

The Balancing Act –
At Work and At Home

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Thomas and Caroline have been married for thirty years. Both are very successful in their careers: she has steadily climbed her way up to a division manager for a Fortune 500 organization, while he has built a strong private medical practice in their community. Along the way, there have been tradeoffs. Work interfered with their personal lives and family goals at times. There have been disagreements about how much work should be brought home, and feelings of neglect when one partner was preoccupied with thoughts of work instead of focusing on the family. He feels that she brings too much work home with her, and she feels that he spends too much time at the office. They both believe that they have too many social obligations and not enough free time. This couple does not agree about a significant decision that was made early in their marriage—whether or not to have children. Caroline says that the decision not to have children was a choice they consciously made to focus on their respective careers and future success. However, Thomas disagrees and states that this path in their lives was not a chosen one. What would cause two individuals, in what appears to be a successful marriage, to have such differing viewpoints regarding a critical decision made in their marital lives?

This vignette illustrates the complexity of the interactions, intersections, and overlaps between the domains of work life and home life with the private domain of the self. We capture these three separate domains, their intersections, and their overlaps in Fig. 1. An overlap does not necessarily lead to conflict. Alternatively, it may lead to balance and dynamic interaction. If, for example, work and home life are mutually reinforcing, then there is balance, not conflict. However, if they are not mutually reinforcing, then there is

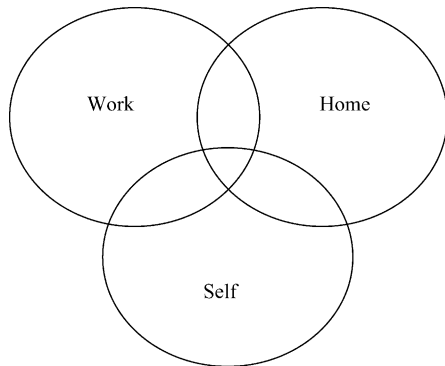
potential conflict. Or, if they are in dysfunctional competition for an individual's time or other resources, then there is active conflict. We plan to explore these issues of conflict and balance throughout the article.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Why should the happy, healthy, productive worker make it a priority to effectively balance the demands from his or her family and work? Quite simply, because so much is at stake when we fail to manage these often-competing demands. Conflict between a person's work responsibilities and family obligations can significantly impact all aspects of the individual's life. There are key consequences that accompany the failure to effectively balance the two domains for the employees themselves, their families and organizations. As a result, not only does the individual suffer from pressures associated with work–family conflict, but the impact extends to spouses, children, bosses, subordinates, etc.

Consider the following example: Robert works an average of 60 hours a week as a sales manager in a rapidly expanding technology firm. He's been married for 11 years and has one daughter, age 8, and a son, age 5. Robert sees that his high performance now at work could pay off in quick advancement up the corporate ladder. As a result, he puts the majority of his energy into his work life and often pushes family requests and obligations to the background. While his wife is understanding at first, over time she begins to put pressure on Robert to spend more time with her and the kids. As a result, Robert becomes

FIGURE 1 THE BALANCING ACT—WORK, HOME. . .SELF



tense and feels guilty when he stays late at work to meet with a client or finish a report. His work performance begins to slide, only putting more pressure on Robert. Eventually, Robert becomes so tense and frustrated that his ability to function effectively in either the family or work domain is hindered. His work suffers, and both his organization and his family are affected by the work–family spillover that occurs. Robert becomes trapped in seemingly endless cycle impacting all aspects of his life.

It is obvious that work–family conflict, or the failure to effectively balance work and family demands, has unique consequences for the individual employee or executive involved, his or her family, and the organization. These outcomes affect the employee in all aspects of life and are not isolated to the work domain. As the amount of work–family conflict that an individual is experiencing increases, his or her job satisfaction and life satisfaction fall. These individuals report lower levels of general happiness and subjective well-being than workers who do not experience work–family conflict. Research has also shown that their psychological distress levels increase, and negative health consequences often result. Failure to balance the demands between work and family has been linked with higher levels of depression and increased alcohol use. In regards to their work domain itself, workers tend to become less

committed to an organization when they are experiencing work–family conflict. Individuals may see the organization as the cause of distress in their lives, thereby resulting in decreased levels of attachment to that organization. It should be no surprise that workers who are experiencing work–family conflict also report higher intentions to leave their current organizations as well as increased reports of actual turnover.

