

# Work-life balance practices and organizational commitment of academics at a Chilean University

## Prácticas de conciliación laboral y el compromiso organizacional de los académicos

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### RESUMEN

Esta investigación aborda uno de los desafíos centrales de la gestión de recursos humanos moderna: las prácticas que permiten conciliar trabajo y familia y su relación con el compromiso organizacional hacia la institución. Se estudia la relación entre la importancia atribuida a las medidas de conciliación trabajo-familia y el constructo multidimensional de compromiso organizacional, a través de una investigación de tipo descriptiva, correlacional, de corte transversal. La muestra son 82 académicos de una universidad chilena. Se realiza el estudio aplicando un cuestionario para medir la valoración de las medidas de conciliación laboral y el compromiso del trabajador a través del instrumento de Meyer y Allen (1991). Los resultados muestran que existe una correlación positiva y significativa del compromiso afectivo y normativo con las medidas de "integración familiar". El compromiso de continuidad en tanto se relaciona positiva y significativamente con las medidas de "apoyo económico" y con las medidas "facilidades para cumplir con responsabilidades familiares" que ofrece la institución. Los resultados han mostrado que la alta valoración de las medidas está relacionada positivamente con el compromiso. Por lo tanto, es relevante la formulación, implementación y comunicación de políticas empresariales de conciliación laboral, por los efectos concretos en el compromiso organizacional y el diseño de programas de conciliación trabajo-familia que consideren las distintas las necesidades de los trabajadores y el tipo de compromiso que estimulan.

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## ABSTRACT

Human resource policies and practices that improve work conditions, as well as employee adaptation to modern life demands affect the institution's valuation within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework. Among these measures, work-family conciliation is an important factor. The aim of this study is to address one of the central CSR challenges in Human Resources Management (HRM): practices that allow work-family conciliation and their relationship with organizational commitment to the workplace. A descriptive, correlational, cross-sectional study was conducted to determine the relationship between the importance attributed to work-family conciliation measures and the multidimensional construct of organizational commitment. A questionnaire was applied to 82 faculty professors from different Chilean universities in order to assess labor conciliation measures and worker commitment using Meyer & Allen methods (1991). The results showed that there is a positive and significant correlation between affective and normative commitment and measures for "family integration". Continuance commitment is positively and significantly related to "economic support" measures and "flexible hours arrangement to fulfill family responsibilities" offered by the institution. The results showed that a high valuation of these measures is positively related to commitment. Therefore, the formulation, implementation and communication of business labor conciliation policies is crucial since they produce concrete effects on organizational commitment. Future studies should focus on establishing which work-family conciliation measures most accurately represent an organizational commitment in order to effectively design specific programs that best respond to the workers' needs.

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## INTRODUCTION

Good work practices are one of the key dimensions of Human Resources Management (HRM), particularly those that make work-family life conciliation possible.

When discretionary human resources measures are implemented by an organization, they are done with the intention to create direct or indirect positive impact on the working environment, a greater commitment of workers to the institution, increases in productivity, decreases in turnover, and increases in retention of competent workers.

The academic contributions in HRM have expanded, demonstrating a wide range of benefits reflected in higher levels of commitment, motivation and performance by employees (Barrena, López & Romero, 2017). Human resource policies encompass strategies for improving working conditions and adapting them to the demands of modern life and the expectations of workers. Therefore, it is relevant to consider whether the measures that the organizations implement in the matter of labor conciliation have an impact on commitment and in what way.

The objectives of the study are to determine the level of importance that the academics of one Campus of University of Concepcion-Chile, attribute to the

measures of work-family conciliation implemented by the institution in order to assess the level of organizational commitment of workers and to establish the relationship between the importance attributed to the measures of work-family conciliation and the level of organizational commitment of the academics. The survey research design was used; simple sampling technique was adopted using the Pearson's  $r$  correlation test.

The results indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between work-life balance and organizational commitment.

The level of importance that academics give to all work-family conciliation measures is high, in all dimensions studied. The group "Permissions for family responsibilities" should receive special consideration, as it was the most important of the four groups studied, instead, Family Integration practices was the least important for the academics. The organizational commitment of the academics to their institution showed a strong average, but clearly this result was a product of the affective component.

