A CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Livia POGAN[∗]

Abstract: In this paper we will capture the characteristics of interlocking relationships that arise from family and professional roles, highlighting the effects on the individual and family relationships, through a comparative analysis from a chronological perspective of several studies conducted in European countries between 1980–2010. All of these studies analyze different aspects of work-family relationship.

The main feature of the contemporary world is the accelerated change of social institutions and all types of social relations, with direct influence on family, which is constantly adapting to demographic transformations. Work is also affected by both technological and social increasingly rapid changes. Therefore, a greater number of young adults, and not only them, even companies and communities, complain about a poor work-life relationship.

Keywords: work-life balance, role conflict, work-family relationship.

Introduction

At the European Union level, the trend of young people to start a family later and later, postponing or even canceling the decision to have children for some couples with both partners working, are already frequently analyzed topics for scrutiny makers.

Thus, the European Union Council has recommended that the Member States should "develop and carry out further adequate research to discover the factors affecting opportunities for women and men to harmonize their work and family life, their desire to have children and attitudes related across different age groups and generations"[1].

Previous considerations have led us to focus our attention on work-family relationship, since these are the major areas in which we all activate. In addition, traditionalist scenario according to which men were responsible for procuring the resources needed to live, while women were accounted for housework and caring

---

[∗] Teaching Assistant, PhD., Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University "Lucian Blaga" of Sibiu; E-mail: livia.pogan@ulbsibiu.ro
[1] European Union Council, *The Council's Conclusions regarding the harmonization of family life with professional life in the context of demographic change, DOC 11841/ 11 SOC 584*, Bruxelles, 2011.

for children, becomes less and less actual as in most families both partners also have professional roles.

Conceptual Framework

Although work and family are the primary sectors in the lives of most adults, which are placed a large extent of our resources of time and energy, when we analyze the studies regarding these two areas, we note that the most frequently mentioned term is "work-family conflict".

This phrase emerged in the early 1980s and refers to those difficulties arising from the incompatibility of professional and personal roles: "form of inter-roles conflict defined by the fact that the roles' requests at work and in the family are incompatible to such an extent that participation either in work related roles or in the family ones is more difficult because of the individual's participation in the other role"[2]. In this context we can consider role as the "set of behaviors and attitudes related to a particular social position that have a specific function for the individual and for society to which he belongs. Each role is actually a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviors that the person has to comply"[3].

We can see that the debut of "work-family conflict" definition coincides with the growing involvement of women in the labor market and the rearrangement of roles within the family. The two spheres interfere, so professional challenges may affect attending personal roles, and family difficulties in turn make difficult work engagement. Work-family conflict can be of three types: time, behavior or tension-based.

Currently, family structure no longer allows defining so clearly the roles of both spouses, as in traditionalist families, because in most couples both partners work, sometimes in several jobs, so that requests become more complex and more numerous. Every individual has at different times of life the possibility to choose certain roles, but sometimes one must comply some requests, while other members of society also have their own behavioral expectations from those with whom they interact, according to the roles assumed.

Because of these various causes appear disruptions grouped under the term "role stress" – "role related stress", seen as role ambiguity, role conflict, disparity of roles, role overload or underload, incompetence, with its reverse, over-qualification.

Empirical studies[4] and statistical data allow us to assume that for the majority of employed persons work and family are the focal areas of activity, for which are

---

[2] Jeffrey Greenhaus, Nicholas Beutell, *Sources of conflict between work and family roles*, in "Academy of Management Review", 10(1), 1985, pp. 76–88.

[3] Eva Kallay, *Managementul Echilibrului viață personală – viață profesională*, Cluj-Napoca, ASCR Publishing, 2011, p. 4.

[4] Rosalind Barnett, *Toward a review and reconceptualization of the work-family literature*, in "Genetic, Social and General Psychology Monographs", 124, 1998, pp. 125–182.

targeted resources of time, energy, commitment, effort or attention, sometimes priority to a sector with the expense of the other.

