

White Paper

Work Family Flow

Helping working parents improve their wellbeing so organisations improve their bottom line

Parent Wellbeing



White Paper

Work Family Flow

Helping working parents improve their wellbeing so organisations improve their bottom line

Overview

How do organisations attract great staff, keep them, and ensure they are working at their best? This is the human resource department's perennial challenge.

And with more employees combining work and family, the challenge to help working parents perform at their optimum is even greater.

'Work family balance' has been proposed as the answer for working parents to better manage their work and family responsibilities.

If working parents can somehow achieve 'balance' between work and family then parents, children and organisations will benefit.

But Australian working parents report feeling rushed for time, having work interfere with family time, and guilt¹.

So is work family balance really working?

We argue that the concept of 'work family balance' is misconceived.

Work family balance suggests that people have a fixed and limited amount of time and energy. If work is taking all that time and energy, then family suffers, or vice versa².

But work family research, and the experience of working parents, suggests this is not how work and family issues typically function.

Instead working parents and organisations need a new way of thinking about work and family.

This new approach must:

- ✓ Understand the interrelationships and interconnections between work and family.
- ✓ Recognise that work offers benefits to family life.
- ✓ Acknowledge that family life offers benefits to the workplace.
- ✓ Recognise that ‘well’ parents are more productive and effective at work, and care better for their children.

At Parent Wellbeing, we propose a new understanding of work and family – **Work Family Flow**.

Work Family Flow is about optimising people’s work family experience to enhance parents’ wellbeing, children’s wellbeing and organisational success.

By helping parents improve their wellbeing, Work Family Flow helps organisations improve their bottom line.

Work and family

There are a significant number of people with dependent children in the Australian workforce, and over a million of those are women.

The majority of these working parents struggle to manage their work and family responsibilities.

In a recent Australian survey, working parents reported feeling **rushed for time, having work interfere with family time, and guilt**³. These impact on working parents’ ability to perform at their optimum.

There are also a significant number of mothers who are looking to enter the labour market if they can find family friendly work. For organisations facing a skills shortage, this is a valuable, underutilised talent pool.

So how best to help working parents make the most of their work family experience?

Work family balance

‘Work family balance’ has been proposed as the answer to working parents better managing their work and family responsibilities.

The aim of work family balance is to somehow achieve a sense of equilibrium between work and family so neither is detracting from the other.

Work family balance assumes a scarcity model. It proposes that people have a fixed and limited amount of time and energy. If work is taking all that time and energy, then family suffers, or vice versa⁴.

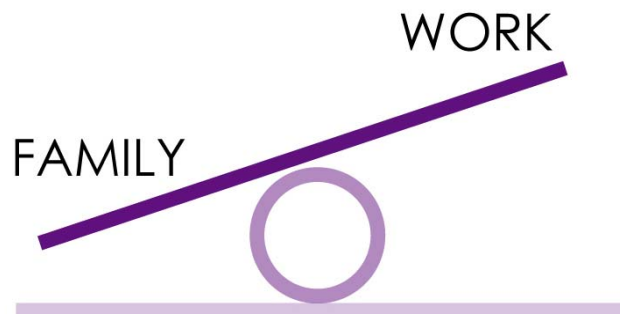


Figure 1: Work Family Balance model

This view is consistent with research findings on work family conflict.

Traditionally, work family research focused on how work and family clash. Researchers examined the difficulties and the challenges that working parents face, such as stress and time pressures.

More recently, work family research has focused on work family enrichment. Researchers have examined the rewards and benefits of combining the two⁵.

We now know, for instance, that working parents bring skills and energy they have developed at home to the workplace.

Skills developed in child rearing, such as multitasking, negotiating, compromising, and conflict resolution, actually help boost work performance and life satisfaction⁶.

Rather than hindering workplace success, family experiences help parents better manage their workplace stress, and increase their general well being.

We also know that parents develop skills and experiences at work that enrich their family life.