Regarding the relation between the importance attributed to work-family conciliation practices and the organizational commitment level of the three dimensions, the Affective Commitment correlates

positively and significantly with the Family Integration practices. Continuance Commitment is correlated with the economic support measures and with the facilities to fulfill family responsibilities. Finally, the Normative Commitment correlates positively and significantly to Family integration practices.

Considering the importance of formulating public and business policies with an structural impact, generating conditions to reconcile private life with working life (Ollier-Malaterre, 2017), the study contributes to the development of strategic human resources policies that strengthen the organizational commitment of its employees through work-family conciliation.

According to the International Standard ISO 26000, socially responsible work practices are an essential element in human development as they improve people's standard of living. It is also essential for social justice, stability and peace. This standard urges organizations to ask whether they "ensure decent working conditions in terms of wages, hours of work, weekly rest, holidays, health and safety, maternity protection and reconciliation of work and family life."

The challenge of integrating work, family and personal life is a growing concern for the vast majority of working people today. In the last decades, two sociodemographic phenomena have had major effects in this arena: the mass entry of women into the labor market and changes in family dynamics (ENCLA, 2011). Today in Chile, 47.8% of working-age women have a paid work, a figure that increases to six out of ten women (63.5%) when the age bracket is considered to be between 20 and 49 years old, corresponding to the segment of workers in the maternity stage.

Work-family conciliation generates the conditions that enable both men and women to fulfill different roles. Thus, organizations that seek to attract and maintain good employees and increase competitiveness should consider the integral well-being of the individual in their management models. Conciliation directly impacts workers' attitudes and behaviors (acceptance of goals, values, and culture), improving productivity and reducing absenteeism and turnover (Betanzos-Díaz & Paz-Rodríguez, 2007).

There has also been a favorable shift in the supportive attitudes of supervisors and managers toward certain work-family reconciliation measures, specifically those related to schedule flexibility (Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes & James, 2017). One of the main

problems of organizations today is the so-called "double-presence", in which the worker fails to disconnect from his family concerns while working. Recent studies have shown that flexibility not only decreases the transfer of work-to-home stress and home-to-work stress (Hyland & Prottas, 2017), but it has also been found that reducing the number of hours worked has positive effects on the health of workers (Sánchez, 2017).

Organizational commitment, which is "the force with which individuals identify with and feel linked to a particular organization" (Ayensa & Menorca 2007), is related to organizational actions aimed at giving recognition, rewards and incentives, and increasing participation of workers (ENCLA, 2011). It is therefore important to ask whether work-family reconciliation practices implemented by the organization also influence commitment.

In the present study, organizational commitment was considered as a multidimensional construct (Meyer & Allen, 1991) composed of: (1) affective commitment: the emotional attachment, identification and involvement of employees with the organization- employees stay because they want to- (2) continuance commitment: the awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization- employees stay because they need to, and finally (3) normative commitment: the feeling of obligation to continue working in the organization.

Having committed workers can potentially improve work performance and ensure permanence, loyalty and identification of human resources, which can significantly reduce levels of unemployment, turnover, absenteeism, dissatisfaction and demotivation (Claire-Rocha, Pelaez & Raul, 2004). Committed workers allow the organization to focus on performance rather than on the variety of attitudes that may lead to conflict and confrontation. Therefore, organizations concerned with generating and maintaining commitment in their employees will find that their employees are willing to change, be flexible, be open and are focused on quality and results.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The design of this study was descriptive and inferential, correlational, and cross-sectional. Its aim was to address the importance attributed by academics of one of the campuses of a Chilean

university to the conciliation measures offered by the institution to its workers, and the existence or lack thereof of a relationship with the organizational commitment level by the group under study.

