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14. Governmental interventions and social re-engineering to facilitate work–life balance: Singapore and South Korea

*Eunae Cho and Chee-Wee Koh**

INTRODUCTION

The issue of work–life balance (WLB) has become a hot topic in many Asian societies. This interest reflects numerous societal changes that many Asian societies have experienced in the past few decades beginning with rapid economic growth (Bloom and Finlay, 2009). Social changes, such as increased participation of women in the workforce and rise in the number of dual-earner couples (Jaumotte, 2003), have posed questions regarding the adequacy of the male breadwinner model. In terms of demographic changes, lower fertility and aging populations led to increased care responsibilities for workers (Phillips, 2002; Mishra and Smyth, 2010). These challenges were exacerbated by a technology-fueled globalization (Friedman, 2000) that involves the rapid flow of goods and capital across the globe, resulting in intense competition between business entities as well as between countries for investments from these entities. Pressure to raise productivity has translated to longer working hours and significant encroachment of work into non-work hours of Asian workers. Finally, changes occurred in people’s value system such that a new generation of workers who grew up in relative affluence now views work as but one life domain and values WLB (Twenge, 2010).

In response to these societal changes, developed economies among Asian countries have attempted to provide interventions at the governmental level in order to facilitate WLB among employees (e.g., Jones et al., 2008; Kim, 2008; Iwao, 2010). Given the constant and rapid changes that many Asian countries are going through, better understanding of the impetus for and hindrance to governmental work–life interventions in the Asian context would inform employers, human resource management practitioners, scholars, and policy-makers.

The main objective of this chapter is to review governmental interventions and social re-engineering efforts in East Asian societies directed at facilitating reconciliation of the work and life domains. We begin by discussing the context of governmental work–life interventions. Then,

we survey major elements of work–life interventions in Singapore and South Korea, with the intention of exploring two key issues. The first issue is what drives governmental work–life intervention in East Asian societies, and we address this through examining Singapore’s initiatives. The second issue concerns hindrance to effective implementation of governmental work–life intervention, which we illustrate with the South Korea case. Finally, we summarize lessons learned and conclude with some recommendations. Our discussion is based on academic research as well as information from official sources in the two countries.

Before proceeding further, we would like to clarify the scope of this chapter. First, we use ‘work–life balance (WLB)’ as a term that broadly refers to individuals’ satisfaction with his or her performance in the work and other life domains, including the family domain. We conceptualize WLB this way because this term does not yet have a unified definition that is widely accepted (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). Also, given that the literature on WLB in Asia is at the nascent stage, such an inclusive perspective might be more helpful to propel future research and inform the practice. Second, we tried to capture the various ways that a government can facilitate WLB. Such efforts can range across labor legislation on work hours and paid leave, pro-natal measures and childcare provisions, governmental policies that reward family-friendly organizations, and public campaigns that promote gender equality (Hein, 2005).¹ Third, given the heterogeneity among Asian countries (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004), we focus our discussion on two East Asian countries. Singapore and South Korea are both collectivist societies (Hofstede, 2001) where work and family are perceived as interdependent domains of life, work is perceived to serve family needs (Thein et al., 2010), and sacrificing family time for work is viewed positively (Yang et al., 2000). It is telling that Singapore and South Korea are also among the countries that work the longest hours (Federal Reserve Economic Data, 2014). We hope that this chapter will serve as an initial step in understanding WLB policy in the Asian context and spur on further research on the topic.

IMPETUS FOR AND HINDRANCE TO GOVERNMENT WORK–LIFE INTERVENTIONS IN EAST ASIA

Confucianism has been thought to undergird many shared heritages and cultural traditions in East Asia (Rozman, 1991). On the one hand, Confucianism emphasizes a solid work ethic (Goodman and White, 1998). The amount of working time, face-time in particular, tends to be a key

factor for performance evaluation (Kum, 2000; Won, 2005), which makes WLB a challenge. On the other hand, Confucianism promotes strong family relations and dictates minimal involvement of government in caregiving for family members (Goodman and White, 1998; Jacobs, 2000). With strong expectations of dependent care imposed on the family, limited governmental work–life intervention tended to be justified in Confucian Asian countries (Palley, 1992; Shin and Shaw, 2003).

The scope of governmental intervention to promote WLB has, however, grown in East Asia in recent years. Research on the developmental role of the state in East Asian societies may provide important insights on the policy shift. Scholars have argued that East Asian societies that experienced rapid and sustained economic growth in the latter half of the twentieth century (i.e., Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) have all been subscribing to ‘productivist welfare capitalism’ (Holliday, 2000). In such a society, the state plays an active and extensive role in directing and developing economic activities (e.g., state-owned enterprises, tax reductions or exemptions for target industry; Westphal, 1990). Individuals are steered towards productive economic activities by low taxes, high employment rates and net incomes, strong public investment in education, health and housing, and a moderate and selective commitment of the state to social security provision and welfare (Aspalter, 2006). With a strong belief that economic growth will eventually benefit all of the population (Tang, 2000), social policy is often subordinate to economic policy (Holliday, 2000). Therefore, while it may be against the Confucian instinct to regulate matters within the family, East Asian states may still do so when intervention is projected to contribute to growth. In the next section, we will illustrate how the concern with growth might undergird governmental work–life intervention in Singapore.