Effects on the Family and Organization

The effects of work–family conflict are not isolated to merely the individual employee, but extend to the family as well. Family performance often suffers as a result of the competing demands of work and family domains. In turn, work–family conflict has been associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction for both spouses and increased instances of divorce and family strife. The increasing number of dual-career couples also creates a unique dynamic in the balance of work and family, because research has shown that the amount of work–family conflict experienced by one partner directly affects the amount of work–family conflict experienced by the other partner. This spillover of conflict from one spouse to another makes balancing the competing demands of work and family all the more complex, in that now the focus is on managing the demands of two individuals, their respective careers, and their mutual family environment. Reported parental problems have been associated with higher levels of work–family conflict, as have instances of juvenile delinquency and violence. Increased stress levels and tension within the home that often accompany work–family conflict impact the day-to-day functionality of the family unit. This can be observed in seemingly minor details, such as the dad who rarely sees his kids in the morning before they go to school or the mom who consistently breaks her promises to attend key school events, which over time can create feelings of resentment and hurt in the family and affect the overall vitality of the family domain.

Organizations are also victims of the employee's inability to balance work and home demands. Work–family conflict directly affects the job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and performance of the worker, thereby indirectly influencing overall organizational performance. Absenteeism is often higher for individuals experiencing work–family conflict, resulting in increased labor costs for the organization. Because intentions to leave and actual turnover are greater for sufferers of work–family conflict, the organization must incur the costs of replacing these employees in the form of recruitment, selection, and training. Health-care costs for the organization can also rise as workers suffer from the negative health ramifications that often result from the distress associated with work–family conflict.

What Forms Does it Take?

Based upon the extensive ramifications associated with work–family conflict, it is obvious that the failure to balance work and family obligations should be of significant concern for both executives and their organizations. But how does work–family conflict occur? What forms does it take? Jeffrey Greenhaus and Nicholas Beutell have identified three distinct types of work–family conflict that can occur when work stressors, such as role overload, extensive pressure, lack of autonomy, and role ambiguity, limit the ability for workers to effectively manage their work and family lives. While they differ in terms of their nature, all three can result in the negative outcomes discussed above.

Time-based conflict occurs when the time devoted to work makes it difficult to fulfill the obligations and requirements of the family role and can impact the worker in either of two ways. One form of this conflict addresses the simple zero-sum nature of time management. In other words, any time spent by the worker in one domain makes it physically impossible for that worker to spend that same time in the other domain. To understand the effect of this type of work–family conflict, consider the executive who consistently stays

late at the office and misses the family evening meal. Over time, this individual is left out of the communication within the family that takes place during this daily activity. As a result, he or she can become increasingly isolated from the family. Time-based conflict can also occur when the employee is physically present in the family domain, but mentally preoccupied with work concerns. So while this individual is trying to meet their family obligations in body, his or her mind is still at work. For example, the parent who attends a child's sporting event or birthday party but spends the majority of the time on a cell phone dealing with problems at the office is not truly committing his or her full self to this time in the family domain.

Strain-based conflict occurs when the pressures of the work role spillover and affect interactions within the family domain. Greenhaus and Beutell define this type of work–family conflict as “strain from participation in one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another.” In other words, the employee who has a particularly stressful day at work comes home in a bad mood and takes it out on his family. He may snap at his spouse for no particular reason or be so tired from the workday's events that he doesn't feel like playing baseball when his child asks. While these individuals are not directly preoccupied with office tasks as in time-based conflict, the negative effects of work stressors are manifested within the home environment as workers displace their negative emotions that stem from work experiences and express them within the family.

Behavior-based conflict is the third and final type of work–family conflict. This type of conflict occurs when behaviors that are acceptable, and even rewarded, in the work domain are incompatible with the behaviors that are desired in the home domain. Problems occur then when the employee fails to recognize the need to adjust her behaviors between the two domains. For example, an authoritative boss who must give clear direction to her employees at work in order to get the job done, may find that her attempts to behave in the same manner at home with her

children are not equally successful and can even result in hurt feelings and resentment. Likewise, the key executive who spends the majority of his day solving problems may encounter resistance when he comes home to a wife who wants him to simply listen attentively to her problems without necessarily instructing her on how to solve them. The key component in this type of work–family conflict involves the need to adjust the behavior between the work and family domains.

