A Qualitative Enquiry into Trans-national Challenges of migrant workers through the lenses of Work-Family Interface

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Abstract

**Background**-Against the backdrop of significant migration changes and the further growth projected in the diversity of the workforce, we explore the trans-national challenges of migrant workers, from a cultural perspective.

**Aim**-Drawing from sociological and administrative theory, we seek to understand how different cultural settings influence trans-national experiences.

**Method**-We report the results of a qualitative exploratory study through the lens of institutional anomie theory.

**Results**-Drawing on this evidence, and on sociological and administrative theory, our findings and theoretical explanation lends strong support to understanding that the greater the gap in the cultural orientation of the worker’s home country and new country, the greater the disequilibrium and anomie in work family interface. This study also confirms that cross cultural variables has a direct impact on trans-national challenges experienced by migrant workers.

**Conclusion**-Our findings assist in developing strategic understanding of how trans-national challenges may improve current practices and policies.

Keywords: work-family, culture, institutional anomie
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Introduction

With the mobility of people across borders increasing, scholars have called for a reframing of the culture literature exploring cultural perspectives on aspects of management such as the work-family (WF) construct (Spector, Cooper, Poelmans, Allen, O’Driscoll, Sanchez, Siu, Dewe, Hart and Lu, 2004, Korabik, Lero and Ayman, 2003). With the migration statistics increasing in Australia, the growing cultural diversity represented in the workforce has heightened the relevance of balance between work and family roles (Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 2007, Googins, 1997, Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1986, 1994). These developments have greatly increased the complexities of the interface between work and family, noting that WF and the influence of national cultural background are often inextricably intertwined, rather than being completely separate from each other. Cross cultural management is the major thrust of this paper and the antecedents and consequences of work family conflict experienced by migrants is a rare effort in cross cultural scholarship.

Australia’s rainbow nation

Australia's population reached 22,066,000 as at 30 September 2009; according to figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2009). This is an increase of 451,900 people over the previous year, reflecting a growth rate high at 2.1%. The majority of this growth (66%), was due to net overseas migration. The top counties of birth for skilled arrivals are from United Kingdom, India, China, South Africa, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Korea, Singapore, and Ireland.
Although all Australian states and territories experienced positive population growth in the year ended 30 September 2009, the proportion that each of these components contributed to population growth varied between the states and territories.

Table 1: Population Data by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Population at end Sept qtr 2009 '000</th>
<th>Change over previous year 000</th>
<th>Change over previous year %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>7 165.4</td>
<td>117.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>5 473.3</td>
<td>117.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>4 450.4</td>
<td>115.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>1 629.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>2 259.5</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>504.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>227.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital</td>
<td>353.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia(a)</td>
<td>22 065.7</td>
<td>451.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Includes Other Territories comprising Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.
Population growth rates:

Australia's population grew by 2.1% during the 12 months ended 30 September 2009. Overseas migration contributed 66% to this total population growth. All states and territories experienced positive population growth over the 12 months ended 30 September 2009. Western Australia recorded the largest percentage gain (2.9%) and Tasmania the smallest (1.0%).

Estimated resident population

- The preliminary estimated resident population (ERP) of Australia at 30 September 2009 was 22,066,000 persons. This was an increase of 451,900 persons (2.1%) since 30 September 2008 and 110,400 persons since 30 June 2009.
- Preliminary net overseas migration for the year ended 30 September 2009 was 297,400 persons.

The above figures extracted from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) indicate that the Australian landscape, heavily influenced by international or overseas migration, is undergoing fundamental changes. Such changes are inextricably linked with culture as a background factor. As social institutions are made up of people coming from diverse backgrounds and national cultural identities with unique personas and make-up, the result is often behavioural consequences. In this paper we focus on the anomic influence of cross culture on behaviour through the work-family (WF) lenses.

We aim to extend research from a WF embeddedness perspective by calling attention to a rich and relevant body of literature that remains relatively untapped by academics and practitioners: the anomic influence of cross culture on WF interface experienced by migrant workers. We describe anomie as a feeling of disorientation and alienation from society
caused by a sense of absence of supporting social systems. Migrant workers are described in this paper as those people moving permanently from an overseas country to another country, in this case, Australia.

We introduce institutional anomie theory, developed by Messner and Rosenfeld (2001; Rosenfeld and Messner, 1997) as an innovative approach to guide our understanding of how national culture affects the WF construct as it relates to the experiences of the migrant worker. We then proceed to provide a brief overview of the WF interface literature followed by a discussion on how culture may be perceived as an anomie pressure causing a spill over effect of family on work and work on family, thereby causing a state of imbalance or disequilibrium.

