

WORK AT HOME: CONFLICT AND COMPROMISE ON THE USE OF SPACE

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Abstract

This is a pilot study that examines the potential effects of home-based businesses (HBB) on space use, housing satisfaction, and housing adjustment or adaptation. Factors affecting the mix of HBB and family activities were measured by means of a mailed survey. From the 40 interviewed, 29 returned the survey; a response rate of 73 percent. All respondents were women from nonmetropolitan areas. The businesses were apparel, crafts, and home-furnishings related. Results indicate that family and business activities overlap in the home even when there is a separate space designated for business. This mixing of family and business activities is a source of household conflict and dissatisfaction. Households with a specific plan for sharing space between the business and family are less likely to have conflicts than those using an "on-demand" system. A theoretical model based on family housing-adjustment theory (Morris and Winter, 1978) suggests that HBBs conflict with the norm: separation of work and family. This conflict requires the adaptation or adjustment of both the house and the use of household space. These findings support the use of housing-adjustment theory as an appropriate model for the study of home-based businesses.

Introduction

Home-based businesses have gained in popularity as alternative sources of income. Estimates vary as to the number of people who work at home. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Horvath, 1986), 17.3 million persons worked at home for pay in nonfarm occupations during 1985. Over eight million worked at least eight hours per week in their HBB. In 1985, Stickney estimated that over 10 million Americans worked at home. This represented a 50 percent increase from his 1975 estimate.

Despite the increase in Americans working at home and future opportunities for HBBs, only limited research has been conducted regarding this segment of the workforce (Beach, 1985; Christensen, 1988; Heck, 1987). Roles associated with external employment have been regarded as separate from those of home and family. This is true both in the functioning of society and as the topic for research (Beach, 1985). The separation of work and home has been strongly held as a norm that reflects and is influenced by traditional gender roles (Becker, 1981; Beach, 1985).

The growth of HBBs today has resulted in an increased interaction between work and family. The opportunity to integrate work and family is considered, in fact, a major advantage of the HBB (Christensen, 1988; Heck, 1987). However, the realities of working at home can include added stress. In particular, stress that stems from the difficulty in separating work and family roles and in conducting a business in a space designed exclusively for residential use (Christensen, 1988; Heck, 1987).

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Background

A home-based business can be seen as a combination or blending of the roles of work and family. For women this is one of its great appeals (Christensen, 1988). Beach (1985) found that families with a HBB involving shared workspace also had shared gender roles or less-traditional divisions of household and family responsibilities.

Beach (1985) found that lack of spatial boundaries between work and family resulted in perception of positive consequences for family life. Beach also found distinct sex differences. Males were more likely to have distinct spaces in the home for a HBB; females were more likely to work in family spaces.

Although there is limited research on households with a HBB, space was a factor in each existing study. McLaughlin (1981) found that a separate, permanent space in the home for the HBB was a determinant of success. Gunatilleke (1983) reported that home owners with HBBs were more likely to improve the home and to add household space.

Working at home in a business thus implies reshaping family roles and the use of household space. Adjustment or adaptation must occur when 1) the line separating work and domestic roles blurs and 2) the workspace and family space are no longer separate.

Morris and Winter (1978) viewed families as evaluating their housing in terms of both cultural and family norms. When housing did not meet these norms, a normative deficit was said to exist. Normative deficits tend to result in dissatisfaction. Families dissatisfied with their housing exhibited a propensity to engage in adjustment or adaptation behavior. Morris and Winter concluded that propensity to engage in a behavior was generally a good predictor of the actual behavior and either adjustment or adaptation could occur.

Adjustment behaviors identified by Morris and Winter were moving to another residence or altering or adding to the existing residence. Adaptation behaviors identified were changes in family size or composition, change in family-housing norms, or organizational adaptation.

If separation of work and home is a strongly-held norm, the family-housing-adjustment theory suggests that this norm may influence the allocation and use of space in the home for HBB purposes. Normative expectations regarding family roles influence household behavior and the types of activities found within the HBB space.

Theoretical Model

Can Morris and Winter's (1978) theory of family-housing adjustment be applied to the study of space use and adaptation or adjustment in households with HBBs? If the premise is, "These families are challenging the norm of separation of work and family," then adaptation or adjustment must occur. If not, conflict and dissatisfaction will result.

Beach (1985) suggested that space is an important component of analysis in the study of HBBs and families. This is because the blending of home and workspace is a salient characteristic of a HBB. Hence, the norms of HBB families should reflect compromise over the use of space through housing adjustment and adaptation behavior. If not, conflict should ensue.