SOURCES OF WORK–FAMILY CONFLICT

Work–family conflict is a reality for those who live in families, and even for those executives who do not live in families – yet must catch the crossover effects of colleagues’ or employees’ conflicts as they spill into the workplace. One of the keys to conflict management is an understanding of the sources of work–family conflict. The core of the conflict comes from three separate, competing, and overlapping sets of demands which, respectively, originate in the home, the workplace, and within one’s self. We address the demands of each of these sources of demands separately.

Much that has been written about work–family conflict focuses on conflicting time demands. We offer a different perspective. Rather than framing the conflict in terms of time, we suggest framing it in terms of energy, attention, and engagement. This perspective becomes important in both understanding the conflict and in managing the conflict. For example, if time is seen as the central issue, this then converts the conflict into a form of mathematical problem. If energy is seen as the central issue, then it becomes more of a human issue than a math problem, and each family, as we saw in the opening vignette, can work out their own balancing act for work–family.

Home Demands

Every home needs a wonderful wife, and it does not have to be the woman. As more and

more women continue both a professional and a family life, home demands have changed. Now more pressure accrues to the male working spouse or a surrogate chosen by the husband and wife jointly, in the case of traditional family homes. Home demands fall into two broad categories, one physical or material and the other interpersonal. The physical or material demands concern framing and maintaining the home, which are especially substantive in large, elaborate homes. For families with financial resources to hire staff and delegate a range of tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, this frees both husband and wife to devote more energy to interpersonal aspects of home life. For families without such resources, the challenges are more complicated.

Children within the family add another dimension to the home demands. Because the American culture often assigns primary home responsibility to women, the stereotypic response to their struggle with work–family balance is unfairly written off as of their own making. Prior to becoming chairman and chief executive officer (CEO) of Hewlett-Packard Co., Lew Platt had a direct experience with the conflict in his own life after his first wife Susan died in 1981 and left him to raise two daughters. At the time of his wife’s death, Mr. Platt was a general manager at HP with significant professional responsibilities, and no longer a spousal partner who took the primary lead at home and within the family. He quickly grasped the dilemma that many of HP’s women managers were faced with on an ongoing basis.

What made Mr. Platt’s loss particularly poignant was the critical ages of his daughters: nine and eleven. There are several critical ages in the development of children, and the developmental opportunity comes only once chronologically. Author and Focus on Family founder James Dobson made a conscious decision during the early years of his children’s lives to devote more energy to his family and less energy to his career development. While Dr. Dobson’s personal and family choice was his, and others may choose differently, it is important to be fully aware of

the key developmental and personal issues at stake for one's spouse, children, and other family members as decisions are made. For example, the critically and terminally ill child in a family may call forth the need for extended family or faith community family members to supplement the energy and concern of the parents in the family.

Work Demands

We have described in detail elsewhere (see Annotated Bibliography) the wide array of task, role, physical, and interpersonal demands for people at work. These demands create either stress or challenge for the individual depending upon individual idiosyncrasy and vulnerability. The sources of work stress are independent of a person's home life and other considerations. However, from the standpoint of work-family conflict, the work demands that may be most problematic are role ambiguity and overload, career stage, and family stage. The work role may contribute to work-family conflict when the role expectations are unclear or the volume of work is greater than the time and energy available for that role. Thus, the confusion and volume overload can spill into the home in both unaware and unintended ways, with adverse impact.

Career stage is a second consideration relevant to work-family conflict. In recollecting at age 93 the early stages of his career and its effect on his family life, a distinguished physician educator observed that he did not have to work as hard as he did at age 33 to be as successful as he was over the entire career. Of course, such retrospective observation is much easier when one has fulfilled a highly successful career. The physician educator was fortunate that he did not lose his family in the process, and retrospective guilt can be unwarranted. One world renowned cancer researcher experienced some of the same reflective guilt as the physician educator and, upon engaging in a family process of reconciliation, discovered that his wife and children had, in fact, not felt shortchanged throughout their lives with him. Still, a

young executive's or professional's striving to achieve in the early career stage may place unwitting pressure on the family.

In addition to the career stage being an important source of work demands creating conflict with the family, one's stage in family life can be a source of overlapping conflict. Working parents with small and adolescent children often feel the conflict and tension of the competing role demands from work and home life. While family-friendly work environments may help ease the tension, individual preferences for separation or integration of these two major life domains are important considerations in this regard as well.

