SR968-22, Sociological Methodology: Interpreting Changing Cultures

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Professor

Dr. Joshua Reichard

Topic Selection and Approval:

a. Email your topic and a rough outline to Dr. Reichard for feedback and approval

well in advance of the assignment due-date deadline.

(president@ogs.edu)

b. Schedule a meeting with Dr. Reichard to review feedback.

(president@ogs.edu)

c. After receiving approval of the topic and rough outline, submit a rough

draft to Dr. Reichard in advance of the turn-in deadline

(president@ogs.edu). He will provide the feedback necessary for

preparing the final paper.

2. The Essay – This paper should be approximately 5-7 double-spaced pages in

length and may be longer. Provide an appropriate (and interesting) title for your

essay. Write a short paragraph introducing the reader to the topic you will explore in

your paper (i.e., This paper explores both theological and sociological dimensions of

the obesity epidemic in the United States...). Then, follow the steps listed below:

(Develop each in paragraph form, and clearly explicate all concepts you will develop.)

Follow this pattern and organize your work under headings, or using the numbers

for the parts of the assignment listed below:

a. Identify a few concepts to be used for the interpretation of the problem you

have chosen. (i.e., for a topic dealing with obesity, you might choose “hunger”

or “emptiness.”) Define/explicate this concept(s), explaining how it will be

employed in your analysis.

b. Identify sub-concepts that are related to the concepts you have chosen in #1.

(i.e., for obesity sub-concepts might include, “gratification,” “satisfaction,” etc.)

Define/explicate these sub-concepts, explaining how they offer additional

analysis of your chosen problem. This extends your analysis beyond #1,

offering additional depth and nuance.

c. Identify several biblical passages or concepts that provide meaning for

these concepts and sub-concepts? (Perhaps something that addressed “food

and drink that satisfy” ... or other passages that deal with such matters as

being “filled with the spirit, “gluttony,” “fasting,” “feasting,” etc.) Drawing on

these passages, and related theological ideas, explain their connection to the

d. concepts/sub-concepts you have employed in your analysis of the problem.

Note: this is not simply attaching Bible verses that “inspire” or “shed light on...”

Rather, the emphasis should center on the conceptual and analytical. (I’m not as interested in “normative” [Christians must... Christians should...]

approaches.)

e. Identify secular (i.e., sociological) studies that utilize or address these

concepts and sub-concepts. (Supersize Me [a movie], The McDonaldization

of Society by George Ritzer, Studies on anorexia or bulimia, etc.) Use these

to develop your analysis sociologically. You can think of this as a very short

“literature review.”

f. Explain how your analysis aids /offers insight into contemporary life/society.

(i.e., the burgeoning fast-food industry, Western society’s focus on efficiency

and calculability, etc.) Where is your chosen problem “visible” in contemporary

society... what contemporary illustrations can you identify and briefly interpret

using some of the analysis developed in #1- #4)?

g. How does your analysis make a contribution to Christian thinking on the

topic/problem? (For example, understanding the relationship between

appetite, indulgence, and a life of the Spirit, and then extending these ideas to

areas other than just obesity and food.) What fresh new idea(s) can you offer

to fellow Christians?

h. How does your analysis make a contribution to sociological thinking about

this issue? Can you offer a new sociological insight or two derived from your

analysis?

**An Exploration of the Effects of Work Life Conflict on Individuals and Families: A Sociological and Theological Analysis**