Culture shapes social norms that guide individuals’ behavior (Hofstede, 2001). While governmental work–life interventions may be perceived by East Asian policy-makers as essential, they are not a natural fit for the indigenous culture. Tension and resistance are therefore expected during policy implementation (Sutton, 1999). For instance, governmental work–life intervention might not yield expected benefits in a society where the male-breadwinner model is widely embraced to the extent that employees avoid utilizing the available benefits; male employees might fear career consequences associated with being ‘a family man’ whereas female employees might choose not to use work–life programs to prove themselves as ‘ideal workers’. In a later section, we will use the case of South Korea to highlight the possible tension and resistance to apparently logical governmental work–life intervention in East Asia.

GROWTH-DRIVEN INTERVENTION: SINGAPORE

Context

When Singapore attained independence from the British in 1965, it faced many existential challenges including social instability, high unemployment, and the lack of significant natural resources (Lee, 1998). The small island state, without friendly hinterlands and a thriving private sector, viewed globalization in tandem with a strong developmental state as the only viable option to survival and sustainable economic development (Yeung, 2011). Tripartite bodies comprising representatives from government, employers, and unions ensure that key labor market factors (e.g., wages) are in line with Singapore's social development and long-term economic growth (Low, 1998). External demand, technology, investments, and human resources then combined to propel the low middle-income country to being a high-income one (Asher and Nandy, 2008). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has called Singapore 'one of Asia's great success stories' (OECD, 2010, p. 159).

Social Policies

Singapore's corporate and personal income tax rates are kept very competitive to attract investment and encourage employment. Social assistance schemes are characterized by stringent means-testing, a case-by-case approach, and low levels of benefits (Asher and Nandy, 2008). To help Singaporeans achieve financial independence, all working residents must participate in a social security savings scheme, known as the Central Provident Fund (CPF). Mutual support between family members serves as the additional safety net. The state's philosophy on the relationship between state, family, and the individual has been articulated by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS, 2002, p. 2):

Some may perceive that marriage and family are private matters, and that choices should be left to the individual. However, these can have collective impact on our nation. When families break down and fail to provide support for their members, the effects reverberate across the society. Therefore it is important for the entire community to support the formation and strengthening of family. When the community and the government work together to create an environment that is conducive to marriage, families and raising children – by shaping values, attitudes and life choices – it is because family matters. To each of us. To Singapore.

Another key social institution that encourages savings, as well as starting and maintaining family ties, is home ownership. About 85 percent

of the population lives in new or resale high-rise public flats built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB). Nuclear family units (usually newlyweds) can purchase new HDB flats at subsidized prices;² further subsidies incentivize decisions consistent with official family values (e.g., purchasing a flat near where a parent lives). The flat can be sold in the open market after a minimum occupancy period. An HDB flat is often the biggest financial investment a Singaporean family commits to.³ In a typical household, both partners would service the mortgage with their CPF savings.

Threats to Growth

From 1970 to 2012, the labor force participation rate of females grew from 28 to 58 percent; in 2010, 47 percent of households consisted of dual-income couples, up from 41 percent in 2000 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2014). Singaporean managers ranked job security and opportunities, flexible work hours, and financial power ahead of attending children's activities or social activities (Skitmore and Ahmad, 2003). Total Fertility Rate (TFR) per female aged 15–44 trended downwards from 3.07 in 1970 to 1.29 in 2012 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2014). While these trends were not unique to Singapore, they were particularly jarring given the prevailing policy choices to maximize economic growth, keep taxation low, and limit public assistance spending. Selective immigration of skilled labor can serve as buffer for an aging population but it often incurs social and political costs; and although growth can theoretically be sustained through higher productivity, productivity growth is often unpredictable (Hui and Hashmi, 2007). Marriage and procreation, family-friendly work environments and work–life balance are thus imperative to Singapore's continuous prosperity.

Major Work–Life Policies

We categorize and discuss the current governmental work–life intervention along three major elements, namely policies concerning work conditions, policies targeting family formation and procreation, and policies directed to develop organizational capacity.

Work conditions

A frequent starting point for governmental work–life intervention is labor legislation that establishes work schedules, rest days, and leave entitlement. The Singapore Employment Act stipulates a 44-hour work week, an eight-hour work day (shift workers can work up to 12 hours a day), and

at least one rest day per week. For eligible workers, overtime work must be compensated at 1.5 times the hourly pay rate. An employee in her first year of service is entitled to a minimum of seven days of annual leave; leave entitlement increases by one day per year of service, capped at the eighth year (i.e., minimum of 14 days). There is neither statutory marriage nor compassionate leave.

