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WORK–FAMILY ROLE SYNTHESIS: INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DETERMINANTS

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In light of the dramatic social transformations occurring in the nature of family and worker demands, nearly all employees today need to make decisions on how to manage work and family roles. Drawing on role theory, we provide a summary framework for understanding individual, family, and organizational influences on the self-management of work and family roles. Work–family role synthesis is defined as the strategies an individual uses to manage the enactment of work and caregiving roles. It involves decision-making choices governing boundary management and role embracement of multiple roles. We present hypotheses and a research agenda for examining antecedents and consequences of employee strategies for managing work and family roles.

Managing the integration of work and family demands is a critical challenge facing most employees, and an issue of growing importance in the management literature. Nearly half of managers in Fortune 500 companies are in dual career families (Brett, Stroh, & Reilly, 1992). In the U.S., less than ten percent of families consist of two-parents with a stay-at-home mother, and over half of children under 18 will live in a single parent family for part of their childhood. (U.S. Census, 1994). Further, about one third of the current workforce has eldercare responsibilities, a rising figure (Shonsey, 1994). In response to these shifting demographics, many firms have adopted voluntary policies such as alternative work schedules and child and elder care assistance to help workers meet family needs, and attract and retain the best talent (Towers Perrin, 1994). The growth in employees' nonwork demands and the rising corporate investment in work–family policies have important implications for individual and organizational effectiveness. Most employees

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need to make decisions on how to manage (and negotiate) their joint enactment of work and family roles to support productivity at home and work. Yet little research has been done on the strategies an individual employs to achieve work–family role integration, which we call work–family role synthesis, the main focus of this paper.

Paper Relevance: IIRM, Work–family, and Conflict Literatures

Work–family role synthesis is an issue that has relevance to (and fills gaps in) many disciplines ranging from human resource management (HRM) to organizational behavior (OB) subfields such as work–family conflict, and conflict and negotiation. For example, much of the HRM literature examines the issue of employer "family friendliness" as indicated by the quantity and use of formal policies adopted. Yet evidence suggests that adoption of formal supports does not guarantee a family-friendly workplace. Recent assessments of work–family initiatives indicate that the potential value of most programs far exceeds their actual use (Solomon, 1994). Work–family programs often have a greater impact on companies' reputations than on employees' stress levels (Blum, Fields, & Goodman, 1994) or efficiency (Dalton & Mesch, 1990). Some scholars believe that firms give more lip service to family issues than to transforming their cultures to be responsive to work–family role integration needs (Kofodimos, 1995). Thus, while measuring program adoption and use is valuable, this approach neglects the degree to which policies are actually experienced as reducing an individual's conflict between competing roles (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) or the individual's influence on the choice of strategies (e.g., use of optional policies) for work–family role integration.

The work–family conflict literature typically assesses the sources, processes and types of conflict between work and family roles and their consequences for attitudinal outcomes. Considerable work has focused on the processes of role interaction between work and family such a spillover, where attitudes and behaviors might carry over from one to another, often provoking competing (and conflicting) demands (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Koppelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). For example, these demands can be direct such as needing to enact two roles at the same time (e.g., taking a personal call from a latchkey child while at work), or indirect (e.g., psychologically worrying about a sick parent while doing one's job). By mainly focusing on measuring and describing conflict, the work–family conflict literature overlooks the individual's influence on the selection of personal strategies for work/family role integration that may beget spillover and conflict in the first place.

Though not a lot of research on work–family role enactment has been done in the conflict and negotiations literature, the paradox many people experience when selecting strategies to manage work and family is highly relevant. Negotiation can be defined as the process invoked by two or more parties attempting to make joint decisions across decision alternatives when their initial preferences differ (Pruitt, 1981). Growing evidence suggests that the preferences of management and

employees regarding how to best manage work–family role conflict are likely to differ. Management may see employee desires for employer support of the family role as a conflict of interest with short run profit maximization and maintaining a productive worker.

From the employee perspective, the work–life domain is certainly a place where individuals are likely to have many personal or internal conflicts. An employee may experience internal conflicts if their employer socially pressures them to use a strategy that is not personally preferred. For example, though an employee may use sick care where a nurse takes care of a mildly ill child so the employee can keep working (since the company has norms that give the message that missing work for caregiving is not sanctioned), the employee may feel internal conflicts if s/he actually prefers to take care of the sick child rather than having a stranger do it. The employee may face conflicts not only from his/her employer, but also from family. For instance, an employee may make choices on how to manage their caregiving role that may antagonize their spouse (e.g., take a leave or choose to work part time, when their spouse prefers them to work full time so that a higher household income is maintained). And certainly many conflict relevant outcomes are likely to be experienced by employees who find their caregiving decisions unsatisfactory: namely aggression, distress, withdrawal (George & Gwyther, 1986). If the gap between well-intentioned policies and their impact on individuals' work–family conflict levels is to be significantly bridged, research needs to consider individual, family, and organizational influences on one's choices of strategies for the integration of work and family roles.

Paper Goals and Objectives

Since individuals may not necessarily work for "family friendly" firms, supportive supervisors, or have family or friends willing to help out with caregiving, greater insight is needed on the influences and outcomes related to the strategies an individual employee to achieve work–family role integration, which we call work–family role synthesis. The goal of this paper is to provide a framework for understanding individual, family, and organizational influences on employee strategies to manage the demands of work and family (child and elder caregiving)[1] roles and how these choices affect individual outcomes. We offer propositions and a research agenda to foster future scholarly inquiry into how individuals manage work–family role synthesis, given their personal and organizational constraints.

[1]Although this article focuses on caregiving roles, we recognize the growing trend toward thinking broadly regarding work-life integration. Under this broader view, any nonwork issue such as personal leisure, sexual orientation, for example, might require the development of a strategy for work-life role management. Decisions on how to merge caregiving and work roles are a subset of this realm. Our focus is on employees with child and elder care demands, which has yet to be discussed systematically in a single management journal. We wish to point out, however that self-care and spousal care, are other forms of dependent care, that also need to be considered in future research.

This paper makes the following contributions. It develops a valuable psychological construct, work–family role synthesis, and relates it to research propositions. It offers a comprehensive and consolidating review of the major existing literature on work–family role management in an unifying framework, including not only well-researched variables in the work–family conflict literature such as gender, but also less studied ones such as elder care, personality, living arrangements and caregiving demands. In doing so, the paper helps to extend the work–family conflict literature which typically assumes that when individuals juggle multiple roles (e.g., work and family) there is likely to be conflict, but overlooks the effects of caregiving strategies. The paper integrates literatures such as human resource policy, and organizational behavior (e.g., work–family conflict, conflict and negotiation and person-environment fit), which often seem to be speaking past each other.

