**
Social support- co-workers	5.88	5.19***
Social support- family, friends	5.56	5.21*

Most characteristics were measured on a 7-point scale with a large number indicating more of the characteristic.
*$p \leq .055$
**$p \leq .01$
***$p \leq .001$

Table 2 continued

Characteristics	Responded Positively (N=67)	Nonpositive or No Response (N=219)
	Mean#	Mean#
Information Flow/ Technical Factors		
Communication	4.73	4.47
Utilization of information	5.80	4.99***
Conflict/ Cooperation	5.73	5.17***
Creative ideas	5.43	4.93***
Good use of skills	5.71	5.41*
Appropriate technology available	5.23	4.97
Decision-Making/ Participation		
Decision-making process	5.21	4.57***
Decisions regarding work itself	4.75	4.37
Decisions regarding work conditions	3.84	3.77
Decisions regarding production	3.51	3.35
Affective Outcomes		
General satisfaction	5.78	5.21***
Growth satisfaction	5.56	5.16*
Satisfaction with participation	5.64	4.95***
Satisfaction with pay	4.30	3.96
Internal work motivation	6.15	5.83***
Voluntary comments	1.46	.79***
Demographic		
Age	33.00	31.46
Education	13.80	14.02
Number of months at Boeing	25.67	21.19*
% Female	48	49
Income	22,407	24,331
% Married	67	72
% White (non-hispanic)	90	89

Most characteristics were measured on a 7-point scale with a large number indicating more of the characteristic.

*$p \leq .05$

**$p \leq .01$

***$p \leq .001$

Further, in-person interviews revealed that this group used these skills more in their teams than those on the TOGM pay system.

Additionally, the people who responded positively to the work spillover question were more likely to be among the "high achievers" in their jobs by either having achieved more work skills or receiving a higher rating in their performance review (see Performance, Table 2).

In the category of "psychological states," those responding positively to the work spillover question had a significantly higher mean score on trust, affective commitment (their personal commitment to doing a good job), and in feeling social support from their team leader, co-workers, family, and friends. From these results, it is reasonable to conclude that the people who responded positively to the work spillover question were experiencing more social support in their lives in general, which may have made it easier to incorporate relational skills learned at work into their families. Also, it is reasonable to think that people who carry a personal sense of commitment to doing a good job at work may also carry this sense of commitment into their home.

Another category covered on the survey was that of information flow and technical factors. People who answered positively to the work spillover question had significantly higher scores on thinking that information and skills were appropriately utilized at work, that there was a spirit of cooperation among workers, and that they were encouraged to have creative ideas. Similarly, these people scored significantly higher on questions regarding participation in decision-making.

The previous outcomes make it easy to understand that these people also had significantly higher mean scores concerning general satisfaction, growth satisfaction, and satisfaction with their amount of participation on the job. The respondents who experienced positive work spillover also had significantly higher means on the item of "internal work motivation," and they also tended to volunteer other positive comments at the end of the survey.

The only demographic variable with a significant difference was that of "number of months at Boeing," with those answering positively on the work spillover question averaging 4.5 months longer on the job. This latter group had more time to experience positive or negative effects and reported positive spillover.

Conclusions

This study provides overwhelmingly positive information concerning the transference of work experiences into family life among members of self-managed work teams. The negative aspects of stress, little time for the family, and "absorption" were virtually absent from the findings. The positive aspect of good communication that Keating et al. (1989) cited as important to good family relationships was reported as the major spillover among this survey population. (Listening skills and conflict resolution would be part of good communication.)

The questions associated with positive work spillover in this study are similar to what Kohn (1969) referred to as self-direction in parenting, a skill helpful for children in today's society. Kohn's study was supported with significant scores for the relationship between positive work spillover and lack of supervision (autonomy), amount of time spent with other people and ideas (decision making, cooperation, creative ideas), and work variety (skill variety).

Interestingly, there was no significant difference among men's and women's responses in this study though gender has been reported as an important factor in past studies. It is particularly notable that there were not significant gender differences among these self-managed work team employees, while Pittman and Orthner (1988), who studied work/family relationships in hierarchical, patriarchal work situations, found differences between responses of men and women. This suggests that both men and women benefit from less hierarchical structures with regard to the work/family interface.

This study supports Cramer and Pearce's (1990) assertion that it is important to have a supportive supervisor. Respondents who answered positively to the work spillover question were more likely to experience their supervisor as supportive. However, the larger difference in responses between the two groups regarding having supportive co-workers reflects the nature of self-managed work teams, where co-workers have more significant relationships than in traditional work settings. Also, this study supports the findings of Daniels and Moos (1988) in that positive work relationships were associated with positive family relationships (as reflected by the work spillover responses).

Certainly, this study supports what Aldous (1969) calls "isomorphism" or similarity of behavior patterning. The respondents were taking their skills and behaviors from work and implementing them at home. This probably runs counter to Mills and Chusmir (1988), who found that conflict resolution used at home was

different from that used at work. However, further study is needed to investigate this relationship.

Implications for Intervention

Self-managed work teams as an intervention tool can be used to address the current social problem of the often discussed "decline of the family" (Popenoe, 1988; Skolnick & Skolnick, 1989). With the trend of businesses addressing the needs of workers and their families, the findings from this study can be used by sociological practitioners when consulting public or private industries interested in supporting the family lives of their workers.

The preliminary findings from this study suggest that family functions can be strengthened through the spillover of skills learned in self-managed work teams. Specifically, listening skills, decision-making skills, and conflict resolution skills learned at work appear to have been implemented by SMWT workers in their families. These skills help strengthen the functions of:

1. Socialization—Socializing children (and resocializing adults) in ways that will make them better communicators.

2. Emotional expression—By having better communication skills (listening, decision-making, conflict resolution), families can provide a more supportive environment for their members.

In addition to positive work spillover, SMWTs have been found to increase productivity and commitment among workers (Yeatts et al., 1991). Therefore, a consultant could recommend implementing self-managed work teams in a variety of settings. However, self-managed work teams have most often been used in manufacturing industries.

Suggestions for Further Study

Future research is needed to clarify responses and to gain reliability in the findings. Additionally, the large number of non responses could be significantly, if not entirely, reduced by framing closed-ended questions based on the popular responses. This would help clarify the positions of the entire survey population.

What seems not to be studied sufficiently is an assessment of the functions families play in our society and the effects work has on these functions. Further, the

question, "Do various management structures affect family functioning differently?" needs to be addressed. Here, certainly, would be where the impact of self-managed work teams on family life could be further examined.

NOTE

1. For a complete list of questions asked, sources of the measures and reliability scores, please contact the authors.

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