

Rethinking the Work–Life Interface: It’s Not about Balance, It’s about Resource Allocation

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This article re-conceptualises the framework surrounding work–life balance. Though previous research has focused primarily on the ways in which work life and non-work life influence each other (mostly negatively), we present an alternative perspective that focuses on personal pursuits and the management of personal resources. We introduce a personal resource allocation (PRA) framework that treats all life demands—whether preferred or required—as forcing individuals to make choices about where, when, and how they expend their personal resources across the life domain. Building on self-regulatory theories, such as control theory, self-determination theory, and conservation of resources theory, we suggest ways in which effective personal resource allocation not only decreases negative outcomes (which has been the emphasis in work–life balance research), but also how effective personal resource allocation can actually contribute to positive outcomes. We conclude by providing some practical implications for individuals and organisations based on the PRA framework and suggest future research opportunities.

Keywords: life demands, personal resources, resource allocation, self-regulation, work–life balance

INTRODUCTION

Employee stress plays a critical role in contemporary organisations, and in contemporary Western culture as a whole. According to some estimates, the total cost of stress may be as high as \$300 billion annually (American Psychological Association, 2007). In addition, the negative outcomes associated with stress and strain can erode individual functioning, the quality of relationships, and overall life satisfaction (e.g. Robinson, Flowers, & Carroll, 2001; Tetrick & LaRocco, 1987). One arena in which stress has received

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recent attention is the area of “work–life balance”, which focuses on the demands inherent in trying to manage work and non-work demands (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Though more research has explored the positive interplay between work and non-work life (using terms such as facilitation, enrichment, or positive spillover; e.g. Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006), the majority of research has focused on the issue of work–life conflict. Thus, a variety of factors have been studied in the area of work–life balance that emphasise organisational interventions to assist employees in managing conflicts that arise among competing life demands.

This article takes a different perspective on the concept of work–life balance. Rather than focusing on a conceptualisation that either draws a clear line between work and non-work life or attempts to integrate work and non-work domains, this article treats the subject from a holistic *personal resource allocation* approach. The first assumption behind this approach is that work and non-work are both a part of the larger, overarching life domain. Personal pursuits and life demands have to be effectively managed or regulated, whether they relate to work, family, leisure, or any other activity. Such an approach integrates previous research on stress, work–life balance, and self-regulation, among other areas, arguing that positive and negative outcomes result from (in)effective management of life—daily, weekly, and in general—given a finite amount of personal resources (e.g. time, energy, and money). The second assumption is that personal resource allocation is highly individualistic; that is, there is no ideal allocation of resources across individuals and/or domains. From this perspective, cognitive and affective outcomes that we experience in life situations are the result of the extent to which the amount of resources we expend to manage a particular demand is consistent with (1) the amount of resources we expect or prefer to expend to manage that demand and (2) the amount of resources we have available to manage that demand. To put personal resource allocation (PRA) into perspective, we propose a conceptual framework that emphasises fit between individuals’ personal preferences and resource allocation outcomes across life domains. Using the PRA framework, we identify examples of intervention strategies at the individual and organisational levels, as well as implications and proposed next steps.

CURRENT CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE

Though some authors (e.g. Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001) have emphasised the positive aspects of the work–life interface, the overwhelming majority of research has focused on the issue of conflict. Thus, current research typically takes a reductionist approach, which focuses on minimising the conflicts that exist between work life and non-work life. As an example,

research regarding work–life balance program effectiveness on individual and organisational outcomes primarily emphasises the role of conflict in the “work–family interface” (see Kelly et al., 2008). The empirical focus on conflict (minimising the negative role that work plays in life) rather than facilitation (maximising the positive role that work plays in life) may severely limit a broader understanding of how the work role may actually enrich the broader life domain.

Growing out of the idea that work detracts from family life, the underlying assumption behind much of the work–life balance research (including many modern conceptualisations) is that work is a necessary evil to support non-work activities. In the organisational context, this assumption drives studies that treat work–life balance programs as consisting of benefits to decrease the negative effects of non-work demands, which do not necessarily provide a direct positive benefit to the organisation (e.g. vacation time, childcare benefits). For example, Konrad and Mangel’s (2000) measure of work–life practices aggregates 19 different practices, and 13 of the 19 practices are focused on workplace benefits (e.g. vacation time, childcare, paid leave) that have little to do with accomplishing work and more to do with using work resources (time, money) for personal life management. This reductionist perspective is one of the reasons why the field of positive psychology emerged out of the larger psychology discipline (Gable & Haidt, 2005). There has been substantially more research focused on reducing negative outcomes than on promoting positive outcomes, but overall well-being is not achieved by simply reducing our exposure to health risks (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is also achieved by identifying aspects of the person, the environment, and the fit between the two that promote growth and personal enhancement.

In the organisational context, work–life balance research also focuses predominantly on the issue of conflict while avoiding the issue of facilitation. The most recent review on the topic by Kelly et al. (2008) included the term “work–family conflict” in the title, but ignored the topic of “work–family enrichment”. Though they mention “enrichment” within the review, their overriding focus is clearly on conflict (the term “conflict” is mentioned 133 times in the text proper, while the term “enrichment” is used 24 times). This overriding emphasis on conflict implies that research and organisations should be focused on reducing the negative consequences of conflict rather than promoting the positive consequences of enrichment. The PRA framework, described below, seeks to spur more research that focuses on the reasons why employees can be satisfied with and thrive on the interface between their work and non-work lives rather than focusing on ways to reduce work–life conflict, as these are not necessarily the same factors. It also seeks to provide organisations with a way to consider various intervention points based on the needs of its employees.

THE PRA FRAMEWORK

The PRA framework (see Figure 1) has four central components: (1) personal resources, (2) demands, (3) resource allocation strategies, and (4) individual outcomes. All four components have received significant attention in previous work–life balance research (e.g. Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Voydanoff, 2004), though various authors and theorists call these terms by various names (e.g. stressors, demands, work–life conflict, role ambiguity). Unlike previous literature on work–life balance, the PRA framework integrates a variety of research across various areas and disciplines to suggest that effective “work–life balance” is really effective personal resource allocation across all life pursuits. By taking a more holistic approach to the life experience (rather than the work experience or the family experience), this framework permits researchers to move beyond assumptions of “work life is bad, family life is good” to person–environment interactions that produce positive (and not just negative) individual outcomes.