“Many research scholars underscore the importance of work family conflict owing to its harmful effects on individuals, families and organizations” (Kengatharan, 2020, 651). The issue of work-life conflict has its genesis in the entrance of women into the labour force while continuing to carry out all the previous roles of caregiving and community worker (Zhu and Chang, 2019; Tong & Fernandes Botts, 2018). The debate has gained prominence in the wellness and wellbeing, human flourishing and the paid and unpaid work discourse. As a social worker, work life conflict is a problem of major concern given the spin-off effects on ill-health and social dysfunction. Work life conflict is where there are incompatible competing demands that create conflict and strain with various roles that disrupt family and spousal relationships, paid work and other life commitments. The discourse refers to work-to-family conflict (work impacting family life) and family-to-work conflict (family life impacting work), these terms are often used interchangeably with work-life conflict. “Work–family conflict (WFC) refers to the strains, stressors and/or overloads that arise when work and family demands are experienced as incompatible” (Leach et al, 2021, p. 571). Work life conflict is the opposite of work life balance. Additionally, there are other concepts that form part of work life balance and work life conflict debate such as role conflict, role strain, time-based conflict, behavior-based conflict, leisure, rest and others. The core essential concepts are work and life (or non-work as is used in the management context). Since the Fall of man, and gradually with the changing industrial and technology revolution man’s life and purpose has changed based on economics, capitalist societies and the ever-evolving changes in the rat race and consumerism culture of the Western world. As Christians, God’s purpose becomes blurred in the constant chaos of daily living. Within the postmodern era, work life conflict is even more pervasive. This exploratory paper examines the effects of work life conflict on mental, emotional and physical health; job outcomes, families and other life impacts and sociological and theological considerations around the debate.

**Health Related Impact**

The impact of work life conflict on health is one of the most surprising outcomes given its severity. The health impacts of work life conflict addressed in the literature include physical ill health such as headache, stomach upset, poor appetite, fatigue and hypertension (Kengatharan, 2020); mental and emotional ill health such as depression, anger and psychological distress (Blithe, 2015; Kengatharan, 2020; leach et al, 2021; Zheng et al, 2022). Recent research has shown that parents’ transitions into and out of work family conflict (WFC) flow on to impact their children’s mental health. This evidence of an intergenerational cross-over has raised concerns, as much population-based research has shown that good mental health early in life is a critical resource for future success in multiple domains—including education, employment, quality of relationships and health…The findings accord with the hypothesis that work–family conflict is a ‘transmissible’ stressor that affects the home environment and the mental health of all family members. Thus, they are consistent with those from Dinh et al., who used the same dataset and showed that entry into work–family conflict corresponds with deterioration in child mental health, and that persistent work–family conflict over a 2-year period is associated with even greater detriment” (Leach et al, 2021, p. 572 & 577). “Female health care and social service providers experienced a high level of depression. Work-to-family conflict (WFC), family-to-work conflict (FWC), and organizational role conflict (ORC) were significantly and positively associated with female social workers’ depression. Exhaustion and cynicism fully mediated the effects of ORC on depression and partially mediated the effects of WFC on depression. In addition, FWC had only a direct effect on depression. A multiple-group analysis further indicated that both marital status and motherhood status may have played a moderating role in the conflict-burnout-depression link and that being unmarried and having no child were risk factors for depression in female health care and social service providers” (Zheng et al, 2022, p 1). The research is clear on the physical and psychological ill health that plague workers with little to no work life balance and extreme conflicts within and across roles. Further studies could highlight what is being done to address these concerns individually and collectively (organizations and society). Blithe (2015) has correlated lack of flexibility and work schedule with psychological distress. Other studies corroborate these findings related to inflexibility at work that creates conflict with paid work and private lives. This points to the importance of societal and institutional solutions to seemingly personal worker troubles.

**Job Related Impact**

Work life conflict also negatively impacts job related outcomes; lower job satisfaction, lower perceived career success, absenteeism, higher turnover intention, tardiness, poor work-related role performance, (Kengatharan, 2020). When workers are constantly bombarded with incompatible and competing work and life demands they often experience burnout and are incapable of feeling satisfaction at work. This too can lead to physical ill health.

**Prosocial behaviors and Impact on Self-care**

There are negative impacts around life, prosocial behaviors and self care outcomes such as lower life satisfaction, life stress, lower involvement, heavy drinking, cigarette use, anger, poor appetite (Kengatharan, 2020). These self soothing defense mechanisms can be dangerous and even lethal. Coping with life’s stressors and implementing self-care that is sustainable is critical.