Family formation and procreation

In step with global frameworks stipulating population control as a precondition for development, Singapore mounted a ‘Stop at Two’ campaign shortly after independence. The anti-natalist policies, which included limiting statutory maternity leave (salary paid by employers) to working mothers who were having their first two children, underwent some reviews in 1984 when TFR started to consistently fall below the population replacement rate of 2.1. In 1987, a New Population Policy was announced with the public campaign message of ‘Have three or more, if you can afford it’ (Wong and Yeoh, 2003). Apart from financial and housing incentives for bigger families, the policy also introduced government subsidy for using approved childcare facilities and longer no-pay childcare leave for female employees in the civil service (*ibid.*).

Studies from that period suggested that working mothers needed greater help. Married professional women experienced moderate levels of job–spouse, job–parent, and job–homemaker conflicts (Aryee, 1992). Among dual-earner couples, wives reported more burnout than husbands; non-work stressors influenced burnout in wives but not in husbands (Aryee, 1993). To relieve the burden on working mothers, since 1978 the government has allowed women from neighboring countries to work as low-cost domestic workers in Singapore (Huang and Yeoh, 1996). Statutory paid maternity leave was progressively enhanced in 2001, 2004, and 2008. The latest enhancement extended the leave period to 16 weeks, regardless of birth order. To allow flexibility, only the first eight weeks of maternity leave need to be taken immediately and consecutively after childbirth; the rest of it could be taken within the first year of birth. Notably, employers’ salary contribution to maternity leave has remained the same since the anti-natalist era (i.e., eight weeks of salary, only to female employees having their first or second child). The state bears all other wage costs, capped at S\$10 000 per four weeks.⁴ In 2013, government-paid paternity leave for fathers (one week), as well as government-paid shared parental leave, which allows fathers to share one week of the working mother’s maternity leave entitlement, were introduced. Previously, there had been criticisms that the procreation packages did not send any signal on the important role of the father (Institute of Policy Studies, 2009; Teo, 2009).⁵

Statutory infant and childcare leave schemes that benefit both parents were also introduced. As at 2014, each parent with a child under the age of two could consume six days of annual unpaid infant care leave, whereas each parent whose child is under the age of seven and aged between seven and 12 is entitled to six days and two days of annual government-paid childcare leave, respectively.

Low TFR was partly attributed to the falling marriage rate and concomitant increase in the age of first marriage (MCDS, 2002). Singapore does not just need more babies; the prevailing social norm also expects these babies to be nurtured by heterosexual, married couples (Teo, 2009). In 2000, the government formed the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) to promote the importance of marriage and family life; in 2002 the PEC was reconstituted as the Family Matters! Singapore committee to 'reinforce the family as an institution in Singapore by positioning family wellness and unity as important life goals' (MCDS, 2002, p. 30) as well as to facilitate family formation (including procreation) and to build a family-friendly environment.

The procreation and family formation campaigns aim to influence individual behaviors. Most employers do not see a strong case to support marriage and childbearing because the cost of an aging population is externalized to the society. Thus the government could not do much beyond enacting statutory parenthood leave and minimizing employers' compliance costs. As competition between firms continues to intensify, and job security diminishes as a result of more frequent corporate restructurings, the assault on family life will persist unless firms embrace work-life balance out of enlightened self-interest.

Organizational development

In 2000, MCDS set up a Work-Life Unit and a Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy (TriCom) comprising MCDS, Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), and the National Trade Congress Union (NTUC). The Work-Life Unit's role was to encourage and enable employers to implement work-life programs, through the biennial Singapore Family Friendly Firm (SFFF) Award, work-life seminars, and training courses. The objective of the SFFF Award was to 'encourage companies to nurture and support a workplace culture which helps staff manage and balance work and family/personal commitments in order to enhance the productivity, morale and commitment of the staff' (MITA, 2002, p. 1). Participating companies would benchmark their practices to four categories of work-life programs: (1) flexible work arrangements (FWAs, e.g., part-time work, flexi-place); (2) leave benefits (e.g., family care, study); (3) employee support schemes

(e.g., social activities for singles, Employee Assistance Program); and (4) work–life infrastructure (e.g., training, employee needs assessment).

FWAs, in particular, were projected to become an important element of companies' human resources strategies (MOM and MCDS, 2001), probably because the government agencies were paying close attention to leading practices in corporate America (e.g., Galinsky, 1990). To lead the way, the civil service introduced flexi-time and telecommuting in 2000 (MITA, 2000). Concerns about slow adoption of FWAs in the private sector might have prompted the TriCom to issue a set of guidelines in 2003 to 'serve as a roadmap for employers who are keen to implement and benefit from work–life strategy' (MCDS, 2003, p. 4).