The PRA framework draws heavily on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and other self-regulation approaches (e.g. Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Carver & Scheier, 1982, 1998; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Individuals bring finite amounts of resources to their daily lives (*personal resource inputs*), and because they encounter repeated *demands* on their resources, they need to *choose* where to allocate those resources. Once allocated, individuals then have fewer resources to meet additional demands. Thus, positive outcomes are achieved when people (1) perceive themselves to have the resources necessary to effectively respond to the

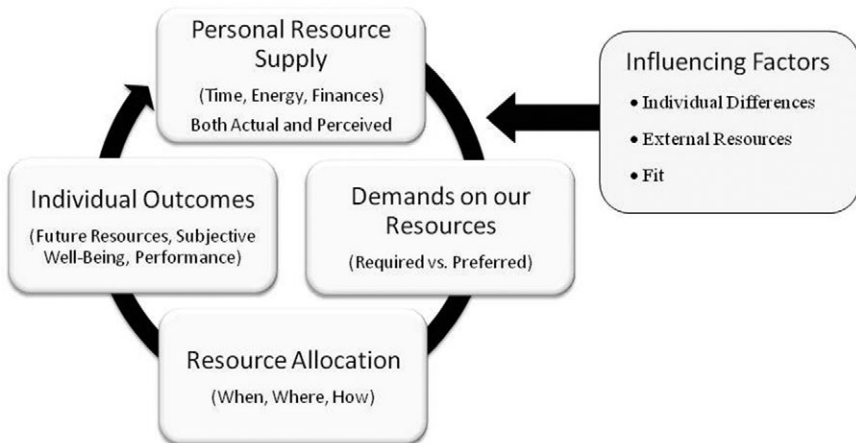


FIGURE 1. The PRA framework.

demands in their life, (2) believe they have sufficient control to allocate resources in a way that fits their preferences, and (3) feel satisfied with the way they have managed their resources. Thus, the PRA framework integrates multiple theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the management of personal resources in response to life demands (which encompass all life pursuits) as an individualistic, continuous process, with possible intervention points at each stage.

THE ROLE OF APPRAISALS

Appraisals, or perceptions/evaluations about one's environment, are a central component of contemporary stress theories (Edwards, 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the PRA framework. This is because decisions regarding resource allocation are predominantly swift, outside of awareness (unconscious), and constrained by bounded rationality (Simon, 1957, 1991). Although individuals attempt to make the most logical decisions based on the information available, their perceptions can be distorted and incomplete, leading to unexpected or unsatisfactory outcomes. In the context of the PRA framework, appraisals can be defined as the cognitive assessment (conscious or unconscious) of available personal resources, people's preference for expending those resources at the present time, and the characteristics of salient life demands. Thus, people are likely to respond more favorably to a demand when they perceive that they possess the needed resources to respond to that demand and when they appraise the demand as being worth the resources required to meet it.

Much of the literature on work–life balance implicitly measures the appraisal process. For example, one measure of work overload (Remondet & Hansson, 1991) asks respondents the frequency with which they perceive certain experiences, such as “my workload is too heavy”, “I have unrealistic schedule demands”, and “my supervisor places unfair demands upon me”, while others focus on perceptions of pace and amount of work to be done (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980; Karasek, 1979). In fact, the entire construct of conflict, one of the most common variables studied in work–life balance literature, specifically focuses on the appraisals people make about the ways in which work life and non-work life are incompatible (e.g. “the demands of my work interfere with my home family life”; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Therefore, work–life balance is often operationalised as appraisals related to the presence or absence of conflict.

Some authors have focused on a synergistic phenomenon called facilitation (Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), in which experiences in one life domain can actually produce energy that can be used in other life domains (e.g. positive spillover). Hanson et al. (2006) found

that positive spillover can result from behaviors (e.g. behaviors learned in one life domain can help people in other life domains), affective experiences (e.g. having a good experience in one domain can produce energy, positive affect, or positive appraisals that influence other life domains), and value-based instrumental experiences (e.g. values reinforced in one life domain become key values that exist in other life domains). Thus, the concept of facilitation focuses more on appraisals of positive interactions between life domains rather than appraisals of negative interactions between life domains.

INPUTS: PERSONAL RESOURCES

Personal resources have received a great deal of attention in previous work–life balance literature, though there has seldom been a comprehensive review of those resources. Most research identifies a particular resource (typically something external to or within the individual, such as social support or autonomy) and studies the contribution of that resource to work–life balance. The PRA framework treats resources as inherently intra-psychic, hence the term personal resources. Although a variety of individual differences (e.g. personality traits) can influence an individual’s appraisals of personal resources (which we discuss a bit later), here we focus on the basic elements required to successfully respond to any life demands.

From this perspective, external resources (e.g. social support) represent a different domain and are not included in the basic PRA framework, though they have been the focus of most previous research on stress in organisations (e.g. Demerouti et al., 2001; Meier, Semmer, Elfering, & Jacobshagen, 2008), and much of work–life balance research specifically (e.g. Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). The primary reason for excluding external resources is because they present possible intervention points (discussed later) that are contingent on the transactions between people’s personal resources and their life demands, and therefore their effectiveness varies according to the person. For example, Meier et al. (2008) found that the benefits of job control (consistently touted as a positive resource in organisations) are moderated by the degree to which employees possess a high internal locus of control. In fact, providing greater job control to those with an external locus of control was found to be detrimental to the well-being of those employees. Thus, locus of control becomes a resource that employees bring to their workplace, which permits them to benefit (or not) from external resources, such as increased job autonomy.

In terms of personal resources that people bring to their daily lives, ultimately there are at least three primary (i.e. basic) resources: (1) time, (2) energy (physical, mental, and/or emotional), and (3) financial resources (e.g. Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Zauberman & Lynch, 2005). These are the three broad categories of personal resources that

can interact with resources and demands in the environment to produce specific individual and organisational outcomes. It is also important to note that the PRA process emphasises people's *appraisals* of time, energy, and financial resources, though these three types of resources can be objectively quantified (e.g. absolute passage of time, biometric assessments of energy, and bank statements assessing financial resources). Although these appraisals do not always align with objective reality, they are more likely to influence individual behavior rather than objective resource assessment (Edwards, 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Time

Time is a resource that receives little attention in work–life balance literature. Although time is implied as being a resource, it is studied by primarily focusing on the amount of time required of demands (e.g. time demands, work overload, time-based conflict; Beauregard, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Time is the ultimate limited resource because no matter what types of interventions we employ, there is absolutely no way to increase the amount of time available in a given day, week, or month. In fact, a great deal of attention has been paid, especially in popular press articles and websites, to the importance of time management (Eaves, 2008). Given that there is no way to increase the amount of time we have to respond to life demands, people have no choice but to find the most efficient way to manage their time. From a positive psychology perspective, people should then be more likely to benefit psychologically (in terms of satisfaction and happiness) when they appraise their time as being allocated in a meaningful way (i.e. that time is spent on something they feel is worthwhile; Barnett & Hyde, 2001) or that they will have sufficient time to respond to demands (Zauberman & Lynch, 2005).

