

Bennett S. LeBow College of Business



Drexel E-Repository and Archive (iDEA)

<http://idea.library.drexel.edu/>

Drexel University Libraries

www.library.drexel.edu

The following item is made available as a courtesy to scholars by the author(s) and Drexel University Library and may contain materials and content, including computer code and tags, artwork, text, graphics, images, and illustrations (Material) which may be protected by copyright law. Unless otherwise noted, the Material is made available for non profit and educational purposes, such as research, teaching and private study. For these limited purposes, you may reproduce (print, download or make copies) the Material without prior permission. All copies must include any copyright notice originally included with the Material. **You must seek permission from the authors or copyright owners for all uses that are not allowed by fair use and other provisions of the U.S. Copyright Law.** The responsibility for making an independent legal assessment and securing any necessary permission rests with persons desiring to reproduce or use the Material.

Please direct questions to archives@drexel.edu

**MANAGING INCIDENTS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT:
A DECISION-MAKING PERSPECTIVE**

Gary N. Powell
Department of Management
University of Connecticut
2100 Hillside Road, Unit 1041
Storrs, CT 06269-1041
Tel: (860) 486-3862
Fax: (860) 486-6415
E-mail: gpowell@business.uconn.edu

Jeffrey H. Greenhaus
Department of Management
Drexel University
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Tel: (215) 895-2139
Fax: (215) 895-2891
E-mail: Greenhaus@drexel.edu

In Press

Human Relations

(Accepted 30 June 2006)

**MANAGING INCIDENTS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT:
A DECISION-MAKING PERSPECTIVE**

Abstract

The present study proposed a decision process that people follow in incidents of work-family conflict and offered an initial test of factors that may influence their decisions. It distinguished between decisions regarding the mobilization of social support to avoid conflict, and decisions regarding participation in a work and/or family activity if the conflict was not avoided. According to analyses of critical incidents provided by managers and professionals employed in full-time jobs, decisions were influenced by internal cues reflecting the individual's priorities in the conflict situation, role sender cues reflecting the priorities of involved parties in the individual's work and family roles, and role activity cues reflecting characteristics of the specific activities in conflict. Moreover, our findings suggest that the utilization of these cues often represents an attempt to preserve positive relationships with important role senders in the work and family domains.

Key words: work and family, conflict, decision making, social support, careers

A considerable literature has accumulated over the past three decades on the interface between work and family roles (Barling & Sorenson, 1997; Eby, Caspar, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980; Zedeck, 1992). This literature has been dominated by a conflict perspective (Barnett, 1998; Eby et al., 2005) in which experiences in either role lead to time constraints, stress, and/or dysfunctional behavior in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict has been found to have a negative influence on work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to turnover), family outcomes (e.g., marital and family satisfaction), and physical and psychological health outcomes (e.g., physical health complaints, depression, substance abuse disorders) (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Eby et al., 2005; Frone, 2003; Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006). Extensive work-family conflict detracts from the quality of employees' lives and the quality of their relationships with family members (MacDermid, 2005).

Individuals and couples often develop routines in advance for how they will respond to work-family conflict that arises on an everyday basis (Medved, 2004). For example, couples with children may decide to "trade off" responsibility for childcare activities that conflict with work (e.g., taking care of a sick child, covering for a day care provider on vacation) by taking turns staying home from work when needed. These routines may be adjusted according to the couple's recent history for dealing with such situations; if one partner has taken time off from work to handle the last three childcare emergencies due to the second partner's unavailability, the couple may decide that the second partner will respond to the next three emergencies.

However, not all decisions that individuals make in response to work-family conflict are covered by previously-established routines. In this study, we explore what individuals do when they face a difficult choice between engaging in a work activity and engaging in a family activity. While we recognize the ongoing, interrelated, and complex nature of work and family

decision making and the influence of individuals' decision and relational histories (Medved, 2004; Shumate & Fulk, 2004), we suggest that there is value in exploring individuals' decisions in specific incidents of work-family conflict. Existing theories and prior research have tended to focus on the phenomenon of ongoing or chronic work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996) and devoted less attention to the decision process by which people manage conflict incidents. Further, although ongoing support from role senders in both the work and family domains is associated with low levels of ongoing work-family conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), we know little about how individuals attempt to mobilize social support in specific incidents and what they do when their attempts to mobilize support are rebuffed.