In our country, the statistics of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women states that an employee in three perceives a high level of stress caused by work-family conflict, more than 50% of parents believe that they have a problem in achieving a balance between time spent in work and with the family and two-thirds of parents face a daily moderate to high stress due to the difficulties and conflicts of work-family roles.

In Europe, studies show that while for women the priority issue is the lack or insufficiency of time necessary for daily activities, men believe that they spend too much time at work. In the trial, these gender differences between the participants were not recorded in the Nordic countries. Most people involved in the survey (90%) feel an imbalance in work-family relationship. Women are the ones who reported in greater extent than men the existence of work-family conflict, and the family-work one[5].

Going down this path, we argue our explanatory resorting to resource conservation theory. If we assume the deficit hypothesis and consider the energy resources of human beings are finite and therefore exhaustible, we conclude that greater involvement in one of the two areas (private or professional) draws the inevitable depletion of resources that can be allocated to the other life sector. At this point it becomes natural to say that when we talk about work-family relationship we have to deal with a trade-off between professional and private roles.

But empirical research also prevents us stick to this conclusion, having demonstrated that there are beneficial effects of simultaneous employment of several roles[6]. Specifically, for example in the case of men who believe they have a good marital relationship and a wife who is receptive to their problems, it was observed that the stress of professional challenges is diminished by the influence of a supportive family environment.

The benefits of roles cumulation have been demonstrated empirically for women also, researchers noting that the physically and psychologically wellbeing is found in a greater proportion among those who are employed, wives and mothers compared to the case of those who are unemployed spouses or moms or single career women[7].

---

[5] See Irena Kotowska, Ana Matysiak, Ariane Pailhe, Anne Solaz, Marta Styrc, Danielle Vignoli, *Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family and Work*, European Foundation for the Improvment of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Publications of the European Communities, Luxemburg, 2010.

[6] Grace Baruch, *Role quality, multiple role involvement, and psychological well-being in midlife women*, in "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 51, 1986, pp. 578–585; Rosalind Barnett, Janet Hyde, *Women, men, work, and Family*, in "American Psychologist", 56, 2001, pp. 781–796; Joseph Grzywacz, Brenda Bass, *Work, family and mental health: testing different models of work-family fit*, in "Journal of Marriage and Family", 65, 2003, pp. 248–262.

[7] Daphne Stevens, Krista Minnote, Susan Mannon, Garry Kiger, *Examining the neglected side of the work family interface,* in "Journal of Family Issues", 28 (2), 2007, pp. 242–262.

This situation can be explained based on the expansionist theory, according to which individual's energy resources are limited or not predetermined, but they are some variables that can be extended, which contributes to increasing the satisfaction of fulfilling a role. From this perspective, one's functioning is enhanced through personal development, to which contribute the variety of situations with which he/she is confronted, such as "small conflicts, added value, social support, opportunities for experimenting success, broadening reference, increasing self-complexity, similarity of experiences and the role gender ideology"[8].

In this context we can talk about role quality, that can be seen as a "difference" between satisfaction of fulfilling that role and the inherent difficulties, sort of balance of pluses and minuses. When the quality level is increased, psychological stress rates decrease, with merit to offset the negative aspects that role fulfillment would involve[9].

Besides the positive effects on the individual, professional involvement has been identified as having beneficial effects on couple life, so most stable couples were identified those in which both partners had professional activity relatively close[10]. Role homophily thesis states that "the roles solidarity of a family increases solidarity and reduces marital conflict"[11] comes to explain this reality noted by field surveys.

The imbalance between work and private life attracts more unwanted consequences at individual, family, and organizational level. The work-family conflict affects physical and mental health of the individual is positively correlated with decreasing satisfaction with life and increased levels of stress and emotional exhaustion. Those who feel more affected by this imbalance also report high levels of anxiety and depression, fatigue and have a higher probability of alcohol consumption[12].