Work–family Role Synthesis

Role theorists define a role as an expected pattern or set of behaviors that exist in the minds of people; and often focus on how the enactment of one role interacts with another (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). They emphasize that the involvement of persons in multiple roles can be complex and stress-provoking, since with few exceptions the more that one exhibits behaviors expected in particular roles, the better; and roles can have conflicting demands (Allport, 1933; Katz & Kahn, 1966, 1978). Traditionally, most role theorists have assumed that the social expectations and demands for managing the caregiving role are often in conflict with those for the work role. Work and family roles are generally seen as in contention with each other—if one allocates more to enacting the family role, s/he should give less to the work role; otherwise role conflict due to spillover from heightened and differing role pressures occurs.

Rather than examining simply the number of roles held, Thoits (1992) argues it is more fruitful to examine how one *structures* or *combines* multiple roles. In other words, the way in which one merges roles is likely to be as critical an influence on individual psychological outcomes as the number of roles held per se (Menaghan, 1989). Both individual and social factors determine how one integrates roles (Turner, 1978).

Based on these assumptions from role theory, *work–family role synthesis* is defined as the strategies an individual uses to manage the joint enactment of work and family roles. In essence, it is one's general approach for structuring the merging of work and family roles, given one's personal and organizational circumstances. We argue there are two main decision-making components to work–family role management: *boundary management* and *role embracement* of multiple roles. While there are many nonwork roles an employee can fulfill, in this paper, our focus is on the blending of elder and child caregiving roles with the work role, since a majority of employees will juggle these roles at some point during their careers.

Applying Nippert-Eng's (1996, pp. 7–8) research on boundary work, *boundary management* is the strategies, principles and practices one uses to organize and separate role demands and expectations into specific realms of home (i.e., dependent caregiving) and work (i.e., doing one's job). Though it involves mental activity, boundary management is enacted through practical and visible activities involving decisions concerning *boundary separation*. That is, some individuals manage work and family as segmented and mutually exclusive worlds, where the realms of work and family are impregnable (Nippert-Eng, 1996). At the extreme, an individual oriented toward high boundary separation strives to keep work and family roles completely separate. S/he deals with family matters mainly during nonwork time and vice versa. A preferred approach might be to work a full day uninterrupted by family responsibilities and never bring work home or dependents to work. This role management strategy is consistent with the *segmentation* work–family conflict perspective, which holds that work and family roles can be structured with nonoverlapping boundaries and little impact on each other (Barling, 1994).

At the other end of the continuum, some individuals conceive of work and home as having no distinctions in thought, time or space (Nippert-Eng, 1996). They are likely to choose strategies involving low separation of boundaries between work and family roles. These individuals make themselves available to receive work-related phone calls at home or personal calls at work. They often restructure the workday in an ad hoc manner to blend shifting family demands, and might make heavy use of work-at-home and other options that blur boundaries. Strategies of low boundary separation are consistent with the *spillover* view of work–family conflict, which assumes individuals operating in multiple roles are likely to directly and psychologically blur boundaries (Staines, 1980).

Role embracement or intensity is the zeal with which one enacts a role. It is reflected in the amount of energy and time that a person chooses to collectively devote to work and family roles. Recently, organizational behavior research has focused on extra-role behavior, which is defined as discretionary behavior that benefits the organization, and goes beyond existing role expectations (Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995). In the context of work and family management, exhibiting extra-role behavior demonstrates a high degree of intensity in the specific role. Although researchers (Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995) have focused on extra-role work behaviors (e.g., volunteering to cover an absent co-worker's job without being asked), we argue this concept also applies to the family role. For example, in the family role, a parent with school age children may decide to become involved in parent–teacher organizations, fundraisers, or tutoring children, behaviors which are optional and exceed normal role expectations. Working employees with dependents generally have a choice regarding how involved they wish to become in carrying out work and family roles. Some employees elect to devote most of their time and energy to their career, playing mainly a financial and/or custodial role in the family. Others choose to meet work expectations, but become more intensely involved in the family role. Consider the example of an

employee who is asked to work late on the same night s/he was going to stop by a nursing home to see an elderly relative. The employee more intensely involved in work than family, might postpone the visit for the next evening or phone a sibling and ask him/her to see the elder, while the person more involved in family than work would tell the boss, "Sorry, but I have a prior family commitment." A third employee who has high investment in both roles (Lobel, 1991) might sometimes elect to visit the home on the scheduled evening and other times work, depending on their access to family resources or their firm's culture concerning managing role conflict.

We see decisions on role embracement and boundary work as the key components of one's strategy for work–family role synthesis, because these are main issues role theorists generally view as being integral elements of role enactment and role conflict coping strategies. As Goffman (1961) argued, role embracement, the extent to which one plays a role with zest or casually, can co-exist with severe role compartmentalization, the degree to which role boundaries are segmented from one another (Turner, 1978). We believe the same applies to working parents or employees with elders. Some employees will provide dependent care or be model workers with equal ardor, yet generally structure role boundaries as segmented. (This is the strategy that has been traditionally expected in many large employing organizations.) Others may pursue one role more intently than another or equally, yet choose to either blur or separate boundaries. We argue that there is no "one best strategy" for role integration, and as Bailyn (1993) argues, individuals seeking to personally optimize competing family and work demands may need to experiment with strategies and "break the mold" of prevailing organizational assumptions.

Work–family role synthesis is also grounded in role conflict and career literatures on strategies for coping with role conflict. Role conflict scholars (e.g., Ross, 1973) traditionally recommend managing role situational primacy (i.e., separating boundaries) or cutting back on investments (i.e., modifying role embracement). Similarly, previous research on dual career couples' management of the psychological, temporal and physical transitions between work and family (Richter, 1984) suggests concepts of boundary management and role embracement. Enacting a transition style essentially involves making decisions about boundary separation. Likewise, making choices about work–family role embracement by deciding to lower involvement in the work or family role, has been suggested as a way to manage conflict for dual career women (Hall, 1972).