The purpose of the present study is to address this gap in the literature by examining how individuals manage incidents of work-family conflict that pose difficult choices for them. The study examines two interrelated processes: (1) the actions that individuals take to try to avoid conflict in such incidents and (2) the choices they make when the conflict cannot be avoided. The first process sheds light on the decision-making factors that contribute to the presence or absence of work-family conflict. The second process provides insight into the direction of the conflict because the selection of a work activity over a family activity represents work's interference with family, whereas the selection of a family activity over a work activity represents family's interference with work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

When decisions must be made in situations in which complete information is not available, the decision process may be represented by a decision-flow diagram or "decision tree" (Connolly, Arkes, & Hammond, 2000; Raiffa, 1968). A decision tree displays, in chronological order from left to right, alternative actions that the decision maker may choose when making a

decision (depicted as paths from a box) and possible outcomes of the decision maker's actions (depicted as paths from a circle). We propose a series of decisions that people make and outcomes of decisions that occur in incidents of work-family conflict. Figures 1 and 2 present decision trees associated with the mobilization of support and participation in the work and/or family activity respectively.

INSERT FIGURES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

Theoretical models of individual decision making make two general assumptions (Ilgen, Major, Hollenbeck, & Segó, 1995). First, people base their decisions on one or more cues or pieces of information. Second, people combine these cues in some manner to reach their decisions. Adapting a Brunswik (1956) lens perspective, Ilgen et al. (1995) provided a general framework for individual decision making that may be extended to individuals' decision-making processes when faced with conflict situations in which different cues may encourage or discourage adoption of different courses of action. A conflict situation exists when a work activity and a family activity are scheduled to occur at the same time, making it difficult or impossible for an individual to participate in both activities; i.e., the situation represents an incident of work-family conflict. We propose that the cues that may influence individuals' decisions during such situations include internal cues, role sender cues, and role activity cues.

Internal cues pertain to the priorities of the individual facing the conflict situation. The variables of work and family role salience capture individuals' general priorities regarding work and family roles (Lobel, 1991; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992). Role salience has been positively related to ongoing work-family conflict in prior research; extensive participation in a highly salient role may lead to reduced participation in a less salient role, which in turn leads to conflict (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Individuals' general priorities as captured by work and family role salience may also influence their decisions during incidents of work-family

conflict. Further, the importance of the specific work and family activities may influence individuals' decisions during conflict incidents. For example, some activities within a highly salient role may be seen as less important than other activities within that role, and some activities within a less salient role may be perceived as more important than other activities within that role. Activity importance variables have not received attention in research on ongoing work-family conflict because they are likely to vary between separate incidents of conflict experienced by the same person.

Role sender cues pertain to the priorities of members of the individual's work and family role sets who are potentially affected by the conflict situation. Role senders may exert varying amounts of pressure on individuals to participate in the in-role activity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964) ranging from weak (e.g., "I would like you to attend the project meeting/parent-teacher conference") to strong (e.g., "It is essential that you attend the project meeting/parent-teacher conference"). In addition, role senders may offer varying amounts of support for individuals' involvement in activities in the other role (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994); some managers (spouses) are more supportive of individuals' needs to attend to family (work) matters than other managers (spouses).

Role activity cues pertain to characteristics of the particular work and family activities in the conflict situation such as whether each activity can be held at a different time or without the individual present. Such cues have received little prior attention in the literature on work-family conflict due to the general lack of attention paid to incidents in which specific work and family activities are in conflict.

In the remainder of this section, we consider the decision process depicted in each decision tree (Figures 1 and 2) and the internal, role sender, and role activity cues that may influence each decision that individuals make during this process.

Support Mobilization Decisions

Social support and the support mobilization process. Uchino (2004) defined social support as including both the structures associated with an individual's social life (e.g., presence of family ties, membership in work networks) and the functions that these structures serve (e.g., providing useful information, building self-esteem). Social support is imbedded in personal relationships; it is highly interactional and emerges in interrelated exchanges and negotiations between parties over time (Medved, 2004; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990).