These consequences manifested at an individual level reflect on family relationships (the individual is no longer able to fulfill its associated role). Personnel environment may become a hostile one, stressful for the individual, but

---

[8] Rosalind Barnett, Janet Hyde, *Women, men, work, and Family*, in "American Psychologist", 56, 2001, pp. 781–796.

[9] Rosalind Barnett, Nancy Marshall, Stephen Raudenbush, Robert Brennan, *Gender and the relationship between job experiences and psychological distress: A study of dual-earner couples,* in "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 64, 1993, pp. 794–806.

[10] Valerie Oppenheimer, *Women's Employment and the Gains to Marriage: The Specialization and Trading Model of Marriage*, in "Annual Review of Sociology", 23, 1997, pp. 431–453.

[11] Ida Simpson, Paula England, *Conjugal Work Roles and Marital Solidarity*, in "Journal of Family", Issues 2, 1981, pp. 180–204.

[12] Michael Frone, *Work – family balance*, in "Handbook of occupational health psychology", Washington DC, American Psychological Association, 2003, pp. 143–162; Ellen Kossek, Cyntia Ozeki, *Work-family conflict, policies, and the job-life satisfaction relationship: A review and directions for organizational behavior–human resources research*, in "Journal of Applied Psychology", 83(2), 1998, pp. 139–149.

also for other family members. It generates a vicious circle in which both areas negatively influence each other ("spillover" in the terminology of Goggins)[13].

The consequences of work-family imbalance occur at organizational level also with decreased performance, increased prevalence of occupational stress, leaving the organization and intention to leave the organization or absenteeism. In the same study, participants who reported high rates of work-family conflict presented low job satisfaction levels. American Psychological Association noted that in 2007 the US costs of work-family conflict are over 300 billion dollars.

Methodology

We intend to achieve in this work a chronological comparative analysis of studies that focused on work-family relationship in European countries. Inclusion criteria for studies in our analysis were: their apparition (from 1980 to 2010), issued in Europe, analyzing the relationship between work and personal life. These studies were identified after consulting several scientific databases.

Following these criteria, we selected several studies conducted by teams of authors led by Rosalind Barnett: "Toward a review and reconceptualization of the work-family literature"[14], "Women, Men, Work, and Family"[15], "Gender and the relationship between job experiences and psychological distress: a study of dual-earner couples"[16], a research from 1986 concerning women involving in multiple roles: "Role quality, multiple role involvement, and psychological well-being in midlife women"[17].

In terms of conceptualizing the work-family relationship we analyzed studies of Grandey and Cropanzano – "The conservation of resources model applied to work-family conflict and strain"[18] and Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress"[19], according to which this relationship can be seen as a trade-off, the two spheres of existence being in competition for our resources of time, energy or emotional.

---

[13] See Bradley Googins, *Work/family conflicts: Private lives – public responses*, Aubum House, New York, 1991.

[14] Rosalind Barnett, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–182.

[15] Rosalind Barnett, Janet Hyde, *Women, men, work, and Family*, in "American Psychologist", 56, 2001, pp. 781-796

[16] Rosalind Barnett, Nancy Marshall, Stephen Raudenbush, Robert Brennan, *op. cit.*, pp. 794–806.

[17] Grace Baruch, *Role quality, multiple role involvement, and psychological well-being in midlife women*, in "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 51, 1986, pp. 578-585.

[18] Alicia Grandey, Russell Cropanzano, *The Conservation of Resources Model Applied to Work Family Conflict and Strain*, in "Journal of Vocational Behavior", Volume 54, Issue 2, 1999, pp. 350–370.

[19] Steven Hobfoll, *Conservation of Resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress*, in "American Psychologist", Vol. 44(3), 1989, pp. 513–524.

In contrast to this perspective falls for example the research of Oppenheimer, "Women's Employment and the Gains to Marriage: The Specialization and Trading Model of Marriage"[20] and Simpson, "Conjugal Work Roles and Marital Solidarity", which argues the benefits of several roles involvement both on the individual and on family relationships[21].