**Institutional anomie theory**

Institutional anomie theory is a sociological theory that explains deviance in social units on the basis of specific social and cultural values (Cullen, Parboteeah and Hoegl, 2004). The classical sociological concept, anomie, has long been a conceptual tool to understand the relationship between social structures, culture and deviant behaviour. The theory of anomie (Durkheim, 1893/1964, 1897/1966) provides the theoretical foundation for institutional anomie theory. Durkheim observed that institutional and cultural changes associated with modernisation encourages a decline in social controls that are based on family and social relationships. The result is anomie - the weakening of norms-and, in turn, increased rates of behaviour not considered being normal which spills over other areas of organisational life. Extending from Durkheim, Merton (1968) noted a pressure for this sort of deviance both in the institutional structure of society and in cultural values. On a cultural level, Merton, emphasises the lack of equilibrium, caused by anomie, between the means and
ends of action. Anomie is caused by the imbalance that results when cultural goals (eg family spilling over work) are overemphasised at the expense of institutionalised means. Merton went on to argue that choice of a deviant means to achieve an end is particularly likely when a social system prevents people from goal achievement in areas influenced by cultural factors. On a similar note, Orru (1987) explains the features of anomie theory in reference to varying cultural orientations, example, social and cultural conditions in America differ greatly from Europe or Asia. It therefore attempts to explain the interplay between the ‘fundamental’ features of social organisation, namely, culture and social structures-specific cultural values give rise to anomic pressures. Virtually all this work has employed a single explanatory model for the analysis of anomy: a specified socio-cultural condition which gives rise to specified feelings in individuals which in turn results in specified ‘deviant’ or abnormal behaviour, or behaviour that otherwise is considered to cause some sense of disequilibrium or alienation/disorientation as we describe it. Thus institutional anomie theory specifies both social institutions and cultural factors that affect behaviour (Cohen, 1965).

We contend that institutional anomie theory provide strong theoretical explanations for the experiences of migrant workers. Whilst most prior research has focussed on outcomes generally accepted as deviant behaviour, we attempt to rather focus on variables, such as cultural influences, in the reasoning process that lead to this state of disequilibrium in the WF interface with specific reference to workers moving across borders, also termed as migrant workers.

The WFI Literature

The growing diversity of family structures in Australia has heightened the relevance of balancing work with family. These developments have increased the complexities of the interface between work and family (Parasuram and Greenhaus, 2002). Therefore the WF interface is more complex than was
envisaged a few years back. According to Barling and Sorenson (1997), changes in the nature of organisations, as social institutions, as well as social changes in family structure, have rendered much of the research-based knowledge of the interface of WF, outdated. Against the backdrop of these changes, and the projected growth in migration of workers across boundaries and cultures in the 21st century and the future, it is appropriate to assess the gaps in our knowledge. This is important to scholarship in cross-cultural management because cross national differences are influential variables on behaviour.

Research to date, has been useful in explaining many of the relationships between family and work domains. The different perspectives studied by researchers have enriched the field, and have provided valuable insights into some facets of WF interface. However variations in the conceptualisations, measurements, theorising, and application of variables across studies have contributed to discrepant results reported and the incomplete knowledge of WF connections. The main focal construct in the WF literature has been based on the experiences of the intersection between work and family within specific countries (eg experiences of Americans living in America or Singaporeans living in Singapore), with no evidence of research being undertaken on the experiences of the migrant worker or people moving from one cultural orientation to another (Yang, Chen, Choi and Zou, 2000; Yang, 2005; Spector, et al, 2004; Lu, Gilmore, Kao, Huang, 2006, Joplin, et al, 2003). Yang, Chen, Choi and Zou (2000), compared China and the United States. Such studies revealed that the relationship between work demands and work family conflict was greater in China than in the United States. Spector (et al, 2004) in a 15 country study and Lu, Gilmore, Kao and Huang (2006) in a 2 country study found the opposite. In a 48 country study Hill, Yang, Hawkins and Ferris (2004) showed that a model linking work demands to work interfering with family and job attitudes held universally across four country clusters. Such disparate findings clearly indicate that more research is needed to study country differences in relation between work demands and family demands. However whilst this may be so, it is
also worth noting that cross cultural research, to date is still lacking on the migrant workers’ experiences when moving across borders.