Several categorization schemes for the functions or content of support have been offered (e.g., Abbey, Abramis, & Caplan, 1985; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; House, 1981). Upon reviewing the social support literature, Wills and Shinar (2000) delineated five types of supportive functions. These include emotional or affective support that enhances self-esteem and alters the appraisal of life events, instrumental support such as financial aid or assistance with meeting role demands that solves practical problems, informational support that increases knowledge about available resources or courses of action, companionship support that meets needs for affiliation, and social comparison support that conveys information about the appropriateness of different behaviors. In this study, we are interested in a particular type of instrumental support, release from time demands in the work or family domain, that helps an individual to solve the practical problem posed by an incident of work-family conflict.

Individuals may receive varying amounts of supportive functions in both their work and family domains for their involvement in the other domain (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999). First, they may receive support for their participation in family activities from various people at work (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, subordinates) as well as from the organization as a whole. Behson (2005) distinguished between formal organizational support (e.g., organizational work-family initiatives such as flextime and dependent care assistance) and informal organizational support

(e.g., supportive supervisor or organizational culture) for employees' work-family concerns.

Second, individuals may receive informal support in the family domain for their participation in work activities from various family members (e.g., spouse, children, parents). In this study, we are interested in informal support that may be provided to an individual from role senders in the work and family domains during an incident of work-family conflict.

When people are faced with a difficult choice between conflicting work and family activities, we propose that the first decision they make is whether to try to reschedule an activity (box 1 in Figure 1). That is, they decide whether to try to mobilize instrumental support in the form of release from time demands that would alleviate the need to make such a choice. For this to occur, unless they have complete control over the conflict situation, they will need to approach role senders in either the work or family domain and ask their willingness to go along with the rescheduling of the activity in that domain that conflicts with the activity in the other domain. Although the willingness to reschedule an activity is not the only type of support a role sender can provide, it represents instrumental support that may be especially helpful in resolving an individual's work-family dilemma.

When people decide to try to reschedule an activity (upper path from box 1 in Figure 1), they face the decision of which activity to try to reschedule first (box 2). If they try to reschedule the work activity first (upper path from box 2), they learn whether their attempt to reschedule this activity is successful. If they fail to mobilize instrumental support in the work domain, they next face the decision of whether to try to reschedule the family activity (box 3); if they make this rescheduling attempt, they then learn whether it is successful. On the other hand, if people try to reschedule the family activity first (lower path from box 2), they learn whether their attempt to reschedule this activity is successful. If they fail to mobilize instrumental support in the family domain, they next face the decision of whether to try to reschedule the work activity

(box 4); if they make this rescheduling attempt, they then learn whether it is successful.

When people are successful in mobilizing instrumental support such that either the work or family activity is rescheduled (upper path from one of the circles in Figure 1), they are able to participate fully in both activities, thereby avoiding the conflict. In such instances, they have no more decisions to make. However, when they fail to mobilize instrumental support (lower path from all circles encountered) or do not make the attempt (lower path from box 1), they are faced with the decisions depicted in Figure 2, to be discussed later.

The decision process depicted in Figure 1 is consistent with theories of how people cope with stressful situations in general. For example, the theory of stress and coping developed by Lazarus and his colleagues (e.g., Coyne & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) suggests that people make two types of cognitive appraisals of situations, preliminary and secondary. The preliminary appraisal consists of the assessment of the potential for benefit or harm in the situation. The secondary appraisal consists of the assessment of what if anything can be done about the situation, taking into account what coping responses are available and the likelihood that alternative coping responses would be successful. In turn, people may adopt two types of coping responses (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980), problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping consists of attempts to modify the stressful situation directly such as defining the problem, generating and evaluating alternative solutions, and adopting an alternative, whereas emotion-focused coping consists of attempts to control the emotional response to the problem and lessen distress about it by cognitive processes such as avoidance and selective attention.

In an incident of work-family conflict, the preliminary appraisal consists of the individual's assessment of whether the conflict situation has the potential for harm. If so, the secondary appraisal consists of the individual's assessment of whether he or she should seek instrumental support in the form of release from time demands and what strategy will be most

effective in seeking instrumental support, i.e., what domain will be the target of the initial attempt to seek support and what further action will be taken if this attempt is rebuffed.