Self-Imposed Demands

Individuals often contribute to their own work-family conflicts by way of self-imposed demands. The most problematic self-imposed demands for work-family conflict center around over-achievement drive and workaholism. These self-imposed demands share some overlapping variance with Type A Behavior Pattern, often known as coronary-prone behavior and occasionally the Sisyphus Complex. Preoccupation with work was first suspected as a risk for cardiovascular disease by the Dutch cardiologist Von Dusch, who observed in the 1860s that an excessive involvement with work contributed to heart disease. Workaholism contributes to work-family conflict to the extent that it prevents one from strategic disengagement from work for alternative purposes in life. [Table 1](#) contains a set of twenty self-assessment questions to help assess whether you are a workaholic or not.

AMPLIFYING THE CONFLICT

In addition to the three sources of work-family conflict just discussed, there are a number of factors that can amplify or enflame the conflict beyond its natural origins. These factors may exacerbate work-family conflict, may be symptoms of work-family conflict, or may be immediate consequences of

TABLE 1 How Do You Know if You Are a Workaholic?

1. Do you get more excited about your work than about family or anything else?
 2. Are there times when you can charge through your work and other times when you can't?
 3. Do you take work with you to bed? On weekends? On vacation?
 4. Is work the activity you like to do best and talk about most?
 5. Do you work more than 40 hours a week?
 6. Do you turn your hobbies into money-making ventures?
 7. Do you take complete responsibility for the outcome of your work efforts?
 8. Have your family or friends given up expecting you on time?
 9. Do you take on extra work because you are concerned that it won't otherwise get done?
 10. Do you underestimate how long a project will take and then rush to complete it?
 11. Do you believe that it is okay to work long hours if you love what you are doing?
 12. Do you get impatient with people who have other priorities besides work?
 13. Are you afraid that if you don't work hard you will lose your job or be a failure?
 14. Is the future a constant worry for you even when things are going very well?
 15. Do you do things energetically and competitively, including play?
 16. Do you get irritated when people ask you to stop doing your work in order to do something else?
 17. Have your long hours hurt your family or other relationships?
 18. Do you think about your work while driving, falling asleep or when others are talking?
 19. Do you work or read during meals?
 20. Do you believe that more money will solve the other problems in your life?
- Reprinted with permission from: Workaholics Anonymous, World Service Organization (2002).

work–family conflict. The five factors are alcohol and other substances, sleep disturbances, business travel, toxic corporate cultures, and the e-mail paradox. These are not intended to be an exhaustive set of factors, and families may discover for themselves specific accelerants that ignite an otherwise routine work–family conflict into a full-blown wildfire. Identifying these factors within the family and then knowing the early warning signs of their pending activation can go a long way in early detection and prevention of specific conflicts for the family and the workplace.

Alcohol and Other Substances

Alcohol abuse is one of the most potential destructive forces in family life, and for those who have lived with an alcoholic, the personality-changing dynamics of the abuser are clear. For those in the workplace, the abuse of alcohol or other substances may be very difficult to detect. For example, a senior military documents security officer was widely known in Washington, DC to abstain from alcohol consumption, as was his wife. The couple never drank at any political, military,

or diplomatic functions. However, after an investigation was triggered when a Top Secret document went missing, it was discovered that the couple were alcoholics who carefully concealed their abuse in the privacy of their home.

While this is a dramatic Jekyll-and-Hyde case of alcohol abuse, it reveals the insidious effects that alcohol or other substance abuse may have in terms of work–family conflict. The common characteristic of the home in which alcohol is abused is disorder and the experience of a lack of control. For families of abusers, this experience is both deeply disturbing and very disorienting. It may be akin to being in a funny house at the amusement park.

Sleep Disturbances

Stress is a known cause of sleep disturbances and insomnia, one early warning sign of change in an individual's life. However, sleep disturbances in turn may play a causal or inflammatory role in work–family conflict, depending upon the individual's response to the sleep disturbance. Not all sleep distur-

bances are problematic and, to the extent that they are short-term responses to peak workloads or changing work demands, they may simply be short-term symptoms of the mind-body adjustment to these changing conditions.

