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Work-family facilitation : a positive psychological perspective on rol combination

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Citation

Steenbergen, E. F. van. (2007, November 28). *Work-family facilitation : a positive psychological perspective on rol combination*. *Dissertatiereeks Kurt Lewin Instituut*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12466>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12466>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

General Discussion

The combination of work and family roles is difficult and will unavoidably cause individuals to experience *role conflict* and *stress*. Since time, energy, and attention are fixed and scarce resources, participation in both work and family roles reflects a *zero-sum game*: The more resources one spends on one role, the less resources can be spent on another role. From this perspective, Edgell (1970) has portrayed work-family role combination as an inevitable dilemma between being “married” to your work *or* to your family life since “any degree of commitment to one role will detract from commitment, and chances of success, in the other, simply in terms of the availability of time and energy” (p. 320).

This scarcity view on role combination has been the dominant point of departure in the work-family literature over the past 40 years. As a consequence, little research attention has been devoted to the possibility of work and family roles *positively* affecting each other. The central objective of this dissertation was to increase understanding of the *positive side* of the work-family interface, by focusing on people’s experiences of *facilitation* between their work and family roles^P. The research presented in this dissertation reveals a much more positive perspective on role combination than expressed by Edgell. Complementing current views on *role conflict*, the present research demonstrates that work and family roles can also *facilitate* each other, resulting in beneficial outcomes for employees as well as organizations. The message for organizations is that – in addition to reducing employees’ conflict experiences - they should try to capitalize on this positive possibility and aim to enhance employees’ experiences of facilitation. In this way, a win-win can be achieved between their own and employees’ interests.

^P As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the work-family literature is also referred to as the “work-home” or “work-nonwork” literature because scholars often examine how individuals experience the interface between their work role on the one hand and other roles in their life (e.g., parent, husband/wife, family member, friend) on the other (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Witt & Carlson, 2006; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). In this dissertation, consistent with this approach, my use of the term *family* is intended to denote individuals’ “non-work” roles in a broad sense.

The present chapter is structured as follows. First, based on the combined findings of this dissertation, I discuss what the present findings tell about the construct of work-family facilitation, and elaborate on why it is important to take this positive side of the work-family interface into account. Second, I discuss antecedents of facilitation experiences in the work and home domains, and address possibilities to influence these experiences. Third, I elaborate on the gender differences found in this dissertation with regard to facilitation in particular. Furthermore in this chapter, the theoretical as well as practical implications of this program of research will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of the present work will be discussed along with directions for future research.

6.1 Work-Family Facilitation Experiences and their Beneficial Consequences

Work-family conflict has been the central construct in the work-family literature; the individual's experience that participation in one role (e.g., in the family) makes it more *difficult* to fulfill the requirements of another role (e.g., at work). As opposed to the scarcity perspective in the literature, Marks (1977) formulated his *role expansion theory*, which views human energy and attention as abundant and expandable and posits that fulfilling one role can *create* energy for the use in that or other roles. As such, this theory postulates that participation in one role can have *positive effects* on other role performances. In this dissertation, I aimed to provide more insight in this positive perspective and focused on experiences of *work-family facilitation*, defined here as the individual's experience that participation in one role makes it *easier* to fulfill the requirements of another role. Based on the two theoretical perspectives offered in the literature, I posited that *both* individuals' facilitation and their conflict experiences in role combination can be understood by the examination of four experiential domains, namely 1) energy (strain), 2) time, 3) behavior, and 4) psychological state. An initial qualitative study (Chapter 2) confirmed that individuals indeed can experience that their work and family roles facilitate each other. It also supported the proposed distinction between the different *types* of facilitation, namely that participation in one role can a) provide individuals with extra energy in the other role (*energy-based facilitation*), b) make them manage and use their time in the other role more efficiently (*time-based facilitation*), c) give them the opportunity to acquire new skills and behaviors for the use in the other role (*behavioral facilitation*), and d) enable them to put matters associated with the other role into a broader perspective (*psychological facilitation*). In a subsequent quantitative study (Chapter 2), these four types of facilitation (in the work-to-family as well as

the family-to-work direction) proved to be distinct, in addition to the different types of conflict that had been identified in previous research (strain-based, time-based, behavioral, and psychological WF and FW conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000). Thus, in managing their work and family roles, people can experience role conflict. However, this dissertation also reveals the ways in which people experience their work role benefiting their family roles, and vice versa. In this way, this differentiation in types of facilitation shows that facilitation also occurs in domains that are often assumed (e.g., Edgell, 1970) to be finite and inherent sources of conflict, such as *time* and *energy* (“you can only spend your energy once”, “there are only 24 hours in a day”). Even in these domains, however, individuals’ psychological experience can be that of experiencing *time benefits* and having *more energy* due to role combination.

But what is the added value of addressing these facilitation experiences and thus go beyond the tradition in the literature to examine individual’s experiences of conflict? Two principal motivations can be given. First, as has been shown, conflict and facilitation are separate and distinct experiences. This means that the absence of conflict does not automatically imply the presence of facilitation and vice versa. Thus, experiencing low strain-based conflict from work to family for example does not imply that one feels *energized* after a working day in a way that positively affects the family domain. Similarly, not worrying about family issues at work (low psychological FW conflict) is different from the positive experience that one’s family roles actually *helps* one to put work into perspective. Second, my research shows the importance of examining facilitation in combination with conflict for a better understanding of the effects of role combination on outcomes in the work, home, and health domains. The examination of employees’ facilitation experiences in role combination – in addition to their conflict experiences – significantly and substantially improved the prediction of *work outcomes* (job performance, affective organizational commitment, work satisfaction), and *non-work outcomes* (home performance, home commitment, home satisfaction, global life satisfaction), and also enhanced the prediction of mental *stress-related outcomes* (emotional exhaustion, depression). Whereas a focus on conflict primarily addressed the detrimental consequences of role combination (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000), the present approach of taking the *positive side* of the work-family interface into account has shown that the combination of work and family roles also involves *beneficial consequences*, namely higher levels of performance in, commitment to,

and satisfaction with the work and home domains, and a lower level of mental health problems (depressive complaints, Chapter 2).