Considered together, preliminary and secondary appraisals determine whether and how people engage in problem-focused coping by trying to mobilize instrumental support.

Influence of cues on support mobilization decisions. The decision about whether to seek some form of support by trying to reschedule an activity (box 1 in Figure 1) may be influenced by internal and role activity cues in both domains, work and family.

People have a greater desire to participate in a role activity when the role is highly salient to them than when it is less central to their self-concept (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Lobel, 1991; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; Stryker & Serpe, 1994) because participation in a highly salient role can reinforce one's self-identity and add meaning to one's life (Thoits, 1991) Therefore, individuals for whom both work and family roles are highly salient will want to participate in the activity in both domains. Such individuals will be more motivated to seek instrumental support in an effort to reschedule an activity so that they can participate fully in both activities.

The importance of the competing activities may also affect individuals' inclinations to seek instrumental support. When faced with choosing between participating in an important activity (e.g., a crucial project meeting) and an unimportant activity (e.g., a homecoming party for a distant relative), people may simply forego the unimportant activity for the important activity. However, when people view both activities as highly important, they will be more motivated to seek support that would enable them to participate fully in both activities.

Further, when an activity cannot be held without them, people may feel a greater obligation to participate in it. Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that people have a fundamental need to belong that is met by establishing and maintaining strong and stable interpersonal relationships; in Maslow's (1968) motivational hierarchy, needs for affiliation or belonging must

be satisfied before needs for esteem and self-actualization emerge. To maintain their sense of belongingness in both domains, individuals who face conflict incidents will place a high value on preserving their relationships with both sets of role senders. When neither activity can be held without them, they can meet this objective only if one of the activities is rescheduled.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals are more likely to try to reschedule an activity when:

- a. Both the work role and the family role are highly salient to them rather than only one or neither role is highly salient to them.*
- b. Both the work activity and the family activity are highly important to them rather than only one or neither activity is highly important to them.*
- c. Neither the work activity nor the family activity can be held without them.*

If individuals seek to mobilize instrumental support in some manner, they then need to decide which activity to try to reschedule first, the work or family activity (box 2 in Figure 1). This strategic decision may be influenced by role sender and role activity cues in both domains. A role sender who has been supportive on an ongoing basis understands and respects an individual's commitment to other life roles (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). For example, a supportive manager recognizes that an employee has important family responsibilities, just as a supportive spouse recognizes that a partner has important work responsibilities. People will be more likely to try to reschedule an activity in a domain with a more supportive role sender because the role sender views the individual's participation in the other role in more positive terms and is more willing to accommodate it. In addition, this decision is likely to be influenced by whether an activity can be held at a different time; if not, there would be little to be gained from trying to reschedule it. Moreover, seeking the help of a generally supportive role sender regarding an activity that can be held at a different time is unlikely to threaten the relationship with the role sender (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who make a rescheduling attempt are more likely to try to reschedule the family activity rather than the work activity first when:

- a. Support from role senders in the family domain is high rather than low.*
- b. Support from role senders in the work domain is low rather than high.*
- c. The family activity can be held at a different time.*
- d. The work activity cannot be held at a different time.*

If people fail in their initial attempt to reschedule an activity in one domain, they may still decide to try to reschedule the activity in the other domain (boxes 3 and 4 in Figure 1). The decision about whether to make a second rescheduling attempt may be influenced by role sender and role activity cues in the domain in which the attempt would be made. In particular, people may be more likely to make a second rescheduling attempt when role support is high (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994), suggesting that role senders will be willing to accommodate the individual's desire to participate in an activity in the other domain, and when the in-role activity can be held at a different time, suggesting that rescheduling is possible.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who are unsuccessful in rescheduling an activity in one domain are more likely to try to reschedule the activity in the other domain when:

- a. Support from role senders in the other domain is high rather than low.*
- b. The activity in the other domain can be held at a different time.*

Participation Decisions

The participation decision process. Because researchers have focused on developing and testing models of ongoing work-family conflict, the participation decisions that people make in specific incidents of work-family conflict have received little prior attention. In an exception, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) asked part-time MBA students to read a vignette and decide whether to participate in a highly-important work activity (weekend work to meet a project

deadline) or a highly-important family activity (a surprise birthday party for a parent), with the stipulations that they could not participate in both activities and that neither activity could be held at a different time. The role sender cues of role pressure and role support in both the work and family domains were manipulated in vignettes. Respondents were more likely to participate in the family activity rather than the work activity when pressure from a spouse was strong, pressure from a manager was weak, the salience of the work role was low, and, to a lesser extent, when a manager was unsupportive of the employee's need to meet family responsibilities.