In the category of work aimed at harmonizing the private and professional roles of we have included the one developed by Frone in 2003, "Work-Family Balance"[22], to which are added the research of Grzywacz and Bass, "Work, family and mental health: testing different models of work-family fit"[23], those of Heiland and Macperson "Do family-friendly Firms perform better?", which analyze family friendly practices and Marks and MacDermid's research, "Multiple roles and the self: A Theory of role balance"[24].

We have also included in the study two articles aimed at validating assessment tools of the work-family interaction, "Work home interaction from a work psychological perspective: Development and validation of a new questionnaire, the SWING" and "Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Scale of perceived Work-Family Positive Spillover"[25].

To analyze traces that poor management of work-family relationship may have, we identified studies developed by Vallerand and his colleagues, "Antecedents and Outcomes of Work-Family Conflict" and "Linkages Between the Work-Family Interface and Work, Family and individual outcomes" of Patricia Voydanoff[26].

An important source of data in our research was represented by the study conducted under the auspices of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, in 2010 "Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family and Work" by a team of researchers that accurately emphasizes the characteristic data of work-family relationship in several European countries.

---

[20] Valerie Oppenheimer, *Women's Employment and the Gains to Marriage: The Specialization and Trading Model of Marriage*, in "Annual Review of Sociology", 23, 1997, pp. 431–453.

[21] Ida Simpson, Paula England, *Conjugal Work Roles and Marital Solidarity*, in "Journal of Family Issues", 2, 1981, pp. 180–204.

[22] Michael Frone, *Work – family balance*, in "Handbook of occupational health psychology", Washington DC, American Psychological Association, 2003, pp. 143–162

[23] Joseph Grzywacz, Brenda Bass, *Work, family and mental health: testing different models of work-family fit*, in "Journal of Marriage and Family", 65, 2003, pp. 248–262.

[24] Stephen Marks, Shelley MacDermid, *Multiple roles and the self: A Theory of role balance*, in "Journal of Marriage and Family", Vol. 58, No. 2, 1996, pp. 417–432.

[25] Ginger Hanson, Leslie Hammer, Cari Colton, *Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Work – Family Positive Spillover*, in "Journal of Occupational Health Psychology", 11(3), 2006, pp. 249–265

[26] Patricia Voydanoff, *Linkages Between the Work-Family Interface and Work, Family and individual outcomes,* in "Journal of Family Issues", Vol.23, 2002, pp. 138–164.

Analysis and Results

If until 2000 prevailing were studies that highlighted the work-family conflict, the imbalance between private and professional life, we have noticed that this situation has changed, researchers in the field coming up with a series of new concepts that bring a positive connotation to work-family relationship. Thus, it is spoken about positive work-family spillover as "that transfer of emotions, skills, attitudes and values with positive values from the original to the receiving, having positive effects on the receiving areas"[27]. Work-family facilitation is "the extent to which participation in work (or home) is facilitated in virtue of experience, skills and opportunities gained or developed at home (or at work)"[28].

The process by which "behavior of an individual in an area (e.g. at home) is influenced by the load of positive feedback which was formed in the other area (work)" is positive work-family interaction. Other phrases used were "work-family enrichment," "work-family self-enhancing", which as the ones defined above, were born from the necessity of conceptualization situations encountered in practice[29].

Chronologically following this empirical research, we note that the evolution was from work-family conflict (1980) to work-family balance (2000), at least in Western Europe; that is from a trade-off between the two spheres of activity to harmonizing them. Thus, we have noticed that in the beginning the studies that analyze the relationship between private life and professional life is focused mainly on highlighting the undesirable effects of this interaction, describing the negative consequences of the work-family conflict and measured the costs of this imbalance on corporate profitability but also by affecting the individual.