Work offers a sense of meaning, identity, purpose, as well as financial rewards⁷.

Work also contributes to an individual's sense of happiness, life satisfaction and perceived quality of life⁸.

Work family balance, therefore, represents a limited view of people's work family experience. That is why we argue for a new way of considering work and family issues.

Work Family Flow

So how can we help working parents make the most of their work family experience? Changing our concept of work and family is an important first step.

Work and family are interrelated and interconnected. They are synergistic and fluid.

That is why we argue the concept of work family balance should be replaced with the concept of **Work Family Flow**.

Work Family Flow is about optimising people's work family experience to enhance parents' wellbeing, children's wellbeing and organisational success.



Figure 2: Work Family Flow model

The aim of Work Family Flow is to achieve wellbeing at work and at home.

Work Family Flow is based on positive psychological principles.

Psychology, after years of studying adversity and suffering, recently turned its attention to examining what makes life worth living.

Positive Psychology has pioneered the study of the 'good life', that is, those factors that contribute to people's wellbeing and enhance their quality of life⁹.

Positive Organizational Scholarship and Positive Organizational Behaviour have also shifted attention to the positive aspects of organisational life¹⁰.

Wellbeing at work

There has long been a practical understanding that happy workers are more productive, but we now have scientific proof.

Research shows that happy people are judged more positively by their supervisors, and show superior performance and productivity than their less satisfied colleagues¹¹.

Service departments with happy leaders receive higher ratings from customers, and happy sales forces lead to happier and more satisfied customers¹².

Happy workers experience less absenteeism, job burnout, and turnover, and also show greater commitment to the organisation¹³. This leads to positive behaviours like going beyond the requirements of the job and helping others.

Although, job satisfaction has been an important predictor of work performance, there is now evidence that **performance is highest when employees are also happy with their overall life**¹⁴.

Barbara Frederickson's 'broaden-and-build' theory explains the phenomenon¹⁵.

We know that negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety and anger, narrow people's attention and limit their thought processes. That is why when people experience negative emotions, they often make errors of judgement.

In contrast, Fredrickson discovered that positive emotions broaden people's attention and thought processes, which increases creativity and flexibility.

Furthermore, **positive emotions build people's physical, intellectual and social resources so they are better able to meet challenges and work effectively.**

Applied to the workplace, Frederickson's 'broaden-and-build' model reveals that positive emotions improve problem solving and decision making, which improves job performance.

The model predicts that satisfied and psychologically well employees are more likely to have the resources to perform at their best¹⁶.

Research also shows that emotions are contagious. Emotional contagion refers to the tendency to mimic the expressions, postures, vocalisations and movements of those around us, which influences a person's emotional state¹⁷.

At work, emotions can quickly spread amongst a group. Happy and satisfied, workers, therefore, spread positive rather than negative emotions, which contributes to increased performance and productivity amongst the entire group.

These findings reveal the importance of 'psychological capital' at work.

Psychological capital refers to an individual's positive psychological state and focuses on 'who we are'¹⁸. It complements human capital, 'what we know', and social capital, 'who we know', to create value at work.

Consequently, there is now strong empirical evidence for organisations investing in the wellbeing of their staff.

Research shows that introducing wellbeing initiatives in the workplace can increase employee wellbeing and, therefore, increase organisational productivity and bottom line performance¹⁹.

Wellbeing initiatives do not have to be used to be beneficial. Research shows that if employees perceive the initiatives as valuable this leads to increased performance and job dedication even amongst those who do not use the benefits directly²⁰.

Research has also shown that work life initiatives positively affect firm value. Investors respond positively to work life initiative announcements leading to an increased share price²¹.

Initiatives include placing individuals into appropriate positions, training to help individuals better fit their jobs, and changing the work environment to achieve a better organisation-person fit.

Positive Psychology has empirically tested a range of wellbeing interventions that have shown to reliably increase wellbeing. The focus is on teaching people tools and techniques they can use in their everyday lives.