Greenhaus and Powell's (2003) study did not examine the full range of participation decisions that individuals may make in incidents of work-family conflict. We suggest that when people have not mobilized social support that would enable them to participate fully in conflicting work and family activities, they may still decide to participate in some combination of the two activities (upper path from box 1 in Figure 2). In this case, they may participate in only a portion of each activity or may be less than fully engaged in each activity; for example, a parent may try to complete work on a laptop computer during a child's soccer game. On the other hand, if people decide *not* to participate in a combination of activities (lower path from box 1), they need to decide whether to participate solely in the work activity or the family activity (box 2). Greenhaus and Powell (2003) examined only the second decision depicted in Figure 2.

Influence of cues on participation decisions. The decision about whether to participate in some combination of conflicting work and family activities or a sole activity (box 1 in Figure 2) may be influenced by internal and role activity cues in both domains. People will be more likely to participate in a combination of activities when both roles are highly salient to them, reflecting their general preference for active involvement in roles with which they identify (Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Lobel, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Thoits, 1991), and when both activities are highly important to them, reflecting their personal preferences in the

incident. In addition, they will be more likely to participate in a combination of activities when neither activity can be held without them. In such a situation, the desire to preserve important relationships with role senders in both domains (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968) will motivate individuals to participate in the activity in each domain to at least some extent.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals who have not rescheduled an activity are more likely to participate in some combination of the conflicting work and family activities rather than a sole activity when:

- a. Both the work role and the family role are highly salient to them rather than only one or neither role is highly salient to them.*
- b. Both the work activity and the family activity are highly important to them rather than only one or neither activity is highly important to them.*
- c. Neither the work activity nor the family activity can be held without them.*

When individuals decide to participate in a sole activity rather than some combination of activities, they face the decision of which activity in which to participate, the family activity or the work activity (box 2 in Figure 2). This decision may be influenced by internal, role sender, and role activity cues in both domains.

Regarding internal cues, people will be more motivated to participate in an activity when the role in which it occurs is more salient to them because involvement in activities in that role is personally more satisfying (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Lobel, 1991; Thoits, 1991). In addition, people will be more motivated to participate in an activity that is personally more important. Thus, people will be more likely to participate in the family activity, thereby foregoing the work activity, when the salience of the family role and the importance of the family activity are high and when the salience of the work role and the importance of the work activity are low.

Regarding role sender cues, people are attentive to signals from role senders in both domains because of their general desire to maintain positive relationships with all parties (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968). Role senders induce participation in an in-role activity through the pressures they exert on individuals (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Kahn et al., 1964). On the other hand, role senders indicate their implicit acceptance of participation in an extra-role activity through the support they provide for individuals' involvement in the other role (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). Thus, people will be more likely to participate in the family activity when pressure from family role senders and support from work role senders are high, and when pressure from work role senders and support from family role senders are low.

Finally, regarding role activity cues, the same desire to please important people in their lives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968) motivates individuals to participate in activities that require their presence. When an activity has to be cancelled because of their absence, role senders in the affected role will be especially displeased. For example, if the partner in a couple who has agreed to attend a parent-teacher meeting on a pre-designated day misses it in favor of a work activity, the meeting cannot be held and the other partner and teacher will be highly aggravated. However, if the family activity that the individual forsakes can be held without his or her presence (e.g., a neighborhood party), the individual's absence, although not appreciated, will be less disruptive. Thus, individuals will be more likely to participate in the family activity when it cannot be held without them, and when the work activity can be held without them.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals who participate in a sole activity are more likely to participate in the family activity rather than the work activity when:

- a. *The salience of the family role to them is high rather than low.*
- b. *The salience of the work role to them is low rather than high.*