Importantly, this research also demonstrated that employees who experience more facilitation are *objectively* in better *physical health*; they have lower cholesterol levels, better physical stamina, and are less likely to be overweight (Chapter 4). Even more so, the *longitudinal* study that was conducted among call center employees (again Chapter 4) showed that the experience of facilitation actually predicts better physical health one year later (namely lower cholesterol levels and a lower body mass index). Furthermore, this longitudinal study showed that experiencing facilitation between work and family benefits employees' *performance at work* as assessed via *objective* indicators (e.g., actual sales volumes), and predicts lower levels of *actual absenteeism* from work. These latter results thus demonstrate that employees' experiences of facilitation between their work and family roles not only enhance their subjective well-being, but also result in concrete, objective gains for these employees (e.g., better health) as well as for their employers (e.g., enhanced job performance, lower absenteeism). In other words, enabling employees to experience a successful combination of work and family roles is a business concern, with bottom-line implications.

6.2 Antecedents and Possibilities to Increase the Experience of Work-Family Facilitation

Since employees can experience facilitation and since these facilitation experiences relate to a wide range of *beneficial outcomes* for employees and employers, it is important to know how these experiences come about and how they can be *stimulated*. Previous investigations already revealed that employees who have family supportive managers and co-workers, and who perceive cultural norms in their organization to be family supportive (referred to as a *family supportive work environment*) experience *lower conflict* between their work and family roles (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2005; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Thus, by providing "cross-domain support" – e.g., support for the family domain at work – the organization can lower employees' experiences of conflict in role combination. In addition to this earlier approach, the present dissertation (Chapter 3) shows that receiving support for work issues at home, a *work supportive home environment* (i.e. support from partner and family/friends for work issues, and norms in the home environment that are work supportive), can

also help individuals to experience lower conflict between their work and family roles.

Besides lowering conflict, I argued that family supportive work environments and work supportive home environments could also *stimulate* the experience of *facilitation* in role combination. A family supportive manager, for example, provides the employee with instrumental and emotional assistance, is open to discuss new ways of combining roles, and communicates trust in the employee. This provides more potential for an optimal integration of, and positive exchange between, work and family roles (see also Voydanoff, 2004b). In support of this reasoning, employees who experienced their work and home environments to be supportive indeed reported *increased facilitation* between their work and family roles. At work, especially having a family supportive manager related to increased facilitation. At home, receiving support from one's family and friends was consistently related to higher levels of facilitation (Chapter 3). Thus, these findings indicate that, by creating a *family supportive work environment* and a *work supportive home environment*, not only can individuals' experiences of role conflict be reduced, but their experiences of *facilitation* can be *enhanced* as well. This underscores the importance of how work-family issues are discussed and dealt with on a day-to-day basis on the work floor and in people's home lives. For example, at work, when organizational norms and representatives of the organization (i.e. managers) implicitly or explicitly communicate to employees that commitment to family roles can only "distract from work" and show little understanding for family issues, this will adversely affect employees' experiences in role combination. Instead, when the work environment recognizes, values, and supports the individual's family responsibilities, rather than viewing the home domain as "distractor from or enemy to work" (and vice versa, when the home domain is supportive of work issues), this is likely to decrease conflict and increase individual's experiences of facilitation between their work and family roles.

Also important in this regard are the results from the field experiment presented in Chapter 5. These showed that reading either negative or positive information about role combination affects how individuals appraise the combination of their work and family roles in their own lives. In this experiment, one group of employees read information that supported a *scarcity perspective* on human energy, which described human energy to be limited and fixed and focused on the difficulties and negative aspects of role combination. In contrast, another group of employees read information that supported an *expansion perspective* on human energy, which focused on human energy being abundant

and expandable, and emphasized the positive aspects of role combination. This experiment showed that employees who read the expansion information appraised their own situation of combining work and family roles *more positively*. That is, as compared to the scarcity perspective, employees who read the message framed from an expansion perspective appraised their own combination of work and family roles *as less stressful, less as a negative threat, and more as a positive challenge*. They also reported *higher levels of facilitation* and reported *more positive and less negative emotions* when thinking about their own role combination. Additionally, the spontaneous comments the employees provided about their own situation of combining work and family revealed a more positive train of thought about role combination (qualitative data, free thought listing). These findings thereby show that information provided by others can affect how we ourselves appraise an event or situation (informational or appraisal support, Holmes & Houston, 1974; Tomaka, Blascovich, Kibler, & Ernst, 1997). Importantly, this suggests that the messages communicated by others, for example at work, at home or in the media, can shape the appraisal of our own situation. Although the effect of receiving one such a message may be short-lived, *repeated* or *chronic* exposure to certain views could lead to internalization of that perspective. For organizations this implies that it is important to pay attention to how work-family issues are framed in organizational communications or how they are discussed by managers and employees of the organization. When, for instance, managers or coworkers always tend to approach role combination from a scarcity perspective (e.g., by exclusively talking about the downside of the combination of work and family roles), this will make it more likely that others appraise and experience the combination of work and family roles more negatively as well. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider the formal and informal messages that are communicated in organizations. Rather than communicating a one-sided scarcity perspective on role combination to employees, it is important to recognize and “place the spotlight on” the *beneficial side* to role combination. This in turn will make it more likely that employees view and experience the combination of their own work and family roles from a more positive perspective as well, potentially starting off a positive spiral.