The following year, the TriCom urged organizations to review their performance management system so that employees on FWAs are not unfairly treated; it also advocated that staff performance should be measured 'by outcomes and deliverables rather than by hours checked and physical presence' (MOM, 2004, p. 2). MOM, which has greater influence over employers, replaced MCDS as the lead agency in the TriCom. Possibly acknowledging that exhortation alone might not significantly boost FWA adoption, MOM established a Work–Life Works! (WoW!) fund to help companies kickstart work–life initiatives, particularly FWAs.⁶

A MOM-commissioned study reported that Singaporean firms that offered part-time work and shorter work week, as well as those with a higher proportion of employees enjoying more generous annual leave entitlements, had lower voluntary employee turnover; however, only a very small proportion of the private firms (less than 0.5 percent) in Singapore offered flexi-time or telecommuting (Ang et al., 2005). To get senior executives on board, the Employer Alliance (EA), an association comprising business leaders who seek to encourage greater work–life practices across industries, was formed in October 2005. The following year, the SFFF Award was rebranded as the Work–Life Excellence Award (WLEA), which 'emphasizes the benefits of integrating work–life with business strategy so that companies can optimize their productivity through better performing workers motivated by effective work–life initiatives' (MICA, 2006, p. 1).⁷ The TriCom subsequently shared the best practices of WLEA winners in a handbook designed to guide human resources practitioners on how to develop effective work–life strategies in organizations (TriCom, 2010).

In April 2013, the WoW! Fund was revamped as the Work–Life Grant and funding criteria were revised to reward companies that can sustain higher utilization levels of FWAs over at least three years. In November 2014, two new award categories were introduced in the WLEA to recognize organizations that have consistently demonstrated outstanding

success in work–life strategies, and supervisors who support work–life practices and adoption. Concurrently, the TriCom released an advisory that included practical information for employees and supervisors on broaching the subject of FWAs and managing FWA requests (TriCom, 2014).

CULTURE-LADEN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: SOUTH KOREA

Context

Promoting WLB has become one of the main political agendas proposed by the Korean government and the topic of active societal discussions. The surge of attention to the issue has been mainly driven by concerns for sustainable economic growth (e.g., the alarming birth rate, low female workforce participation rate). Enhancing gender equality has also been a critical issue in the discourse of work–life policies in South Korea (e.g., Korean Women’s Development Institute [KWDI], 2011), perhaps reflecting the reality of South Korea as one of least gender egalitarian societies in the world (Emrich et al., 2004). Korean organizational culture tends to conceptualize the ‘ideal worker’ as a male worker with a stay-at-home spouse (Won, 2005), while prevailing traditional gender role ideology entrenches women’s exclusive responsibility to provide familial care (Won and Pascall, 2004).

Development of Work–Life Intervention

Table 14.1 shows the major government policies and legislation for WLB in South Korea in chronological order. Although the policy movement began in the 1990s, earlier discussion of WLB has been narrow in scope and benefits offered were limited. Given that prevailing organizational culture and social structure are based on the male-breadwinner model, it is not surprising that the focus of these earlier interventions were on employed women (e.g., maternity protection).

The work–life interventions in Korea continued to expand in the 2000s. An important aspect of the policy changes in the 2000s was that governmental work–life intervention targeted male as well as female employees. With the recognition that supporting employed women only partially addresses the problem and that WLB cannot be achieved without male participation in unpaid work at home, the target of government policies was broadened. For instance, the amendment of the Equal Employment

Table 14.1 Selective policies relevant for work–life balance in South Korea

Year	Policy	Key Developments
1987	The Equal Employment Opportunity Act	Provides equal employment opportunities and treatment for men and women States the role of government and society to protect maternity
2001	Labor Standard Act The Equal Employment Opportunity Act The Employment Insurance Act	Maternity leave (paid) extended from 60 to 90 days Employed men are eligible to take childcare leave
2005	Labor Standard Act The Equal Employment Opportunity Act Framework Act on Healthy Families	Legal work hours per week shortened from 44 to 40 hours Parental leave (up to one year, with partial salary) available for employees who have care responsibility for children under one year old Basic plan proposed to establish healthy families Support for work–family balance Promotion of family-friendly social atmosphere Expansion of maternity leave to cover miscarriage/stillbirth
2006	Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (Saeromaji Plan 2010) Framework Act on Women’s Development (Dynamic Women Korea 2010)	Monetary support for parental leave increased Plans proposed to increase the number of public childcare facilities and public after-school programs Plans proposed to support unemployed women to (re-) enter the workforce Career development support for women who left the workforce due to pregnancy, childbirth, and/or childcare Formation of basis for compatibility of work and family
2007	Equal Employment Opportunity and Support for Work–Family Reconciliation Act	The Equal Employment Act is revised to include work–family reconciliation Paternity leave (three days, unpaid) available for husbands whose wife gave birth Eligibility for parental leave (up to one year) expanded to employees who have care responsibility for children under three years old