However, chronic and long-term sleep disturbances are of concern for the individual, the family, and the organization. For the individual, sleep deprivation can lead to attention deficits that may contribute to health problems and even accidents in the workplace. For the family, one member's sleep disturbance may become "contagious" with other family members. For the organization, sleep disturbances and deprivation may lead to loss of productivity. One senior municipal executive experienced a two-year period of rather severe insomnia for which medical treatment found little effect. This senior executive's emotional reactivity was enhanced, leading to chronic interpersonal conflicts with members of his city council, which in turn had spillover effects into his marriage and home life.

Travel . . . and More Travel

Travel can exacerbate work-family conflicts in at least two ways. The first way is due to the emotional separation caused by the physical distance of the traveling family member. If the family is a secure base of emotional operation for a husband or wife, travel serves to interrupt the periodic emotional reassurance and social support that intimate family relationships provide. The famous folk singers Peter, Paul, and Mary found during one year that they were on the road well over 200 days, significantly cutting into their individual family relationships. Strong family bonds can withstand reasoned periods of separation due to travel, but any fragility within the family bonds is strained by the separation.

The second way in which travel exacerbates work-family conflict is the additional burden which such travel places on the at-home spouse. There are a variety of functional and mundane aspects of home life, such as taking out the garbage, which simply must be managed if the home is to be healthy

for the family. Most families divide duties among parents and children, or contract with domestic help for childcare and other important home duties. Who assumes the traveling parent's duties in the absence of that parent?

Toxic Corporate Cultures

Peter Frost has brought our attention to the organizational problem of toxic emotions and pain that is often endemic to work life. William Cohen and his clinical psychologist wife further brought attention to the paranoid organization and other dysfunctional forms of corporate cultures. In some organizations, it does seem that it is necessary to be a little bit paranoid, or a little bit schizophrenic, or somewhat manic to succeed within that specific corporate culture. This in no way suggests neither that these corporate cultures are healthy, nor that they should be emulated by other executives or organizations. The problem from a healthy family standpoint is that unhealthy corporate cultures have unhealthy spillover effects into the family.

The "pressure cooker" corporate culture is particularly problematic for those seeking a healthy work-family balance. Organizations that are pressure cookers simply drive their employees, not allowing time for energy recovery nor strategic disengagement from production. The old joke in Schenectady, New York was that you could tell a General Electric Company man by his blood pressure. There are peak work periods, however, when long hours may be appropriate. For example, when the Rotary International year comes to an end in June, Russell-Hampton President Bob Lyons joins other employees in manning the phones every day and in working 14-h days in the office as thousands of Rotary Clubs around the world order the President's Awards recognitions.

The E-Mail Paradox

An emergent factor that may amplify work-family conflict is the ever-present e-mail system, which creates a paradox. E-mail is a double-edged sword that may simplify and

streamline, or become a 24-7 cowbell that strangles the family life out of the employee. When an executive or employee allows e-mail to overwhelm his or her attention with expectations of rapid response, then this electronic aide intrudes upon family life in an adverse manner. This is the negative side of e-mail which can exacerbate work–family conflict.

On the positive side, e-mail can be a simplifying tool that allows an executive to send praise and positive reinforcement quickly, simply, and personally. For example, university president Jim Spaniolo has found that e-mail is a wonderful way to communicate positive feedback and to send personal, congratulatory notes to colleagues everywhere who are performing well. Spaniolo is always careful to reserve any difficult or potentially confusing communication to one-on-one, face-to-face contact that ensures the accuracy of such difficult communications. Used appropriately, e-mail can give executives and employees alike the discretionary control in their communication that enables them to accommodate work–family demands and reduce resultant conflicts.

BALANCING STRATEGIES: HOW CAN WE EFFECTIVELY BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY?

It is obvious that work–family conflict has serious ramifications for the individual employee, his or her family, and organization. While a large amount of research has documented the nature of work–family conflict and the negative outcomes often associated with it, less attention has been focused on the ways employees can effectively balance these often-incompatible pressures from their work and family domains. However, many options exist for the worker who wishes to alleviate some of this conflict in her life. These management strategies occur at the individual level in terms of managing work responsibilities, family obligations, and self-imposed expectations.