Although traditionally researchers have seen dual career and managerial employees as the employee groups most needing to develop a strategy for managing work–family roles, we argue that the construct, work–family role synthesis, is widely applicable. *Many* employees will need to sculpt a strategy for juggling work and caregiving demands at some point during their careers. In the days when most families were "traditional" (i.e., two parents, single breadwinner), segmentation and determination of role investments were more likely to have occurred naturally as a result of the way family and work roles were structured. Since, for a lot of

workers today the distinct separation of work and family spheres is a myth (Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbush, & Brennan, 1993), segmentation is less likely to occur, unless the employee actively pursues this strategy, a practical issue that has been generally underexamined by work–family scholars. Individual and organizational factors such as whether one is a single parent or only child, or works in a firm which is supportive of family will influence role management choices. As our model below suggests, assumptions regarding possible strategies for synthesizing work and family roles need to be revised to better mesh with the varying situations of members of today's workforce.

Work–family Role Synthesis Model

Model Overview. As shown in Figure 1, characteristics of the family[2] and organizational context, and the employee, influence individual decisions regarding the strategies (boundary management and role embracement) for role synthesis. An employee's strategy for role synthesis includes analysis of the personal family environment (i.e., personal caregiving demands and resources) and the professional (i.e., the organizational context where the individual is embedded). The existing literature also suggests that their gender and personality might be additional influences.

Individual characteristics and those related to their family context influence choices on how to manage work and caregiving roles. Previous research suggests that the individual's gender, personality and family context are important antecedents of strategies for role synthesis.[3] Family context variables include: the level and quality of caregiving resources available, and dependent characteristics such as his/her relationship to the individual, proximity of living arrangements, and the range and magnitude of caregiving demands.

A person's ability to demonstrate skills in managing work–family roles is dependent on having a work context that affords one with the opportunity to exercise discretion or choice. The individual and his/her family role are embedded in a work context with formal and informal aspects influencing strategy choices. The type of work and family policies adopted by the organization (e.g., dependent care reimbursement, on-site child care, flextime) as well as the degree of autonomy associated with the job are likely formal influences on personal decision-making on how to manage work and family roles. Also, the informal work context,

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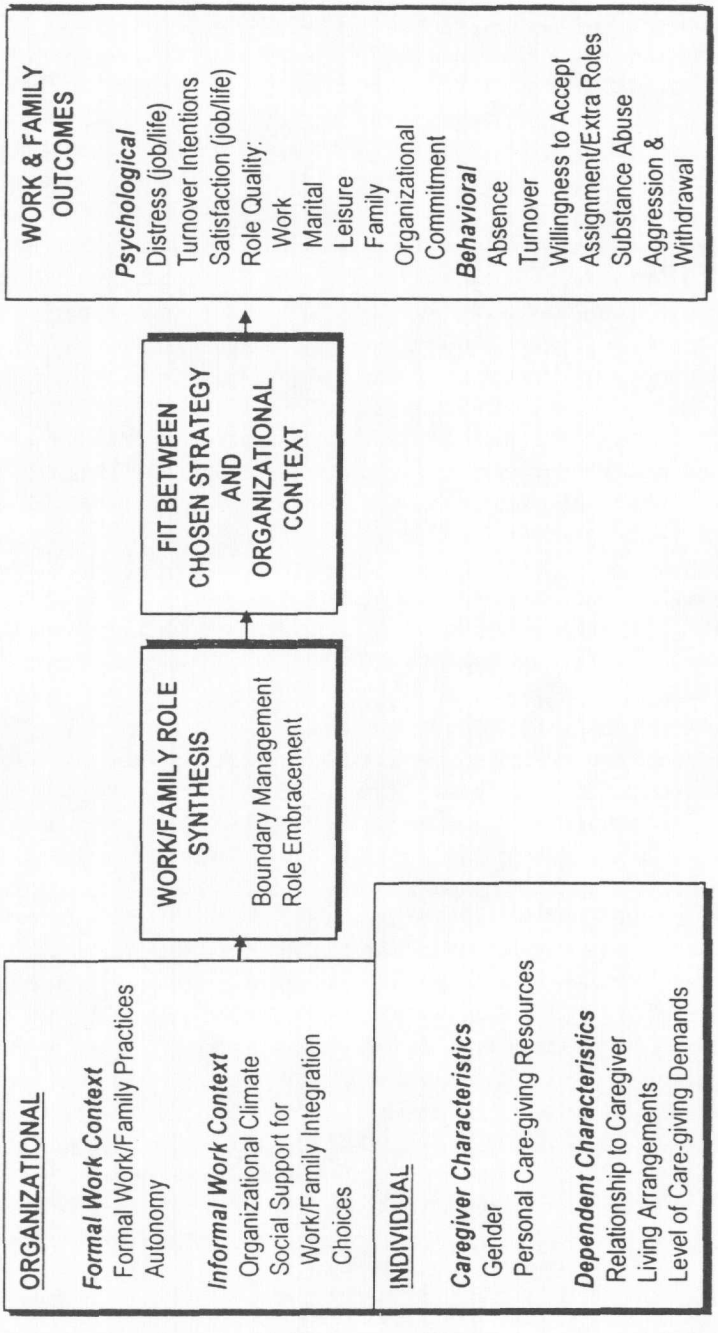
[2]We focus on family issues related to caregiving roles in this paper. We recognize that if married, the preferred strategy of one's spouse may be another influence on the individual's enactment of the caregiving role. However, this variable gets into marital relationship issues, and is beyond the bounds of this paper. Our focus is on family variables related to the direct enactment of the caregiving role (e.g., nature of dependent etc.).

[3]Certainly, other individual factors such as identification with the family or career role might be important influences on strategy selection. We use personality and gender here as exemplars, but our list is by no means meant to be exhaustive.

Figure 1
Model of Antecedents and Outcomes Pertaining to Self-Management of Work/Family Roles



including organization culture and social support for low separation of work–family roles, directly influences the strategy selection.

The person–environment (P–E) fit literature suggests that the fit between the person and the environment is an important determinant of whether both parties gain satisfactory outcomes from the relationship (e.g., Chatman, 1989). As the model illustrates, the degree of "fit" between the strategies chosen for work–family role synthesis, personal preferences, and the organizational context directly relates to psychological and behavioral outcomes. Below we provide rationale for each of the variables and offer propositions on model linkages to foster future research.

Individual Characteristics: ***Gender***. Regardless of age, occupational level, marital status, and hours worked outside of the home, women consistently work more hours (combined paid and unpaid), spend more time on family responsibilities, and experience greater role overload and work–family conflict than men (Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Wiersma, 1990). One study found that in dual earner families with multiple children, women worked ninety hours a week (combined paid and unpaid chores) compared with sixty hours for men (Clay, 1995).