**Impact on Family Relationships**

Research has shown that impacts of work-life conflict on relationship between spouses, parental relationships (Kengatharan, 2020; Leach et al 2021) and parenting stress in particular for unpartnered mothers with young children ( Hwang,W. & Jung, E., 2020) are also a challenge. According to Leach et al (2021), “work family conflict is widespread; experienced by approximately one-third of Australian mothers and fathers. There are now a substantial number of both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies reporting detrimental impacts on parents psychologically and on family relationships—including deterioration in both mothers’ and fathers’ mental health, marital satisfaction, and parent–child interactions” p. 571. They go further to posit that “there is a large body of literature to support the association between work–family conflict and each of the mediators tested—parent mental health, marital satisfaction and irritable parenting. The current study builds on this literature to additionally show how long-term work–family conflict might translate into greater adversity in these fundamental indicators of family health and connection. This is consistent with the idea of a ‘loss spiral’ in resources—that there is an accumulation of negative impacts over time as work–family conflict places strains on families that continue to compound, with measurable adverse effects on children’s mental health. It is not consistent with the idea that parents and families ‘adapt’ to experiences of work–family conflict, and ‘acclimatize’ to these conditions after an initial period of adjustment. ” (Leach et al, 2021, p 577).

**Theological and Biblical Analysis**

A critical level of analysis is a theological reflection of work and life through examination of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Theological teaching from the bible expresses a return to Christian ways of living and being in order to balance and refocus our lives. Though not immediately obvious, the discourse points to key aspects around the theology of work that present a different position from the sociology of work. It also presupposes an understanding of the work life balance and sabbatical rest movement as presented in the bible and exemplified by scholars such as Batac (2023). Consequently, there are some timeless principles that align within the discourse. Principles of hope, justice, restoration, leadership and equality are some areas for redemptive hermeneutic exploration. In creation, the roles of both men and women were clear, to occupy, work the land and have dominion over the earth and to be help meet to man respectively. The Fall has caused some confusion of roles, responsibilities and purpose and has fueled gender inequality and imbalance perpetuated through historical materialism often explained through Marxist ideologies of work, conflict and power. The redemption through salvation will renew our calling and reposition societal functioning that is balanced, equal and renewed. This exemplifies integration of religion and society. Guitián, & González, A.-M. (2022) work reflects new perspectives around the epistemology and theology of work. “While there is greater appreciation for the “subjective experience of work”, there is also growing individualization of the expectations regarding work. In addition, a sense of the transcendent dimension of life is on the decline, which can be associated with a progressive departure from the spirit and practice of Christianity, at least in the West. Indeed, if Christianity invites us to consider work primarily in terms of service and as a way of fulfilling the original mandate of Genesis, an individualistic and primarily worldly view of work could be taken as an indication that belief in God has little practical relevance in shaping personal life and, ultimately, in shaping culture itself” pp. 759.

There are theological and sociological worldviews that seek to explain the challenges at play and seek to offer solutions for the future. The nature of man from a theological perspective is presented as man (both man and woman) created in God’s likeness and image in His personhood to serve and to have dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, over all the Earth (Genesis 1: 26-31). God’s purpose for our lives is to occupy and have dominion over the earth in a simplified hunt, gather, rest and connect to Him. In God’s pronouncement at the Fall, he directed that by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to dust (Bible Gateway, Genesis 3:19). Sabbatical rest is also examined in theological worldview as given by God and is seen as a cure for human restlessness (Kessler, 2012). “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Bible Gateway, Genesis 2:1-3). It presents a need for connection with God and rest from labour. As the old adage says, the only solution to tiredness and exhaustion is rest. Therefore, orthopraxis within this discourse on work life conflict is about renewal, alignment with God’s purpose for our lives and sabbatical rest. Beyond the physical act of sleep, rest denotes a psychological mental and spiritual experience that rejuvenates and connects to the source and leaves a state of renewal. Work life balance and rest are essential to transforming people’s lives in relation to fulfillment and wellbeing.