These interventions focus on the whole person, and not just the person that comes to work. Wellbeing initiatives, therefore, help improve productivity at work and also contribute to a happy home life.

Wellbeing at home

Raising children is one of the most demanding, amazing and undervalued activities in our society.

Parents take prime responsibility for rearing the next generation but the benefits of raising happy, healthy and resilient kids is felt community-wide.

To ensure children become fully functioning adults, psychology and mainstream parenting resources have largely focused on understanding optimal child development, or what is 'best for baby'.

For example, researchers have identified the most effective parenting style as authoritative. Authoritative parenting involves being warm and loving, but also consistent and setting limits.

Although the 'best for baby' approach makes a valid contribution to understanding family wellbeing, it **largely ignores the parents' perspective**.

Positive psychology suggests a different viewpoint. Positive psychology suggests that the interrelationship between parent and child is dynamic, multi-directional and significant for both parent and child.

We know from emotional contagion that emotions are contagious.

Children are acutely sensitive to the moods of their parents. They know when their parents have had a good day at work and when they have had a bad day.

Children's moods also have the ability to influence parents' moods.

We also know from Frederickson's 'broaden-and-build' theory, the power of positive emotions.

Parents' positive emotions help build positive emotions in their children, which develops an upward spiral of positive emotions and builds resilience and resourcefulness in all involved²².

Positive parents contribute to their children's wellbeing, but they also contribute to their own wellbeing.

Studies into work and family confirm this view. Research reveals that the love and support parents receive at home helps them feel confident about themselves and their work.

Family also provides a personal buffer to parents when they experience difficulties at work²³.

Happiness and wellbeing create value in people's lives. But it is not simply about 'feeling good'.

Wellbeing is also about living a meaningful life. With meaning and purpose, people rise above their day to day hassles, and feel fulfilled.

Both work and family offer opportunities for meaning and purpose.

By acknowledging the synergies, interrelationships and interdependencies of work and family, parents increase their own wellbeing, their children's wellbeing, and are better able to contribute to organisational success.

Conclusion

In a market where organisations compete to attract, keep and get the best out of their staff, working parents are a valuable resource.

Working parents bring a wealth of skills gained in caring for their children, but they also experience daily hassles that impact on their ability to perform at their best.

Unfortunately, trying to achieve a 'balance' between work and family responsibilities is misplaced.

Instead, at Parent Wellbeing, we propose that **Work Family Flow** is a better way to conceive of work family issues.

Work Family Flow acknowledges that:

- ✓ Work and family are interrelated and interconnected.
- ✓ Work is beneficial to family life.
- ✓ Family life is beneficial to work.
- ✓ Happy parents are more productive and effective at work and care better for their children.

Work Family Flow is about optimising people's work family experience to enhance parents' wellbeing, children's wellbeing and organisational success.

With an increased sense of wellbeing and quality of life, parents, children and organisations all benefit.

About Parent Wellbeing

Parent Wellbeing helps parents improve their quality of life.

Unlike many other parenting resources, Parent Wellbeing does not tell parents how to care for their children. Instead, we help parents care for themselves so they are better able to care for their children.

Parents care for kids. We care for parents.

We run corporate workshops and offer one on one coaching to help parents make the most of their work and family lives.



We publish parent care books that comfort and inspire parents, including the best seller *Little Bundle: Comfort and inspiration for new parents*.

Jodie Benveniste, director of Parent Wellbeing, delivers keynote presentations on Parent Wellbeing and Work Family Flow.

We also provide an online resource for parents at www.parentwellbeing.com

About Jodie Benveniste

Jodie Benveniste is an author and parenting expert with a unique approach. A mother of two children, Jodie has a background in psychology and academic research.

She has been researching work life issues for over a decade. Her approach is grounded in sound science, rigorous research and a deep insight into the way parents think, feel and behave.

Jodie brings a wealth of professional and personal experience to her work. She uses books, workshops and speeches to guide and mentor parents.