Much less research has been conducted on how gender relates to strategies for co-managing work and family. The existing research suggests that women with dependents are more likely to choose higher family role intensity, and lower boundary separation than men, regardless of job level or hours worked per week (Clay, 1995). Research shows that women have higher direct involvement in managing child care arrangements, are more likely to respond to caregiving difficulties (Galinsky, 1991), are more likely to perceive problems with care (Kossek, 1990), and have higher absenteeism due to child care than men (Klein, 1986). Similarly, eldercare research shows that females are the primary caregivers for not only their parents, but also their in-laws (Brody, 1985).

Some women in dual career marriages or single parent families may choose a work–family strategy that Hall and Hall (1979) labeled "acrobats," where one attempts to react to all work and family role demands. This approach is consistent with Lobel's (1991) view that individuals (particularly women) can have high identification with both work and family roles. Other dual income women whose careers are viewed as having lower primacy (based on either occupation or hours worked per week), will likely adopt an accommodator strategy, where they are heavily involved in managing family roles to accommodate a partner's career. This strategy is supported by research indicating women's greater preference for policies allowing for greater family role involvement such as part-time work and leaves of absence (Kossek, 1990). Regardless of their level of investment in work roles, women are likely to pursue higher family role involvement than men are.

Given these workload and role investment differences by gender, it is not surprising that spillover of distress and fatigue from work to family, and from family to work is stronger for women than men (Hall & Richter, 1988). While men are able to highly separate roles to a greater degree (Williams & Alliger, 1994), women are likely to have more permeable and flexible boundaries between work

and family roles, due to increased demands related to workload (paid and unpaid), need for multi-tasking of roles, and differing styles in managing boundaries between work and home. Women are more likely than men to be thinking about home when at work and involved in home issues even when making the transition to leave for work (Hall & Richter, 1988).

Thoits (1992) provides underlying rationale to explain these findings indicating that women and men often have different role management styles. She argues that role combinations affect men and women differently psychologically; what matters is not necessarily the number of roles held, but which roles are held in which combinations (e.g., working mother; successful family breadwinner) and by which gender (Thoits, 1992). Employed mothers are more likely to use higher embracement and lower boundary separation in managing the caregiving role because of women's different social constructions of how work and family should be co-managed compared to those of men.

Proposition 1a: Employed women are more likely to use a strategy for work–family role synthesis having higher caregiving role embracement than employed men.

Proposition 1b: Employed women are more likely to use a strategy for work–family role synthesis having lower work–family boundary separation than employed men.

Personality. Personality is defined as a person's distinctive interpersonal characteristics and reflects stable and enduring tendencies in a person's social behavior. Just as vocational theorists such as Holland (1973) have shown that motives, values and interests are related to career choices regarding particular occupations, it follows that personality attributes may be linked to choice of a particular work–family management strategy. Selecting a strategy for managing work and family roles can be viewed as just another type of career decision involving how to approach one's job in a way that fits with personal tendencies and values. We argue that several of the dimensions comprising the "Big Five" (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hogan, 1991; Hogan, Hogan, & Roberts, 1996) structure of personality are likely to influence one's choice of a work–family management strategy: openness to experience (curious, imaginative, sensitive) and conscientiousness (dependable, thorough).

Persons with high levels of openness to experience are imaginative, curious, and open-minded, which suggests they might be more willing to choose a strategy with lower boundary separation of work and family roles. This approach is generally more nontraditional than following the conventional strategy of separating work from family, as organizations have traditionally viewed work and family as separate worlds (Kanter, 1977). As noted, finding an appropriate work–family strategy often requires creative experimentation, and, as Bailyn (1993) argues, a willingness to "break the mold" (e.g., question prevailing assumptions.)

Existing research also suggests that conscientiousness influences the amount of energy and time devoted to work and family roles. Highly conscientious indi-

viduals are likely to choose a strategy of pursuing both work and family roles with high intensity, a style consistent with Lobel's (1991) belief that some persons can have high investment in both roles. Persons high in conscientiousness believe that they have a commitment to "do their best" in whatever role they are performing. Persons high on conscientiousness are described by researchers as trying to be responsible and dependable (Hogan, 1991). Such individuals may attempt to "be a super mom or dad." Lambert and colleagues (1993) found that the heaviest users of work–family supports (an indicator of high involvement in managing the family role) also contributed the highest number of employee suggestions, an indicator of extra-role work behavior.

Proposition 2a: Openness to experience is positively related to use of a strategy for work–family role synthesis that is low on boundary separation.

Proposition 2b: Conscientiousness is positively related to intensity of involvement in work and family roles. That is, the greater the person's tendency to be conscientious, the more likely s/he will use a strategy for work–family role synthesis of high involvement (high investment of energy and time) in both work and family roles.

Family Context: Caregiving Resources and Dependent Characteristics

Caregiving Resources. Despite calls by researchers for greater focus on the implications of family structure for employing organizations (Schneer & Reitman, 1993), the influence of personal caregiving resources on the way an employee structures work and family roles has received little attention. Caregiving resources include two main components. One resource is being in a household earner configuration where the individual has access to a live-in partner who can devote all or part of his/her time to the caregiving role. The other is having access to relatives (i.e., grandparents, siblings, ex-spouses, etc.) and close friends who are willing and able to provide care.[4]

Employees who are in dual career, single parent or single child situations or lack availability of relatives for caregiving will structurally be less likely to separate work and family roles and more likely to give higher intensity to the family

[4]We recognize that a Families and Work Institute study on family child care and relative care by Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, and Shinn (1997) found that care by a family member is not necessarily actually better care than care from a nonrelative and does not guarantee quality care. Thus, empirically, who provides the care (e.g., family or close friends) may not necessarily predict actual quality as assessed by child development theorists. This issue certainly merits additional study. However, our focus is on the employee's psychological selection of caregiving strategies within their family context. The existing research does suggest that individuals often *perceive* who provides the care (e.g., a family member) to be related to high quality and the level of care problems. In this paper, we focus on how who provides the care may influence the individuals' selection of caregiving strategies.

role. While some research focuses on the selection of coping strategies for role involvement and boundary management in dual earner families (e.g., Hall & Hall, 1979), studies often overlook single parent families, single persons with elders, or the availability of relatives other than a spouse to help with caregiving.