Financial Resources

Sufficient financial resources provide individuals with needed money to effectively respond to certain life demands. A lack of financial resources has been associated with decreased life satisfaction (Frijters, Haisken-DeNew, & Shields, 2004), and many employees are motivated to obtain positions that permit them to increase their available financial resources (e.g. promotions, raises, bonuses). From a PRA perspective, people should benefit psychologically when they feel as though they have sufficient financial resources to allocate to salient life demands. Much like Maslow's Needs Hierarchy (1943), these demands may stem from more basic physiological and safety needs (e.g. shelter and food) to activities that promote social acceptance (e.g. group memberships and social status indicators), and achievement (e.g. college tuition and additional training).

When financial resources are appraised as sufficient, demands requiring financial resources are less likely to produce stress and anxiety. In fact, some people start working specifically to receive money to acquire material possessions or maintain a particular lifestyle (e.g. buying a more expensive car or a larger house), which subsequently should increase their well-being. Yet, research on hedonic adaptation has indicated that increases in happiness (especially due to financial gains) do not necessarily produce long-term positive outcomes (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999), although this effect is dependent on multiple situational and individual differences (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). Hence, the appraisal of certain life demands and the specific strategies used to respond to those life demands will likely be influenced by appraisals available and needed financial resources.

Energy

Energy can be defined as the perceived sufficiency of physical, mental, and emotional resources for responding to life demands. Contemporary research on self-regulation suggests that, regardless of the domain (physical, mental, or emotional), energy is a limited resource that can be depleted in even short periods of time (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). From a COR perspective, people are motivated to expend energy pursuing activities that they find meaningful or worthwhile while minimising the amount of energy they expend pursuing activities they perceive to lack value. Thus, when people perceive that they have the energy necessary to effectively respond to their life demands (whether that energy is physical, mental, or emotional), they should experience more positive psychological outcomes (Marks, 1977). Furthermore, the enrichment literature suggests that some experiences can actually help to increase available energy. For example, having a good day at work can help to produce energy that will spill over into non-work life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Responding to life demands that people find fulfilling may also have positive effects on their appraisals. For example, research suggests that individuals can learn to positively appraise their life situations by focusing on positive events and achievements in their life (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

DEMANDS ARE *NOT* JUST NEGATIVE

Typically, the stress literature treats the terms “stressors” and “demands” as the same construct. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Demands-Control-Support (DCS) Model (Karasek, 1979) both use the term demands as a surrogate for stressors. However, the PRA framework defines demands in a much broader sense. It defines demands as anything that competes for personal resources. Thus, anything

people feel they have to do (requirements) as well as anything they want to do (preferences) potentially constitutes a demand on our time, energy, and financial resources. This is often missed in the work–life balance literature, where work demands (work responsibilities) are often stacked against family demands (family responsibilities), while ignoring other actual demands on people’s personal resources (e.g. social life, personal life pursuits, religious requirements, exercise, sleep). This has led some researchers to study a singles-friendly culture that goes beyond family demands (e.g. Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007).

The narrow definition of “demands” within the work–life balance literature also limits our understanding of the role of life in general. As mentioned above, it tends to exclude activities that people prefer to pursue in favor of activities that we are required to pursue. However, even activities that people prefer to pursue (e.g. hobbies, a social life) demand energy, time, and (potentially) financial resources to effectively pursue those activities. The difference exists within the appraisal process, as people are likely to appraise preferred demands more positively than they are required demands. Yet, both serve as a drain on our personal resources. From a resource availability perspective, it is irrelevant whether a demand is a “have to” or a “want to”, but from an appraisal perspective there are substantial implications.

COR theory would further suggest that people are motivated to expend resources on activities they want to pursue and minimise resource expenditure on activities that are required (but not preferred). For example, Grawitch, Barber, and Kruger (2009) found that the more police officers identified with the policing role, the greater their level of job involvement and commitment to the police department. Thus, identifying with a particular role may play an important part in determining how much of our personal resources we want (or are willing) to expend in that role. From this perspective, people would be motivated to eliminate or reduce demands that are “required” and increase the number of demands that are “preferred”.

Self-determination theory also emphasises the difference between regulating for goals that are congruent with one’s intrinsic motivations (autonomous regulation) versus those that are sought for external motivations (controlled regulation) that may be incongruent with one’s preferences, with the former being seen as more worthwhile and meaningful to the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The distinction between regulating for truly autonomous/self-congruent versus controlled/self-incongruent demands lies on a continuum, with more congruency leading to better psychological and performance outcomes in a number of domains (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, research suggests that expending resources on activities that we enjoy or activities that strengthen physical and mental health (e.g. exercise, having a good day at the office) can actually help to generate positive energy, which can subsequently

spill over into other aspects of life (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007).

In the work–life balance literature, the work role is typically treated as a “required” and negative demand, whereas the family role (though family is a required demand) is often considered to be the “preferred” context in which people want to expend their resources. Expanding this dichotomy out to the larger non-work domain, this assumes that employees are motivated to minimise the expenditure of personal resources in the workplace for the sake of having more resources to expend outside the workplace. Since resources are limited, this means that “work–life balance” is really defined largely as non-work resource protectionism. From this perspective, work is primarily the domain in which we expand our financial resources, while minimising the expenditure of time and energy resources. In fact, contemporary researchers have created a psychological experience called workaholism (Spence & Robbins, 1992) that defines those workers who want to work too much. Though research designs regularly consider workaholism to be negative, there is seldom any attention paid to the reasons why workaholism might be problematic. Instead, the assumption is that workaholism is bad because work is a necessary evil that threatens the more desirable non-work life domain. However, some individuals who are classified as workaholics (work compulsively and excessively) derive great enjoyment from their work and may merely be “happy hard workers” (Buelens, & Poelmans, 2004; Ng, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2007; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008).

In applying appraisals to the resources and demands elements of the PRA framework, individuals will appraise the amount of time, energy, and financial resources they have available to meet particular demands (resource availability). One motivational perspective that can be applied to the PRA process is expectancy-value theory (Vroom, 1964). Individuals may also appraise the demands they encounter (in terms of their worth) as a function of the energy, time, and financial resources required to meet those demands (e.g. how much effort is this going to require), as well as possible outcomes of their resource investment (e.g. is the reward worth the effort). This evaluation will ultimately result in decisions about where, when, and how to allocate their personal resources, but these appraisals can also affect individual outcomes. When demands require more resources than originally expected or more resources than an individual feels that s/he currently possesses, this expectancy-outcome violation may lead to the experience of dissatisfaction with balance or to conflict among life pursuits. If this violation persists, people may adjust their appraisals of effort and expected outcomes over time to be more consistent with actual resource requirements and outcomes, thereby motivating them to expend resources on demands in a more efficient manner.