6.3 Gender Differences

In the work-family literature (and perhaps also in daily society?), it is often assumed that the combination of work and family roles is especially problematic

for women. However, by addressing the positive side of the work-family interface (experiences of facilitation between work and family), my research revealed that women – at least in this organization – are doing well in combining their work and family roles. That is, women experienced to a greater degree than men a *positive exchange* between the work and family domain in that their work role facilitated the fulfillment of their family roles and vice versa. Thus, taking a role expansion perspective has been especially valuable to open up the way to uncover the benefits that women experience from participating in multiple roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Choice is the key word here. I argued and found that, for women, the work role has a different psychological meaning than for men in that for women the element of *choice* for the work role is more salient (see also Rothbard, 2001; Thoits, 2003). In present-day society, both in Europe and the U.S, it is still more common for men to fulfill the work role, to fulfill this role fulltime, and to provide for the main part of the family income, whereas it still is more common for women to take on the largest part of the care-taking and household activities (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Pottrass, 2002; Emancipatie Monitor, 2006). Moreover, the provider role is culturally still regarded as the primary role for men, while the role of care-taker is still assigned primarily to women (Ridgeway & Corell, 2004). Based on these gender differences in actual role fulfillment and gendered role expectations, I posited that, whereas fulfilling the work role is fairly self-evident for men, women experience the work role to a higher degree as a *self-chosen* role, that is instrumentally and/or emotionally easier to exit. I argued that, on average, women are thus more likely to fulfill the work role because of positive aspects that are attached to this role or to combining this role with their other roles in their lives. As such, I argued that female employees should experience higher levels of facilitation between their work and family roles. The results from the organizational survey, which was completed by a large part of the organization's employees ($N = 18,355$, *Appendix Chapter 2*), confirmed this. Women experience the work role (and the combination of work and family roles) more as self-chosen than males do. Also supporting this reasoning, women experienced more facilitation between their work and family roles than men. Women specifically reported that their work and family roles positively affected each other in terms of time benefits, learning new skills and behaviors, and acquiring additional psychological perspectives (higher levels of time-based WF and FW and behavioral WF and FW facilitation and higher psychological WF facilitation than men). The results from the large-scale organizational survey also

confirmed that women experienced a higher level of facilitation between work and family than their male colleagues.

Furthermore, it appears to be *more important* for women to experience facilitation between work and family. That is, the extent to which women experienced facilitation had a *greater impact* than for men on relevant outcome variables in the work and home domain, for example on their level of satisfaction with and own assessment of their performance at work. Therefore, it is highly important to achieve that female employees experience a positive exchange between their work and family roles. The results discussed in this dissertation indicate that, for women, this can be primarily achieved via managerial support.

Apart from the finding that women tend to experience more facilitation and that the experience of facilitation has more impact on outcome variables for women, it is important to note that the present results underscore the need to pay attention to the issue of work family role combination for both men and women. This issue is often exclusively considered as a “women’s issue” (Thompson et al., 1999). However, the present research shows that experiencing a successful combination of work and family roles (high levels of facilitation, low conflict) has important consequences for women and men, and that both women and men will benefit from receiving support to achieve this.

6.4 Theoretical Implications

The results discussed in this dissertation complement and balance the scarcity perspective that has long prevailed in the work-family literature. The combination of work and family roles is not inherently difficult, nor will participation in one role necessarily imply only negative effects for another role. The scarcity perspective has been valuable in identifying the role conflicts that individuals can experience, which are significant phenomena with real negative consequences. However, the dominance of this perspective in the work-family literature has painted a picture of role combination that is exceptionally *one-sided* and too negative (see also Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Voydanoff, 2004). In line with the reasoning proposed by role expansion theory (Marks, 1977), the present research shows, for example, that fulfilling one role can also make people feel *energized* to perform in the other role. In fact, this dissertation has shown that the experiential domains that are traditionally seen as the basis of the occurrence of role conflict, namely strain (energy), time, behavior, and psychological state (Carlson et al., 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, 1988; Carlson & Frone, 2003) can also be used to explain the different ways in which individuals

experience that their work and family roles facilitate each other (energy-based, time-based, behavioral, and psychological facilitation).

The present results on facilitation between work and family roles evidently challenge the validity of a singular focus on the negative side of the work-family interface. For example, the results regarding job performance contest the major contention of the scarcity perspective on role combination that participation in other roles can *only undermine* one's effectiveness at work. The present findings show that this can be the case; I found that for both men and women experiencing strain-based FW conflict relates to the assessment of lower performance at work. However, this research also revealed that the extent to which individuals experience facilitation – for instance energy-based and psychological FW facilitation – relates to *higher* performance levels at work. The latter result is even confirmed with the examination of self assessments as well as objective measures of job performance, which underscores the significance and robustness of these positive effects on employees' job performance.

