



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**WORK BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT TACTICS AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AMONG OFFSHORE EMPLOYEES IN THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY**

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**WORK BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT TACTICS AND WORK-FAMILY  
CONFLICT AMONG OFFSHORE EMPLOYEES IN THE OIL AND GAS  
INDUSTRY**

NURFITRI NADZIRAH BINTI SARKAWI

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The project entitled ‘Work Boundary Management Tactics and Work-Family Conflict among Offshore Employees in the Oil and Gas Industry’ was prepared by Nurfitri Nadzirah Binti Sarkawi and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development).

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## ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the relationship between work boundary management tactics (behavioural tactics, temporal tactics, physical tactics and communicative tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees in the oil and gas industry. This research questionnaire was administered to ninety-five (95) offshore employees in an oil and gas company at Miri, Sarawak. Pearson's correlation analysis test was used to test the hypotheses of the study. The result of the study shows that there is a significant relationship between behavioural tactics, physical tactics and communicative tactics with work-family conflict, while there is no significant relationship between temporal tactics with work-family conflict. Hence, the findings of the study may provide useful information and knowledge to improve the current policy of work-life balance for the practitioners and future researcher.

*Keywords:* Work boundary management tactics, work-family conflict, offshore employees

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti hubungan antara taktik pengurusan sempadan kerja (taktik tingkah laku, taktik temporal, taktik fizikal dan taktik komunikatif) dan konflik kerja-keluarga terhadap pekerja luar pesisir di industri minyak dan gas. Borang soal selidik telah diberikan kepada sembilan puluh lima (95) orang pekerja luar pesisir di sebuah syarikat minyak dan gas di Miri, Sarawak. Ujian Analisis Korelasi (Pearson) telah digunakan untuk menguji hipotesis kajian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan di antara taktik tingkah laku, taktik fizikal dan taktik komunikatif dengan konflik kerja-keluarga, sementara itu, taktik temporal tidak ada hubungan yang signifikan dengan konflik kerja-keluarga. Oleh itu, penemuan kajian ini dapat memberikan maklumat dan informasi untuk membantu organisasi untuk meningkatkan dasar keseimbangan kerja-keluarga dan boleh dijadikan sebagai bahan rujukan kepada pengkaji pada masa akan datang.

*Kata kunci:* taktik pengurusan sempadan kerja, konflik kerja-keluarga, pekerja luar pesisir

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of Study

Offshore employees in the oil and gas industry are the person who works on offshore drilling rig also known as an oil platform. In the United Kingdom, offshore employment is their strong linked industry and was increased by 42% production of an offshore worker from 2014 to 2017 (Oil & Gas UK, 2018). Almost 50,000 employment in 2017 shows that the employment worker offshore increase and 3% of them are women (Oil & Gas UK, 2018). According to Garside (2019), the total of offshore rigs as in 2018 statistics, Southeast Asia has 152 rigs and it is in the 5th largest number of offshore rigs after the North Sea, Gulf of Mexico (U.S.), Persian Gulf and Far East Asia. This shows that a big number of employees are working offshore in the oil and gas industry in Southeast Asia. In 2018, Malaysia reported a growth of 13% in the hiring of oil and gas employees (Suki, Rony, & Suki, 2019). From previous research by Focus Malaysia (2018), the demand for oil and gas jobs is rising. Moreover, the typical pattern for working days of offshore employees is 7 days to 14 days and some are more than 2 weeks. Most of the offshore workers are men and little number of them are women. Commonly, when they are onshore, they have a total day off the same length as they stay offshore and sometimes less (Forsyth & Gauthier, 1991). From the previous research, the offshore employees have to deal with work and family conflict which will change their abilities to manage the level of integration and segmentation in the midst of work and family roles (Basile & Beauregard, 2018). The conflict between work colleagues and family members happens because of the absent of the individual who works offshore from family or work in a longer period.

Work-family conflict can be described as the source of stress which many individuals had faced and experienced. From previous research by Carlson et al. (2000),

the work-family conflict has found that there are several variables that can give impact the individual such as psychological distress, job satisfaction, dedication towards works, turnover intention and life satisfaction. According to (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), there are three (3) categories of work-family conflict which are time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. Hence, conflict can happen when the individuals spend more time in one domain than other domain either work more than family or family more than work. Based on the pattern of working days of offshore employees, there must be a conflict in their work and family.