Since the boundaries between work and family necessarily become more blurred for single parents, single children, or those balancing careers, employees in these family structures are likely to choose strategies enabling more flexibility and blending of work and family roles than those who have a spouse at home full time, are in dual earner marriages where partners' jobs are of clear secondary status (i.e., part time, accommodator role), or who have siblings. The notion that family structure is a predictor of work–family outcomes is consistent with research indicating that maternal employment is significantly related to negative spillover for dual career men (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992). It is also supported by research showing that higher use of familial care was negatively related to problems with care arrangements (i.e., greater negative spillover) regardless of whether familial care was used for all care or only on an emergency basis (Kossek, 1990; Kossek & Nichol, 1992).

Employees who have greater availability of relatives other than a spouse for caregiving are likely to choose a strategy of higher boundary separation and higher work role embracement than those who mainly use nonrelatives. These employees will have more trust and greater psychological comfort in parsing caregiving duties. Relatives may also be considered more dependable, charge less (if at all), and be more willing to expand caregiving hours as needed (Galinsky & Friedman, 1993). The argument that workers may be more likely to compartmentalize work and family roles if they have a relative caregiver is supported by the prevailing influence of Western values in traditional research on the effects of maternal employment on children. This research often focuses on the possible negative effects of "substitute" or "surrogate" care on child development, implying the normalcy and primacy of full time physical care by the biological mother (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Relatives, while still surrogates, are likely to be perceived as a closer proxy to the parent (typically the mother) than nonrelatives, therefore enabling workers to choose segmented boundaries, and give high intensity to the work role. While little or no research has been done on how the availability of relative care for eldercare affects employees' strategies for role synthesis, it seems likely that an employee would be more likely to be able to select higher boundary separation and higher work role embracement, the greater their access to family caregiving resources. While the argument that family caregiving resources are linked to strategies for work–family role synthesis may seem obvious, these resources are important variables rarely systematically included in studies.

Proposition 3: Familial caregiving resources are positively related to using a strategy for work–family role synthesis that is high on boundary separation and work role embracement.

Dependent Type: Elders and Children. Although firms often adopt similar policies for elder and child care, human resource and organizational behavior scholars often overlook how caring for a parent differs from caring for a child. The existing research suggests that one's strategy for boundary management will differ for children and elders. We argue that employees are more likely to choose a boundary strategy of higher separation for eldercare than for child care. Eldercare psychologically and structurally lends itself more toward greater boundary separation than child care, due to differences in care life cycle, authority dynamics, medical problems, and caregiving predictability.

Unlike the eldercare life cycle where the elder becomes more physically dependent and has less personal autonomy as s/he ages, the childcare life cycle is reversed. Aging is linked to greater independence. For example, as children age, they can perform more of their own physical care (feeding, toileting, dressing). Caregiving for children who grow and gain greater autonomy over time is more likely to be a positive experience as parents watch offspring becoming young adults. In contrast, a leading eldercare consultant comments, "Eldercare is not about having babies and raising children—the positive aspects of life. Eldercare is about the end of life, about aging and dying" (Shonsey, 1994, p. 48).

Life cycle differences are also reflected in the progression of care formality. Unlike childcare, eldercare often starts informally, and at first an employee may not view assistance as "eldercare," but merely as "helping out." The caregiver may provide periodic help with transportation, finances, retirement decisions, and household tasks (Winfield, 1988). As an elder's mental and physical capacity decreases, caregivers' needs for formal services increase, as care demands become too much to handle alone (Osterkamp, 1988). In general, the greater the use of formal services, the more likely an individual will choose higher boundary separation.

Eldercare's difficult authority dynamics also support higher boundary separation. Usually the elder and employee have a history with the elder in the parental role, with autonomy rarely controlled by a child. Then, either gradually or abruptly the authority dynamics reverse. But except in cases of severe medical or mental disability, caregivers usually have some ambiguity in control over managing care, and their decisions may be met with considerable resistance (Thomas, 1988). They often struggle with assessing the appropriate level of autonomy, especially as cognitive capacity deteriorates (Pratt, Schmall, & Wright, 1987). The situation may be aggravated when the elder hides problems such as poor diet or medical problems, out of pride or need for independence.

Unlike childcare, eldercare usually involves unpleasant critical medical conditions that may arise suddenly. Only 3% of elders in a seminal study conducted at Traveler's Insurance Company, one of the first employers to provide eldercare, did not have any medical or health problems (Winfield, 1988). Eldercare officially ends with the death of the elder. As such, eldercare stimulates anticipation of final separation from parents and of one's potential dependence on one's own children

(Brody, 1985). Placing an elder in a nursing home heightens guilt (Brody, 1985). Thus, for many, caring for an elder may be experienced as more stressful than caring for children, fostering use of a strategy of higher boundary separation from the caregiving role as a means of escape.

The formality of care arrangements also supports use of higher boundary separation between work and family roles for eldercare. Reliable public services can be purchased for many eldercare demands, such as transportation (the most common), housekeeping and household maintenance, and nursing care or companionship (Winfield, 1988). In contrast, maintaining tight boundaries between work and child care obligations may be less feasible. Children's needs during work hours tend to be more frequent, and parents are more likely to rely on informal arrangements with friends or neighbors, which may be less reliable (Galinsky & Friedman, 1993). Children may require daily transportation from day care to preschool, school, and/or extracurricular activities and back to care. Parents often may interrupt work to attend special events (e.g., school parties, recitals).

Proposition 4: Individuals are more likely to use a strategy for work–family role synthesis having higher boundary separation for elders than for children.

Living Arrangements. Relatively few studies collect data on dependents' living arrangements, despite substantial variation in the extent of proximity for those in blended families or with elders. Regardless of dependent type, the more that living arrangements offer close proximity and opportunity for frequent contact, the more likely an employee will use a strategy of lower boundary separation and higher family role embracement. Since elders are less likely than children to live with the employee, the living arrangements usually physically support greater boundary separation for elders. In cases of great geographical distance, which one study found to involve a fourth of its workforce (Winfield, 1988), it may be difficult for the individual to regularly observe the elder's situation.

Shared households with an elder tend to become more common as the elder's health deteriorates (Noelker & Poulshock, 1982). This is supported by research indicating a positive relationship between the level of disability and shared living arrangements (Stone, Cafferata, & Sangl, 1987). When elders do share households, research suggests higher work–family conflict and spillover (Brody, 1985). Coresidence with a memory-impaired elder is associated with decreased caregiver mental health, social participation, and financial resources (George & Gwyther, 1986). Assuming that shared households reflect an elder's poorer health and need for increased and continuous assistance, caregivers that actually live with an elder will have a strategy characterized by low boundary separation and high family role embracement.