The instrument used was a questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first was focused on delimiting the respondent's socio-demographic profile. Having reviewed several CSR Manuals, and specifically the "Internal Public" dimension (Fundación Prohumana, 2006; ADEC, 2009; ISO 26000, 2010; Servicio Civil de Chile 2015; Proyecto DESUR; ENCLA 2014, 2015; Instituto Ethos 2007; Vives, A. 2014), the second part discussed the knowledge level and degree of importance for the academic in the implementation of a group of work-family conciliation measures, which

have the following nomenclature: Labor flexibility measures (IMP\_FLEX); Economic support measures (IMP\_ECO); Permissions for family responsibilities (IMP\_RESP); and Family Integration Practices (IMP\_INTEG).

Finally, in the third part of the instrument, the Meyer & Allen (1991) questionnaire of 18 items was applied, which measured organizational commitment considering that the construct is composed of three factors: affective, continuance and normative. The instrument reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha index, which presented a good index of internal consistency. The results shown in Table 1 indicate that the instrument was reliable.

**Table 1.** Reliability ratings by the instrument used.

	Cronbach's alpha
Continuance Commitment	0.739
Normative Commitment	0.873
Organizational Commitment	0.888

Source: own elaboration.

A Likert-type measurement scale was used from one to five for both the importance of work-family conciliation measures and organizational commitment. This study was performed with data from 82 surveys applied to academics of one of the three campuses of University of Concepción and who, at the time of applying the survey, will work in one of its three Faculties and School: Agricultural Engineering, Veterinary Sciences, Agronomy and Administration and Business. The four units reached a total of 173 academics. The sample for this study was non-probabilistic, of voluntary subjects, given that the total number of academics from Campus Chillán was invited to collaborate in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the information obtained by the instrument, it was possible to establish and compare the importance attributed to the work-family conciliation practices implemented by the institution and the organizational commitment level by the academics. A scale from 1 to 100 was used which was divided into three levels (Table 2). In this way, the scores obtained both for the measures evaluation and for Organizational Commitment level in each of its three dimensions can be analyzed according to the ranges of the scale.

**Table 2.** Intensity scale.

Range	Category
0 to 33	Weak
34 to 66	Moderate
67 to 100	Strong

Source: Barraza (2008).

As shown in Table 3, the importance level that academics give to all work-family conciliation measures is high, obtaining an indicator higher than 75 out of 100 in all dimensions studied. The group

"Permissions for family responsibilities" should receive special consideration, as it was the most important of the four groups studied, being valued with an average indicator of 93.1.

**Table 3.** Importance attributed to conciliation measures.

Work-family conciliation measure	Indicator
Labor flexibility measures	88
Economic support measures	89.8
Permissions for family responsibilities	93.1
Family integration practices	78.3

Source: own elaboration.

The second group in valuation importance was the Economic support measures (IMP\_ECO), then the Labor flexibility measures (IMP\_FLEX) and finally Family integration practices (IMP\_INTEG), which was the least important for academics.

The organizational commitment of the academics to their institution is shown in Table 4. Using the same scale as in Table 2, a strong average in organizational

commitment was observed with an indicator of 70.5 out of 100. However, if each commitment that composes this general average is observed in detail, it can be verified that the organizational commitment strength is a product of the affective component, which has the highest commitment indicator (85.1), while continuance and normative commitments are moderate.

**Table 4.** Organizational commitment by academics.

Organizational Commitment	Indicator
Affective Commitment	85.1
Continuance Commitment	62.6
Normative Commitment	63.8

Source: own elaboration.

Table 5 presents each item of the Meyer & Allen questionnaire (1991) and the respective indicator obtained. The general average showed that

commitment was high, but clearly this result was a product of the affective component.