With this research, I have aimed to provide a balanced view on role combination by addressing both role facilitation and role conflict experiences, and I have demonstrated the value of this approach to understand *both* the beneficial and detrimental consequences that can be associated with role combination. Accordingly, these results provide evidence to move beyond an *either/or* approach of the scarcity perspective versus the expansion perspective in work-family research (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Kirchmeyer, 1992), and speak to the need to develop an *integrated theory* that accounts for the origination of both conflict and facilitation experiences and their consequences. In work-family research scholars often focus either on the occurrence of conflict – addressing the scarcity perspective (e.g., Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997) or only describe the resources that should be related to the experience of facilitation – focusing on the role expansion perspective (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Wayne et al., 2007). However, concurring with other researchers (e.g., Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Voydanoff, 2004), I argue that, rather than examining these experiences in isolation, both sides of the work-family interface should be examined *conjointly* for an improved understanding of individuals' experiences in the combination of their work and family roles as well as their consequences. In this regard the Dual Process Model developed by Bakker and Geurts (2004) offers a valuable and promising approach. This model acknowledges and integrates the two theoretical perspectives in one parsimonious model in which *demands* of the job or job context (e.g., high work pressure, and poor working conditions) lead to feelings of exhaustion and

conflict, whereas *resources* of the job or job context (e.g., learning and career opportunities, feedback, autonomy) lead to feelings of flow, motivation, and experiences of facilitation. An important extension of this model suggested by our findings would be to not only look at demands and resources at work. By also examining resources and demands in the *home domain* a comprehensive model could be developed in which resources and demands in the work and home environment are related to employees' facilitation and conflict experiences, and outcomes in the work and home domain.

Moreover, in future research it would be valuable to further examine the beneficial effects of "cross-domain support". The research discussed in this dissertation showed that employees who received cross-domain support (i.e., support for the family domain in the work environment, and support for the work domain in the family environment) experienced higher levels of facilitation and lower levels of conflict between their work and family roles. It would be interesting to try to disentangle the practical, instrumental forms of support from the more psychological forms of support. A manager for example, can provide practical support in offering enough scope and flexibility which enables employees to find a combination of their work and family roles that works for them. This provides employees with more opportunities to engage more completely and gratifyingly in family roles, which makes it more likely that they feel energized by those roles and, for instance, learn additional skills, behaviors, and psychological perspectives. However, it would also be interesting to examine the extent to which the employee feels that his or her family roles are really acknowledged and valued by the organization and the effects of this. Conceivably, experiencing such psychological support for the family domain would stimulate the occurrence of facilitation even further as this communicates to employees that there is value in their participation in other life roles and that participation in these roles can form important assets to their work role. I argue that this would foster that employees recognize, identify, and actively apply the behaviors, skills, and insights from other roles, thus increasing the likelihood that these roles positively feed the fulfillment of their work role.

Furthermore, an interesting extension of the present research would be to examine whether the beneficial effects of providing these forms of instrumental and psychological cross-domain support extend *beyond* enabling employees to experience a better combination of their work and family roles. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) posits that the relationship between the employee and the organization (and representatives of the organization, i.e., managers) is a reciprocal relationship in that employees'

behavior and attitudes commensurate with the degree in which the organization (manager) displays commitment to them as individuals. When an employee feels valued and cared about by the organization and one's manager, he or she will "repay" this with increased motivation and effort at work and loyalty towards the organization (Wayne et al., 1997). In this line of reasoning, I posit that providing support for employees' life roles other than the work role signals to employees that the organization (manager) cares about and invests in their overall well-being (see also Greenhaus & Powell, 2000). Thus, it is likely that these positive actions will be repaid by the employee with enhanced effort at work and positive attitudes about the manager and the organization. In this way, a "chain of reactions" can be set in motion that is characterized by increased levels of mutual trust, commitment, and positive interaction. Thus, I propose that providing cross-domain support can also be seen as a more general, positive strategy for the organization and managers to motivate and retain employees. Future research is needed to empirically examine this.

6.5 Practical Implications

The findings discussed in this dissertation have important implications for organizational practice. The examination of the *interface* between employees' work and home life roles shows that difficulties experienced in role combination (*conflict*) can have detrimental consequences for the employee as well as the organization, such as emotional exhaustion (burnout), depressive complaints or lower work satisfaction. This indeed is one side of the story. However, this dissertation also reveals that employees' work and home life roles can *positively affect* each other (as indicated by experiences of *facilitation* between work and family). Participation in other life roles can actually facilitate the work role in that this can (*re-*) *energize* an employee for work, make the employee more *efficient*, provide opportunities to acquire new *skills and behaviors* that help them to perform well at work, and brings about *psychological benefits* in terms of a broader frame of reference that helps the employee to put work matters into perspective. In the same vein, participation in the work role can facilitate one's home life roles. Importantly, these experiences of facilitation are associated with a range of *beneficial consequences* for employee well-being as well as the organization. For instance, employees who experience more facilitation between their work and home lives are more committed to the organization, more satisfied with their jobs, and happier with their lives in general. Additionally, this research demonstrates that employees' experiences of facilitation result in *concrete*

(objectively measured) gains for employees as well as the organization, namely *improved employee health, better job performance, and lower levels of absenteeism* from work. For organizations, this implies that, in addition to reducing employees' experiences of conflict in role combination, they should aim to enhance the experience of facilitation in order to achieve these beneficial outcomes for the employee and the organization. The present research thus shows that, in current times of heightened, more global competition, it can be a *business advantage* to enable and actively support employees in finding a successful combination of their work and family roles. Moreover, because it is likely to become more and more common that both males and females actively engage in paid work, and because current employees tend to attach great importance to finding a balance between their work and family lives (Peeters & Heiligers, 2003), it is highly advisable for organizations to adequately manage work-family issues. If organizations are capable to support employees in successful role combination, this will contribute to a happy, high-performing workforce and to retaining their human capital. Moreover, supporting employees in work-family role combination is likely to have the additional advantage of signaling to (potential) future employees that the organization invests in employee well-being, thus making the organization an attractive place to work in.