Her warmth, empathy and passion offer comfort, inspiration and insight. Jodie's work helps parents improve their quality of life.



Contact **Parent Wellbeing**

Phone: 08 8278 4342 / 0412 088 804

Fax: 08 8370 3549

Email: info@parentwellbeing.com

www.parentwellbeing.com

Notes

- ¹ Pocock, B., Skinner, N. & Williams, P. (2007) *Work, life and time: The Australian work life index 2007*, Centre for Work + Life, The Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia.
- ² Galinsky, E. (1999) *Ask the children: The breakthrough study that reveals how to succeed at work and parenting*, Harper Collins, New York.
- ³ Pocock, B., Skinner, N. & Williams, P. (2007) *Work, life and time: The Australian work life index 2007*, Centre for Work + Life, The Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia.
- ⁴ Galinsky, E. (1999) *Ask the children: The breakthrough study that reveals how to succeed at work and parenting*, Harper Collins, New York.
- ⁵ Greenhaus, J. & Powell, G. (2006) 'When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment', *Academy of Management Review*, vol.31, no.1, p.72-92.
- ⁶ Graves, L., Ohlott, P. & Ruderman, M (2007) 'Commitment to family roles: Effects on managers' attitudes and performance', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 92, no. 1, pp. 44-56.
- ⁷ Pocock, B. (2006) *The Labour market ate my babies: Work, children and a sustainable future*, Federation Press, Sydney.
- ⁸ Greenhaus, J. & Powell, G. (2006) 'When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment', *Academy of Management Review*, vol.31, no.1, p.72-92.
- ⁹ Seligman, M. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000) 'Positive psychology: An introduction', *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 1-14.
- ¹⁰ Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) emerged from a research group at the University of Michigan, visit <http://www.bus.umich.edu/Positive/>. Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) arose from the University of Nebraska's Gallup Leadership Institute.
- ¹¹ Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. & Diener, E. (2005) 'The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success?', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 131, no. 6, pp. 803-855.
- ¹² George, J. (1995) 'Leader positive mood and group performance: The case of customer service', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 25, pp. 778-795.
- ¹³ Thoresen, C., Kaplan, S., Barsky, A., Warren, C. & de Chermont, K. (2003) 'The affective underpinnings of job perceptions and attitudes: A meta-analytic review and integration', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, pp. 914-945.
- ¹⁴ Wright, T. (2007) 'The moderating role of employee positive well being on the relation between job satisfaction and job performance', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. vol.12, no.2, pp.93-104.
- ¹⁵ Fredrickson, B. (1998) 'What good are positive emotions?' *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 2, 300-319.
- ¹⁶ Wright, T. (2007) 'The moderating role of employee positive well being on the relation between job satisfaction and job performance', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. vol.12, no.2, pp.93-104.
- ¹⁷ Hatfield, E. & Rapson, R. L. (2004). Emotional contagion. In Craighead, W. E. and Nemeroff, C. B. (Eds.) *The concise Corsini encyclopedia of psychology and behavioral science* (3rd Ed.). John Wiley & Sons, New York, pp. 323-324.
- ¹⁸ Luthens, F., Youssef, C. & Avolio, B. (2007) *Psychological capital: Developing the human competitive edge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- ¹⁹ Wright, T. (2007) 'The moderating role of employee positive well being on the relation between job satisfaction and job performance', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. vol.12, no.2, pp.93-104.
- ²⁰ Muse, L, Harris, S.G., Giles, W.F., & Field, H.S. (2008) 'Work-life benefits and positive organizational behavior: Is there a connection?', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp.171-192.
- ²¹ Arthur, M. (2003) 'Work-family initiatives and share price reaction: An institutional perspective', *Academy of Management Journal*, 46, 497-505.
- ²² Seligman, M. (2002) *Authentic Happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Random House, Sydney.
- ²³ Greenhaus, J. & Powell, G. (2006) 'When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment', *Academy of Management Review*, vol.31, no.1, p.72-92.