Methodology

This study was conducted in 1987-1988 and published as Journal Series Number 8817 of the Agricultural Research Division. Funding was provided by the University of Nebraska Foundation in Lincoln. The sample was taken from 353 persons who attended home-based business seminars from 1985-1987. The seminars were sponsored by the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service. Each attendee was contacted and asked to participate in a study of the viability of HBBs. Of the 175 persons who initially agreed to participate, 98 operated a HBB. Of these, 50 were in the apparel, crafts, and home-furnishings-related businesses targeted for the study. Forty females and one male from this group agreed to participate. Only the 40 female respondents were used.

Data were collected through in-depth, personal interviews and a questionnaire survey. The interview focused on the production, marketing, and promotional techniques of home-based business operators, plus the opportunities and constraints experienced. In addition to the main study, an examination of space use among these HBBs was conducted. The space use data were collected by means of a questionnaire left with each participant and returned by mail.

The instrument, based on one previously used by Parrott (1986), measured four aspects of family and home-based businesses. These were 1) space use and conditions; 2) satisfaction with family and home-based business space; 3) existing alterations; and 4) the propensity to alter space in the home for the purposes of the HBB. Completed surveys were returned by 29 of the 40 HBB owners, a 73 percent response rate.

Content Analysis

Interview and analysis stages of the project were conducted based on the content analysis technique outlined by Weber (1985). Inter-judge reliability for content categorization of the entire HBB study was 72.1. This was computed using Scott's formula for pi as recommended by Holsti (1969).

Findings

Sample Profile

Over 80 percent of the respondents were married, had children at home, and lived in nonmetropolitan areas. The majority had some formal education beyond high school. These women were in HBBs primarily for economic and family reasons. Slightly over two thirds had been in business less than 10 years. Business income was considered supplemental by family members. Nevertheless, the business represented a substantial commitment in time; over two thirds of the participants worked more than 20 hours per week in their HBB.

Existing Housing Conditions

Most home-based businesses involved more than one room in the home. Three fourths of the sample reported the use of three or more rooms. Most frequently used were the living room, extra bedroom, kitchen-dining areas, and unfinished spaces such as the basement, garage, or storage shed. These figures are shown in Table 1. About one third of the businesses had a separate area designated for the business alone.

Table 1. Most frequently used rooms (in percent) by type of business activity (N=29).

	Pro- duction	Storage	Book- keeping	Meet Clientele
Living room	--	--	--	42
Third bedroom	--	21	--	--
Kitchen	24	--	17	--
Dining room	--	--	17	--
Unfinished basement	--	26	--	--
Garage	24	32	--	--
Outside shed	--	21	--	--
Separate business area	40	42	32	21

Note: Only values greater than or equal to 17 percent are reported.

A variety of family activities take place in the space of the home used for the HBB. These are shown in Table 2. This overlap of activities suggests that even when there is a designated space for the HBB, family activities also take place in those areas. These findings are similar to those of Beach (1985) who reported a blurring of the boundaries between family and business space.

Table 2. Family activities in the business space (N=29).

Family activities	Percent reporting
Storage	55
Leisure	
Crafts & hobbies	50
Entertaining	45
Reading & relaxing	45
TV & music	42
Children's play	21
Family work	
Eating	34
Home mgmt & paper work	32
Food preparation	32
Laundry	26
Private	
Sleeping	13

These data indicate that the business did intrude into family space and that family activities intruded into the business space. For example, almost half the HBB owners met with clients in the family's space. The business storage overlapped into the areas of the home that were commonly used for family storage. Very little HBB activity, however, was found in private spaces such as sleeping areas.

Alteration of Existing Space

Of the 29 participants, two thirds made changes in their home to accommodate the HBB. Of those, about 40 percent changed or adapted existing space. Less than 20 percent converted unfinished space; fewer still added space. Over 10 percent added storage or utility space and less than five percent added outdoor space.

Almost half of the participants who made changes altered existing space rather than increasing the floor space in the home. Only 14 percent of the participants added storage space. Yet, the lack of storage space was the greatest source of dissatisfaction. Of the remaining third who had not changed the home to accommodate the business, about a fourth planned to make changes in the next three years.

Adaptation of Space

Organizational adaptation was evident in the different ways the overlap of family and HBB activities were resolved. The most common methods for allocation of space for activities were: an "on demand" system, 47 percent; designated space for family and HBB activities, 29 percent; and scheduled times for family and HBB activities, 5 percent.

Conflict Over Space

Almost half of the participants did not have a specific plan for scheduled or designated sharing of the space. This may account for the high percentage of conflicts arising over shared-use of space. Almost half of the sample reported one or more conflicts over the use of space in the home for both HBB and family activities. The most frequent conflict cited by the participants was the overlap of leisure and HBB work space.

Data collection on space use was taken at the personal interview and analyzed by means of a content analysis technique (Weber, 1985). One of the major themes that emerged from the personal interviews was conflict. A subtheme under the conflict category was the use of space within the home. This served to reinforce the questionnaire data. The issues from the interview data were: 1) the lack of division of space for the family and the HBB; 2) clutter from the HBB; 3) movement of HBB activities to accommodate family activities; 4) lack of adequate space; and 5) clients attitudes or respect of the space as a "home."

