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Introduction

The theoretical implications of studying the role collective organizations play in the access and use of work and family policies have been largely unexplored within the work and family literature. Much of this literature is dominated by studies associating family friendly policies and practices with individual affect, behaviors, and attitudes, e.g. role conflict, stress, turnover, commitment, and satisfaction (Kossek and Lambert 2005; Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek et al. 2006). While an individual perspective is useful, the literature lacks discussion of a collective perspective on employee access to work-life flexibility policies, for example considering a unionized context or public policy implementation.

Past Studies have used institutional theory or economic factors to explain the adoption of work-life flexibility policies across organizations (Goodstein 1994; Goodstein 1995; Ingram and Simons 1995; Osterman 1995; Arthur 2003). Other studies have examined the relationship between availability of work-life policies on a variety of outcomes such as recruitment, organizational commitment, or firm performance (Konrad and Mangel 2000; Avery and McKay 2006). As Eaton (2003) points out, often there are many barriers to actual use of available policies; moreover, as Lambert and Waxman (2005) note, there is typically organizational stratification in the availability of these policies as they are often designed and implemented in ways that do not necessarily help workers, particularly those in blue collar or lower level jobs.

Paper goals: In order to address the gaps noted above, we examine the association of collective voice, individual voice, individual and workplace characteristics on employee access to various work-life flexibility policies and practices. In particular, we expand theories of collective and individual voice by applying and testing them in the work-family arena. Moreover, we examine the extent to which collective and individual voice moderate the association of specific individual and workplace characteristics with employee access to work-life flexibility policies and practices. Below we provide a brief overview of the collective agreement provisions in our study and the outcome variables of interest.

Work-life issues covered in collective agreements. Collective agreements typically include a set of paid time off provisions such as vacation, sick days, and personal days. These provisions can be helpful for employees in balancing work and family demands. Less frequent, but certainly present, in collective agreements are provisions that allow for temporal and spatial flexibility. These policies and practices include flex-time, telecommuting, compensatory time, as well as the ability exchange shifts, compress the workweek, and return to work gradually after an illness or birth. We will show in the paper, collective agreements typically vary in three ways in regards to provisions governing work-life flexibility and working time. They are either 1) Explicit, where collective agreements either explicitly give employees the right to negotiate such flexible work arrangements with their supervisors, 2) Supervisory Discretionary where access to these work-life flexibility policies and practices is left to supervisor discretion, or 3) Absent, where they provide no language at all. Thus, even when collective agreements are explicit in language regulating the workplace, accessing time and spatial flexibility depends in large part on supervisor-employee interaction within different forms of work organization and job tasks.
Given this reality, individuals with a strong voice and access to collective voice should be more likely to access work-life flexibility policies and practices.

**Collective voice outcomes from flexibility.** Collective voice has two dimensions in our study: union effectiveness and union support. The literature on collective voice emphasizes the ability of employees through their union to express their thoughts and concerns about the workplace in a variety of ways (Freeman and Medoff 1984). Unions that are effective in responding to employee concerns and needs are exercising collective voice on behalf of workers. Union effectiveness is a measure of how strong employees perceive the union to be as their collective representative. Union support focuses on how well the union helps employees solve problems at work and problems specifically related to their schedule.

**Individual voice.** Individual voice focuses on the extent to which employees have a say about their jobs and how comfortable they feel expressing their thoughts about their work schedule to their supervisor. The work-family literature typically integrates any concept of individual voice into workplace climate variables such as individual perceptions of supervisor support, or organizational support, or of the negative consequences from policy use. However, we see this as a separate construct since individuals views of usability may vary from worker to worker. Thus, we separate out this effect to test its individual impact.

**Hypotheses**

We will investigate and provide theory on the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis (1) Collective and individual voice are positively associated with employee access to work-life flexibility policies and practices.

Hypothesis (2) Collective and individual voice moderate the association of workplace and individual characteristics with employee access to work-life flexibility policies and practices.

Given that certain work-life flexibility practices, e.g. telecommuting, are more likely to be possible in certain types of jobs, we include a test for moderation of voice with occupation and work organization characteristics. This will demonstrate whether union or individual voice can influence the impact of these factors on employee access to work-life flexibility.

**Sample and Analysis**

The data for this paper comes from 8 unionized public and private organizations across the United States. We conducted interviews with managers and supervisors at each organization and conducted an employee survey based on a stratified random sample across departments in each organization. The individual survey data consists of 897 employees within 20 labor unions across the 8 organizations. These data provide us with direct measures of employee access to flexibility policies and practices. The flexibility policies and practices include measures of temporal flexibility such as flex-time, flex-shifts, compressed workweeks, compensatory time, part-time return to work, as well as a measure of spatial flexibility such as telecommuting. We use a probit analysis to test the effect of union support, union effectiveness, individual voice, and various individual and workplace characteristics on employee access to work-life flexibility policies and practices.

Although labor unions are key institutions in negotiating wages and benefits for millions of employees, U.S. unions are not traditionally thought of as champions of work-life flexibility.
This paper can make a substantial contribution to issues of employee voice by demonstrating how unions can make a difference in employees’ demand for work-life flexibility.
References


Work Schedules – Trends and Differences among Key Worker Sub-groups

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Abstract

Statistics Canada’s Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) dataset has been collected and released for 1999 to 2006, and will no longer be extended. The advantage of the WES is that it contains an extensive number of job and individual variables for Canadian workers, including many important elements of work schedules. Over the past several years, our research team has undertaken a research project exploring several of these elements. The purpose of this study is to look at work schedule trends over time among four sub-groups of interest, essentially representing less privileged females and males versus more privileged females and males. The scheduling variables are: workweek length (separated into ‘short’ & ‘long’ part-time, and ‘short’ & ‘long’ full-time), weekend hours, unsocial hours, late schedule notice, and/or flextime. While it is difficult to categorize work schedules lengths as being inherently good or bad, it is fair to presume that late schedule notice or weekend/unsocial hours are generally negative to workers, while access to flextime programs is generally positive.