For employees in a divorced family, the more that the custody arrangements are designed to allow close proximity to the child on a regular basis, common sense suggests that a strategy of high family role embracement and low boundary

separation will be more likely to be used. Yet work–family conflict studies frequently neglect to collect data on custody arrangements.

Proposition 5: The more that living arrangements provide close proximity to the dependent, the more likely an employee will use strategies for work–family role synthesis characterized by low boundary separation and high family role embracement.

Caregiving Demands. Employed individuals often experience considerable differences in the type and number of tasks with which they are assisting, yet this variable has often been understudied by researchers, who typically measure only the number and ages of children or elders. Yet caregiving tasks can range from Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) such as eating, dressing, bathing, toileting, transference, and mobility, to Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) such as companionship, shopping, housecleaning, or transportation (Winfield, 1988). A national study of individuals with elder dependents found 80% helped with household tasks, 67% provided assistance with one or more personal hygiene functions, 46% assisted with indoor mobility, 50% administered medication, and 50% helped with financial matters (Stone et al., 1987). The more tasks with which an individual is assisting, the more likely spillover from the family to work occurs. We argue the more tasks with which an individual is providing assistance, the more likely an individual will need to choose a strategy of low boundary separation and high family role embracement, due to increased caregiving demands. For example, one study found that daughters who had recently terminated employment were more involved in ADL tasks than employed daughters (Barnes, Given, & Given, 1992). Wolf and Soldo (1994) report that the number of ADL limitations reduce a woman's propensity to be employed, but does not deter her from providing parent care.

The concept of assisting with ADLs applies equally well to minor dependents. It may in fact be a better measure of the amount of care required by children than age, for while age does give an indication of the care requirements of very young children, it does not account for any physical or developmental disabilities in children of all ages.

Proposition 6: The greater the number of activities of daily living tasks that an individual provides, the more likely s/he will use a strategy for work–family role synthesis of high family role embracement and low boundary separation.

Organizational Context

Both formal and informal aspects of the workplace influence an individual's options for how to synthesize work and family roles. These include: formal policies, job design, social support for work–family strategy choices, and prevailing cultural expectations.

Formal Work–family Policies and Job Autonomy. Formal policies differ in the degree to which they encourage boundary overlap between work and family

and affect work and family role intensity. Policy research might be enriched by greater reliance on theories of work–family integration (i.e., direct spillover, indirect spillover, segmentation) to classify the effects of policies on managing work and family roles. For example, by allowing the work to be restructured to meet family demands, policies such as flextime modify boundaries to directly lower direct spillover from time-based conflict. For example, most employees can't spend time on caregiving and work roles simultaneously without role strain.

Other policies such as an on-site child care center might affect both direct and indirect spillover. Using the center might directly affect one's ability to have lower boundary separation since one could see the child during lunch hours and might commute to work with the child (affecting style of role transition and time for parent–child interaction). The center may also affect indirect spillover (when psychological effects carry over between work and family roles), by psychologically helping some parents feel secure knowing their children are close by, thereby enabling them to focus on work roles during the day. In contrast, leaves of absence and part time work mainly affect work role embracement, by enabling workers to have less work involvement. Still other popular policies such as financial (pretax spending accounts, voucher programs) or information assistance (child and elder care resource and referral) may have little or no influence on role management strategies.

If policies supporting low boundary separation or high family role intensity are not available, employees will have little choice but to quit or follow a strategy that lets work control the way they structure the management of caregiving roles (Shellenbarger, 1996b). Ironically, some scholars note that the most popular work–family policies adopted are those that only support high boundary separation and work role intensity (Kofodimos, 1995). Yet having access to policies allowing choice over managing boundaries and role intensity is a necessary but insufficient condition for self-management of work–family role synthesis.

Use of formal policies is contingent on the degree to which one's job allows for autonomy about where and when work gets done, an issue that is often overlooked in empirical studies. Autonomy refers to the degree to which the job allows the individual discretion and independence in scheduling work, determining work methods, and performing work (Breaugh, 1985). While many job characteristics such as job security and workload have implications for one's ability to manage work and family demands, schedule inflexibility, is the aspect of job autonomy that has most consistently been shown to create interference between work and family roles (Pleck et al., 1980).

Employees in jobs demanding coverage for customer service during inflexible hours (e.g., emergency room physician), persons employed in small companies, or persons working in operations in which technology controls the pace of their work (e.g., assembly line employees), are unlikely to be able to use strategies of low boundary separation. Persons working second shift in a manufacturing operation in which products are assembled sequentially, cannot easily leave their job to

transport children or an elderly parent to a recreational activity, telecommute (or even respond to an emergency), even if the policies are formally available.

Thus, the less autonomy inherent in the person's job, the more unlikely one will follow a strategy of low separation between boundaries. If such a strategy was used by a person in a job with low autonomy, the person would probably be unable to contribute fully to developing the product or providing services. The approach would also create tensions with co-workers and managers who are forced to perform roles that are not part of their regular duties. While low autonomy can create a structural barrier against closely integrating work and family roles, it does not affect the amount of time and energy (embracement) the person is willing to devote to work and family roles.

Proposition 7a: Regardless of an individual's caregiver or dependent characteristics, a low degree of job autonomy is associated with heavier use of strategies for work–family role synthesis that have high boundary separation.

Proposition 7b: Assuming one's job allows for high autonomy over where and when work is conducted, the greater the availability of policies to support low boundary separation and high family role embracement, the greater their usage by individuals who likely to prefer these strategies (e.g., women, those with dependents, low on family caregiving resources.)

Informal Work Context: Social Support and Organizational Climate. The organizational climate and the social expectations of managers and peers define what boundary management and role embracement behaviors are normative or expected, and create perceived sanctions for behaving otherwise. While some work–family programs can support low boundary separation and high family role intensity, most programs are not widely used and their availability provokes responses from indifference to resentment (Kofodimos, 1995). The choice of formal strategies supporting low separation and high family role intensity are likely to be particularly subject to social cues from organizational members, since policy use is optional.