It is important that these research findings are used to make managers and organizations' top management more *knowledgeable* about the positive side of work-family role combination. The difficulties associated with combining work and family often first come to mind, and among managers, the fear can exist that participation in other roles than the work role can "only distract" from work. The benefits associated with the participation in multiple roles are less well known. Managers should therefore be informed that employees' family roles can be an important asset to the work domain, and that by accomplishing that employees experience facilitation between their work and home lives, concrete benefits can be achieved (e.g., higher work satisfaction, better performance, less absenteeism).

In this regard, proactive steps in the work environment can be undertaken to assist managers in this task. Contemporary managers should know how to discuss and practically deal with work-family issues. The present findings show that the nature of the work climate and (lack of) support from managers and co-workers can have an important positive or negative influence on employees' experiences in role combination. When employees receive little *managerial support* for family issues at work, this has a negative impact on their experiences in role combination. Likewise, when *organizational norms* communicate to employees that making use of work-family benefits (e.g., part-time work, parental leave) or

otherwise devoting more time to family responsibilities will be interpreted in the organization as a lack of commitment - and will thus have “negative career consequences” - this detrimentally affects employees’ experiences in role combination. Thus, it is important to question such organizational norms and it is highly advisable to *train* managers, for example by the use of workshops, to be supportive of work-family issues. Managerial support for work-family issues does not imply becoming “soft” in that managers cannot be firm on work targets or deadlines or should always accommodate to family issues. Nevertheless, it is important that managers are *aware* of employees’ family situations and that they are *approachable* for employees in the case of problems in role combination. In this regard, managers should be taught to be *sensitive* on these issues and to communicate to employees that they are *willing to discuss* issues of this kind. It is important that managers support employees in a practical fashion when needed, for example by constructively and creatively discussing with employees new ways of organizing the combination of their work and family roles. In this way, it is most likely to create a “win-win” between the organizational and employee interests. But it is also important that managers signal to employees that they acknowledge and value employees’ participation in other roles than the work role alone. In this way, managers can stimulate that employees’ work and family roles reinforce each other, for example by stimulating that employees recognize and apply the valuable behaviors, skills, and insights they acquire from the participation in other life roles. Moreover, it is probable that such a constructive approach of supporting employees to find a successful combination of their work and family roles prevents employees from making “either/or” choices in role combination, such as quitting one’s job, or opting for only a small part-time job (Ellemers, 1993).

Thus, rather than assuming that commitment to family roles is incompatible with effective performance at work and restricting the career opportunities of individuals who display such commitments (see also Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007), it is important to create a *family supportive work environment*, in which organizational norms and managers not only acknowledge, but also value and actively support family roles. This will reduce employees’ conflict experiences and enhance their facilitation experiences in role combination, resulting in beneficial consequences for employees and the organization alike.

Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to the way in which the topic of work-family role combination is discussed in organizations – in organizational communications, by managers, and informally among co-workers - but in a

broader societal context as well. The results presented in this dissertation showed that the mere reading about positive or negative aspects associated with role combination *influenced* how positively or negatively employees appraised their own situation of combining work and family roles. This indicates that messages communicated by others in one's organization or home life shape the perspective the individual takes of combining work and family roles. Repeated or chronic exposure to such views can thus impact upon employees' subjective well-being in important ways. For example, when co-workers among each other exclusively talk about the difficulties in the combination of work and family roles or when a manager only approaches role combination from a negative perspective ("It must be difficult for you, working four days a week with a young child at home"), this makes it more likely that employees focus on the negative side and experience the combination of work and family roles more negatively as well. The need to not only discuss and highlight this negative side is illustrated by my observation that, during the interviews I conducted, it happened many times that employees spontaneously mentioned that in their work *and* daily lives others often only tend to ask about the difficulties associated with role combination and they were pleasantly surprised that I didn't. In the media as well, the problems and difficulties that employees are faced with in role combination are frequently highlighted and discussed, especially in articles or broadcasts concerning working women. Illustrative of the fact that this perspective is one-sided and that the positive side deserves coverage as well, is a small article in a Dutch newspaper (Bolwijn, NRC, 2005) that discussed some of the findings of the present dissertation. In this article, which focused on the experiences of female employees in role combination, the different ways in which women can experience a positive exchange between their work and family roles (types of facilitation) were described. This article received an abundance of reactions from women who were glad to finally see this positive side of role combination to be addressed as well (and for instance also said they put it on their bulletin board for inspiration). These observations thus indicate that, in our work and home lives and in society at large, work-family issues too often are exclusively approached from a negative perspective. This is highly unfortunate. Firstly because this view does not present an adequate picture of employees' experiences in role combination. Secondly because placing a spotlight on the beneficial side to role combination would make a difference in that it is likely to make others approach the combination of work and family roles from a more positive perspective as well.

To recapitulate, this research reveals what can and also needs to be done from a *psychological perspective* to support employees in achieving a successful combination of work and family roles. It is often thought that getting employees to experience a more successful combination of work and family roles can only be achieved by making changes in the objective situation at work or at home (e.g., reducing working hours, increased support in housekeeping) or in the formal arrangements and material provisions sphere (e.g., providing formal benefits and arrangements to employees such as day care facilities). The present research, however, demonstrates the importance of psychological support: having a supportive work climate, receiving informal support from one's manager and co-workers, and the importance of how the topic of role combination is dealt with and discussed on a day-to-day basis. As such, this research reveals the psychological factors that need to be addressed in order to assist employees in finding a successful combination of work and family roles.