This first typology of studies was succeeded by other papers proposing the implementation of several strategies at both legislative, organizational and personal level, to try and harmonize the two areas of life. As discussed and shown above, the recent approach to this area is from another perspective, reflected by the introduction of new terms, with a positive connotation, in antithesis to the consecrated phrase "work-family conflict".

We could say that these dynamics took place following the implementation of several strategies aimed at reconciling the two areas – private and professional life, after at first field research brought to the attention of stake-holders the existence of this social problem and the consequences and the negative impact it has on individuals, family relations, organizational environment and corporate profitability.

The intervention focused its action on three levels: legislative policy (see recommendations of the Council of the European Union in the light of Europe

---

[27] Ginger Hanson, Leslie Hammer, Cari Colton, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–265.

[28] Michael Frone, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[29] Sabine Geurts, Toon Taris, Michiel Kompier, Josje Dikkers, Madelon Van Hooff, Ulla Kinnunen, *Workhome interaction from a work psychological perspective: Development and validation of a new questionnaire, the SWING*, Work & Stress, 19 (4), 2005, pp. 319–339.

2020), family-friendly practices implemented at the organizational level (flexible working hours, work remotely, care facilities for children or elderly) and the development of techniques that contribute to personal development of the individual (training, coaching, aimed at developing skills in time management, career management, etc.).

The European Pact on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2011-2020 encourages achieving a better balance between work and private life for women and men, to enhance gender equality, increase labor market participation of both sexes, but also to contribute to addressing demographic challenges.

Also, the EU Council recommends Member States "to develop and to conduct adequate research to discover the factors affecting opportunities for women and men to harmonize their work and family life, their desire to have children and attitudes related within different age groups and generations"[30].

Discussions

Intervention on the three levels above mentioned led to decreases of the intensity level of this conflict in developed countries. Organizational resources involved in intervention in order to balance the two areas of life that have proved their efficacy are those family-friendly practices that organizations can deploy trying to support employees.

Thus, in some cases, they were organized childcare services on site (nurseries, kindergartens at the employer), or employees are receiving subsidies for childcare or other dependents in their care (elderly). Other organizations promote compressed working week consisting of 4 days of 10 hours or 3 days with 12 hours, flexible hours characterized by a core of the middle of the day, for example from 10 to 14 am. There are also situations where physical presence in the office is not required, allowing telecommuting, work from anywhere.

Listing these organizational policies aimed at reconciling work and private life is indicative, applied in practice are met different versions or combinations of those. Several factors, such as work features, individual characteristics, family manner and other coordinates specific to the individual or organizational environment influence the effectiveness and application of family-friendly practices.

These models of balancing family and professional life are the subject of several investigations, and it cannot be called into question their effectiveness, which in many cases has been demonstrated, but their financial justification, given that the implementation of some of them bring costs that probably exceed the profit

---

[30] Council of the European Union, European Pact for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, 2011–2020, Doc. 7370/11 SOC 205, 2011, p. 9.

obtained by increasing productivity. Economic power of the company and brand policy get involved here[31].

The items listed above are in fact expressions of organizational culture specific for each company or institution. Thus, we noted that companies often tried to improve their employee performance acting on the job and working conditions. Recent research has highlighted the importance of the job occupant and his personal attributes in getting performance[32].

Given that in this equation the organization participates with the available resources it has in order to harmonize family life and profession, the aforementioned conclusions of studies that draw attention to the importance of employee personal contributions they bring in this context are explained.

Thus, self-efficacy, defined according to the theory of social cognition of Bandura as representing confidence in personal abilities to organize and execute activities necessary to achieve identified outcomes[33] and personal needs of the individual are the personal resources of employees who are related to wellbeing and low levels of work-family conflict[34].

Identifying these personal issues can be fructified in practice both at the selection stage and in the training of human resources. Many companies pursue for this reason, through psychological evaluation, to identify certain characteristics at the entry level at prospective employees. It is here about those changes in labor content and demands of employers that we mentioned in the beginning of this paper, which aims besides knowledge and technical skills specific to a certain specialization, these personal characteristics, transferable skills, so the trend is to go beyond the classic skills psychological testing to a more complex assessment, that includes personality, interests and attitudes of future employees.

