

European Work-Family Life Balance Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Lisbon Strategy of EU has put forward that the women's participation level to labor market shall be at least 60 % by 2010. Increasing this participation rate is vital for Europe in a world of global competitiveness. United States is already leading the economic race worldwide and the lead is unlikely to narrow in near future. Demographic changes are also working against Europe; the population is aging and as more people retires from the labor market, there is going to be less people to work and support the necessary economic growth. These developments enforce the policy makers to focus on the encouragement of women to participate to the labor force.

The studies show that women's multiple roles, responsibilities and relationships at both work and family domains cause them to experience dual high level of work/family conflict. In result, family friendly policies have positive effect on work/family balance and women's participation to labor force. Harcar's model of working woman's effect on society is taken into account as main model to research policies created to deal with this important issue. In this comprehensive model a conceptual framework has been presented, which focuses on working women and their efforts to balance their work and family roles.

The main strategy to achieve the goal set by Lisbon Strategy is the implementation of family friendly programs. The applications of family friendly programs in different European countries are researched. One can say that family friendly policies have a major effect of women decision to work. But these policies are not helpful to solve the problem by themselves. Women's role in the society seems to have a lot to do with the participation level of women to labor force. To reach the goal, policy makers have to come up with strategies to change these cultural attitudes towards women as well.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE DEFINED

Work-family balance has received increased attention recently due to dramatic changes in the workplace and family life over the past decade. Organizations have introduced flex-time, work-at-home options and the 4-day work week. The workforce has also seen a large increase in female and professional workers, with many of these being considered working moms. Moreover, the personal computer and the Internet have caused a paradigm-shift in the manner that people function at both work and at home. These societal changes and technological advances have in an incidental way created a serious potential for interference, conflict, and competing demands between the expectations of the workplace and personal needs at home. Often, the pressures from the job and family domains are mutually incompatible and thus can create conflict or dissonance (Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005).

It has been suggested that investigators need to address the positive side of work-family integration as well as study the impact of work on family life, and vice-versa (see Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Such an integrative perspective can allow the examination of how work and family may enhance each other (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). Recent research has applied

these various conceptualizations of work-family linkage such as work-family inter-role conflict. Findings indicate that high levels of interference from one role can result in a dissonant state where dysfunctional behaviors (e.g., absenteeism, tardiness, leaving work early, personal use of the work phone) become evident (Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003) or, more ominous, the employee experiences burnout (Peelers et al., 2005). Conversely, organizational support of employee flexibility and family needs has been found to be associated with higher levels of work-family balance and a concomitant decrease in job dissatisfaction and somatic complaints (see Thomas & Ganster, 1995). According to Lambert, Kass, Piotrowski and Vodanovich's study (2006), in 2004, over 50% of married households were considered to be "dual-income" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004, www.bls.gov). Moreover, of the 35.4 million U.S. households with children under the age of 18, 60.6% consisted of two working parents. The majority of families with children at home require the two incomes, creating a difficult struggle for Americans to balance work and family demands in an effort to maintain their overall well-being. Also, Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1992) analyzed data from a longitudinal study of 631 white and blue collar employees and found that 41% of their participants reported feeling work-family conflict at least occasionally. Similarly, Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, and Weitzman (2001) surveyed 6,451 IBM employees and found that approximately 50% of their participants reported having problems achieving work-family balance. These findings are consistent with those of the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998) that uncovered a trend over the previous 20 years of decreased security, increased demands, and increased time-consumption (i.e., longer working hours).

Work and family interconnection is a linking mechanism as a relationship between a work construct and a family construct. Edward and Rothbard (2000) organize these mechanisms into six general categories: spillover, compensation, segmentation, resource drain, congruence, and work-family conflict. This paper will be based on work-family conflict, which can be defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which work and family role demands are mutually incompatible so that meeting demands in one domain makes it difficult to meet demands in the other.

The studies show that women's multiple roles, responsibilities and relationships at both work and family domains cause them to experience dual high level of work/family conflict. In result, family friendly policies have positive effect on work/family balance and women's participation to labor force. Harcar's model of working woman's effect on society is taken into account as main model (Harcar) to research policies created to deal with this important issue. In this comprehensive model a conceptual framework has been presented, which focuses on working women and their efforts to balance their work and family roles. Following are the proposals presented according to the model.

Proposition 1: Because of women's multiple roles, responsibilities and relationships at both work and family domains, they experience dual high level of work/family conflict

Proposition 2: If the relationship between work and family boundaries at both domains are managed appropriately, both work/family balance and women's life satisfaction can be achieved

Edwards and Rothbard (1999) discovered that strong borders between work and family may be beneficial to some people. Specifically, based on responses from over 1700 university employees, they found that when individuals desire a high degree of separation between their work and family domains these employees will try to effectively manage the boundaries between these domains. Frone et al. (1992) found that work to family conflict was significantly more common than family to work conflict (60% to 22%, respectively). Thus, these authors suggest that family boundaries appear to be much more permeable to work conflict than vice versa. These conclusions were mirrored by the findings in the 1997 NSCW

study (Bond et al., 1998), where participants reported a much higher incidence of spillover from work to home versus home to work.