Data from the questionnaire indicated that conflicts over space also contributed to future plans for housing adaptation. Of those participants planning to make changes to accommodate the business, 83 percent reported one or more conflicts.

Two issues emerged from the interview and questionnaire data. First, there was considerable intrusion of the HBB into family areas and vice versa. Beach (1985) referred to this overlap as a lack of boundaries between family space and that used for business. Second, this overlap was cited as a source of conflict.

Participant's responses were grouped according to 1) whether they reported conflicts over space; and 2) whether the space used for both activities was shared through a specific plan or was available "on-demand." Differences occurred between households that used a specific plan for allocation of space and those that used an "on-demand" system.

The "on-demand" system appeared to result in more conflicts over space. This is shown in Table 3. Additionally, households reporting conflicts showed a greater integration of family and business activities when using the "on-demand" system of sharing. This confirmed expectations from Beach (1985). See Table 4.

Table 3. System of shared family and business space by conflicts reported.

Number of conflicts	N	Planned use *	"On demand" use
In percent			
0	11	78	27
1 or more	14	22	73

*Includes space that is scheduled by time or by designated allocation of space.

Table 4. Households reporting space conflicts from the mix of family and business activities in shared space.

Activity intruding on business space	N	Planned use*	"On demand" use
In percent			
Office work	10	10	90
Eating	10	20	80
Read and relax	14	14	79
Home mgmt. work	22	22	78
Entertaining	14	29	72
Children's play	6	14	71
TV and music	13	29	64
Storage	16	38	63
Crafts and hobbies	12	28	57

*Includes space that is scheduled by time or by designated allocation of space

Satisfaction

Business owners were generally satisfied with the space of their home for a HBB. As shown in Table 5, the overall mean for satisfaction with the design of the space to accommodate a HBB was 2. This finding, however, was lower than expected from previous studies of general housing satisfaction (Parrott, 1986; Niemeyer, 1982; Stoeckeler and Gage, 1978).

Past research has shown that persons can be satisfied with their housing in general, though dissatisfied with certain features (Brink and Johnson, 1979). Findings in this study support Brink and Johnson. The space used to carry out functions of production, bookkeeping, storage, and for meeting clientele registered different levels of satisfaction among the participants. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Satisfaction with the design of the home for business activities.

Activity	Score	Standard deviation
Satisfaction		
Overall	2.04	1.18
Storage	2.63	1.12
Meeting clients	2.13	0.99
Production	2.07	1.09
Bookkeeping	1.96	0.87

Note: 1= very satisfied; 5= very dissatisfied.

According to Morris and Winter (1978), studies have shown that normative deficits explain most of the relationship between housing, housing characteristics, and satisfaction. The pattern appears to hold true for socially defined deficits, deficits defined by the family, and for deficits that are a combination of the two. It seems likely that normative deficits relating to HBB and family activities influenced satisfaction levels for participants in this study.

Conclusions

Family and HBB activities overlap even when there is a separate space designated for the HBB. This overlap of activity space creates priority conflicts between family and HBB activities. In addition, this use pattern creates the perception of "clutter" and magnifies storage needs. Previous research suggests a relationship between normative space and quality deficits, alterations, and adaptations (Morris and Winter, 1978). Trends highlighted in this study show the need for further research regarding norms, space deficits, family roles, and space conflicts of those engaged in home-based businesses.

Many households change the home to accommodate business. Conversely, only a limited number actually increases the size of the home to provide more space or a better organization of space. As a consequence, the apparent space needs of the home-based business may not be resolved. Many households do not work out a specific plan of shared use to keep the family and business separate. This clearly relates to the frequency of conflict over space. These two factors may contribute to lower-than-average satisfaction levels.

Implications

The results of this pilot study should only be considered preliminary. However, the use of family-housing adjustment theory in the study of HBBs seems appropriate. Households in this study adapt space use to accommodate the integration of work and home. Since previous research identified the separation of work and home as a strongly held norm (Becker, 1981; Beach, 1985), this would appear to represent a change in family norms.

In our study, households with the greatest spatial integration of work and family activities showed the greatest conflict or dissatisfaction over the use of space. Those planning future changes in the home to accommodate business are those experiencing conflict or dissatisfaction. This suggests that adaptation and adjustment behavior is at work to reduce normative deficits. This reinforces McLaughlin's (1981) finding that a separate business space is important. The participants may have evaluated space used for family business against the established cultural norms for family housing. Because our society has not fully legitimized working for pay in the home (Christensen, 1988; Berch, 1982), the space used for a HBB is not sanctioned.