Table 14.1 (continued)

Year	Policy	Key Developments
2008	The Act on the Promotion of Creation of Family-friendly Social Environment The Act on the Promotion of Economic Activities of Career-interrupted Women	Reduced work hours available for childcare (up to one year) available for employees with children under three years old The certification for family-friendly organizations and institutions Provides support for unemployed women due to pregnancy, childbirth, childcare, and/or other family-related reasons when they wish to return the workforce Career counseling, training, and work-family balance program at the Center for Women's (re-) Employment Support
2010	Equal Employment Opportunity and Support for Work-Family Reconciliation Act	Eligibility for parental leave (up to one year) expanded to employees who have care responsibility for children under six years old
2011	Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (Saeromaji Plan 2015) Framework Act on Women's Development (Dynamic Women Korea 2015)	Requirement of workplace on-site childcare facilities Monetary support for childbirth and childcare increased Adoption of flexible working arrangements encouraged
2012	Equal Employment Opportunity and Support for Work-Family Reconciliation Act	Paternity leave (up to five days, three paid days) available for husbands whose wife gave birth Family care leave (up to 90 days) available for employees who have care responsibilities for family members (e.g., parents, spouse, children, or parents-in-law)
2014	Equal Employment Opportunity and Support for Work-Family Reconciliation Act	Eligibility for parental leave (up to one year) expanded to employees who have care responsibility for children under eight years old

Opportunity Act (2001) stated that employed men are eligible to take childcare leave.

More recently, WLB has been at the forefront of government policies. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act has been amended to the Equal Employment Opportunity and Support for Work–Family Reconciliation Act (2007), which enacted statutory paternity leave and reduction of working hours for childcare. Since 2010, the government has adopted FWAs in the public sector and has encouraged corporate organizations to do likewise. These policy changes to promote WLB appear to be based on the awareness that responsibilities and demands for caregiving need to be shared at the societal and governmental levels; with more and more people becoming responsible for caregiving of children and of elderly parents, profound changes in the society as a whole are needed, rather than simple provisions of family-friendly programs and benefits (KWDI, 2007). Along this line, recent work–life interventions are designed to aid employees and families with more diverse needs (e.g., family care leave for employees who care for their elderly parents).

In sum, work–life policies in Korea have been changing both quantitatively and qualitatively. In terms of quantity, a continuous growth in terms of the available benefits (e.g., the length of maternity/paternity leave, the number of public childcare facilities) suggests that the Korean government acknowledges the importance of WLB for people’s well-being as well as sustainable national development. In terms of quality, the target and breadth of various governmental interventions for WLB have expanded, reflecting policy-makers’ realization that promoting WLB goes beyond protecting maternity or being family-friendly.

Major Work–Life Interventions

Multiple ministries are involved in work–life policies in Korea. These ministries work through different platforms to facilitate WLB (Table 14.2). We categorize and discuss the current governmental interventions on WLB along three major elements, namely policies concerning work conditions, policies targeting family care responsibilities, and policies directed to build organizational capacity.

Work conditions

The Labor Standards Act amended in 2003 sets a 40-hour work week, eight-hour work day as the maximum, with at least one paid rest day per week (Korea Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2014). However, organizational culture that rewards long work hours has challenged the policy. A majority of Korean employees reported that they experience

Table 14.2 *Work–life policies and involved governmental ministries in South Korea*

Ministries	Policy Objectives
MOGEF, MOEL	To create equal work environment for men and women To help employees easily make leave arrangements and reinstatement To provide career training and opportunities for women whose careers are interrupted due to pregnancy, childbirth, and care responsibilities To prevent long work hours in organizations
MOGEF, MOHW, MOE	To ease the burden of childcare Support for workplace on-site childcare facilities Support for after-school programs
MOEL	To encourage the adoption of flexible work arrangements in the public and private sectors
MOGEF	To conduct gender impact analysis in order to understand whether men and women are affected differently by the policies, to establish gender-sensitive policies, and to reduce gender discrimination To foster family-friendly work environments Certification of family-friendly organizations Work–life seminar and consulting service for organizations

Note: MOGEF = the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family; MOEL = the Ministry of Employment and Labor; MOHW = the Ministry of Health and Welfare; MOE = the Ministry of Education.

work–family imbalance (85 percent) and that a long work day is the chief obstacle for WLB (KWDI, 2011). In terms of leave entitlement, The Labor Standards Act mandates that employers should provide paid work leave for employees so that they recover from work and maintain their health. Employees whose tenure is longer than one year are eligible for 15 days of annual leave. The length of annual leave increases by one day per two years of service.⁸