Within the Workplace

First, the employee must take an active role in the management of his work responsibilities. While some characteristics of the work environment may appear to be out of one’s personal control, there are many active choices that executives and employees can make to help balance their work and personal lives. As discussed above, individuals experiencing work–family conflict are typically faced with irregular or inflexible work hours, extensive travel, and work overload. The first key to balancing such work demands involves time management: such as setting clear and reasonable goals for work tasks, negotiating travel demands and meeting obligations, and the delegation of assignments when feasible.

To help achieve effective time management, Boris A. Baltes and Heather A. Heydens-Gahir have suggested that a life-management strategy known as selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) be applied to reduce work–family conflict. When using this strategy, employees first identify and set goals to give them clear direction in which to exert their energy, i.e. selection. In the second phase, optimization, individuals acquire, refine, and use the necessary means to achieve those goals set in the first stage of the process. This stage is often characterized by modeling personal behavior after others whom we find successful, learning new skills relevant to achieving our goals, and actively scheduling time and energy. In the final stage of SOC, individuals use additional resources to compensate for their lack of ability to fully meet those goals that were outlined in the first stage. For example, an executive may have to utilize live-in child-care options to help achieve her goal of providing a supportive environment for her children when work demands force her to be away from home. The key objective of this life-management strategy involves focusing on what the important goals are for a person and then directing resources, such as time, to fulfilling those goals.

Boundary management also represents a key coping strategy for balancing the

demands between work and home. According to Ellen Kossek and Raymond Noe, this approach recognizes that individuals must play an active role in managing the “joint enactment” of both work and family roles. Therefore, this option seeks to achieve work–family synthesis while allowing an individual to remain in his or her current position. Such a synthesis is attempted through the concept of boundary management that organizes and separates role demands and expectations based on the boundaries set by the individual. Some individuals choose to set strong boundaries by making the domains mutually exclusive and allowing no interaction between them, while others choose to apply no boundaries at all and allow constant interaction and overlap between family and work life.

Christena Nippert-Eng identified two strategies for managing work–family conflict, based on their position along this continuum of boundary management. Segmentation describes the approach in which clear boundaries are laid between the two domains and overlap is rarely permitted. Individuals utilizing this strategy establish a high level of boundary separation and aim to keep their work and family roles completely distinct. These employees deal with work demands during the established work time and home concerns only during the established home hours. Conflict is reduced because individuals are focused on only one domain at a time, and, therefore, fulfilling only the demands associated with that particular role.

Integration, on the other hand, is utilized when few boundaries exist between domains and no clear distinctions are made regarding the appropriate time for enactment of either role. Individuals using this strategy to reduce work–family conflict will make themselves available to either domain at any time. Therefore, conflict is reduced because the domain with the most pressing need is always addressed, regardless of the time of day or the individual’s physical location. For example, individuals applying integration to their domains will accept work calls at home on Saturday, but may also leave work on a Tuesday morning to run an errand with their child.

Finally, the personal management of work responsibilities can be achieved through choices made when structuring and choosing career paths and job assignments. Research shows that as employees receive more autonomy and flexibility in their positions, their level of work–family conflict significantly decreases. Therefore, individuals attempting to balance their work demands should seek avenues in their careers which allow greater flexibility and autonomy. These choices may be made when deciding whether to accept a promotion or position with a new organization or by simply communicating the need for greater control in their current positions. Employees should also actively understand themselves and their personal needs when making job choices and seek a degree of person-organization fit which complements the various priorities in their lives. Such active management of work responsibilities can significantly alleviate the amount of work–family conflict experienced.

Within the Family

While executives and employees must manage their job responsibilities when negotiating between work and family lives, family obligations also play a significant role in the balancing act. Numerous pressures in the family environment – such as the presence of young children, the primary responsibility for caring for children, and the management of care for elder family members – can all stimulate conflict between the work and family domains. However, individuals can take steps to manage their family obligations while simultaneously fulfilling their responsibilities at work.

The design of the family structure itself can intensify the degree of work–family conflict experienced. Work–family conflict increases as families become larger and more complex, such as through dual-career families with increasing levels of obligation. However, research has shown that these factors can be mitigated by support within the family. Employees who report that their spouses provide career support, personal support, and

help with the children experience less difficulty in balancing the two domains. Communication within the family plays a key role in fostering this social support. For example, simply letting your spouse know that this is a particularly stressful time at the office and you may have to work late the next few weeks can help everyone in the family adjust to changes in responsibility without feelings of abandonment or resentment.