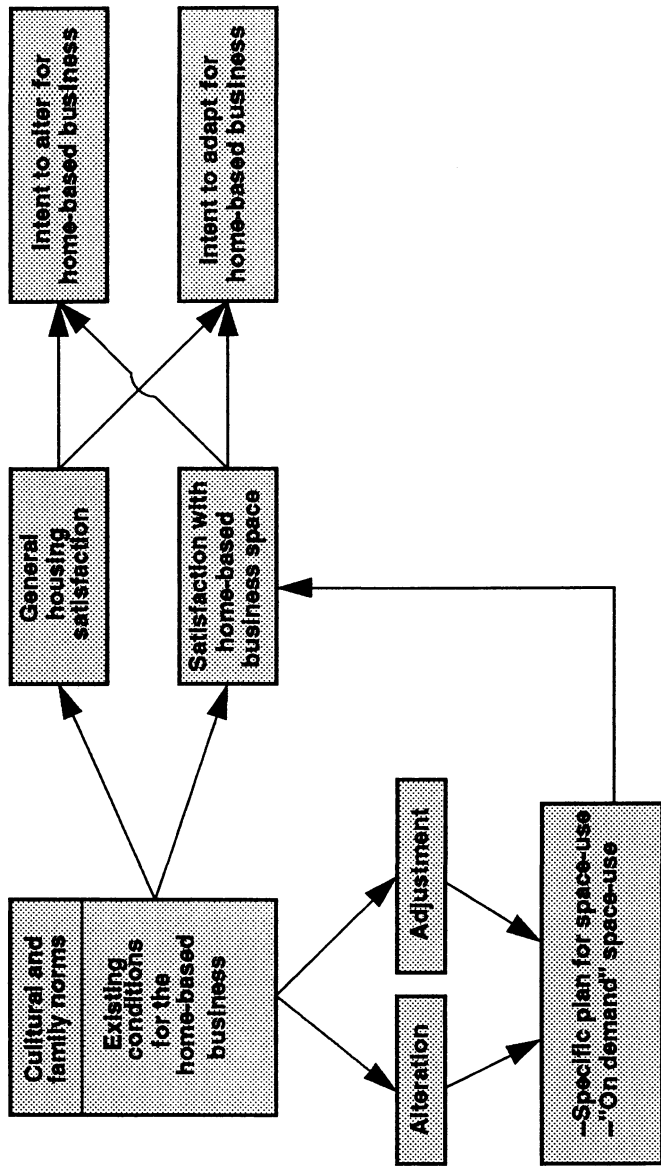


Figure 1. Preliminary theoretical model for home-based businesses based on the theory of family-housing adjustment (Morris and Winter, 1978).

Figure 1 illustrates a preliminary model based on Morris and Winter's (1978) housing-adjustment theory. Families with HBBs evaluate their housing space and existing conditions for the business based on cultural norms that apply to family housing. If the housing space conditions do not meet these norms, a normative deficit exists and dissatisfaction may result. Families who are dissatisfied are more inclined to adjust through alterations, additions, or moving. Other common responses include organizational adaptation such as scheduling space use, designating or allocating the space, or using an "on demand" system. Conflict-based role expectations, norms, and existing housing conditions may influence both satisfaction with the space for the HBB and general housing satisfaction. The interaction or separation of family and business space in the home is a critical factor that influences housing conditions. Decreases in household satisfaction may result in normative deficits.

Future research using larger samples is needed to explore many issues. Specifically, examination is needed on the status awarded the business by family and other household members and attitudes toward the business. In addition, the issue of conflicts over space needs to be compared to factors such as the percent of household income generated from the business, the use of HBB income, the length of time in business, the stage of the family life cycle, and constraints to alterations or adaptations that could better accommodate the business. Trends found in this study regarding factors such as conflicts, systems for sharing space, and the mix of family and business activities, need to be pursued to determine if significant associations exist. Reported dissatisfaction needs to be investigated to discover causal relations.

The issue of gender and home-based businesses needs to be explored further. Beach (1985) found differences in male and female use of space in home-based businesses. In our study, many of the traditionally "female" areas, such as the kitchen and living room, were used for HBB activities. Likewise, traditionally "female" activities, such as home management, food preparation, and children's play often occurred in the same space as the HBB activities. These areas or activities are also strongly associated with the norm of appropriate family or home spaces. The influence of these factors on satisfaction, alterations and adaptations to accommodate business, and conflicts over HBB and family activities merits further study.

Although the findings reported here are preliminary, there are important trends that merit integration into educational programs targeted to current and potential HBB owners. Space within the home is needed for the HBB; this need puts pressure on family-activity space. Planning for a HBB should include: 1) allocation of space for the business, 2) plans to integrate or separate HBB and family activities; 3) a specific plan for space shared by the HBB and family; 4) techniques for resolving HBB and family conflicts; and 5) plans for physical adjustments to the home to accommodate the home-based business.

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