6.6 Future Research

Additional Longitudinal Research

A possible limitation of the present research lies in the reliance on cross-sectional survey data in Chapter 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, cross-sectional data were used to examine whether there was added value in examining people's facilitation experiences – in addition to their conflict experiences - for the prediction of variables that are widely regarded as *outcomes* in work-family research (Allen et al., 2000, Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005; Witt & Carlson, 2006). In Chapter 3, in coherence with previous theoretical and empirical research (e.g., Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Wayne et al., 2007), I argued that receiving support enables one to achieve a more successful combination of roles, thus viewing supportive environments to be *antecedents* of conflict and facilitation. However, since most previous work-family research is cross-sectional in nature as well, additional longitudinal, multi-source research designs are needed to fully rule out the possibility of reverse causation and to conclusively address concerns of mono-method bias (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007). However, a strong point of the present dissertation is that, besides the use of cross-sectional survey data, longitudinal and experimental research designs were used in further chapters. As such, the longitudinal data in Chapter 4 supported that employees' facilitation experiences predict objective outcome variables over time (employee health, performance, and absenteeism). An interesting avenue for future longitudinal research would be to test the *reciprocal relationships* over

the years between one's resources in the work and home domain, experiences of facilitation between one's work and family roles, and outcomes, such as performance and health. For example, it is conceivable that performance at work and one's health must not only be seen as outcome variables in the process. It could be that there is a reciprocal relationship as well in that superior performance at work, and being in good physical health again bring about additional resources (e.g., additional learning and career opportunities), which in turn stimulate the experience of facilitation, thus possibly creating a "gain spiral" of positive outcomes (Bakker & Geurts, 2004).

Research in other Contexts

The studies that are presented in this dissertation were conducted in one single financial services organization (ING). Because this concerns a very large organization (over 30,000 employees), in which employees work in highly diverse jobs and job contexts, it is reasonable to assume that other research will find comparable results. However, the financial services sector is a sector with attractive primary and secondary compensation and good working conditions (e.g., relatively high salaries, professional technologies, high levels of autonomy at work). These resources could be associated with experiencing higher overall levels of success in the combination of work and family roles. Thus, additional research in other sectors and organizational contexts is needed to further establish the robustness of the present findings.

An interesting extension of the present research - and the work-family literature more generally (Casper et al., 2007; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) - would be to conduct *comparative international studies* to increase our understanding of the culture-specific and universal experiences in the work-family interface. Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) proposed that collectivist, feminine, low uncertainly avoidant, and/or low power distance cultures promote more role integration than masculine, high uncertainly avoidant, and/or high power distance cultures. Thus, it is conceivable that, as compared to the latter cultures, employees in the former cultures generally receive more support for family issues in their work environments (and more support for work issues in their family environments), which increases the likelihood that employees in these cultures experience a more successful combination of their work and family roles. In the comparison of the Netherlands and the U.S., for example, (the Netherlands being a more feminine and less individualistic country, Hofstede, 2005), it is plausible that Dutch employees, on average, are more likely to experience facilitation and less likely to experience conflict between their work

and family roles than American employees. Differences in institutional factors such as countries' welfare systems should also be taken into account in comparative studies. Social-democratic regimes (e.g., Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands) have a more extensive well-fare system that is accessible for all citizens and communicates the importance of combining work and family than liberal regimes (e.g., United States, United Kingdom) or conservative regimes (e.g., Italy; van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2002). It should be examined how differences in these resources at the national level (e.g., job security, pension rights, family benefits) relate to the element of experienced choice for the work role and employees' facilitation and conflict experiences in role combination. Additionally, it would be important to further examine *gender differences* in comparative studies. In the present research, women experienced higher levels of facilitation between their work and family roles than their male colleagues. Based on traditional gender role expectations and gender differences in role fulfillment that still exist in present-day society, I argued and found that, for women, the element of choice for the work role is more psychologically salient than for men. To the extent that such expectations are held, I expect that female employees should experience more facilitation than male employees. Women in a representative U.S. sample also have been found to experience more facilitation than men (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). These parallel findings suggest that our conclusions are likely to apply to other national contexts. However, when role expectations are different (e.g., in a different cultural system, or due to different gender beliefs) or when there are fewer gender differences in fulfilling the work role, I do not necessarily expect to find the same pattern of results. Future research is needed to more systematically examine this.

Different Types of Facilitation and Conflict

The present research established that individuals can experience different types of facilitation (energy-based, time-based, behavioral, and psychological facilitation). Addressing these types of facilitation, together with strain-based, time-based, behavioral, and psychological conflict, has been an important first step to understand the different experiences that individuals have in the combination of their work and family roles, and the beneficial as well as detrimental consequences that can result from these experiences. In the present research, all four types of facilitation emerged as reliable predictors of one or more of the outcome variables examined. Moreover, many of the differential relationships observed were *gender specific*, which makes the pattern of results even more complex. For instance, energy-based WF facilitation was related to

higher work satisfaction for both men and women. At the same time, however, behavioral WF facilitation related to increased work satisfaction for men, whereas psychological WF facilitation related to increased work satisfaction for women. Another example is that *psychological FW facilitation* (the experience that one is better able to put work matters into perspective by virtue of one's family roles) related to higher self-rated job performance for *women*, but related to higher levels of home performance, home commitment, home satisfaction, and global life satisfaction for *men* (Chapter 2). Thus, although the present research revealed that these different types of facilitation experiences exist, that they are statistically distinct, and that they relate to a broad range of beneficial outcomes, additional research is needed to predict more specifically which types of facilitation specifically yield beneficial outcomes for women and men.