There are two competing perspectives regarding individuals’ experiences of the WF interface. The one view is known as the enhancement perspective (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994). The essence of this view is that multiple roles can be beneficial with the potential of positive spill overs of behaviours. The dominant view, which we focus on, is known as the conflict perspective (Greenhaus and Bartuell, 1985). The essence of this view is that because work and family demands are mutually incompatible, the WF interface experience is inevitably perceived as problematic and fraught with tension. Proponents of this perspective tend to examine the degree of WF conflict experienced by individuals (Huang, Hammer, Neal and Perrin, 2004; Milkie and Peltola, 1999) as well as the spill over of negative emotions and behaviour from one domain to another (Sumer and Knight, 2001; Williams and Alliger, 1994). Embedded within the institutional anomie theory, one type of WF conflict identified is behaviour based conflict which results when the behaviours required in one domain are incompatible with those required in the other resulting in anomic or deviant behaviour. This conflict perspective has dominated the research on WF dynamics for the past twenty-five years (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1997). The conflict perspective assumes that time and energy are limited resources and that individuals who participate in multiple roles invariably experience imbalance or conflict between roles. This theoretical explanation has been reinforced by observations of individuals who are struggling to balance their work and family responsibilities (Marks, 1997; American Institute of certified Public Accountants, 1992). Despite the challenges associated with WF research; there is also a vast body of research that has made valuable contributions into the WF construct. Much of this research has focused on the determinants, such as time, gender,
work stress, economics, social, technological and psychological factors with little or no attention given to national culture as an influential variable in the reasoning process of the migrant workers’ experiences (Spector, Allen, Poelmans, Lapierre, Cooper, O’Driscoll, Sanchez, Abarca, Alexandrova, Beham, Brough, Ferreiro, Fraile, Lu, Lu, Velazquez and Pagon, 2007; Lee and Hui, 1999; Joplin, Shaffer, Francesco and Lau, 2003).

**Integrating WF Interface into the Cultural literature**

Following on the research of Yang, Cheng, Choi and Zhou (2000), we adopt individualism-collectivism (I-C) as the core element of our theoretical analysis because comparative research on WF interface finds support for it and also because it is a construct well researched in cross-cultural and cross national studies.

With society becoming more and more multi cultural, it is important to remember that the environment in one culture may present certain challenges not faced by another. It is hardly likely that ones national cultural orientation will be moderated or erased when moving across cultural boundaries and borders. We contend that because different cultures do exist, an understanding of how cross cultural differences impact on WF interface is critical to management studies. Essentially cultural influences impact on management and is reflected by behaviour. Behaviour due to cross cultural differences affects management approaches such as decision making, attitude towards risk, performance management, formal procedure, organisational loyalty, competition and innovation. A supplemental way of understanding cross cultural differences is to understand it as a normal distribution. The more dissimilar 2
cultures are, the more limited the overlap (Luthans and Doh 2009) resulting in anomie or disequilibrium.

*Individualism-Collectivism -Influences on the WFI*

An important cultural orientation that varies across nations is individualism – collectivism (I-C). Individualistic societies are societies in which people’s primary concern tends to be with the self, emphasising personal achievement and independence. Using Hofstede’s analysis, Anglo and western countries, considered individualistic (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001), are perceived as countries where excessive workloads spill over family. In accordance with arguments made by Yang, et al (2000), people in individualistic societies will view work demands as competing with family. In individualistic societies, this sort of conflict may very well lead to family resentment and anomic pressure leading to deviant behaviour. Thus the individualist will view the needs of the self and the family as distinct and will experience conflict when there are demands made by both. Therefore the work and family domains are seen as exerting competing demands where addressing one will likely be at the expense of the other. As a result, when work time demands are high, individualists are bound to experience higher levels of work-family stressors and consequent strain than are collectivists (Spector, et al 2004). In Unites States, excessive work hours are seen as family neglect and viewed negatively. In order to provide a more definitive comparison of I-C societies, Spector, et al (2004), studied clusters of predominantly I-C countries and found support that work hours tend to compete for family hours in I-C countries due to their varying cultural differences. These studies were comparatively based, that is, the experiences of Americans in America and Chinese in China.
Our premise is that the problem presents itself differently when a person from a collectivistic type society moves across borders to an individualistic type society where the cultural orientation is significantly different to their home country.

People in collectivistic societies see themselves as part of social networks including extended families and groups, emphasising interconnectedness with others and giving priority to family consecutiveness over individual needs. Therefore work roles are seen as serving the needs of the in group rather than the individual. People that put extra effort into their work will only do so with the support of their family extended family support.