Family care responsibilities

Policies targeted to help employees with family care responsibilities include leave arrangements (maternity leave, paternity leave, leave or reduced work week for childcare, and leave for caring for family members)

and childcare support (workplace/public childcare facilities and childcare subsidy). Maternity leave provides 90 consecutive days of paid leave for pregnant women, 45 days of which should be used after childbirth.⁹ Paternity leave provides up to five days leave (three paid days) for men whose spouse gave birth. Childcare leave¹⁰ allows employees who have a child younger than eight years old to take up to one year of leave. During the leave, employees receive partial salary (typically 40 percent of income, capped at KRW1 000 000).¹¹ Instead of the childcare leave, employees who have children under eight years old may work part-time (15–30 hours per week) for up to one year. In this case, salary is determined based on the hours worked. Finally, employees are eligible to take up to 90 days of unpaid leave per year to care for family members.

Major intervention for childcare support has been centered on the provision of quality childcare. Difficulty raising children (e.g., arranging childcare, high education costs) has been consistently ranked top among many factors that hamper WLB in Korea (KWDI, 2011). The government mandates larger organizations (300+ employees) to have on-site childcare facilities or to partner with local childcare facilities (Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2014). Employees whose organization does not provide on-site childcare facilities are eligible to receive a childcare subsidy from both the organization and government. To encourage organizations to provide on-site childcare facilities, the government not only provides financial support for organizations but has also relaxed certain (non-safety related) building codes for corporate childcare facilities. The government currently runs and plans to increase public childcare facilities that give dual-earner couples priority in registering their children.

Organizational development

Several governmental interventions have been targeted to challenge existing procedures and culture in organizations. For example, a campaign called ‘Wednesday is Family Day’ encourages an organizational culture that allows employees to leave work on time and spend more time with family, at least once a week (Korea Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2014). Next, the government measures and publicizes the ‘Family-Friendliness Index (FFI)’ of organizations in order to raise awareness of family-friendly management and to inform organizations of their current level of family-friendliness. The FFI is assessed using a checklist on the availability and utilization of various family-friendly organizational programs (e.g., FWAs, on-site childcare facilities, Employee Assistance Program, and leave arrangements). Work–life seminars and consulting services are available to organizations that want to adopt family-friendly policies. Moreover, the government certifies family-friendly businesses

and institutions based on the FFI. This governmental certification is expected to benefit organizations via improved public image and better business opportunities (e.g., bonus point in the selection process of government contractors). Research has shown that the number of companies involved in the FFI has increased, and more importantly, the overall score on the FFI has increased (Jeong et al., 2014).

Recently, FWAs have been frequently discussed as a means to provide more autonomy for employees to help them better manage their work responsibilities and personal demands (Korea Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2011). Since 2010, the government has intensified efforts to encourage wider adoption of FWAs. Part-time positions were introduced in selected public sector organizations, and empirical research has been conducted to better understand the motivation for and difficulties associated with implementing part-time positions (e.g., Yang, 2011). Given that FWAs are a relatively recent focus of governmental intervention, more legislative actions and supports are expected in the years to come.

Barriers to Work–Life Interventions

Several cultural aspects of South Korea have influenced the effectiveness of the work–life interventions; evidence suggests that culture has been more of a hindrance than a facilitator. Frequent social meetings with co-workers or supervisors after work are a critical part of one’s career (Bae and Chung, 1997) in collectivistic South Korea where close relationships among in-group members are valued (Hofstede, 2001). Such evening social gatherings are further justified by organizational assumption that employees have a (stay-home) spouse who is the primary caregiver (i.e., male full-time sole breadwinner model). Despite government efforts to encourage employees to spend more time with their families or on their personal pursuits, the norm dictating the ‘extended work day for committed employees’ makes it challenging to do so. Another aspect of collectivistic culture is that the goal of collectives has priority over personal goals; employees in collectivistic cultures tend to be less insistent on pursuing personal gains that undermine the goal of the work group and despise those who seek personal gains (Bochner, 1994). In support of this notion, potential inconvenience for co-workers and supervisors has been reported as a major obstacle in using the available programs (e.g., Yang, 2011). Finally, organizational culture that idealizes employees who log long work hours and who do not allow family matters to spillover to work also discourages utilization of work–life programs. Actual and anticipated negative consequences associated with work–life policy usage (e.g., demotion) have been reported as a major hindrance (Kim and Lee, 2009; Kwon and

Kwon, 2013). In sum, it appears that government interventions have yet to overcome cultural obstacles to promote WLB.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have discussed developments and major aspects of governmental interventions for WLB in Singapore and South Korea. Evidence suggests that Singaporean's perception of WLB has remained stable, at a moderate level, from 2006 to 2012 (MSF, 2012). However, Singapore's TFR has continued to fall from 1.60 in 2000 to 1.29 in 2012, and touched the historic low of 1.15 in 2010 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2013). Two-thirds of Korean employees in a dual-earner couple perceive work–family imbalance (KWDI, 2011) and Korea's TFR remains at a record low, although the downward trend has halted since 2006 (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2014).