The Interplay between Situational and Dispositional Factors

Another interesting extension of the present research would be to further establish which *antecedents* are likely to stimulate the specific types of facilitation distinguished here. In recent research, jobs and job contexts that are rich in resources (e.g., autonomy, learning opportunities, feedback, and managerial support) have been found to increase the likelihood that employees experience generalized facilitation between their work and family roles (Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Voydanoff, 2004). It should be examined whether specific resources in the work and home environment differentially affect the different types of facilitation experiences. For instance, having much freedom to decide how to use the time at work - and at home - conceivably increases the opportunity to experience time-based facilitation, whereas having a lot of learning and feedback opportunities in one's work and home life could primarily increase chances for experiencing behavioral facilitation.

In addition to the examination of situational characteristics of the work and home environment, an important question also is *which* individuals generally are most likely to experience (specific types of) facilitation or conflict. Since individuals cannot leave their dispositions behind when they come to work or participate in their family roles (Stoeva, Chiu, & Greenhaus, 2002), it is important to examine which *personality traits* make individuals more prone to experience facilitation and conflict. Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997) have defined dispositional traits as stable and consistent ways of *thinking, feeling, or acting* exhibited by individuals. Moreover, they regard dispositional traits as the "*frame*" through which situational appraisals are made (see also Stoeva et al., 2002). As such, personality factors can influence how individuals *perceive*,

appraise, and *react* to situations of work-family role combination. For example, *proactive individuals* tend to identify opportunities and act on them, to show initiative, and to persevere under difficult circumstances. In contrast, less proactive individuals are passive and reactive, and tend to adapt to circumstances, rather than changing them (Aryee et al., 2005). Thus, with regard to role combination, the proactive individual conceivably is more likely to appraise a situation as a *challenge* (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and is more likely to actively look for and apply available resources, and constructively react to the situation at hand (Geenhaus & Powell, 2006). As such, proactive individuals may generally be more likely to experience facilitation, but again it may also be that specific types of facilitation are most closely linked to this personality variable. For example, proactive individuals may be particularly likely to seek new situations or opportunities to learn new skills, thus especially increasing their chances to experience behavioral facilitation.

Logically, in future research it would also be important to shed more light on the specific conditions in the work and home environment under which certain individuals are most likely to experience facilitation or conflict between their work and family roles. For example, it is conceivable that a job context that is rich in learning opportunities especially increases behavioral facilitation among pro-active individuals because, conceivably, these individuals are more likely than passive individuals to identify and use the different possibilities to learn new skills and behaviors that are available to them. Such future research on the interplay between situational and dispositional characteristics would assist in designing specific work-family interventions programs that suit individual employees.

The Power of Appraisal Support

In this dissertation, I have examined the role of appraisal support and have shown - by means of a field experiment - that the appraisals individuals make about their combination of work and family roles can be *influenced* by information provided by others. I believe it is a novel and fruitful direction for future research to devote more attention to these cognitive appraisal processes regarding the combination of work and family roles, and how individuals affect each other in this respect. Recently, scholars have started to underscore that stress experiences must not be viewed as isolated personal phenomena, but rather to acknowledge that stress has important social dimensions (Haslam, 2004). Others in our social environment and the groups we belong to shape what we view as important, desirable, ignoble, or damaging, thus influencing how we

ourselves cognitively construe events and situations in our lives. An interesting question is to examine how powerful the influence of others can be on the appraisals we make about role combination. Previous research on burnout in the work place, for example, shows that burnout can to a certain degree be “contagious”. In a study among teachers, it was found that those who frequently talked with their burned-out colleagues (e.g., about problematic students) had the highest chances of “catching” the negative attitudes expressed by their colleagues (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000). Additionally, another study conducted among 85 work teams of the Dutch police force revealed that collective feelings of burnout, but also positive feelings of work engagement, affect the individual team member (Bakker, Emmerik, & Euwema, 2006). The authors explain that this process could occur via non-conscious emotional contagion (people’s tendency to automatically mimic each others expressions, postures, and behaviors) but also via a conscious cognitive process of “tuning in” to the other’s emotions, which triggers memories of similar emotions, in turn making it more likely that two persons experience the same emotion. The latter explanation appears to be related to the appraisal support process in which information and views expressed by others influences one’s own interpretation of a situation. In the context of the combination of work and family roles, it seems highly relevant to examine how, for example, team members affect each others’ assessments of experiencing conflict and facilitation between their work and family roles. It would also be interesting to systematically examine how for instance in “women’s friends groups” work-family issues are discussed (e.g., primarily highlighting the stressful or the positive aspects), and how this impacts upon the individual’s own views and experiences. In this regard, it would be valuable to design an *intervention program* in which employees are stimulated to actively think about and discuss the positive side of role combination with others in a group, and examine whether this indeed yields that they appraise and experience the combination of their work and family roles more positively over time.