Our contention is that when a person from a collectivistic society moves across borders to an individualistic country, the WF stressors will be significantly higher due to certain variables, the first being extended family support. Whereas people in individualistic societies tend to reside in nuclear families, collectivistic societies tend to extend their families comprising more generations. Such societies tend to value highly, responsibility towards the elderly. In addition, the centrality of family in collectivistic societies such as Hong Kong constitutes a major source of life satisfaction and activities that interfere with this facet of their lives will result in diminished levels of life satisfaction. According to one study including the influence of ‘utilitarian familism’ on WF, 64% of women and 59% of men in Hong Kong worry about how their work hours affect their personal life, as compared to 40% of British and 40% of Americans (Wharton and Blair-Loy, 2002). Whatever these figures read, we maintain that they will be significantly influenced when people move across cultures. Factors contributing to such significant influences may be in the form of economic, social and technological influences.
The economic implications of moving from a collectivistic type society to an individualistic type society, means that the both adults must be employed to meet financial obligations. Economic factors often pose a major stressor to individuals in their efforts to secure a comfortable home environment. Uneven economic growth across the globe sees some countries growing more quickly than the others. With the global financial crisis currently being witnessed, such stressors will be more pronounced as workers are laid off. Such families will more likely have minimal financial support through savings as well as the absence of support from extended family.

Another characteristic of collectivistic societies is the availability of domestic help. This allows the husband and wife to work with the children being taken care of. The greater economic disparities in collectivistic societies make domestic help more accessible.

One may also assume that social stressors amongst migrant workers are more significant due to changing social environments. Often due to various forms of pressure imposed upon families, relationships deteriorate and birth rate amongst migrant workers decreases. The pressure for the female to join the workforce and the decline in birth rate indicates that some trade off would have to be made between work and family priorities. On the other hand, it could very well be that due to the absence of domestic assistance and extended family support, the female is expected to stay at home to take care of children. This presents certain economic stressors as the absence of dual income earnings mean that more compromises and sacrifices would have to be made. Owning a home might take longer than expected, again trade offs would have to be made in decisions regarding work, family and the resources available to meet demands from both the work and family domains.

Technological advancements mean that employees are now able to work from home and can be contacted outside work hours. Access to information and communication technologies
illustrate a dramatic change to work force dynamics. As Joplin (et al 2003) indicates that employers are now able to extend a long arm of reach into employees’ lives after work hours. This has resulted in a flexible on site presence. However, whilst workers from some collectivistic societies such as Hong Kong and Singapore are familiar with this imposition and may be able to cope with this when moving to an individualistic society, others grapple with the constant use of technology as compared to its lesser imposition in their home country.

Antecedents such as economics, lack of extended family support, technology have a direct impact on the experiences of the migrant worker’s work family balance.

The differences in I-C societies therefore provide justification in how work and family demands might lead to anomic pressure on the WF interface. It is this basis that forms the central thesis of this article -that, the likely outcome for a person moving from a collectivist society across cultural borders and accepting employment in a highly individualistic society may be in the form of:

a) Economic pressures/anomie;

b) Social and family pressures/anomie; and

c) Technological influences/anomie.

This leads to our hypothesis:

**H1:** Cross national work-family experiences will moderate the WF stresses leading to anomic pressure and disequilibrium. WF interface will be negatively influenced when a person from a collectivist society moves across borders to an individualistic society.

**H2:** C-I moderates experiences of migrant workers as it relates to variables such as technology, social and family support, economic circumstances
As there has been very little comparative research upon which to base this proposition, this aspect of the study, at this stage, is exploratory.

Methodology

In this study, we attempted to explore how cultural dimensions influence WF interface as experienced by migrant workers, which eventually lead to anomie. We adopted a qualitative approach influenced by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1976; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). We believe that this approach is most suited as it encourages explorations of multifaceted (and thus highly complex) issues, such as work/family interface. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) grounded theory has the best potential in discovering new constructs and/or to enrich existing theories.

Data Collection

Participants

In total, 25 participants were part of this study. Countries of birth were South Africa (n=9), India (n=5), Bangladesh (n=2), America (n=2), Iran (n=2), Italy (n=2), and Sri Lanka (n=3). All participants were screened before the interview and had to satisfy certain criterias. To be eligible for the interview, all participants had to have lived and worked in both their home countries and Australia for at least 3 years, some participants had children, whilst some did not, some were single whilst others were in a relationship or were married. A good representation of gender and age were also significant criteria’s. Of the twenty five participants, 12 were males and 13 females. Their mean age was 38.5 years, with an average
of 4.17 years of work experience. The participants were employed in a diverse range of organizations, such as education, health sector, retail and beauty, and private industry.

Procedure and data collection strategy

Participants were recruited through personal contacts via snowball sampling. At the start of the interview, participants were informed about the main purpose of the research project. They was also informed that the researchers were interested in:
- their description of their home country according to the I-C dimension;
- their work family experiences in Australia and how this compared with their home country; and
- broadly the challenges (if any) they encountered since migrating, within, but not restricted to, the themes technology, family and social environment and economic circumstances. The broad themes for this study was inspired by a number of factors: the authors’ international background and personal experiences, the author’s teaching and research areas in cross cultural management and human resource management, and finally the dearth of data on experiences of migrant workers across different cultural settings. As per the grounded theory framework (suggested by Glaser, 1978: 51), we encouraged responses that were open-ended and general, and this assisted towards identifying sub-dimensions and categories.