Work boundary management tactics are built and maintain the boundaries between individuals and critical areas of their (Carlson, Ferguson, & Kacmar, 2013; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Kreiner et al. (2009) classified four (4) types of boundary management tactics which are behavioural tactics, temporal tactics, physical tactics and communication tactics. Offshore employees work in a rotating schedule where they work for a specified number of offshore days or weeks offshore and then return home without working in the same number of weeks or perhaps shorter (Basile & Beauregard, 2018). Ross (2009) stated that offshore employees rely on onshore communications technology to allow them to communicate with their family members at home. In the fact that they can be more socially segmented psychologically due to the physical separation of workers from their families, which means that the employees lose contact with other people in the non-related to work (Thomas, Sampson, & Zhao, 2003). Hence, this study contributes to the work boundary management tactics which are the test whether it can help to overcome the work-family conflict among the offshore employees in Malaysia. Referring to Basile & Beauregard (2018) findings, when the employees are at the work environment, they founded that physical, communication and psychological separation from home activities creating the employees a high level of work-family

conflict. Similarly, in the home environment, workers are physically separated from the work environment, there will be less contact with work colleagues and less participation work activities that can increase the perception of tensions between work and family (Basile & Beauregard, 2018).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between work boundary management tactics and work-family conflict among working offshore employees in the oil and gas industry.

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

Work-family conflict nowadays has become a huge concern among researchers. This is because a big critical change happens in the work and family domain especially in this significant economic problem around the world. The imbalance between those two domains may lead to a negative effect on the individual if the person does not take it seriously on how to manage this issue. In fact, work boundary management tactics can be considered as one of useful strategy to help the person in achieving balancing work and family domain and reduce work-family conflict (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Araujo, Tureta, & Araujo, 2015). However, there is less study on work boundary management tactics in Malaysia especially among offshore employees in the oil and gas. Most of the study was conducted in the Western country with other contexts (Araujo, Tureta, & Araujo, 2015; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Cousins & Robey, 2015; Knapp, Smith, Kreiner, Sundaramurthy, & Barton, 2013; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000).

The previous studies have focused on exploring how women attempt to negotiate the work-home interface (Araujo, Tureta, & Araujo, 2015). In this study, the researcher aimed to fill other contextual gap suggested by previous researchers. The investigation

and analysis made by Nipper-Eng (1996) and Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep (2009) for the idea of boundary work and specific tactics from boundary tactics. The researchers also suggested exploring how boundary work in other context and testing the Boundary Work Tactics that was created by Kreiner et al. (2009) (Araujo, Tureta, & Araujo, 2015). Other previous research was on the impact of organizational capability and incapable of the highly segmented occupational environment and one of it is offshore work (Basile & Beauregard, 2018). Additionally, with the lengthy rotations period away from either home or work and work-life interface (Basile & Beauregard, 2018). The researchers suggested to conduct and expand the purview of research into high segmented work environment such as offshore work in order to boost a good result for the employees and employers in an organization (Basile & Beauregard, 2018). In addition, this future research could help to justify changes in human resource policies for better assess capable or incapable of individuals and organizations for assisting the positive result (Basile & Beauregard, 2018).

Hence, the researcher is interested in this study to investigate the relationship between work boundary management tactics and work-family conflict among offshore employees in the oil and gas industry. This is because the previous study focuses more on women boundary perception on work-family conflict and most of the study is conducted in West country but a limited study in the Asian country especially in Malaysia and among the offshore workers. Most of the offshore workers are men. This lead the researcher to investigate more by exploring how the boundary tactics influence work-family conflict among the offshore employees, we can extend our knowledge and understanding of work boundary management tactics.

Behavioural tactics are to act as social activities and support used to compromise and build the work and family boundary (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). It consists

of three-part. The first part is where using other people to act as the border between work demand and family demand. Previous research has found that by using skills and availability of other people who can help to build a border between work responsibility and family life (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Next, another way is through leveraging technology which the individual can manage their technology usage which acts as a personal digital assistant to guide and control their work-life boundary. These behavioural tactics also help to allow differential permeability by differentiate the individual roles at the workplace and home without mixing it around and invoking triage where they need to prioritise urgent and important demands (Carlson, Ferguson, & Kacmar, 2013). The researcher believes that by using behavioural tactics will contribute to lessening the work-family conflict of the employee.