**Sociological Analysis**

From a sociological perspective, work life conflict and the sociology of work and industrial sociology has been disaggregated through theorists and debates around Marxist, conflict and functionalist ideologies, feminist notions of gender roles and society and other socio-political and structural notions around society (Grint, 2005; Watson, 2017). Industrial sociological analysis is crucial to the discourse on work through an examination of technology and industrialization. The world of work has changed and as we move through the 4th and embrace the 5th industrial revolution the way we look at work and the future of work given improvements in artificial intelligence and other technologies can improve outcomes for work life balance. Understanding the social systems and social structures within which we operate as humans will create opportunities and disadvantages. Through this lens the nature of man is centered on the purpose of serving society, creating labour and care responsibilities for labourers. Rest is examined through the sociology of leisure and is conceptualized as withdrawal from work and other routine activities to activities that are more pleasurable including connection with community, playing sports/exercise and other activities (Parker, 2021; Tobias, 2020). It denotes the ideology of neoliberal capitalism and examines how people spend their free time. Psychologically, work life balance and rest are associated with wellbeing and mental symbiosis. It presents man as centered and in control of one's life and cognitive synergies. Imbalance is presented as psychological unwellness.

**Concluding Thoughts and Fresh Ideas for Examination**

The ill health, family breakdown and overall ill effects on human flourishing caused by prolonged exposure to work life conflict are why I chose to explore work life balance. As a Christian scholar and social worker, my passion and motivation for changing the world through bringing choices for stability in work, family and rest is consistent with my values. I value time, connection while being able to provide for the family and though work life balance may look different for different people based on intersectionality, one thing is constant as humans we need to connect and rest, but also provide for our needs. Though society has taken us on different paths through commercialization and capitalism, as humans our need to work, live and rest are universal. From a more personal perspective, that of my colleagues and other women, I reflect on my own challenges, and our encounters with work life conflict through role based and time-based conflict and this has motivated me to seek out change in this area. My role as a leader has been to provide cognitive and emotional support as a caring transformational leader but also through practical measures that allow women to find balance. I have communicated empathy, permitted early dismissal from work and telework options that allow for greater alignment and integration of roles and alignment of time which is a finite resource. In addition to providing leadership for my staff, I see my role in providing leadership for greater work life balance in our world as a change agent. At the core of the problem is a changed worldview of the purpose of work and life. Central to this is a critical reflection of our higher purpose from a theological and sociological perspective but also examining experiences that will lead to changes in daily living within a community of practice. Evidenced in the literature there are legislative and other changes that impact how we work and live and the future of work:

* productivity through reduction of working days/hours as paradoxical as that may seem. Senator Bernie Sanders has presented a proposal for legislation to reduce standard working hours to 32 hours. This is in alignment with many countries in Europe and Asia that have implemented and are piloting a 4-day work week.
* improvement in parental and family leave options (ILO, 2017)
* promotion of the importance of rest and leisure through improved vacation time. On March 16, 2024 the Jamaican Health Minister encouraged citizens to take adequate rest. (Jamaica Observer).
* evidence of people getting back to their roots and promoting lifestyles that are connected to occupation and earth connection perpetuated through tiny house/ van living while utilizing farming subsistence to provide for themselves and help others.

Though life has taken us away from our essence of being intended by God, there are ways that are taking shape to constructively solve this problem and refocus our lives around our core human needs and providing for ourselves, our families and helping others, while enjoying earth and nature, connecting with friends and family and worship and rest. Though this may be unrealistic for most persons, the ideals around the future of work have embraced the notion of ensuring that roles are not in conflict and that there is adequate time to disconnect from labour/work to spend with family and friends, to help the needy within the community and to worship, reflect on God, creation and purpose and rest.

In this paper, the negative effects of work life conflict have been highlighted. It is our duty to begin to further explore sociological and theological perspectives for constructive social change in order to change our world.

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