Some broad themes, which we refer to as anomic influences, were identified: “collectivism” (groups, family support, extended family, hierarchy); “individualism” (importance to the self as compared to the group); and “economics” (child care, foreign exchange, dual income); “Technology” (use of technology at home, after hours, electronic management). These themes were constantly compared with themes from other participants to determine their fit in the categories. Through this iterative process, a number of conceptual categories were
generated (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The relevance of each category to the core issues under investigation (i.e. the anomic influence of cross culture on WF) was also compared. This process was repeated for all participants as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Questions were open-ended with probing and follow-up questions used to clarify ambiguous or unclear responses. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90min. The interviews were then transcribed with the qualitative software program using Nvivo which facilitated data condensation, codification, and the theory building process (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). Interviewees’ experiences and opinions were used to determine the nature and composition of relevant anomic variables (Locke, 2001). Our methodology was based on Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) work on grounded theory which refers to “a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analyzing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field notes, interviews, or other documents; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded” (Strauss, 1987, p. 22). This entailed three broad stages:

1. Theoretical sampling, where decisions about which data should be collected are determined by the theory that is being constructed;
2. Constant comparison; and
3. Composition of theoretical elements. In other words, we systematically and intensively analyzed data by making constant comparisons, aiming for methodically coded data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Details and other information that interviewees seemed to repeat were noted during data collection. Based on this, the protocol was generated. The protocol used is indicated in Table 2. Preliminary analysis of transcribed notes from the data collection identified themes in line with our theoretical framework. Therefore whilst the questions were broad, the probing
technique was more analytical (as opposed to merely descriptive), focusing on encouraging
detailed elaboration of those themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 75–95). This broad approach
allowed the perspectives of the participants to be foregrounded, in line with grounded theory
whilst at the same time was embedded within our theoretical framework.
# Table 2: Protocol and probing questions

## Demographics
(a) What is the name of your home country?
(b) Did you work for a period of 3 or more years in your home country?
(c) If not, what is the last country, prior to Australia where you have worked for 3 years or more?
(d) What is your job title?
(e) Do you have any children/how many?
(f) Which year bracket were you born? (Baby Boomer; Gen X; Gen Y)

## Time Based & Strain Based Conflict

### Time Based Conflict
- **Work-To-Family Conflict**
  (a) In your home country, did you often feel that time spent working conflicted with time that could be spent with family? Was this a big problem for you and why?
  (b) How about in Australia? Is it any different here and if so, what is different about it?

### Family-To-Work Conflict
- (a) In your home country, did you often feel that time spent with the family conflicted with time that could be spent working? Was this a big problem for you and why?
  (b) How about in Australia? Is it any different here and if so, what is different about it?

## Strain Based Conflict

### Work-To-Family Conflict
- (a) In your home country, did you often come home from work feeling stressed or tired, and felt that this affected the time you spent with your family? Was it a big problem for you/why?
  (b) How about in Australia? Is it any different here and if so what is different about it?
- (a) In your home country, did you often spend time stressing about work related issues, during family time? Or dealing with co-worker phone calls or emails? Was it a big problem for you/why?
  (b) How about in Australia? Is it any different here and if so what is different about it?

### Family-To-Work Conflict
- (a) In your home country, did you often spend time at work stressing about family issues or dealing with phone call/email intrusions from family?
  (b) Would you say that during such times your performance at work was affected?
  (c) How about in Australia? Is it any different here and if so what is different about it?

## Antecedents
- (a) Would you say that the occurrence of work/family issues in your home country were mainly the result of the type of work you did (for instance, your job may not be very flexible, it may be complex, or involve lots of travel, and a high workload) or a result of the type of family you had (for instance, your family might have been through stressful times in your home country, due to young children or other family members living with you — such as uncles/elders)?
  How about in Australia? Is it any different here, and how so?

## Career Progression and Performance
- (a) Have work/family stressors affected your career progression? How so?
- (b) Have work/family stressors frequently affected your performance at work? How so?
- (c) Did you choose to focus on your family at the expense of your work, more in
your home country or in Australia? Why so? Why not?

Coping Strategies

(a) Has coping with work/family conflict been easier for you in Australia or in your home country? Why so?
(b) What coping strategies, if any, have you used to cope with work/family conflict (for instance, hired a domestic helper around the house, received co-worker support etc.)?
(c) Have these strategies been more effective in Australia or in your home country?