CHOOSING WHERE, WHEN, AND HOW TO ALLOCATE RESOURCES

When faced with a variety of demands, individuals make choices about how they allocate resources. People choose how much time they spend exercising, how many hours they sleep at night, and how many social events they attend each week. In the workplace, they may choose how long they spend on a task, when they start or stop work, and when they take a break. In fact, researchers have repeatedly argued that increased autonomy at work yields increased performance and well-being (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Thompson & Prottas, 2006), largely because people have more control over how they manage their resources.

Yet, people do not allocate their resources in exactly the same way. For some, resource allocation is a very active process of prioritising and reorganising demands. For example, individuals with a high internal locus of control (Rotter, 1975, 1990), high future-time perspective (Rabinovich, Morton, & Postmes, 2009), and high conscientiousness (Lee, Kelly, & Edwards, 2006) may be very active in managing their personal resources. They seek greater levels of autonomy, which provides them with greater control over when, where, and how they allocate time, energy, and money. On the other hand, those with high external locus of control, high present-time perspective, or low conscientiousness may allow situational demands to dictate their resource allocation. Relying on a more passive process of resource allocation, these individuals may allow immediate demands to continually supersede long-term demands.

For example, some individuals are very proactive in meeting demands. They evaluate their available resources (i.e. time, energy, and financial) and use this appraisal as a way to prioritise and structure their demands. They may block off time to meet a particular demand (e.g. setting specific time aside to work on a report or to make phone calls). They may also use tools and techniques, such as to-do lists, calendars, or specific goals, as a way to organise and prioritise their demands. This is an active process that integrates appraisals of personal resources with appraisals of existing demands. Without giving sufficient attention to the appraisals of both resource availability and resource requirements, individuals may find themselves continually in a position of resource insufficiency. This is especially true when individuals simply respond to demands as they surface—using a “fly by the seat of your pants” approach—allocating resources to one salient demand after another as they arise without considering (a) the potential effect of that resource allocation on subsequent demands and (b) the efficiency with which resources are allocated to meet that demand (e.g. doing everything by oneself vs. learning to delegate). Thus, this second approach is a more reactive decision-making process.

However, active decision-making also comes with potential negative consequences. Self-regulation research has demonstrated that the effective use of self-regulation strategies (e.g. self-control, self-monitoring) requires effortful processing (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) to obtain a desired outcome or to avoid an undesired outcome (Carver & Scheier, 1990, 1998). For example, a recent study (Dar-Nimrod, Rawn, Lehman, & Schwartz, 2009) examined the differences between maximisers (i.e. those who collect as much information as possible in order to make the “right” decision) and satisficers (i.e. those who collect sufficient information in order to come to an “acceptable” decision). The results revealed that maximisers are less satisfied with their end decisions than are satisficers because they expect the rewards from their final choices to match the amount of time and effort they invested in decision-making. This suggests that though an effective resource allocation strategy is important, trying to find the one right way to allocate personal resources has unintended negative consequences. In terms of work–life balance, when people expend a large amount of personal resources trying to identify a way to get to do everything they want to do (have it all), rather than finding ways to get to do those things they feel are most important, they become disenchanted, potentially suffering psychologically (van Vegchel, de Jonge, Bosma, & Schaufeli, 2005).

INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES: RESOURCES, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING, AND PERFORMANCE

How people choose to expend their resources ultimately determines at least three primary individual outcomes: (1) future resources, (2) subjective well-being, and (3) performance. First, how people manage their personal resources determines how many resources they have left to allocate to other demands. How people manage their time also determines how many demands they can respond to on a daily basis. The basic premise behind much of the current work–life balance research is that people spend fewer resources on “required” demands so that they have more resources to respond to “preferred” demands. Yet, recent research on facilitation suggests that engaging work produces additional energy that can spill over into other activities outside of work (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Hanson et al., 2006). Hence, there may be points of leverage in helping people find work roles that produce this phenomenon.

In addition to future resources, how people allocate their personal resources can also influence well-being. The “maximiser/satisficer” study discussed above highlights the need to be selective about how much energy and time (resources) to expend in finding an acceptable solution. Expending too many resources to reach the “right” decision may simply lead to ultimate dissatisfaction with whatever decision is reached. Similarly, people who live

beyond their means (i.e. fail to allocate their financial resources effectively) as a way to obtain their “ideal” lifestyle tend to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression (Martikainen, Adda, Ferrie, Smith, & Davey, 2003), in addition to substantial debt.

Within the stress and emotion regulation literature, there is also discussion of maladaptive and adaptive regulation strategies (e.g. Larsen & Prizmic, 2004). When people expend resources to proactively meet their demands (rather than expending resources that focus just on the emotional response to the demand rather than to actually meeting the demand), they tend to experience more positive well-being outcomes. That is, when people expend resources in a way that allows them to respond to demands (i.e. problem-focused coping—e.g. accomplishing a goal, finishing a task), they are likely to experience more positive outcomes. When they expend resources simply as a way to cope with the negative emotions that result from the existence of demands (i.e. emotion-focused coping—e.g. the anxiety produced by work overload) without expending resources to actually meet the demands themselves (e.g. procrastinating, withdrawal), they are more likely to experience negative well-being outcomes.

Yet, there may be a time and a place to rely on emotion-focused coping strategies in response to demands. Though some researchers have argued that problem-focused coping strategies are more adaptive (e.g. Koeske, Kirk, & Koeske, 1993), there is some evidence that emotion-focused coping strategies can be useful, especially when people lack control over particular demands (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). Parkes (1994) argued that coping flexibility (i.e. ability to use multiple types of coping strategies based on situational demands) leads to the most effective management of personal resources. Therefore, effective self-regulation includes the capability of recognising when a particular goal is unattainable and the ability to alter one’s current activities to respond to that recognition (e.g. disengaging the goal, engaging an alternative goal; Carver & Scheier, 1998). Thus, from a subjective well-being perspective, when people are satisfied with the way they have used their resources to respond to life demands, they should be more likely to experience positive subjective well-being outcomes. This is especially true when considering demands that possess greater degrees of salience or importance for an individual (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). For example, individuals who place more emphasis on their work relationships to fulfill social and achievement needs may be more likely to see work demands as less stressful than individuals who place more emphasis on non-work relationships.