The relationship with the supervisor can be an important and powerful influence on the way one handles work–family problems (Galinsky, 1991). For example, supervisors often may not support subordinates' use of available policies, even those that are company sanctioned or legally mandated (Kofodimos, 1995; Salzman, 1993; Shellenbarger, 1994). Yet the choice to restructure work or engage in lower work role involvement can and often does involve ad hoc agreement between employee and supervisor (Hall, 1989). Besides the supervisor, the support of co-workers for family matters, particularly their willingness to cover duties, is important for facilitating work–family integration (Schwartz, 1994). Some scholars (Miller, Jablin, Casey, Lamphear-Van Horn, & Ethingon, 1996) argue that

employee use of work–family policies involves negotiation of work role expectations and distinctive social processes because of the biases co-workers often have against users.

Especially in team-based environments, supervisors and subordinates are being given discretion to informally negotiate arrangements following broad policies that can be interpreted according to individual situations and the "needs of the local business unit" (Lee, 1990). Combining this administrative ambiguity with the decline of long term job security, employees may be afraid to engage in behaviors that may signal that work is not their ultimate priority (Shellenbarger, 1995). Social pressures can inhibit use of work/life supports, particularly in firms experiencing rising competitive pressures and increased cost cutting (Kofodimos, 1995). Studies consistently indicate that though workers at big companies may be stressed, few take advantage of policies on the books to spend more time with family (Shellenbarger, 1996b).

Proposition 8: Assuming one has individual characteristics favoring these strategies, an individual's use of policies supporting low boundary separation and high family role involvement is positively related to the degree to which they are socially supported.

Informal Work Context: Organizational Climate. The influence of organizational culture and climate on the effectiveness of individual strategies for managing work–family role integration has generally been overlooked. Insufficient attention has addressed the degree to which social workplace influences affect individuals' decisions to use optional policies and the effectiveness of strategies chosen. Many organizations may have formally adopted programs that publicly indicate support of family roles, yet do little to support them in the work culture (Kofodimos, 1995). Some employers have responded in a "strategically ambiguous" way: they offer policies, while at the same time are vague concerning how the rules governing use should be interpreted (Eisenberg, 1984). Lack of administrative clarity elevates the importance of understanding the implications of culture for policy attractiveness and use.

The attractiveness of strategies supporting high family role involvement and boundary integration is influenced by organizational climate. Just as organizations can have a climate for service or a climate for safety, reflecting commonly held perceptions regarding specific domains (Schneider & Rentsch, 1988), organizations have a climate for boundary separation and the degree to which caregiving roles should be pursued during the normal work day.

Organizations vary considerably on how they see and deal with work–family issues (Hall & Richter, 1988). In some organizations, taking work calls at home or bringing children to the office is the norm, while in others, maintaining tight boundaries between work and home is valued (Galinsky et al., 1991). Work groups and firms that are designed to be virtual organizations with heavy use of work-at-home arrangements are likely to have boundary management climates that result in

greater overlap of work and family life than those fashioned for high separation (e.g., no personal calls at work, little or no flextime). Some firms may have a climate suggesting that competent workers can handle work–family issues on their own time and employees who can't manage them shouldn't work (Galinsky et al., 1991). Others may have members who deeply believe that employers should offer family supportive policies.

Milliken, Dutton, and Beyer (1990) argue that the amount of organizational attention devoted to work–family issues and the interpretation of the environment depends on how work–family issues are framed by management. When management's basic values and experiences are heavily those of the traditional two-parent family with one breadwinner, progress on work–family issues will be blocked (Hall, 1989). For example, when policies such as flexible work arrangements are perceived as appropriate only for mommy trackers, not career-oriented workers, and as not adding value, their use is accompanied by decreased advancement opportunities (Kofodimos, 1995). The widespread adoption of formal work–family polices to support higher work–family role integration and dual role (work and caregiving) embracement is still a relatively recent phenomenon (Galinsky et al, 1991). Given that cultures often lag in the degree to which they shift to support new policy, we argue that the attractiveness of newer work–family management strategies (i.e., low boundary separation, high embracement of family roles) is influenced by the organizational climate.

Proposition 9: Assuming one has individual characteristics favoring these strategies, the use of a strategy for work–family role synthesis characterized by low boundary separation or high family role embracement is positively related to the degree the strategy is supported by the organizational climate.

Fit Between Strategies for Work–family Role Synthesis and the Work Environment: Implications for Work and Family Outcomes

Despite leading theorists' calls for more research on the significance of context for human resource management issues (Jackson & Schuler, 1995), the notion of "fit" between an individual's work–family approach and the organizational context has not been examined. The person-environment fit view argues that attitudes and behavior are not a function of a person or environment separately, but their congruence, fit, or match (Edwards & Rothbard, 1996). The literature suggests that lack of "fit" can have many negative psychological and behavioral results including conflict between roles (see Chatman, 1989).

The use of specific strategies that involve high boundary integration and family role intensity involves a mixed range of psychological and behavioral outcomes. Psychological outcomes include perceived work and family conflict, work satisfaction, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and self-esteem. Behavioral outcomes include turnover, physiological stress, and substance abuse.

Work and family outcomes have primarily been viewed as consequences of work and family conflict, which has been well documented (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). We view these outcomes as consequences from a broader perspective: the degree of "fit" between the person's strategy for work and family role synthesis and the organizational context. We acknowledge that work and family roles sometimes may inherently be in conflict. However, the literature has ignored the fact that individuals to some degree have a choice as to how to manage work and family roles, taking into account the organizational and family contexts in which they operate. The appropriateness of an individual's work–family management strategy can be related to workplace norms and expectations to measure congruence between the person and the organization, or the person and the work group.

In some firms, the work culture demands that professional success may be achieved by working on site during established work hours (e.g., from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) where there is no interaction between work and family during the workday (Bailyn, 1993; Schwartz, 1994). Commitment to career, the firm, and productivity might be demonstrated via time presence (i.e., face time—the amount of time spent at work is viewed as an indicator of productivity) (Perin, 1991). In such a context, a manager's choice to work part time, an option supporting a strategy of lower work role embracement, might in the long run create lower personal and professional outcomes due to a poor fit. Similarly, using flextime for boundary management in a culture that values face time during established office hours could actually increase negative work–family outcomes due to a lack of congruence, an effect contrary to the policy's intent.