Hill et al. (2001) explored the conditions wherein spillover between the work and family domains might occur and how the breakdown in the barrier between the two domains can impact work-family balance; a strong positive correlation between perceived work flexibility and work-family balance was found. Not surprisingly, Hill et al. also reported a positive correlation between occupational level and difficulty with work/family balance such that those with higher occupational levels admitted greater difficulty attaining work/family balance.

The findings from these studies suggest that in certain situations weak borders between work and family domains may be more beneficial in promoting balance, whereas in other situations, strong borders may be more beneficial. On the other hand, when the work domain is not flexible and is very different from the family domain, individuals may prefer a high degree of separation between the two domains; thus strong borders enhance well-being. Clark (2000) echoes these conclusions in her work/family border theory by hypothesizing that if the work domain and the home domain are alike, then weak borders between the two domains should lead to balance.

Proposition 3: Women's work/family balance and their life satisfaction have effect on social well-being

Macarov (2000) assesses some of the most salient features of families and work today and then suggests implications for the relationship between the two in the future. According to him, both families and work exist within the wider context of society as a whole and are affected by swings in public opinion, ideological changes, and structural revisions. Therefore attitudes toward families, work, and the relationship between them cannot be separated from the economic, social and ideological milieu in which they exist. The family has remained the basic building block of society (Macarov, 2000).

Macarov (2000) also discussed the families impact on work and work's impact on families for the future. According to him, as the age, roles, and responsibilities of family members change, there will be noticeable changes in the workplace. As life expectancy increases, more workers will need to take care of aged family members, but such care will limit work or work hours. However, the increased financial burden may require additional income via work. It may become necessary for employers, government, or both to provide eldercare arrangements in order to maintain the necessary workforce. All these changes created some needs from workplace such as maternity/paternity leave, childcare arrangements, etc.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average two-income middle-class family has seen its annual workload grow from 3206 hours in 1989 to 3335 in 1997. That has left employees with less time to spend with their children which brings contradictions between so-called family values and economic ones (Wechsler, 1999). Although each expert has a different perspective, they agree that the work/family field remains fragmented and there is a crucial need for integration.

Although the caring work of the family is crucial for the sustainability of the economy, many factors converge to make it harder for the family to perform this role of social reproduction. Many working parents must rely on childcare purchased in the open marketplace. Various studies, however, show that childcare facilities are not always able to provide a high quality of care because childcare workers receive low wages and have a high rate of turnover. This is the so-called "care crisis" that imposes substantial costs upon children, parents, employers, and society as a whole. The lack of adequate childcare costs corporations \$3 billion a year in absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. More importantly, however,

children suffer under the current system in terms of achieving cognitive and social skills. In addition, studies show that low-income families are particularly hurt by low-quality childcare.

Proposition 4: Organization culture and workplace norms have effect on work-family balance and women's life satisfaction.

Just when a strong family was needed most during the difficult transition period toward the information age, much has changed in the last thirty years when we look at attitudes toward elemental issues relating to the traditional family such as marriage, divorce, and child-rearing. The numbers tell a dramatic story. For example, in 1950, approximately one in three women participated in the labor force; in the 1990s nearly three in five were in the workforce. New mothers return to work more quickly than in the past. In 1998, fifty-nine percent of mothers with children under one were working, up from thirtyone percent in 1976.³⁶ Dual-career families with small children now compose a majority of the families in the United States.

FAMILY FRIENDLY PROGRAMS

As the globalization of the market place increased the competitiveness of the business, the battle to be the leaders in the new world turned the focuses of policy makers to market growth. U.S. was in front of E.U. in this competition and the growth rate of both parts is in favour of U.S. (Alesina and Tabellini 2007). In Europe the attention turned to demographic changes of the last decades. The population was aging and as more and more people retires from the labor market, there will be limited people to work and to support European growth in near future. These ideas lead Europe to create strategies and programs (European Employment Strategy, Lisbon Strategy, etc.) in order to reach high level of employment. As the working population decreases, the encouragement of women for the employment became a major issue. Back then half of all women labor force was out of labor market but their participation level was increasing (Vlasblom and Schippers, 2004; Bergemann and Van der Berg, 2006).