Lastly, how people manage their personal resources can influence performance results. When people effectively respond to their life demands, they tend to produce a greater quality of results, which is the hallmark of effective self-regulation (e.g. Porath & Bateman, 2006). For example, research indicates that training people in how to effectively respond to the demands of

their jobs results in higher job performance (Hanson, 2007). Providing direction and guidance in terms of decision-making can produce higher-quality decisions (Li & Harris, 2008). Helping employees set and progress toward desired goals can increase the likelihood of success in achieving those goals (Renn & Fedor, 2001). Outside of the work domain, research has indicated that effective runners are effective because they pace themselves appropriately (Ariyoshi, Yamaji, & Shephard, 1979), that people will make poor decisions when their cognitive resources are impaired (Sedek, Kofta, & Tyszka, 1993), that people's reaction time decreases when their physical resources are physically depleted (Fery, Ferry, Von Hofe, & Rieu, 1997), and that rational adults will make poor parenting decisions when their time, financial, or energy resources are depleted (Barling, MacEwen, & Nolte, 1993). Thus, the literature consistently demonstrates the need for people to effectively self-regulate if they are to effectively manage resources. In a broader sense, making informed decisions about the way we allocate personal resources is likely to increase our overall performance in responding to life demands.

KEY FACTORS THAT AFFECT RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The PRA framework integrates a variety of research across many different domains to suggest that effective "work-life balance" is really effective personal resource allocation across life pursuits. However, a variety of factors can influence the ways in which the PRA process plays out across different individuals and settings. Individual differences, external resources, and person-environment fit all play a role in personal resource allocation.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Individual differences play a role in how the PRA process plays out for each person. Previous research would suggest that individual differences can influence all three aspects of the PRA process, largely because individual differences influence the appraisals people make about their personal resources, demands, and acceptable resource allocation strategies. There are at least three types of individual differences that can influence the PRA process: demographic differences, trait personality differences, and interest/attitudinal differences. Though the line between each of these three factors may be somewhat arbitrary (e.g. extraverts are interested in and have positive attitudes toward other people), they can be defined slightly differently.

Demographic Differences

Demographic differences are those that arise primarily due to differences in life situations. In terms of demographic differences, research has well

documented how socio-economic status (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000), sex (Voydanoff, 2004), number of children (Voydanoff, 2004), education level (Voydanoff, 2004), type of work (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992), health status (Fox, 1999), and even the distance people live from their workplace (Jansen, Kant, Kristensen, & Nijhuis, 2003), can influence various individual outcomes. For example, people with children must integrate an additional demand (i.e. parenting) into their daily allocation of time and energy resources. Those that identify with their role as parent, friend, or spouse may appraise non-work demands as more important and enjoyable than work-oriented demands. People living in lower socio-economic conditions tend to possess fewer monetary resources to expend on personal life demands, such as family demands, social demands, and personal pursuits. These individuals may be more motivated to identify opportunities for increasing the amount of financial resources (e.g. through overtime) and may look for opportunities to take on additional work demands at the expense of other demands.

Personality Traits

Personality traits relate to relatively stable aspects of an individual that determine how that individual tends to respond to ambiguous stimuli and the types of situations in which people will prefer to operate. Personality traits influence people's perceptions and appraisals of the world around them. The most notable conceptualisation of personality is the Big 5 Personality traits of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992), though other personality characteristics exist. In terms of the PRA framework, personality traits can first and foremost influence appraisals of the available resources people have to expend. For example, extraverts would be predisposed to appraise themselves as having more resources available to respond to social demands than would introverts. Optimists would be more likely to appraise their resources as sufficient for managing all of their demands than would pessimists. In the work-life balance literature, (1) extraversion tends to be associated with increased facilitation; (2) conscientiousness tends to be associated with decreased conflict and increased facilitation; and (3) neuroticism tends to be associated with increased conflict, decreased facilitation, and decreased satisfaction with work-life balance (e.g. Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Wayne et al., 2007).

Interests and Attitudes

Finally, interests and attitudes can be defined as relatively stable characteristics of individuals that influence general responses to stimuli in the environment. Personality traits may be seen as influencing interests/attitudes, but interests/attitudes are more modifiable than personality traits (Ajzen, 2005).

In addition, interests/attitudes can emerge over time (e.g. learning that you like a new food that you had never tried before). Whereas demographics and personality traits influence all three primary aspects of the PRA process, interests and attitudes primarily influence the number and types of demands on which people are willing to expend their limited resources. The more interests that people possess, the more likely they will consciously or unconsciously add demands to their daily life. The addition of each new demand competes for time, energy, and maybe financial resources in the context of existing demands. People may be more likely to prioritise interests ahead of required demands whenever possible; hence, the level of interest that people demonstrate toward certain demands may indirectly influence the specific resource allocation strategies they employ. Attitudes work in much the same way. In organisational research, attitudes are consistent outcomes that are studied in the form of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, engagement, and others. In the broadest sense, attitudes influence our positive and negative reactions to specific events in the environment. People may be more likely to expend resources on demands for which they have a positive attitude and expend resources avoiding demands for which they have a negative attitude.

Though various attitudes related to the workplace are likely to share some overlap, some research suggests that attitudes about the work, workplace, or job are not all the same. For example, Schaufeli et al. (2008) found that workaholism, engagement, and organisational commitment were related, yet independent constructs. In addition, Greguras and Dieffendorff (2009) recently concluded that the organisation, the workgroup, and the job each worked to fulfill different types of employee needs. Thus, while attitudes in general may be influential in the PRA process, different types of attitudes (e.g. job vs. organisation) may result in different appraisals or resource allocation decisions, leading to different types of outcomes.

Perhaps one of the most useful conceptualisations for considering the role of interests and attitudes in the PRA framework as it relates to the workplace concerns a construct called role identification or job embeddedness. Both constructs (though measured differently) contain at their core the idea that people differ in the extent to which their self-identification is tied to their work, their job function, and/or their employer. Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) found that some people are likely to view the work role as simply a means to an end (e.g. financial resources; job orientation), some are likely to view their work role as an opportunity to meet their achievement needs (career), and some are likely to view their work role as an opportunity to achieve something better than themselves (e.g. societal contributions; calling). For example, Grawitch et al. (2009) found that police officers who viewed their role as a calling reported greater organisational commitment and job involvement, and lower emotional exhaustion and

turnover intentions than did those that classified their role as a job (those that classified their role as a career fell in between the two groups). In terms of job embeddedness, Hom et al. (2009) found that a greater sense of identification with the work role was a powerful factor that influenced employee perceptions of their relationship to the organisation over an 18-month period. From a general PRA perspective, these types of orientation toward work, the work role, or the organisation, may alter the perception of “required” and “preferred” demands by transforming the work role into a “preferred” demand instead of a “required” demand. Because the individual sees their work demands as being more self-congruent, and therefore intrinsically motivating (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this is likely to alter the types of resource allocation strategies employees would consider using.