When managing family obligations, it is important to realize that the quantity of time is not always the key factor. Instead, quality of time spent in the family role may be even more important. The majority of the average waking workday is spent either in the work environment, commuting to and from work, or handling other work obligations, leaving little time in the day to accomplish home responsibilities. However, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz point out that managing energy, not time, is the key to higher performance and personal renewal. In other words, it may not be the amount of time spent with the family, but the nature of that time. Three hours of energetic, fully engaged, time spent with the family on a weeknight may not equal the amount of time spent at the office that day, but may be more rewarding in terms of the energy and fulfillment achieved. Also, the chosen time spent with the family may be equally important. For example, the average weeknight may not be very significant to the family, but the weeknight that a child has a piano recital or a spouse is receiving an award may be of considerable importance. In other words, while quality time is important, the right time may carry even greater significance.

Self-Management

The final component that must be managed when balancing work and family responsibilities focuses on self-imposed expectations and reactions to role demands. Self-management is a central ingredient in high levels of emotional competence. Key individual difference factors influence the degree of work–family conflict experienced. Neuroticism, Type A

tendencies, and negative affectivity have all been found to increase perceptions of work–family conflict. Additionally, predispositions to stress, such as a lack of personality hardiness, and differences in ability to cope with life stressors will further limit an individual's ability to effectively balance work and family demands. It is important that employees recognize the role that their individual personalities play in shaping their reactions to these life stressors. It is interesting to note that as workers age, they report less work–family conflict, thus reflecting the impact of learning experiences on the ability to recognize and manage work–family interactions.

Self-imposed expectations of one's performance in work and/or family roles can be directly related to the level of psychological involvement one feels toward that role. As work becomes more important to us in terms of how we define ourselves, the decisions we make and the direction toward which we expend our energy are affected. This concept is most clearly reflected when considering the classic workaholic mentioned previously. While lack of adequate attention to one's job can result in poor performance and dismissal, an intense obsession and preoccupation with one's job can pose a significant risk for one's health and family. It is difficult for executives—in that commitment, long hours, high performance, and job involvement are all characteristics common to success in today's organizations. However, when taken to the extreme, these behaviors can become destructive for both the individual and her family. Workaholics often suffer from chronic fatigue, obsessive worry, short temper, poor communication, insomnia, and mood fluctuations. In turn, their performance at work may suffer, leading to more pressure and extreme behaviors. All of these negative outcomes inevitably influence the family environment and the attempt to effectively balance the two domains.

The individual must play an active role in self-management in order to balance work and family lives. A key step in this process is the realization of the need to balance both of these aspects of their lives and the examina-

tion of self-expectations. It is important for employees to be aware of the demands that they place upon themselves in order to understand how to generate reasonable expectations that allow for a balance between the two domains. This self-knowledge must be gained in order to create the awareness that an individual needs to alter his or her perceptions, behaviors, and lifestyles. The resulting increased awareness will open the door for the individual to seek the support the helps reduce work–family conflict. Employees must be willing to ask for the support they need, whether from their partner or their organization, in order to benefit from this valuable source of strength. Communication of individual needs to all those affected by a poor work–family balance, e.g. partners, children, supervisors, plays an important role in this process. The acceptance of support, when offered, is essential for managing these dual obligations.

While the failure to balance work and family lives effectively holds significant ramifications for individuals, their families, and their organizations, it is important for employees to realize that they have options available to help manage the amount of work–family conflict they experience. There are three key components which must all be addressed to achieve this desired balance: managing work responsibilities, managing family obligations, and managing self-imposed expectations. Each of these components represents a distinct aspect of the worker's life over which he must exhibit a degree of control to effectively manage all of the conflicting pressures often found in work and family domains. For the individual, it is important to realize that he plays an active role in determining the degree of work–family conflict he experiences.

A WORD TO THE WISE EXECUTIVE

Effectively balancing the mutual demands of both work and nonwork lives is an essential component of managing today's workforce.

While the demands between the alternative domains may create a conflict for some employees, we believe that each of these aspects of an individual's life can coexist successfully. In other words, conflict does not have to occur, and the alternative aspects of an individual's life can be complimentary, rather than competitive. The key consideration for employees, executives, and organizations is the active management of each role. Once that is achieved, the probability of engaging fully in all domains increases greatly.