Results

A significant factor identified was that individualism-collectivism was a moderating factor in the work family experiences of the participants. As all participants essentially moved from what they described as collectivist societies, the emergent anomic influences identified were as per table 3. Such influences were embedded within the protocol ‘time based and strain based conflict’.

Table 3- Examples of coding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Some Direct Quotes</th>
<th>(2) Identifying anomic influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... In Australia, I am practicing as a health worker AND working in Academia (not just in Academia like in SA). Worse here, in terms of time, and time spent with family. There is no support system (family to help take care of kids) in Australia because all family is in South Africa. In Australia, you have to manage everything yourself, even though you must do a lot of work after hours as well. Domestic support is very important and in my home country there was a lot of it. ...</td>
<td>Lack of domestic help, family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Back home we had a support structure, and a network of family and friends that could offer services such as picking the kids up or somebody else take care of the children when they fell ill (such as a family member). I had an 8-5 job in SA whereas here my hours were a bit longer,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here in Australia, I choose to a greater extent to focus on my work, far more than in India. I found that I came into this country at the age of 34, with little money after the exchange rate; I thus needed to work, especially because I was still paying off a home in India that I owned. I wanted to maintain the same standard of living here so I needed to work full time and provide the best for my children. Having to start from beginning again contributed to this need as well.</td>
<td>Economics, foreign exchange, financial support, pressure to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I come from a collectivist society...I am experiencing more w/f conflict in Australia because of the job that I am in ... and prior to this I was working in another company that was not as demanding (no taking work home). With school you have to prepare in advance for future classes, and this cuts greatly into family time. Technology is very invasive. You almost feel guilty if you do not read your emails on a Sunday afternoon.</td>
<td>Technology, intrusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relevance of family support and domestic assistance was highlighted in the following illustrative comments:

*Working in South Africa was a little bit easier because of the support system in place …*
*There may have been some times where work was busy and family did conflict with work time, but rarely so and if it did, it did not seem an issue..*

… *In Australia, it’s much worse. There is a lot of conflict with regards to this issue. You have to work around both your time and family and sometimes there is no choice but to just spend your time working, look at other ways to spend time with your family when the workload is actually decreased.* (Mother of 2, part time academic and full time health care practitioner).

*In my home country, I was progressing very well in my career and there was not much conflict between work and family. In Australia it took me 2 to 2 and a half years to get my family settled before I could concentrate on any sort of career progression, and that was because of the stress of actually trying to sort out my family to make sure they’re comfortable, and then I had to find an appropriate time to continue with my career progression (mother of 2, retail worker)*

*There is no domestic help with daily household chores so those chores must be incorporate into your daily routine. I cope in Australia by planning my week and trying to find times in my week when there is a balance between my family and work time, I try to find allocated times during the week, to do my work, and if that is not possible, I do find that I stress during the week, and then I try to cover that workload on the weekends and then my*
family is neglected during that time. I think I am getting better at coping with the stresses but it is a skill that I am still developing (mother of 3, full time in industry).

Back in Iran we had a support structure, and a network of family and friends that could offer services such as picking the kids up or somebody else take care of the children when they fell ill (such as a family member). I had an 8-5 job in Iran whereas here my hours are a bit longer, as I am a student. Here my hours were a bit longer, the kids had to go to after-care. At home, I had somebody else collect them from after-care and the hours were very long. I had a domestic helper as well as a nanny in Iran, and that was very convenient and cheap (mother of two, presently full time student).

Since arriving here, I learned that I had to help out with the chores around the house, such as vacuuming, cleaning, cooking, taking the kids to school, which my wife was unable to do herself. I learned a lot from her, with regards to the idea that both partners have to help with the chores to keep the marriage and family going, because of circumstances. Because of my shift work, I do get irritable sometimes and can’t be bothered about house chores, which does put strain on my family relationship (father of two, crowd controller).

(ii) The use of information and communication technology was perceived by some participants as an intrusion in their family life which led to strain.

In Australia I don’t really have a management role so it is different here, however I do deal with a lot of emails and calls during my family time nonetheless and this definitely can be stressful sometimes (mother of 3, health care practitioner).
Time spent working in Australia in my industry means that huge amounts of work comes home with me, which is on average 3-4 hours a night, so family-time after work is rushed. I want to spend more time overseeing my children’s homework, going to sport practice etc. A huge portion of my weekend is consumed with school work that I have to do, most of which is electronic. Even the twelve weeks of annual leave is usually devoted to preparation for the job. The whole educational experience that is so technologically influenced in this country is much demanding... The fact that I am in a private school means that there is greater demands from students and parents and the school, so I put more time and effort into the job than I would in South Africa. I find that I am reading emails and responding to parent queries late at night. In South Africa, this was not the case (mother of two, school teacher).