Additionally, there has been little research that has investigated the role of work orientation on the workaholism–negative outcome relationship. That is, because workaholism is treated as a natural phenomenon when job demands or financial pressures spiral out of control, or when obsessive-compulsive employees refuse to stop pursuing a work goal, it is often assumed that workaholism is a problem. However, Bonebright, Clay, and Ankenmann (2000) found that there is a difference between what they defined as “enthusiastic” workaholics and “nonenthusiastic” workaholics. Enthusiastic workaholics reported lower work–life conflict and greater life satisfaction than did nonenthusiastic workaholics. Though enthusiastic workaholics reported more work–life conflict than did nonworkaholics, they did not report lower levels of overall life satisfaction, suggesting that work–life conflict itself is not sufficient to decrease life satisfaction (unless employees dislike their jobs). Thus, finding meaning in one’s work can be the difference between the perception that work life is the cause of problems and the perception that work life contributes to personal fulfillment.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

External resources in the PRA framework can be defined as any resources outside of the person that influence that person’s resource allocation process. Though a variety of external resources can be considered, they generally can be broken down into two major areas: support and training/personal development. Each of these areas can influence the PRA process, which then contributes to employee resource allocation outcomes.

Support

Support is, by far, the most commonly studied external resource when it comes to work–life balance. Originally, support surfaced from the stress literature as a coping mechanism (Thoits, 1995), with an emphasis on

instrumental (i.e. providing tangible materials or assistance) and emotional (i.e. listening, advising, coaching) support. In the workplace, more specific types of support include supervisor support (Caplan et al., 1980; Oldham & Cummings, 1996), co-worker support (Caplan et al., 1980), and perceived organisational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). Support is also the most common “resource” that is assessed as a part of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and is a central component of the Demands-Control-Support (DCS) model (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Karasek, 1979). In the context of work–life balance, support outside of the workplace is most often conceptualised as family support (Adams, King, & King, 1996), and support that crosses the work/non-work domain is commonly referred to as a family-friendly culture (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Yet, when it comes to responding to demands across the larger life domain, other support mechanisms can be included, such as technological support and informational support (Klein, Conn, & Sorra, 2001). These types of support are necessary to permit employees to effectively allocate resources to meet demands that are not confined to one specific life domain (e.g. using telecommuting), and may possess both instrumental and emotional components.

Support generally influences the PRA process at either the demands stage or the resource allocation stage. At the demands stage, instrumental support can influence the types of demands that are actually experienced. For example, if an employee’s spouse chooses to be a stay-at-home parent, it reduces the number of demands required by that employee in terms of parenting, housework, and other non-work demands. As another example, if an employee’s supervisor supports autonomy, an employee then has the capability to re-structure demands in such a way that inefficient demands can be reduced or eliminated. If the employee’s supervisor supplements that support for autonomy with additional technology (e.g. a laptop), then the employee may have greater latitude in terms of when, where, and how work is performed (e.g. telecommuting). In addition, if the employee’s supervisor provides the emotional support (i.e. understanding, appropriate expectations) or instrumental support (i.e. policies and procedures), an employee may be able to telecommute regularly, influencing how that employee allocates resources on a daily (or even hourly) basis. Many workplace practices, especially telecommuting, hinge on supervisor and co-worker support to produce desired results (Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999; Vega, 2003). Thus, support is important for effective employee personal resource allocation.

Training and Development

Though support is important, training and development improves an employee’s ability to effectively allocate resources. Training and development

can influence both an employee's current resource levels (i.e. energy, financial) and employee resource allocation decisions, largely by increasing mastery of some competency (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). For example, greater skills acquired through training and development initiatives can improve one's status within the organisation (which improves financial resources), but they can also improve the efficiency with which that employee accomplishes work (Noe, 2005). Thus, employees learn to more effectively allocate resources so that they expend less time and energy in completing work tasks, which then permits employees to expend their time and energy on other demands. In addition, effective career development training (e.g. mentoring) should lead to employees becoming more skilled at navigating the workplace, which allows them to receive greater promotion opportunities and, subsequently, greater financial resources (though promotions sometimes come with increased demands). More skills-oriented training, such as occurs with a lot of health and wellness initiatives, can expand or improve employee resource allocation decisions (e.g. choosing to eat healthy foods) and their level of personal energy resources (e.g. through improved nutrition, exercise, and sleep). Some research (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) even suggests that key aspects of self-control (which would be required for effective resource allocation) can be improved with training.

PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT

Though characteristics of the individual and external resources each play a role in influencing the outcomes associated with employee resource allocation, ultimately effectiveness of the PRA process will be influenced by the fit between the employee and that employee's life domains. Person-environment fit can be defined as the alignment between (1) the demands of a particular environment (e.g. situation, job, task, role), (2) the characteristics of the individual operating in that environment, and (3) the personal resources the individual currently possesses that can be allocated to meet demands (Edwards, 1996; Lewin, 1951). From a macro perspective, fit exists when alignment (actual or perceived) occurs some amount of time (the exact amount of time is likely influenced by individual expectations and attitudes), with increased alignment leading to more efficient use of resources (and subsequently more positive outcomes) and misalignment leading to more inefficient use of resources (and subsequently more negative outcomes).

Organisational research has conceptualised person-environment alignment issues to fall under either person-organisation fit or person-job fit, both of which influence individual outcomes (Edwards, 1996). Person-organisation fit operates in a supplemental manner, requiring congruent

values for optimal employee and organisational effectiveness (Kristoff, 1996). Although person–organisation fit usually centers on values, it can also include goals or behavioral norms (Chatman, 1989). Person–job fit, however, is considered to be complementary in that the employee or the organisation provides attributes that the other is lacking (e.g. needs–supplies fit and demands–abilities fit; Cable & DeRue, 2002).

Individuals should seek out life pursuits that maximise felt congruency between preferred and required goals (similar to person–organisation fit); acquire, develop, or protect resources that meet personal needs, and seek out demands that utilise (without exceeding) one’s abilities. For example, successfully navigating one specific social situation can more adeptly be performed by individuals that enjoy social situations, have a personality that can thrive in social situations, and possess the time, energy, and money (if necessary) at the present time to effectively navigate the social situation. This is not to say that an introvert or people with depleted personal resources cannot operate effectively in such situations. However, misalignment may temporarily produce negative well-being or situational performance consequences for the individual. If misalignment regularly occurs, then person–environment fit (especially appraisal of fit) is threatened.

This can be exacerbated when key aspects of misfit are directly related to needs that people possess. Greguras and Diefendorff (2009) recently found that person–organisation fit was most important when people had a high need for autonomy, person–group fit was most important when people had a high need for affiliation, and person–job fit was most important when people had a high need for competence. Thus, various aspects of fit or misfit may become more important when the need to take something from a particular life demand is not being met. Returning to the work orientation constructs (e.g. role identification and job embeddedness), people are more likely to experience fit when what they are getting from the work role (i.e. financial, achievement, or self-actualisation benefits) matches what they prefer to get from the work role. Therefore, as long as the demands associated with the work role continue to produce what people desire to take from the work role, they are likely to experience fewer negative consequences as a result of their work role than are people who are not getting what they expect.