*H<sub>a</sub>1:* There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (behavioural tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

Temporal tactics focus on the way people manage time for boundary management which consist of controlling work time and finding respite where the individual distancing themselves from work or home demand (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). The previous researcher found that temporal tactics can give benefit to the individuals as it helps to delineate which role is involved which demonstrates the appropriate identity and allows better roles to be compartmentalised (Carlson, Ferguson, & Kacmar, 2013). For example, when the individual is on the workplace in the work time, the individual should contribute to work demand only without mixing family demand at that time. Alternatively, individual use temporal tactics as their boundary can minimise the conflict between work and family.

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (temporal tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

Next, physical tactics identify by Kreiner et al. (2009) to identify a clear border between two domains in which the individual are located. Physical tactics is a creation of physical borders such as rooms, home and workplace. It also a psychological adjustment to a role when shifting from one location to another (Carlson, Ferguson, & Kacmar, 2013). For example, when the individual walking out of their home office into the family room, there is a room or door as the border between work and family domain and the individual will need to mental change from working matters to family matters. As a result, the researcher believes that physical boundary tactics will likely lead to lower the work-family conflict of the offshore employees.

*H<sub>a</sub>3*: There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (physical tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

The communicative tactic is focusing more on manage expectation in advance of the work and family boundaries (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). The past research identifies that when the individual use communication tactics to avoid confronting violators by other people (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). By using communication, it helps to set and managing expectation for others to maintain the boundary. The previous research also found that individual has better able to focus on the present role by communicating their expectations (Carlson, Ferguson, & Kacmar, 2013; Ashforth,

Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). If this expectation is followed, the boundary between work and family is clear. The researcher expected that communication tactics will contribute to reducing work-family conflict.

*H<sub>a</sub>4*: There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (communicative tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

## **1.2 Research Objective**

### **1.2.1 General Objective**

To investigate the relationship between work boundary management tactics and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objective**

- i. To identify the relationship between work boundary management tactics (behavioural tactics) and work-family conflict.
- ii. To identify the relationship between work boundary management tactics (temporal tactics) and work-family conflict.
- iii. To identify the relationship between work boundary management tactics (physical tactics) and work-family conflict.
- iv. To identify the relationship between work boundary management tactics (communicative tactics) and work-family conflict.

### 1.3 Research Hypothesis

In compliance with the research objectives, the following hypothesis is prepared to guide the research study.

$H_a1$ : There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (behavioural tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

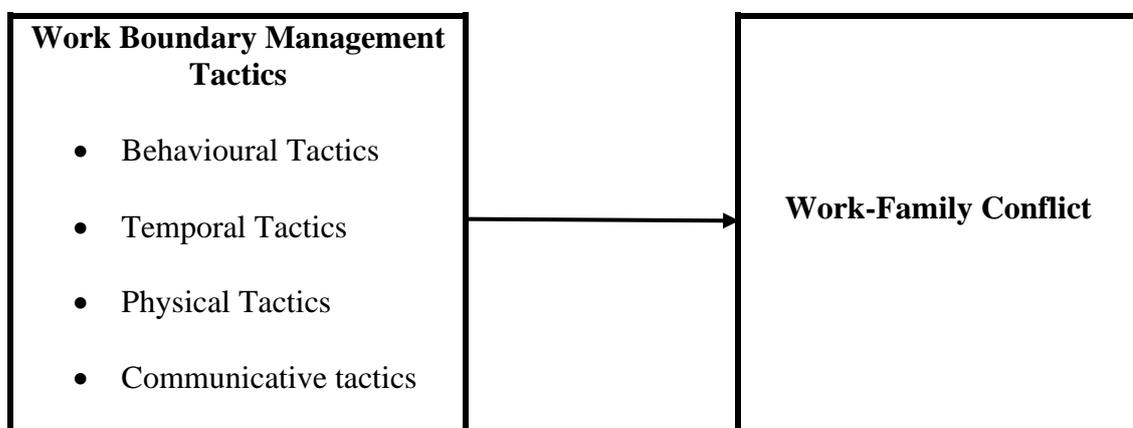
$H_a2$ : There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (temporal tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

$H_a3$ : There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (physical tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

$H_a4$ : There is a significant relationship between work boundary management tactics (communicative tactics) and work-family conflict among offshore employees.