The inspiration for this study continues to be Betcherman and Lowe’s (1997) analysis of the Canadian labour market. At that time, they identified a number of worrying trends, including the polarization of working conditions. They outlined three scenarios for the future for Canadian workers. In essence, the message was that average working conditions might deteriorate or improve, the conditions for less (more) privileged workers are almost certainly going to deteriorate (improve). In our recent studies (e.g. Zeytinoglu, Cooke and Mann, 2009) and those by others (e.g. Saunders, 2003), it has been established that relatively powerful workers in Canada have higher quality jobs with relatively good pay, hours, and other conditions while less powerful workers are much more likely to be stuck in jobs with relatively poor working conditions. We believe that among the most important variables in determining power in the labour market is attained education. In this study, we also sort workers according to gender since previous studies (e.g. Cooke, Zeytinoglu, and Mann, 2009; Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Vallée 2005) indicate that females have a higher prevalence of non-standard work arrangements, especially of the less desirable variety.

For this particular study, WES data from 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2005 have been utilized. THE WES is a ‘linked’ dataset in which data from employee microdata (from survey answers from employees) are matched to workplace (i.e., employer) microdata. However, since the unit of analysis in our study is at the individual worker level, we primarily use employee data. For this presentation, data analysis will be
restricted to descriptive statistics in a variety of forms. This approach is appropriate to visually highlight the scheduling elements that have varied or remained constant, over this time period. In addition to the scheduling variables mentioned above, other key variables are: education, wage level, job satisfaction, and the receipt of employer-provided training, retirement/pension plans, and other non-wage benefits. These variables are used to identify the sub-groups of workers in Canadian who can be classified as being relatively more or less privileged.

Although data analysis is ongoing, some preliminary findings are available. At first blush, and when looking at trends among all Canadian workers, it appears that there has been little variability in these work schedules between 1999 and 2005. When considering only job characteristics of less privileged females, it appears that the prevalence of part-time schedules is high and increasing, as is the prevalence of negative scheduling elements (see above). Fairly similar conditions exist among less privileged males, except that the prevalence of these negative schedules elements is lower and more stable. As expected, the prevalence of part-time schedules and the negative scheduling elements are much lower among more privileged workers. One unexpected observation, though, is that less than half of Canadian workers have access to flextime programs, and this proportion is actually stable or declining, including apparently among privileged females. This is a possible sign of an overall decline in employment conditions in Canada over this time period, which is certainly a topic being debated in the mass media as well. That said, our preliminary results reaffirm that despite evolutionary changes, more powerful, educated workers have more favourable work schedules, on average.

Keywords: flexible work schedules, work hours, job quality, gender, education, non-standard work arrangements

References


Union Members’ Priorities – Regional and Individual Differences

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Abstract

This study is a follow-up to Dionne’s 2009 CIRA presentation which explored whether ‘Generation Y’ workers (i.e. those born between 1978 and 1994) are motivated by different factors than those of ‘Generation X’ (born between 1965-1977) or ‘Baby Boomers’ (born between 1946 and 1964). The impetus for that study was the commonly held belief (or stereotype) that Generation Y workers are more demanding and less deferential and loyal than those among the other generations. In brief, Dionne essentially described the Baby Boomers as ‘living to work’, Generation X’ers as ‘working to live’, and Generation Y’ers as thinking ‘Give it to me…I deserve it’. The results, however, suggested that Generation Y’ers had the same bargaining priorities as others, on average. The five highest ranked priorities, among those who were and were not part of Generation Y, were vacation, paid leaves, work hours, other leaves, and career development. This raises the question as to whether the presumed differences between the generations are fictitious, or whether they remain hidden within this dataset. It should be noted that respondents were asked to identify their bargaining priorities for items other than an increase to pay rates.

The data for this year’s study, like last year, is compiled from a series of opinion surveys given to 2,000 individual workers from within the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC). The objective of this study is still to explore whether different workers have different bargaining priorities. That said, it is reasonable to expect that age might be more influential than generational membership per se, since workers facing impending retirement potentially have a vastly different outlook than newcomers early in their career, and even from those at the mid-career stage. Thus, younger members of Gen X who have struggled to find good quality employment potentially have more in common with Gen Y workers than with older, mid-career folks also categorized as Gen X’ers. Moreover, previous studies have suggested that tangible differences in labour market conditions and work-life perspectives exist in Canada on a regional/provincial and urban-rural basis. This will receive the bulk of the attention in our study, since this dataset has the unique benefit of consisting of workers in multiple locations across Canada but with relatively similar backgrounds, employers, and working conditions.

Additionally, we think that hidden gaps between these ‘generations’ will be more clearly revealed if also classifying workers according to other individual characteristics such as gender and attained education. For example, all else equal, females might be more interested in leave options and non-standard work arrangements that help them manage their non-work commitments, while males might be relatively focused on indirect compensation items such as overtime or shift premiums. Attained education is relevant because it affects the amount of power they have with their current employer as well as the quality of opportunities in the broader labour market if their employment changes voluntarily or involuntarily.
In brief, the conceptual foundation of this paper is provided by industrial relations and sociology literature that explores: i) the relationship between age and work ethic, commitment, and job quality, ii) regional differences in labour market conditions and the role of education (Cooke, 2007), iii) the ‘double-duty’ facing females at work and home, and iv) issues pertaining to public sector bargaining and restructuring in Canada.

Keywords: generation gaps, employee wants and needs, non-wage benefits, regional disparity, work-life balance