However, prior to designing such interventions it is needed to conduct *additional field experiments* to closely study the conditions under which providing appraisal support is most effective. Along the lines of the field experiment in Chapter 5, future studies could further uncover what kind of (repeated) informational messages are most likely to influence individuals’ appraisals of role combination, the *time-span* of these effects, and when and how *internalization* of a certain view on role combination occurs. Moreover, it would be interesting to also include *behavioral measures* in future experiments. For example to examine

whether individuals who are stimulated to appraise role combination as a challenge rather than a threat also display differences in terms of their actual behaviors (e.g., more pro-active searching behavior for information about work-family role combination). Furthermore, it is important to study in depth whether the effectiveness of informational support varies as a function of the *source* that provides it. As explained earlier in this dissertation, social identity theory suggests that the appraisal process is structured by people's internalized group memberships in such a way that ingroup members are seen as a more relevant source of information than members of an outgroup (Haslam, 2004; Haslam & Reicher, 1996; Turner, 1991; Ellemers, de Gilder, Haslam, 2004). This would, for example, imply that the information and views expressed on role combination by our team members and friends will be more influential in shaping our interpretation on the combination of work and family than views and information from strangers. However, an interesting question that needs to be addressed is which others are viewed as "relevant" ingroup concerning the issue of work-family role combination. For example, can any team member provide effective appraisal support, or is it a pre-condition that someone is a same-sex team member in a comparable family situation to impact one's appraisal of work-family role combination? In sum, conducting additional field experiments will provide important insights on whether and how precisely coaching and intervention programs could, by providing informational support, "train" employees to view and approach combining work and family from a more positive perspective.

The Partner Relationship

An interesting and important extension of the present research would be to simultaneously examine both husbands' and wives' experiences in the combination of work and family roles, thus taking the *couple* as unit of the analysis. Previous research has shown that partners can affect each other in that conflict experiences can *crossover* from one partner to the other (Hammer, Allen, Grigsby, 1997). It would be interesting to examine if crossover of facilitation experiences can also occur. Moreover, up to date, little is known about how interaction patterns between partners impact upon both partners' conflict and facilitation experiences in role combination. Taking the couple as the unit of analysis could, for example, enhance our insight into the effects of *social support in the partner relationship* on both husbands' and wives' experienced success in role combination. In this regard it could be valuable to make a distinction between different forms of social support (Haslam, 2004, House, 1981), such as

emotional support (e.g., understanding of and listening to the other's worries), *instrumental support* (e.g., direct assistance in taking over chores or staying at home when a child is ill), and *appraisal support* (e.g., providing information that changes the other's interpretation of a situation). It would be interesting to examine the patterns of support that husbands and wives provide each over a certain period of time to investigate whether, for instance, husbands and wives differ in the extent to which they provide each other with instrumental and emotional support and to examine how this affects their level of conflict and facilitation experiences in role combination. Such an examination would also be relevant in view of the rather intriguing finding in the present dissertation that, for men, receiving support from one's partner related to lower levels of conflict (as was expected), whereas, for women, higher levels of partner support were actually associated with higher levels of conflict. Although other explanations are possible as well (e.g., reverse causation), Fernandez (1995) has pointed out the interesting possibility that social support can also have a "reverse buffering effect" in that talking with others can underscore and legitimize negative feelings, thus increasing one's feelings of strain. Thus, it would be highly interesting to examine *how* exactly husbands and wives support each other in role combination to gain more insight in possible "constructive" and "destructive" forms of support and their effects on facilitation and conflict experiences.

Moreover, an important direction for future research would be to assess how both partners' conflict and facilitation experiences affect the *work-family choices* partners make, for instance regarding the division of caring and household tasks and the division of paid labor between partners (Kluwer & van der Lippe, 2004; Kluwer, Heesink, & van de Vliert, 1996). When examining how such work-family choices are made it would also be highly interesting to assess the way in which partners *negotiate* about these issues at home. Negotiation research in business and interpersonal conflict situations has shown that negotiators often fail to realize their *integrative potential*, which is unfortunate because in integrative agreements the available resources are used in an optimal way, both parties are highly satisfied, and the probability of future conflict is reduced (de Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon, 2000; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). When are partners in the intimate relationship most likely to reach integrative agreements it that the available resources are optimally used (e.g., material resources, individual talents), both partners are satisfied, and the chances of marital conflict are reduced? In this regard it would be fruitful to examine both partners' *individual characteristics* (e.g., social values orientation, achievement

motivation), their *experiences in role combination* (e.g., level of facilitation and conflict), and *characteristics of their relationship* (e.g., status, procedural justice). In such examinations broader *societal* and *economic* factors (e.g., social norms, relative wage rates) should be taken into account as well (Kluwer & van der Lippe, 2004; van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994). Finally, it would be interesting to examine how these (negotiated) work-family choices in turn impact upon longer term outcomes such as the quality of parent-child relationships or both partners' career outcomes.

6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research presented in this dissertation has provided a balanced picture of the experiences that individuals can have in the combination of their work and family roles. Extending the common focus in previous literature on experiences of role conflict (and their detrimental consequences), the present research has also addressed the *positive side* of work-family role combination and has shown different ways in which work and family roles can *facilitate* each other. This research shows that experiencing facilitation between work and family roles has *beneficial consequences* for employees' *well-being* in their work and home lives (e.g., higher work satisfaction, higher life satisfaction), contributes to employees' *mental and physical health* (e.g., lower depressive complaints, lower cholesterol level, healthier body weight), and results in *concrete gains for the organization* as well (e.g., enhanced job performance, lower absenteeism). Furthermore, this research indicates that the experience of facilitation can be stimulated by means of appraisal support and by providing support for family issues in the work environment as well as support for work issues in the home environment. For a long time, the work-family literature has been dominated by a focus on the negative side of work-family role combination. This dissertation provides a positive perspective on the combination of work and family roles, which will hopefully also find its way to a non-academic audience. Especially in a society that will become more and more reliant on active labor participation of both the male and female population, a better understanding of how these roles can positively influence and support each other will become of paramount importance.