UTILITY OF THE PRA MODEL

The underlying assumption of the PRA process is that positive outcomes will result when people are able to allocate their resources in a way that is optimally aligned with their preferences and capabilities, whereas negative outcomes will result when misalignment occurs. To a great extent, the PRA process emphasises the need to establish the proper fit—across the entire life domain—between demands, individual characteristics, and personal

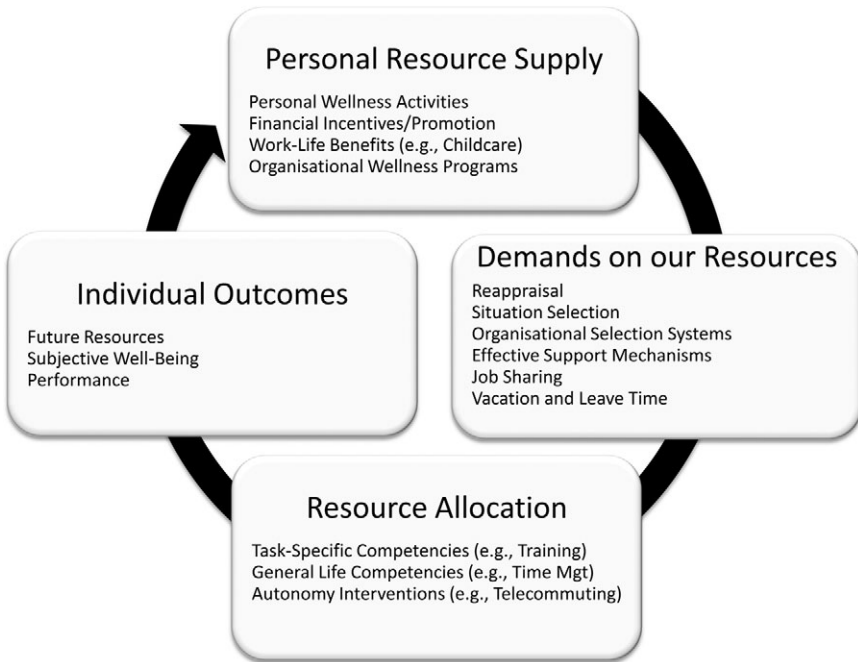


FIGURE 2. Examples of influences on the PRA process.

resources. Moving beyond simply one life domain (i.e. the workplace), the PRA process emphasises that fit is essential within each life domain and within the interface of seemingly different or separate life domains (e.g. work and non-work life) because the increased expenditure of resources resulting from misfit in one life domain will have an adverse effect on performance in a different life domain, even if fit exists within that domain. The PRA process as described here is built on previous research that has examined some aspect of resource allocation. Integrating this research can permit individuals and organisations to develop strategies for improving the way resources are allocated, resulting in more positive outcomes. Figure 2 provides some examples of the way that individuals and organisations can influence the PRA process.

Individual-Level Strategies to Improve Resource Allocation Effectiveness

There are a variety of ways that individuals can alter the way they engage in personal resource allocation. At a basic level, individuals can focus on

expanding their pool of available resources. Individuals can increase the amount of energy they have to respond to demands, and they can improve the amount of financial resources they have at their disposal. At the demands stage of the PRA process, individuals can engage in a variety of activities specifically designed to alter their perceptions of demands. Finally, at the resource allocation stage, individuals can make more enlightened, active choices about how they allocate their personal resources.

In terms of influencing the amount of resources people have at their disposal, they may choose to focus on expanding their pool of available energy or financial resources. This decision would be largely based on the appraisal that there is insufficient energy or money to meet required or preferred demands. In terms of increasing one's energy resources, the health literature has provided considerable evidence to suggest that exercise (Puetz, 2006), nutrition (Allen & Armstrong, 2006), and sleep (Kong, Shepel, Holden, Mackiewicz, Pack, & Geiger, 2002) can all assist in producing more energy, which can be marshaled toward the successful completion of life demands. Thus, individuals who are looking to expand their personal energy resources may consider increasing the amount of exercise they get, improving their diet, and optimising their nightly quality and quantity of sleep.

Although there are exceptions, we can generally assume that work is the primary means through which individuals replenish and expand financial resources. However, with respect to a given job, individuals may also seek opportunities to increase their financial resources both within and outside of the organisation. Hourly employees may work more hours to receive overtime pay or even work special shifts (i.e. holidays) for extra pay. Employees may also request a pay raise, and/or seek higher paying positions within the organisation. If opportunities to increase one's financial resources are limited within the organisation, individuals may also search for additional employment to supplement their income or leave the organisation for a higher-paying position elsewhere, as evidenced by a consistent link between pay satisfaction and turnover intent (Currall, Towler, Judge, & Kohn, 2005).

Though expanding the pool of available resources can effectively alter the PRA process, sometimes appraisals of demands can also be altered. A variety of appraisal and reappraisal interventions have been postulated and studied in recent research (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Most notably, individuals can learn to prioritise demands or cognitively reframe demands. Prioritising demands provides individuals with a clear understanding of which demands are more important than others. This serves as a filtering strategy, whereby an individual assesses the current resources available and decides which demands merit the most attention at a given point in time. This permits the reduction in the number of demands to which individuals plan to respond. Alternatively, reframing demands alters the perception of demands rather

than reducing the number of demands. Reframing is based on the notion that required demands are a greater drain on personal resources than are preferred demands because they are perceived negatively by the individual. By reframing a life situation or series of experiences in a more positive light, an individual can alter perception of the demand itself, which can decrease inappropriate resource allocation strategies (e.g. avoidance) and increase more appropriate resource allocation strategies (e.g. proactive). When demands are approached more proactively, fewer resources should be ultimately required to respond to those demands. Emotion regulation strategies that focus on reframing are often associated with more adaptive outcomes (e.g. commitment, satisfaction) and have shown no relationship with adverse outcomes, such as burnout (Grandey, 2003). Also, people who find meaning in their work report fewer negative outcomes and more positive outcomes than those who do not (Grawitch et al., 2009; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Hence, aligning cognitions and emotions with situational demands can, over time, be useful in decreasing the amount of resources required to meet those demands.