Because many governmental work–life interventions are recently designed and implemented, it might be premature to evaluate their effectiveness. Also, it can be difficult to infer effectiveness without a valid benchmark. For instance, the work–life outcomes in both countries could be worse if the respective governments had not taken action. For this reason, we will instead attempt to evaluate the *process* of intervention, and highlight critical elements in governmental interventions.

Good Practices

The government can potentially play many roles in promoting WLB. First of all, through legislation and effective enforcement, governments can enable employees to assert their right to provide care to dependents. Both Singapore and South Korea have statutory leave entitlements for employees with care responsibilities, although they vary in type, length, payment, and flexibility. The governments also help defray the wage costs of certain leave schemes, which decreases the likelihood of employer non-compliance.

Other options should be considered before legislation because perception of over-regulation of the labor market may stifle business investments. For non-legislative approaches to work, however, the government needs to gain buy-in from employers (Evans, 2002). In the context of work–life intervention, the Singapore and Korean governments attempted to catalyze changes in organizational human resources practices through several means. First, both governments provide learning resources at subsidized or no cost to employers (e.g., organize seminars for CEOs and human

resources practitioners, publicize best WLB practices in high performance organizations, set up a resource website, and/or accredit programs on personal work–life effectiveness). Second, they fund the implementation of work–life programs in organizations, either through direct provision of consulting services (South Korea) or through reimbursing set-up costs (Singapore). Singapore’s Work–Life Grant also incentivizes sustainable work–life practices. Third, both governments instituted national awards to recognize employers that adopt good work–life practices. South Korean companies that are certified as ‘family-friendly’ even have a slight advantage in procuring government contracts. Fourth, by embracing work–life programs, both governments leverage their position as a major employer to influence human resources practices in the market. Fifth, both governments have been prepared to make policy adjustments (e.g., introduced paternity leave) to complement attitude shifts. Last but not least, the Singapore government also establishes alliances with partners in the community (employers and unions) to enable constructive dialogue and ensure national alignment in policy design and execution.

In addition to specific WLB strategies, governments can drive gradual cultural changes and create public endorsement for WLB via social engineering strategies. The Korean government has created strategic plans to enhance gender equality (e.g., gender impact analysis in the policy process) in the hope that an egalitarian gender role attitude will help enhance WLB in the long run. In Singapore, broadening the policy focus from encouraging family formation and procreation to facilitating WLB with the aim of benefiting all employers and employees would also ensure broader-based support for governmental intervention.

Challenges

Despite government interventions, several challenges have persisted. Cultural impediments have already been discussed earlier in the context of South Korea. While stigma associated with taking dependent care leave is less of an issue in Singapore, face-time is still a hindrance. One in four Singaporean employees expressed concerns about using FWAs, such as negative comments from supervisors or receiving unfavorable assignments (Yahya and Tan, 2014). Among SMEs, which employed 70 percent of the workforce, face-time was a major consideration in rewarding employees (Tan, 2012). There may also be other reasons for low FWA utilization in SMEs. Unsupportive supervisors and co-workers have been reported as barriers to FWA utilization (Lee, 2003). Notably, some studies (e.g., Moon and Kum, 2008) have blamed poorly designed programs that burden supervisors (e.g., maintain manning level) and co-workers

(e.g., cover additional work). Such difficulties are likely to be exacerbated in SMEs since they typically have fewer employees. As noted earlier, in addition to engaging top company executives, the TriCom in Singapore has started to reach out to managers and supervisors *within* organizations, through a new category in the WLEA award as well as an advisory body that attempts to address their concerns and needs directly.

A more fundamental issue may be FWA availability. In Singapore, although availability of flexible work hours and telecommuting has increased from 2006 to 2012 (MSF, 2012), only 20 percent of private sector employers intended to hire more people on FWAs. In South Korea, the adoption rates of flexible work hours and telecommuting were 7.3 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively (Kim and Joo, 2011). A recent study in Singapore showed that 55 percent of employers admitted their organization's performance in creating FWAs was average or poor (Randstad, 2014). The new Work–Life Grant has been designed to spur availability as well as sustain higher levels of utilization, through helping companies defray both set-up and running costs.

Financial barriers are an important issue. In South Korea, despite government subsidy, the financial burden originating from various work–life policies falls heavily onto organizations. The fact that the implementation and utilization of work–life intervention inevitably result in costs (e.g., supervisory costs, extra personnel and/or space needed) can be easily overlooked while the benefits of the intervention are touted (Evans, 2002). Financial consideration might also lead to underutilization of work–life benefits among employees who cannot afford to use work–life programs that provide insufficient monetary compensation.