Employing strategies that are not appropriate for the work environment (a lack of fit) can result in detrimental outcomes such as tainted career reputations (Grover, 1991; Kofodimos, 1995), blocked advancement (Corey, 1993) reductions in pay, and job loss (Schwartz, 1989; Shellenbarger, 1991). In some organizations, a climate develops where being career-oriented and employing strategies supporting boundary integration and high involvement in caregiving roles are viewed as non-overlapping issues (Kofodimos, 1995). In such a climate, a strategy of high boundary integration and family involvement would be ineffective. An example is illustrated by comments from a manager of career development at a large public utility (Guterman, 1994):

> [In my organization], there is a growing expectation that people have to do more with less, which puts them in conflict with family needs . . . employees struggle with just what the company wants from them, when for example, it promotes balance but does not really support it. My staff and the company's assistance department are seeing an increasing number of managers who are self-demoting themselves to lower-level positions because they are unable or unwilling to live with the expectation of being all things to all people. . . . (we have seen a rise in) disability and stress claims. (p. 119)

As Lobel (1992) argues, individuals will experience poor fit when personal values regarding role integration differ from organizational expectations, and when expectations associated with the work role inhibit the person's ability to perform in the family role in the manner s/he desires. Negative outcomes will also occur in cases where an individual uses strategies that are not congruent with the work context. Specifically, a lack of fit may result in many of the same negative outcomes that have been found to be related to work and family conflict including distress, turnover intentions, poor performance, dissatisfaction with work and family life, reduced organizational commitment, aggression against family members and substance abuse (e.g., Barnett et al, 1993; Burke, 1988; Higgins & Duxbury, 1992; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1993; Bartolome & Evans, 1980). Similarly, higher fit between the chosen strategy and the organizational context is likely to relate to the same positive outcomes (e.g., job and family satisfaction; Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992) emanating from lower work–family conflict. Employees that have a strategy for role synthesis that fits with their context will tend to experience work–family balance (as defined by themselves, since internal standards are likely to vary greatly across individuals). We hypothesize:

Proposition 10: The greater the congruence between the strategy for work–family role synthesis used by the person and its appropriateness for the organizational context, the more positive individual work and family outcomes.

Conclusions

The central problem addressed in this paper was: "What factors determine the choice and outcomes of individual strategies for managing the synthesis of work and caregiving roles?" Greater understanding is needed on how the growing diversity in employed caregivers' demands and resources, and variation in organizational responsiveness to work–family issues relate to the ways that individuals manage work and family responsibilities. Our model begins to address these issues by providing a broad framework and testable hypotheses of individual and contextual influences on employee strategies to manage the synthesis of work and caregiving roles and their linkages to employee outcomes. In doing so, we also integrate several important literatures—namely human resource policy, career, and work–family conflict, and child and elder care, which have generally not been well bridged, despite their common foci. For example, our paper is one of the first to link strategies for managing child and elder care, or work–family conflict with use of formal and informal human resource supports.

Besides the valuable propositions offered, our framework poses many important possibilities for future research on strategies for managing the synthesis of work and family roles. First, research is needed on how employees modify strategies for role synthesis over their careers, lifespan, organizational affiliation, nature and level of dependent caregiving demands, and family structure. Scales

measuring our model's main aspects of work–family strategy (boundary management, role embracement), and contextual variables such as supervisor and peer support, and the organizational climate are also in urgent need of development and validation.

Research is also needed on how employee strategies chosen for work–family role integration are selected and negotiated based on the influence of others frames of reference, such as the employers' role expectations and those of many family members in order to better understand the outcomes related to decisions regarding boundary management and work–family role embracement. Typically, researchers have studied these issues within the target person's frame of reference or at best within two married individuals. However, it is increasingly unlikely that effective strategies can be developed in isolation or limited to communication between dual career partners, given shifting family structures of growing complexity, and heightening employer expectations for extra-role performance. Future studies in this area can build upon existing dual career research, which has often focused on the fit between attitudes and behaviors of two spouses; boundary management and role intensity differences between spouses, particularly when work intrudes on home; and how organizations affect the couple's management of the work–family interface (Sekaran & Hall, 1989).

Similarly, just as vocational theorists such as Holland (1973) have shown that motives, values and interests are related to career choices regarding particular occupations, future research might also examine the extent to which personality attributes are linked to choice of a particular work–family management strategy. This is a vastly understudied area, which should be given increasing attention, as one's strategy for managing work and family roles can be viewed as just another type of career decision involving how to approach one's job in a way that fits with personal tendencies and values.

Turning to organizational contextual influences, research is especially needed on how the perceived availability and the design of formal supports relate to strategies for role integration. There is great diversity in the types of organizational policies to support work and family issues (e.g., childcare referral services, on-site childcare, flextime). As we argued, these policies differ in their influence on boundary separation and work and family role embracement. Using flextime is qualitatively different from using a part time work policy. In general, a flextime policy mainly affects boundary separation, while a part time work policy affects work and family role embracement. Applying theories of work–family conflict (segmentation, spillover) to understand how the type of policy used affects individual outcomes is sorely lacking.

Given the widespread reports (e.g., Shellenbarger, 1991) that social pressures impede the full use of policies, additional study is needed on how organizational social/cultural factors affect strategies for work–family role synthesis in order to enhance policy effectiveness. It is a waste of organizational assets to allocate resources to policies that are not being used to their potential. Additional research

is needed to better understand how to socialize work groups to better support the productivity of voluntary policies targeting personal life issues.

Work might also be done on the degree to which an individual's ability to select and implement strategies appropriate for one's organizational context is a core management competency. Although is has been widely written that the ability to balance work and family is an important skill that managers need (Bailyn, 1993; Bartolome, & Evans, 1980; Kofodimos, 1993), there has been limited empirical research on this competency. Proficiency in developing and implementing a personal strategy for managing work and family is not yet seen as a core management skill that is placed on the same level as planning, organizing, directing, controlling and others. Preliminary work is currently being conducted by scholars and practitioners (e.g., Wharton-Merck Work/Life Roundtable) to identify competencies (e.g., personal skills in managing self) related to work and family management (Shellenbarger, 1996a).

Of course, employees cannot develop proficiency in synthesizing roles without greater understanding of how *organizations* play a major role in creating conditions to foster competency development. The ability to learn and demonstrate skills in work–family management is dependent on having a supportive context that allows one to exercise choice. This is a critical research issue of importance not only to managers, but also to society in general. A fundamental problem facing growing numbers of individuals is how to develop appropriate strategies to maintain a positive work identity, given their growing work and nonwork demands. In effect, how do people effectively cope with creating and maintaining the public persona they need in order to be effective at work and still uphold their family goals and values? If employees are not given the opportunities to develop productive strategies to enable more effective involvement in family life, work–family guru Arlie Hochschild warns that work will be experienced as more rewarding than personal life. She argues that work has become a form of "home," and home with its complicated and rising family demands has become a form of "work" (Shellenbarger, 1996b).

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