Of course, the less reframing that has to regularly occur, the less individuals must actively alter their current perspective. Hence, when it comes to demands, individuals can also engage in situation selection to maximise the likelihood of fit between demands and resources (Friede & Ryan, 2005). For example, individuals who possess high levels of extraversion may seek demands (e.g. type of work, personal pursuits) that align with their need to interact with others. A highly extraverted person would find personal pursuits that demand social interaction minimally taxing compared to a more introverted person. In addition, individuals with a high internal locus of control would allocate resources more effectively in situations that provide a high degree of autonomy than individuals high in external locus of control. Though there are some traits that appear to be useful across most situations (e.g. conscientiousness, self-control, emotional stability), the benefits/drawbacks of individual characteristics in influencing resource allocation are often contingent on fit between an individual and the environment. Therefore, selecting situations that provide a good fit should result in more efficient resource allocation.

Finally, at the resource allocation stage, individuals can actively choose to allocate their resources. Rather than passively allocating resources, individuals can choose when, where, and how to allocate their resources to best fit their personal needs. Acquiring competencies related to specific demands (e.g. practice, job-related training; Winfred, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003) and acquiring competencies that can be applied to better manage a system of demands (e.g. time management skills; Claessens, van Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2007) can assist individuals in more effectively allocating time, money, and energy to meet life demands (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

Organisational-Level Strategies to Improve Employee Resource Allocation Effectiveness

Organisations and employers can also influence the personal resource allocation process. This may include providing interventions focused on increasing their employees' pool of available resources, altering the demands that employees face, and providing support for effective employee resource allocation. Organisations can provide numerous resources to help increase employees' personal resource supply. Three of the most salient types of interventions in contemporary organisations are wellness programs (to increase employee energy), monetary recognition for achievements (to increase employee financial resources), and benefits that provide financial resources to assist in meeting non-work life demands (e.g. relocation stipends, childcare or eldercare benefits, life management services). Research suggests that wellness programs can increase the amount of energy employees have to respond to demands, which can subsequently increase productivity in the workplace (Goetzel & Ozminkowski, 2008). Merit raises, bonuses, and promotion opportunities can all provide a boost to employee financial resources, thus expanding that resource domain. However, when it comes to promotion opportunities, such opportunities also come with additional demands that may detract from an employee's energy resource supply. These additional demands may result in negative reappraisals or a situation in which an individual perceives a lack of fit between demands and resources (van Vegchel et al., 2005).

With respect to demands, organisations can develop selection mechanisms to maximise the likelihood that employees are a good fit with a variety of characteristics of the workplace, including job, culture, co-workers, and supervisor (Sekiguchi, 2007). Organisations can provide employees with work-life benefits that permit employees to temporarily eliminate or reduce workplace demands so that they can expend more resources meeting demands in other life domains (e.g. vacation time, paid time off, sabbaticals, paid or unpaid leave) and/or flexible work options that permit employees to alter the amount of resources they expend in the work domain, typically in exchange for less pay (e.g. job sharing, part-time options). Though this option can increase the amount of time and energy available for demands in other life domains, it is also typically associated with a reduction in the employee's financial resources. Lastly, organisations can ensure that there are sufficient human, technological, financial, and other resources available to achieve organisational goals.

In terms of resource allocation interventions, organisations can ensure that employees have the job-related training they need to be successful (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Providing sufficient training opportunities decreases the amount of energy and time employees are required to expend in meeting

workplace demands. In addition, mentoring and coaching can assist employees in developing effective strategies for responding to workplace demands. Finally, organisations can provide employees with greater autonomy, so that they can control when, where, and how they choose to accomplish their workplace demands. Flexible work practices (e.g. telecommuting, flexible scheduling) provide employees with more flexibility in how they allocate their resources across multiple life domains (Grzywacz, Carlson, & Shulkin, 2008).

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The PRA approach to work–life balance has at least four main implications that distinguish it from previous approaches. In terms of demands, it does not necessarily treat “work” and “life” as separate domains to be balanced or satisfied. All personal pursuits, whether they are related to family, social, work, or even spiritual activities, fall under a more general term of life demands that need to be addressed according to an individual’s perception of meaningful pursuits and personal resources. This avoids conceptual and measurement issues around a bias toward demands being negative and required, especially in terms of work demands. For example, labeling individuals who derive most of their meaningful experiences from work as “workaholics” that do not have a “life” outside of work misses the point of individual preferences in life pursuits. Therefore, future research should include more nuanced measurement of demand appraisals, including meaningful life pursuits.

A second key implication of this approach is that there is no “right way” to respond to life demands. Though we have identified some key factors that may influence personal resources, appraisals of demands, and resource allocation strategies (demographic factors, personality traits, attitudes, and interests), there has been little research integrating these individual differences and exploring the relevance of these factors to “work–life balance” issues. For example, research has examined the predictive validity of such variables as role identification and job embeddedness, but there has been little research exploring how those phenomena come to exist. There has also been a dearth of research examining how such variables influence perceptions of demands and resource allocation strategies. Instead, the focus has typically been on linking these variables to individual outcomes without studying the process that leads to those outcomes.

A third key implication of this approach is that the demands themselves need to be evaluated in terms of priorities and choice. Often, individuals and organisations rush to intervene with respect to available resources or allocation strategies without considering that perhaps the expectations for meeting demands are unrealistic or self-defeating. The schematic shift from “having it all” to “having what’s most important” can be liberating for both employees

and organisations that are entrenched in a struggle over time, energy, and financial resources to meet sometimes competing demands. Future research into intervention strategies should consider ways in which to prioritise and monitor priority changes in these demands over time (as they are most likely dynamic in nature) in terms of both the individual and the organisation.

In line with balancing individual and organisational demands, a fourth implication of the PRA framework is that it is both the individual's and the organisation's responsibility to explore resource allocation strategies that meet demands in a mutually beneficial manner. Employees cannot expect the organisation to continually provide more (often financial) resources to help them meet their chosen life demands at the expense of organisational functioning. Likewise, organisations cannot expect their employees to continually provide more of their time and energy resources to help them meet organisational demands at the long-term expense of personal well-being. Therefore, each party must agree to prioritise demands and maximise allocation strategies given their pool of available resources. Research should consider the organisational context when helping individuals interact with their life demands (e.g. organisational resources to support workplace practices), as well as the employee context (e.g. employee resources to meet organisational goals) in which organisational demands can be met.

In conclusion, this article has presented a framework for reconceptualising work–life balance by de-emphasising the negative role that work plays in life and emphasising resource allocation strategies that promote a systems perspective study of life pursuits. Using the PRA framework, current self-regulatory theories, resource theories, and motivation theories, among others, can be integrated to explain the life experience, rather than the work experience or the family experience. Our goal was to provide a potential framework that moves beyond the assumption that “work is bad and family is good”. This would permit the scientific study of all life pursuits that incorporates person–environment interactions that produce positive outcomes, rather than simply those that either increase or decrease negative outcomes. Using the PRA framework, future research may be able to draw clearer conclusions about resource allocation and well-being by fleshing out the various components of the framework.

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