It is obvious that many opportunities exist for conflict between an executive's work and nonwork roles, due to time demands and the ever-present strain associated with demanding organizational positions. However, management strategies can enable the executive to find a balance in his or her life in which success in each of the life roles is attainable. We do not believe that success in the work role necessarily constitutes decreased functioning in the non-work role or vice versa. Instead, both roles, as well as self-expectations, can be managed, and even embraced, simultaneously. All of the contributing forces, such as self, family, and organizational demands, can coexist without creating conflict. The key factor is that individuals are aware of the potential impact of each role on the other roles in their lives. Consequently, the active management of energy, as opposed to time, can enable executives to achieve in all areas. Therefore, the potential solution to work–family conflict is more complex than simply spending the same amount of quantitative hours in each domain. Instead, the understanding of which time, and the quality of that time, becomes much more important. As a result, executives may still spend a greater number of hours outside of the home domain, but the total hours spent enacting the family role may become less influential on life and family satisfaction than the nature of those hours.



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Insight into the development and types of work–family conflict can be achieved by reading Jeffrey Greenhaus and Nicholas Beutell’s article entitled “Sources of Conflict between Work and Family Roles,” *Academy of Management Review*, 1985, 10, 76–88. A thorough explanation of the effects of work–family conflict, in terms of individual, family, and societal implications, can be found in Donna Wiley’s 1987 article “The Relationship between Work-Nonwork Role Conflict and Job-Related Outcomes: Some Unanticipated Findings,” which appeared in the *Journal of Management*, as well as Linda Thomas and Daniel Ganster’s article “Impact of Family-Supportive Work Variables on Work–family Conflict and Strain: A Control perspective,” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, 6–15. Further evidence is documented in the article entitled “Compelling Evidence of the Need for Corporate Work/Life Balance Initiatives: Results from a National Survey of Stressful Life Events,” by Charles Hobson, Linda Delunas, and Dawn Kesic from the *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 38, 38–44. Other information on the issues of work/life balance can be gained from reading Joan Kofodimos’ *Balancing Act* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993) and the *Harvard Business Review’s* book on *Work and Life Balance* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2000) and accessing web-based resources such as www.worklifebalance.com or www.worklifebalancecenter.org.

Additional in-depth readings on stress, the demands that more broadly cause it in addition to work–family conflict, its array of psychological, behavioral, and medical consequences, the various moderating variables in the stress process, and the range of indi-

vidual and organizational interventions for healthy stress management are available in *Preventive Stress Management in Organizations* by James Campbell Quick, Jonathan D. Quick, Debra L. Nelson, and Joseph J. Hurrell, Jr. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1997), the *Handbook of Work Stress*, edited by Julian Barling, Kevin Kelloway, and Michael Frone (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), and the *Handbook of Stress, Medicine, and Health*, Second Edition, edited by Cary L. Cooper (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2005).

To gain an understanding of the alternatives that individuals can use to simultaneously manage work, family, and self-expectations, interested readers should pick up Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz’s book entitled *The Power of Full Engagement* (New York: Free Press, 2003). These authors stress that managing energy, as opposed to time, is the key ingredient for successfully engaging in all areas of one’s life. Additionally, Boris Baltes and Heather Heydens-Gahir have suggested that the life-management strategy of selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) can be a useful tool for individuals seeking to find a work–family balance in their lives. Their suggestions can be found in the article “Reduction of Work–family Conflict through the Use of Selection, Optimization, and Compensation Behaviors,” which was printed in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2003, 88, 1005–1018.

Finally, two key pieces illustrate the need for individuals to play an active role in managing the joint enactment of both work and family roles. Ellen Kossek and Raymond Noe suggest that boundary management is a key factor for individuals faced with conflict-

ing role demands ("Work-family Role Synthesis: Individual and Organizational Determinants," *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 10, 102-129). They propose that individuals can achieve a work-family synthesis while continuing to meet the obligations of each life role. In a similar vein, Christena Nippert-Eng, proposes in her book *Home and work: Negotiating Boundaries through Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) that an effective balance between

work and family can be achieved along a continuum of boundary management. She presents two alternative approaches in which individuals either clearly segment their lives into work and family time, or integrate the two domains with each other. Each of these tools can help individuals, organizations, and families understand the role they play in balancing the competing demands in employee lives.

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