**Table 5.** Organizational Commitment by dimension.

Affective commitment	Indicator
CAF1. I would be happy to continue the rest of my working life working at the University.	88.1
CAF2. I really feel that any University's problem is also my problem.	80
CAF3. I feel that I have a strong sense of identification with the University.	88.6
CAF4. I really feel emotionally attached to the University.	85.3
CAF5. The University makes me feel at home.	78.2
CAF6. I'm really happy to work at the University.	90.4
<b>Average</b>	<b>85.1</b>
Continuance Commitment	
CCO7. If at the end of the year I leave the University, there would be many labor advantages that I would lose.	80.3
CCO8. One of the disadvantages of leaving the University is that there is little chance of finding another better institution.	65.6
CCO9. Even if I wanted to, it would be very difficult for me to leave the University for all the benefits I would lose.	64.6
CCO10. If I continue in the University, it is because in another place I would not have the same advantages and benefits that I receive here.	60
CCO11. I think there are few options for a better workplace to consider leaving the University.	66.1
CCO12. Currently, I remain in the University mainly by necessity.	39.2
<b>Average</b>	<b>62.6</b>
Normative Commitment	
CNO13. I think it is my duty to continue working at the University.	63.8
CNO14. I feel that I owe a lot to the University.	72.2
CNO15. I think I could not leave the University because I feel that I have an obligation with the people here.	61.3
CNO16. The University really deserves my loyalty.	78.7
CNO17. I would feel guilty if I left University at the end of the year.	53.7
CNO18. I think it would not be good to leave the University even though I benefit from the change.	53.2
<b>Average</b>	<b>63.8</b>
<b>General average</b>	<b>70.5</b>

Source: own elaboration.

In the "calculated" dimension, the result of 80.3 of the item "If at the end of the year I decide to leave the University, there would be many labor advantages that I would lose" stands out. Likewise, in the case of normative commitment, all the affirmations were valued in a moderate range, with the exception of item CNO14 "I feel that I owe a lot to the University" and CNO16 "The University really deserves my loyalty", that were qualified with a "strong" intensity.

Finally, in order to examine the third objective of this study regarding the existence or lack thereof of a positive relation between the importance

attributed to work-family conciliation practices and the organizational commitment level of the three dimensions of academics, the Pearson's *r* correlation test was performed. The SPSS software (18.0) was used.

Correlations between the different dimensions of the organizational commitment construct and the four items of work-family conciliation practices under study were obtained. As presented in Table 6, Affective Commitment correlates positively and significantly with the Family Integration practices ( $r=0.299, p=0.007$ ).

**Table 6:** Correlations matrix of the importance of conciliation measures and organizational commitment.

		IMP_FLEX	IMP_ECO	IMP_RESP	IMP_INTEG
Affective Commitment	Pearson's correlation	-0.135	0.195	0.049	<b>0.299**</b>
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.233	0.083	0.667	<b>0.007</b>
	N	80	80	80	80
Continuance Commitment	Pearson's correlation	-0.059	<b>0.227*</b>	<b>0.264*</b>	0.132
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.604	<b>0.043</b>	<b>0.018</b>	0.242
	N	80	80	80	80
Normative Commitment	Pearson's correlation	-0.003	0.189	0.154	<b>0.435**</b>
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.977	0.094	0.173	<b>0</b>
	N	80	80	80	80

Source: own elaboration. With \*\*: correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral); and \*: the correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral)

Continuance Commitment is correlated with the economic support measures ( $r=0.227$ ,  $p=0.04$ ) and with the facilities to fulfill family responsibilities ( $r=0.264$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). Finally, the Normative Commitment correlates positively and significantly to Family integration practices ( $r=0.435$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

The subject regarding the ways in which organizational variables generate higher levels of organizational commitment in workers has been studied extensively, including work climate, transformative leadership, organizational structure, organizational size, quality management systems, and organizational cultures based on ethical values (Hunt, Wood & Chonko, 1989, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). According to the results, another variable that has correlated significantly and positively with commitment is perceived organizational support. Workers who perceive that they are supported by their organization feel an intention and obligation to correspond, reflected in the desire to remain an active member and to become involved in organizational goals (Allen, 2001).

In recent years, the integration of socially responsible behavior has become a strategic priority for companies. According to Mory, Wirtz, & Göttel (2016), aspects of CSR that directly affect workers have a strong effect on affective commitment

and a comparatively low effect on the normative commitment of the organization.

Work-family balance has a high effect on the prediction of work attitudes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and the intention of rotation (Wayne, Butts, Casper & Allen, 2017). Likewise, the perception of an organizational culture that supports work-family reconciliation is positively related to affective commitment and negatively related to work-family conflict and workers' intention to leave their organization (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999).