It is a common thing to have work-related phone calls after hours, such as when I work with a teacher from another school. Also, I have become accustomed to checking my emails as I receive them on Sunday to prepare me for Monday.

(iii) All participants described their society or home country as highly collectivist, receiving family support and also domestic assistance. Moving to Australia was a cultural shock financially. This was due to costs associated with child care, inability to secure domestic assistance, and to some, the pressure to engage in dual earnings to sustain the family. At the same time certain participants compromised their career ambitions to manage the work family balance.

I was very career oriented when I was in Sri Lanka. It was just me and my husband so there was no one depending on us, it was just the two of us, so we could do whatever we wanted.
Things are totally different here. I am not career oriented anymore. I can’t be, I can’t afford to be. Having 2 children under the age of 13 requires my time when I get home from work, making it impossible to be career oriented, and since there is nobody to help you there is no time and no energy to be career oriented. I also cannot afford after school care fees or child care (mother of two, working in the toy/gaming industry).

In Australia, when we first came here, the children were very young and we had to place them in kindergarten, and this was very stressful financially. Also we both did not have flexible working times, so we had to take turns attending to this task, but since the kids have grown up, everything has worked out fine, especially because we have the older brothers helping out with the smaller ones. The experiences get better with time (father of two, crowd controller).

... the primary distractions are regarding financial issues and the living conditions and locating a permanent job. I am getting more worried because there are 4 people dependent on me and oftentimes I feel like I have to be more responsible because they are looking towards me and they do not have anyone else to look up to. Although this is an individualistic country, I believe that we still live in a collective culture where we have a community and there are community aspirations and some compulsions as well. When we see communities of people living in good houses and good sources of income, and good living conditions and we are unable to be on par with them, this certainly affects us psychologically and that is a form of stress to me as well. I felt less responsibility to take care of my family in India than I do in Australia, because I did not have financial stress or a job security problem and my family are familiar with Indian culture and she could do more things over there (father of three, full time student and part time academic).
Interesting to note, whilst moving to Australia did present challenges, creating a better future for the children appeared to be a motivating factor.

We were well established in Sri Lanka so moving back to Sri Lanka is/would be easy, but because of my kids, I am uncertain whether I want to move to Sri Lanka. First I have to finish my PhD before me and my husband decides, and day by day the migration rules are changing so I am uncertain of the future (mother of two, full time student).

Our interview data also suggested that participants perceived their career progression to be negatively influenced by work family conflict.

I have an interest in taking on positions of leadership, but simply for the workload that comes with it, knowing how it will impact on my family situation, I shy away from it, am not ready for it. This definitely does impact on my desires for moving up in the profession. If I were still in my home country, I would have grabbed this opportunity because of support received from my parents.

Here in Australia, I choose to a greater extent to focus on my work, far more than in Egypt (father three, teacher)

**General Discussion**

The aim of this study was to identify the nature of anomic influences in the work family experiences of people moving from one cultural setting to another.

In terms of anomic influences, our findings confirmed our hypothesis that varying cultural settings adversely affects the work family interface. In this study we were interested in how changing family circumstances, financial circumstances and information and
communication technology emerge as anomic influences.

The change in the work family interface experienced by participants was also a result from moving from a highly collectivistic society to a highly individualistic society, hence influences from different cultural settings. Our findings indicate that for example, people moving from highly collectivistic society where support in various forms are readily available, are more likely to experience work family conflict than people living in a different cultural setting. The basic expectation is that participants would have been comfortable and would have experienced less WF conflict if they received family support, were financially established and did not see technology as invading into their family time.

Participants described their home country as inherently collectivistic in term of interpersonal interaction. The need to maintain harmonious personal, social and work relationships was emphasised. This has important implications as participants described their home country environment as tightly knit societies where individuals are embedded within cohesive in-groups (Hofstede, 1991). As a result it is possible that people may find it extremely difficult to separate their work and social roles (Ho and Chiu, 1994). Our results supported this finding and found that participants were more likely to integrate their work and social roles if they received support or moved from one collectivist society to another. In contrast, Australians being more independent are less constrained with the ties that bind them to their social roles and obligations. Therefore, they are more likely to focus on work issues at the workplace rather than blurring work and personal issues together (Thein, et al, 2010).

Results for information and communication technology found that participants had a less direct access to communication technologies, and preferring it to remain within the boundaries of work and not invade their personal time. In contrast, Australians tend to accept and expect
that technology is an essential part of life especially with the younger generation.