Recommendations

Our analysis has identified a number of barriers in implementing national work–life policies. To tackle them effectively, the government needs to fully appreciate the concerns of various stakeholders, especially the SMEs. Supervisors and co-workers are also key stakeholders. Strategies to minimize hassles associated with the implementation of work–life benefits are sorely needed to boost utilization rates. In addition, continuous revision and expansion of the policies are needed to appeal to the wider population. For instance, although ‘work–family balance’ and ‘work–life balance’ are often used interchangeably, they differ fundamentally in the sense that work–life balance is more inclusive – it encourages individuals (with family or not) to have a balanced approach towards multiple life domains. In other words, policy-making should go beyond supporting employees' need to manage work and family demands and take into

account individuals' diverse needs. In fact, governmental intervention may need to extend beyond the provision of work–life benefits, to also address hindrances associated with national/organizational culture. For instance, in South Korea, a more egalitarian gender ideology needs to be established as the norm (e.g., dual-earner/dual-career society) because WLB would remain the holy grail without changing deep-seated practices of gendered division of labor. Recently, the Singapore government has committed to strengthening the social safety net (Lin, 2014) – a ‘rebalance’ of its previous position that growth would trickle down to all without major governmental intervention. This more nuanced view of growth may influence future governmental work–life intervention (e.g., a greater emphasis on building family or even social cohesion).

So far, much of the public discourse on WLB has focused on flexibility. There is little, if any, discussion on work itself. While FWAs may enable the individual to better manage work–life demands, they may also allow employers to sidestep the issue of long work hours, which have many adverse impacts on the individual, including (ironically) lower productivity (Burke, 2009). In addition to promoting WLB, policy-makers may consider incentivizing corporate adoption of evidence-based intervention in the areas of work design and job analysis (e.g., Wilson et al., 2012), employee selection (e.g., Farr and Tippins, 2010), and performance management (e.g., Pritchard, 2012), which will enable organizations to create smart jobs, help people gravitate toward work that fits their strengths, enhances job satisfaction, and boosts work quality. Since individual SMEs may not have the resources to rigorously implement these interventions, a government-funded model, similar to Singapore’s Work–Life Grant, can be considered.

Finally, further research effort is warranted to provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of work–life interventions in Asian contexts. Program evaluation research is crucial to revisions of current programs and design of better programs that are evidence-based. While a number of programs and policies have been implemented, little evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of the programs.

CONCLUSION

Asian societies have witnessed rapid changes in both the work and the family domains, which heightened incompatibility between work and family demands. Accordingly, governmental interventions have been developed and implemented in an attempt to aid employees to reconcile work and family responsibilities. In this chapter, we reviewed the

impetus and hindrances for governmental work–life interventions in the East Asian context with specific practice examples from Singapore and South Korea. We hope that this chapter would serve as an initial step in understanding national WLB policy in the Asian context and spur further research on the topic.

NOTES

- * The authors contributed equally to this work and are listed in alphabetical order.
1. We attempt to present the East Asian perspective – we are mindful that countries have varying visions regarding the role of government and whether it is appropriate for government to intervene in family life (Hein, 2005).
 2. Generally, only first- and some second-time flat buyers may be eligible to buy a flat directly from the HDB, with first-time buyers typically receiving higher subsidies; eligibility is mainly determined by family income.
 3. In the second quarter of 2014, a typical two-bedroom resale flat in a suburban location was valued above S\$300 000 (in June 2014, the exchange rate was approximately 1 USD to S\$1.25).
 4. A suite of financial incentives (e.g., tax breaks for mothers) accompanied the work–life measures discussed in this chapter. The comprehensive list of Singapore government marriage and procreation measures introduced over the years can be found at <http://www.heybaby.sg/summaryofmeasures.html> (last accessed 7 April 2015).
 5. In Singapore, pragmatic management of dual-career demands within the family might have led to more egalitarian practices (Quek and Knudson-Martin, 2008). The majority of Singaporeans indicated that both partners should share equal responsibilities in financial contribution, housework, and childcare (Institute of Policy Studies, 2013).
 6. By April 2007, S\$10 million were disbursed.
 7. Note the subtle shift in value proposition from enhancing the productivity, morale and commitment of staff (SFFF) to optimizing productivity of firms (WLEA).
 8. The statutory paid annual leave is capped at 25 days.
 9. Government provides the entire salary for employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and one-third of salary for employees in larger organizations, capped at KRW4050 000 per month.
 10. Childcare leave is going to be renamed in 2015 to ‘parental childcare leave’ to emphasize shared responsibility for childcare between men and women.
 11. In August 2014, the exchange rate was approximately 1 USD to 1015 KRW.

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