Jiménez and Moyano (2008) analyzed the culture of work-family reconciliation in a company in the banking sector in relation to the workers' labor commitment. They observed a strong and significant relationship between the two constructs. It is specifically noted that the greater the managerial support received by workers, the greater their commitment to the company, particularly normative and affective commitment.

The present study analyzed how the degree of importance attributed by academics to the four dimensions of work conciliation impacts their commitment to the organization. The relationship between the valuations of conciliation measures is high in all cases, which makes it possible to determine if the efforts made in this case

by the university are having any concrete effect on the workers' perception of the institution. The results have shown that the high valuation of the measures is positively related to commitment, which implies workers' recognition of them.

Each measure has been classified as important, with the most valued being the "facilities to fulfill family responsibilities", and ultimately the practices of "family integration". The organizational commitment of the academics was registered, on average, as "strong", a product of high affective commitment, since the other components- continuity and normative- were registered in a moderate range.

Finally, this research shows a positive relationship between the importance of some conciliation measures offered by the institution and the organizational commitment of the academics. Affective commitment, which manifested as the highest of the three types of organizational commitment in this study, is positively correlated with Family Integration practices, but not with the labor flexibility that, although was considered important, did not have a strong relationship to organizational commitment, contrary to the results of Malone & Issa (2013). Therefore, conciliation measures that support the worker in making more time for family can influence the emotional identification of the worker with the institution. Examples of practices that are commonly classified in the Family Integration category are holiday celebrations and recreational activities that include the employees' families.

It is worth reviewing the dimension of continuance commitment that is positively correlated to the measures of "economic support" and to the facilities that "fulfill family responsibilities." The institution must consider that the workers do not perceive great costs associated with leaving it, since the continuance commitment with the institution registers as moderate. However, this has been correlated positively with the measures of the "economic support" provided by the institution and with the facilities to fulfill family responsibilities. Therefore, these measures could be managed and communicated in another way and disseminated on a priority basis by the institution.

The measures that institutions can implement in these areas are many, including: maternity and paternity policies, marriage, and various types of permissions and facilities, from visits to the doctor, children's school activities, and even sabbaticals.

## CONCLUSION

The results regarding the level of organizational commitment of the academics and their relationship to the importance attributed to the measures of labor conciliation that the University implements appear to be coherent with the policies of labor conciliation implemented by the institution. The importance is evident in the large number of initiatives in the university's field (more than 70), such as facilities to organize working time, permission to fulfill family responsibilities, services for the care of dependents and various other measures of support. In fact, the institution, for more than 15 years, has been among the main organizations considered as "best places to work for mothers and fathers" in Chile. Since this is recognized by its workers, it has led to high levels of organizational commitment.

For any organization, it is an economic effort to implement work-family reconciliation measures. Therefore, it is desirable that these have some positive effect on the worker's perception of the organization, and eventually on worker behavior.

Implementing conciliation measures valued by workers, maintaining a prestigious business ranking and achieving high levels of organizational commitment should be considered company strengths, since they are massive competitive advantages. However, in light of the results, it is necessary to strategically manage the communication of the conciliation policies to the workers so that these strategies have a direct and concrete impact not only on commitment, but also on improving the organizational environment and productivity growth.

Another factor that supports the idea of giving greater importance to the commitment of workers is the contingency of higher education. Based on market logic, the competitive conditions that institutions, such as the university where this study was performed, are very complex, so having strengths such as collaborators' loyalty and the maintenance of high quality standards in all areas is a critical element.

The support that the organization gives to its collaborators in matters of "quality of work life" must be known and valued by workers in the age of knowledge, as it is a key element for talent retention. Future studies should delve into causality

of labor conciliation and workers' organizational commitment, so that organizations may effectively design programs of labor conciliation that promote greater identification of workers with their institution. Also, this research could be extended to exploring the relationship of labor conciliation practices with other constructs in the field of organizational behavior, such as job satisfaction, culture and work climate. Another challenge is to expand the number of observations and make a comparison within and between sectors, in order to determine whether there are variations in the impact of labor conciliation on organizational commitment. In addition, this study was conducted in the Ñuble Province, Chile; therefore, future studies could address causal relationships and investigate the relationship between constructs, extending the territorial scope.

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