Finally the results indicated that the financial situation of participants also impacted on how they experienced their WF interface. The exchange rate and ability to engage in domestic assistance were regarded as highly salient and meaningful for participants.
**Revisiting Institutional Anomie Theory**

Institutional Anomie theory specifies certain arrangements that give rise to the emergence of anomic behaviour. This pressure emerges from institutional conditions that are a defining feature of modern society. The central tenet of this theory is that economic dominance stimulates the emergence of anomie at the cultural level (Bernburg, 2002). Messner and Rosenfeld’s portrayal of America as an institutionally imbalanced society with primacy according to economic roles over familial, arguing that this imbalance generates ‘anomie’ or normlessness (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1997, Rosenfeld and Messner, 1997). While institutional anomie theorists argue that ‘the claims of economic roles are typically honoured at the expense of non-economic roles when conflicts occur’, it can be argued that a primary motivation for work is maintenance of the family and that societies that accord importance to family will tend to accord importance to work. Institutional anomie theory
provides no evidence that conflicts are resolved in favour of the pursuit of wealth when other non-economic roles are jeopardised (Jensen, 2002). Recognising the limitations of institutional anomie theory vis-à-vis Merton- and the limitations of Merton vis-à-vis institutional anomie theory, we believe that it is nevertheless an appropriate theory in that it calls our attention to societal processes with consequences such as deviant behaviour. This important contribution can inform empirical research on changes in institutional environments across multicultural societies and time periods.

There is certainly no dearth of evidence that culture influences the nature of WF conflict, however we have not successfully located any qualitative studies around how people who migrate permanently to a country that has essentially a different cultural orientation to their own country, are affected by the WF intersection leading to anomic pressure. It is also unknown to what degree WF models are applicable to developing / less affluent countries.

This paper sought to examine the influence of culture on the mechanisms through which experiences in the WF system influences behaviour. The purpose of this study was to begin exploring how WF experiences, affect individuals moving to countries very different in cultural orientation to their home country. At this early stage of study we believe that it is a plausible assumption that ‘if one’s work related problems and responsibilities begin to interfere with the accomplishment of one’s family related obligations, these unfulfilled family obligations may begin to interfere with ones day to day functioning at work causing anomic pressure from one domain to spill over into the other domain’. This will especially be the case when individuals migrate or work in a culturally different society to one they are used to.
Limitations and future research directions

Our research is not without limitations. First, although the use of a qualitative approach provided rich and detailed information about anomic influences on the WF interface experienced by migrant workers the data obtained was from a relatively small sample (n 25). Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to the greater population. Qualitative researchers (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) noted that the sample size for grounded theory relies heavily on theoretical saturation (Glasser and Strauss, 1976; Goulding, 2002; Locke, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Theoretical saturation occurs when “(a) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well-established and validated” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 212). Second, the findings were based on a small group of participants from collectivist societies. It may be that others coming from collectivist societies do not experience such anomie. Finally the international background of the first author’s cultural background could have influenced participants’ responses (the first author conducted the interviews). Anomie theory is a sociological theory which has its roots in criminal studies therefore, its application to WF, although innovative, is still exploratory.

Despite these limitations, this research has contributed to the literature in two important ways. First, we integrated sociological and criminology studies with cross-cultural studies to provide a deeper understanding of the precise nature of anomie or imbalance in the WF interface. A second contribution is that we have extended the WF literature to include the experiences of people moving from one cultural setting to another as compared to exploring the experiences of, say, Americans’ WF interface in
Summary and Conclusion

The WF construct has significance and importance in cross cultural management scholarship. Therefore there are several reasons why studies in cross cultural management are important. First, with the pace of globalisation, the world is becoming increasingly confronted with employees with diverse cultural and socio-demographic backgrounds. These varying meanings of WF are determined by cultural and social factors, causing different anomic pressure or tension between work and family. This may be due to contradicting or ambiguous expectations which will certainly have consequences for organisational behaviour. In addition to having different expectations, individuals may cope in dissimilar ways. This phenomenon is especially true for individuals (with family) accepting international assignments. Second, many western democracies have been developing family friendly policies in order to alleviate the anomic behaviour caused by the tension between work and family. However research seems to indicate that in addition to universally valid policies and practices, a contingent approach is necessary to address the varying needs of individuals (Poelmans, Spector, Cooper, Allen, O’Driscoll and Sanchez, 2003, Poelmans, Kallith and Brough, 2008). We have offered an ambitious agenda for theory and practice to increase the understanding of cross cultural influences on the work family interface.

In our view it is critical that researchers and policy makers appreciate how different national cultural backgrounds shape the need for and likelihood of citizen participation and engagement as well as workplace modifications. Reports of such effects are only beginning to
be published. Australia’s background report for the OECD review of family friendly policies (2002) is noted as exemplifying this.
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