The legal regulations has been started to seen as limiting factors in front of the progress. Besides, Europeans has come to notice that American or Anglo-Saxon way of doing business, which is the least possible intervention of legislation in labor relations between employer and employee with the legal cultural effects of Anglo-Saxon norms, has positive effects on companies' productivities and countries' growth (Limoncuoglu, 2008). This led the social sides to ask more freedom in labor regulations and "family friendly programs" blossomed as the new solution to the problem.

Family friendly programs have been generally categorized under four groups :

- (a) regulations about leaves – maternity leave, sick leave, etc.;
- (b) regulations about flexible working hours;
- (c) regulations about child care and child benefits;
- (d) regulations about other support measures.

But if we look at the implementation of these programs within the countries we may point out that the regulations are only the one side of the apple. There are also special programs operated by business itself to attract and maintain better employee, to increase the motivation, productivity and effectiveness. Therefore, it is useful to consider the solution based policy suggestion under two groups (Limoncuoglu, 2008):

- a) Policies particular to governments – Governmental policies
- b) Policies particular to business – Business oriented policies

TABLE I : FAMILY FRIENDLY PROGRAMS ACROSS EUROPE

Country	Maternity Leave	Paternity Leave	Parental Leave	Flexitime	Child Benefit/Provision
Sweden	No separate leave. It's included in parental leave.	10 days paid	480 days = 18 months paid	Yes	Benefits: Up until the age of 16 & 20 / Childcare: Responsibility of the municipalities.
Denmark	18 weeks paid	2 weeks paid	32 weeks paid	No	Benefits: Non-income related benefits / Childcare: Responsibility of the state + subsidies
Italy	5 months paid	No	10 (11) months paid	No	Benefits for the first 5 months / Childcare after 3 years old.
Greece	17 weeks paid	2 days	3,5 months paid but some limitations	No	Benefits: Up until the age of 22 / Childcare: obligation for companies with 300 + workers - tax exempt for families
Germany	14 weeks paid	No separate leave. It's included in parental leave.	3 years but paid for 12 (14) months.	Yes	Benefits: Up until the age of 18 (21 or 27) - children allowances - ChildRaising allowances / Childcare: Reserve seat after 3 years old & subsidies.
France	16 - 24 weeks paid	11 (18) days paid	3 years paid	Yes	Benefits: One time - for the first 3 years - subsidy for childkeeper / Childcare: Responsibility of the state after 2,5 years
U.K.	52 weeks; paid for the first 39	2 weeks paid	13 weeks unpaid (4 weeks a year limitation)	No	Benefits: Child tax credit and benefits for educational purposes / Childcare: Responsibilities of the families

In parallel with the purpose of the research we looked into the regulations of different countries within Europe. The countries are chosen regarding the level of employment rate of women within the country and the importance of their status within Europe. Sweden and Denmark are the countries where this level is relatively high. Greece and Italy are on the other side. Germany, U.K. and France are included in the work as the cornerstones of E.U. The programs are categorized under 5 different branch: Maternity leave, paternity leave,

parental leave, flextime, child benefit/provision according the categorization made above. As healthcare benefit and paid annual leave provision throughout Europe are similar, we did not take the other supportive measures account. The Table I summarize the summary of our research. It should be noted that the term flextime in our research means the right of a worker to switch between full-time and part-time job. It is also important to mention that the level of payments made for each category varies across countries.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that the rights of workers in the countries with better female labor force participation are much better than those of worse. The length of the leaves, however, may be misleading for such an analysis. The leaves are longer in Italy compared to Denmark for example, but female participation level to labor force is much better in Denmark. Childcare provisions have great effect on women decision to be in the labor force in such cases. The families in Denmark may have shorter leave periods but the care of their child is guaranteed by the state once their leave has finished. So, it can be said that once the women have a tendency to be in the labor market when they do not worry about the care of their child. This is not an absolute outcome of the Table however. It can be seen that the rights in France and Germany are slightly better than those of Scandinavian countries but the studies have shown that the Scandinavians have much better female employment level (European Foundation, 2007).

There exist studies on the responsibility of housework for different countries (Tang and Cousins, 2005; European Foundation, 2007). We see that once the community sees the housework as a female-only job, the female participation level to labor force drops (Limoncuoglu, 2008). The husbands are less willing to help their wives in Germany and France compared to Scandinavians, so the women in these countries have a better chance to balance their works and private lives. Therefore they chose to be in labor market with a higher rate.

The research points out that family friendly programs, alone, will not be sufficient to convince women to be in employment unless their husband starts to share their housework including the childcare and/or the state takes some responsibilities (especially on childcare subject). Therefore we also recommend policy makers to focus on programs that will somehow affect the cultural view towards women as the only "housecarer". Europe is in need of new programs to change the male dominant society or it's not hard to say that the desired growth in economy and the desired level of quality of life are much more far targets to reach than they are planned.

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