We mentioned earlier that in practice the results of scientific studies are exploited both in the selection phase and subsequently. Thus, more and more companies are investing in counseling employees, offering them programs that go beyond the consecrated classical training, which transmitted specific information to be implemented strictly in the working process, towards team-building targeting individual's personal development by facilitating teamwork, for example.

---

[31] Livia Pogan, *Work-family conflict in the context of demographic change*, in "Annals of the "Constantin Brâncuşi" University of Târgu Jiu", Letter and Social Science Series, Issue 4/2014, "ACADEMICA BRÂNCUŞI" Publisher, 2014, p. 147.

[32] Delia Vîrgă, Diana Pascu, Mădălina Mioc, Isabela Draguţ, Andrei Ţepeş-Onea, Emma Petrucă, *Rolul resurselor personale în starea de bine a angajaţilor: implicarea în muncă şi epuizarea profesională*, in "Revista Psihologia Resurselor Umane", Volumul 11, Nr. 1/2013, 2013, pp. 51–65.

[33] See Albert Bandura, *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, New York, Freeman, 1997.

[34] Delia Vîrgă, Diana Pascu, Mădălina Mioc, Isabela Draguţ, Andrei Ţepeş-Onea, Emma Petrucă, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–65.

Coaching also is a very useful tool in organizational environment, so organizational skills, time management, ability to make decisions are powered.

The reasons why the balance between private and professional life can shift are numerous and may include taking too many or too few roles, poor role definition, conflict between these roles or mismatch between expectations and personal role. Balancing the roles occurs when roles assumed, the importance it had for the individual, their type and the necessary resources of time and energy fit. When this goal is not reached, the first step is identifying grievances, to which are added finding those areas where we can intervene to improve the problem and identifying those environments that allow the person to develop.

Such actual practices unquestionable bring benefits to those that directly enjoy them, the employees, but also bring advantages for their families and the company. These are facts and reasons supporting the implementation of such programs.

Conclusions

We set out at the beginning of this paper to present significant scientific approaches that try to conceptualize work-family relationship, comparing them from a chronological perspective. We noted their placement sometimes in a position to see this relation as unbalanced, cases where the question of the existence of a trade-off was issued, but also in a position to harmonize the two spheres of existence sometimes.

As we mentioned, the studies reviewed were conducted in European countries, not in Romania, and we focused attention on them because in these countries, as one might say, already exists a tradition in addressing this theme and some consolidated and validated practices to approach imbalances arising in the management of private-professional relationship; the rich range of data allowed us to obtain a broader perspective. In addition, in our country research in this field is at the beginning, currently only existing some statistics to determine the existence of an imbalance between work and family for a good part of employees and some attempts of the transnational corporations to implement harmonization policies already applied and validated in other countries where they operate. This situation prompted us to focus our attention to the exposed issues.

Some researchers consider for instance that "social and professional competition forces the family to work increasingly more. Thus, in most families, both parents work; children spend more time with TV or computer than with their parents. The social urge is to produce goods, to prove financial wealth (a bigger and well-maintained house, a more efficient car, more expensive holidays) imposes a growing rhythm that can lead to the feeling that we are always running out of

time. For this reason, in many families arise conflicts because the partners fail to sufficiently and properly communicate among themselves, neglecting their social life (extended family, friends, etc.), personal development etc."[35].

As shown, social realities and human nature favor indeed the emergence of a trade-off, whose financial, mental, relational and even health costs have prompted the need to examine the relationship between personal and professional life, in order to find viable solutions. Thus, there are cases where we deal with work-family conflict, but also situations where we talk about balance, the difference being given by the manner in which the interference of the two areas was treated.

---

[35] Eva Kallay, *op. cit.* p. 8.