### 1.4 Conceptual Framework

*Figure 1 Conceptual Framework*



In this research, there are two components of the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1. The first component is the boundary management tactics that act as the independent variable which consists of four elements that are behavioural tactics, temporal tactics, physical tactics, and communicative tactics. The second component is the dependent variable that is work-family conflict. This conceptual framework was adapted from Carlson et al., (2013) and Kreiner et al., (2009).

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

This research affects the working offshore employees in the oil and gas industry. Both men and women offshore employees are selected from any position in the organization. The significance of the study acts as a guide for offshore employees so that they can face with work and family demand. There are four (4) key elements of work boundary management tactics which can help them to balance their interferences and conflicts in work and family. This study is using a quantitative method and the questionnaire was adopted from previous research on boundary management tactics and work-family conflict. This study was conducted to fill in the research gaps as stated in the problem statement. Besides that, this study helps the organization to highlight and implement the importance of each individual worker practising work-life balance to avoid work and family conflict.

### **1.6 Limitation of Study**

Although the study was well prepared, there were some complications and limitations faced by the researcher before and during conducting the study. The researcher has some difficulty in conducting surveys toward offshore employees as the

questionnaire was distributed online. There is a limitation of internet access on the platform that makes the offshore employees difficult to answer the questionnaire. Besides that, the Human Resource Executive also suggested to print out the questionnaire form and distribute it to the offshore employee when they get back from the platform. However, only a small number of employees will enter the office and the rest of them went back to their respective homes. Next, the respondent may be answering the questionnaire promptly and unjustifiably as they may be busy with their working matters and wanted to go back home earlier. In Malaysia, research about work boundary management tactics is still little makes the researcher having a hard time to find suitable literature review and information. Next, in Malaysia, when it comes to work-family conflict research, there were not many researchers done social research on offshore employees most of the research is about women and corporate employees.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

The terms that are frequently used in this research are defined conceptually and operationally.

### **1.7.1 Boundary Management Tactics**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

Boundary theory focuses on the ways of how individuals create and maintain their role and personal define entities that separate one another. The concept of boundaries had been used in many disciplines that refer to behavioural, temporal, physical and communication (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000).

### **Operational Definition**

In this study, boundary management tactics can be specified as to how offshore employees manage their time and cope up with challenges of their work and family by applying it to their daily life. Four elements in Boundary Tactics are behaviour tactics, temporal tactics, physical tactics and communication tactics.

### **1.7.2 Behavioural Tactics**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

Behavioural tactics can be identified as social practices used to minimize work-family conflict, incongruence and violation, negotiated and construct the characters of the work-family boundary (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

#### **Operational Definition**

Behavioural tactics can be defined as the abilities of offshore employees using other people, leveraging technologies and allowing differential permeability affected an individual's balancing their work-family boundary.

### **1.7.3 Temporal Tactics**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

Temporal tactics are defined as the individual's manipulating their strategies choices about temporal issues surrounding work that involve time they spend on work and family (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

### **Operational Definition**

In this study, temporal tactics can be specified as the ability of offshore employees managing their work and family in time management and synchronizing their responsibility at work and home.

#### **1.7.4 Physical Tactics**

##### **Conceptual Definition**

The definition of physical tactics is an individual attempted to identify the domain in which there are located. In today's cultural, most have returned to working at the home model while others where they are not in the same generation keep the workplace and home as different physical entities. A wall, a window or a door can be the physical boundaries (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

##### **Operational Definition**

In this study, physical tactics can be defined as the ability of offshore employees to operate physical boundaries and physical distance between domain and managing the physical objects so that they can endure the responsibility between work and family.

#### **1.7.5 Communicative Tactics**

##### **Conceptual Definition**

Communication tactics were consisting of communicative approaches that include the criteria set expectations and violators confronted. Communication means defining work-family boundaries to important people around them such as a partner, children, parents and members of the workplace (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).