- c. *The importance of the family activity to them is high rather than low.*
- d. *The importance of the work activity to them is low rather than high.*
- e. *Pressure from role senders in the family domain is high rather than low.*
- f. *Pressure from role senders in the work domain is low rather than high.*
- g. *Support from role senders in the family domain is low rather than high.*
- h. *Support from role senders in the work domain is high rather than low.*
- i. *The family activity cannot be held without them.*
- j. *The work activity can be held without them.*

METHOD

Procedure and Sample

We sought a sample for this study using a snowball sampling approach (Scott, 1991). This approach, frequently used to obtain data from a variety of firms and industries (e.g., Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002; Tepper, 1995), builds on the contacts of specific individuals within organizations. Part-time (evening) MBA students in two required management classes at a large U.S. university, virtually all of whom held full-time jobs, were given the opportunity to participate in the study as one option for earning extra credit. Seventy-nine percent of the students agreed to participate (34 out of 43). They asked up to ten individuals who worked in full-time managerial and/or professional jobs to fill out a survey anonymously and return it to the senior author via a postage-paid envelope. Managers and professionals in full-time jobs were sampled because such individuals often work extremely long work hours (Brett & Stroh, 2003; Jacobs & Gerson, 1998) and experience “work creep” (i.e., encroachment of the work domain on family and personal time; Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005), making it likely that they would have experienced incidents of work-family conflict that represented a difficult choice.

Of the 340 surveys distributed, 270 (79%) usable surveys were returned. Respondents

were from a wide range of industries (38% service, 22% manufacturing, 5% nonprofit, 4% government, 31% other). Respondents were 58% male, 88% Caucasian, and 70% married. Respondents' mean age was 39.6 years, mean full-time work experience was 17.2 years, and mean number of children under age 18 living with them was 0.9. The highest degree earned was a graduate degree for 38%, bachelor's degree for 36%, and lower degree for 26% of respondents.

Survey

Data were gathered using a variation of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Kirwan & Ainsworth, 1992). A critical incident is regarded as “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions” (Flanagan, 1954: 327) and as “inherently memorable” (Kirwan & Ainsworth, 1992: 47) to the individual who experiences it. Respondents were instructed in the survey, “Think of a time when you faced a difficult choice between engaging in a work activity and engaging in a family activity” and then asked questions about this incident. We expected incidents reported by respondents to meet the above criteria for critical incidents because they were asked to specify a particular incident they had personally experienced that had represented a difficult (i.e., memorable) choice for them.

Internal cues. Two items assessed work and family activity importance: “How important was the work (family) activity to you?” (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important). Two-item scales adapted by Greenhaus and Powell (2003) from Lodahl and Kejner's (1965) job involvement scale assessed work salience ($\alpha = .71$) and family salience ($\alpha = .82$) respectively.

Role sender cues. Two items assessed pressure from role senders in the work and family domains: “How much pressure did you feel from people at work (e.g., supervisors, subordinates, coworkers, suppliers, customers) to engage in the work activity?” and “How much pressure did you feel from members of your family (e.g., spouse, children, parents, extended family members) to engage in the family activity?” (1 = hardly any pressure, 5 = considerable pressure).

Two items assessed support from role senders in the work and family domains: “How much support were you receiving from people at work (family members) for your need to meet your family (work) responsibilities?” (1 = hardly any support, 5 = considerable support).

Role activity cues. Four items assessed role activity cues: “Could the work (family) activity be held without you?” and “Could the work (family) activity be held at a different time?” (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Composite cues. Three composite cues were calculated from items that assessed the same cue in the work and family domains. “High-high role salience” was coded as 1 when both work and family salience were 4.0 or above; “high-high activity importance” was coded as 1 when both work and family activity importance were above their respective scale midpoints (i.e., 4.0 or above); and “neither activity could be held without you” was coded as 1 when responses to the items, “Could the work (family) activity be held without you?” were both no. When these conditions were not met, the composite cue was coded as 0.

Decisions and outcomes. Five items assessed decisions and outcomes regarding the mobilization of social support: “Did you try to reschedule an activity?” (0 = no, 1 = yes); “If so, which activity did you try to reschedule first?” (0 = work activity, 1 = family activity); “Was your attempt to reschedule this activity successful?” (0 = no, 1 = yes); “If your initial attempt at rescheduling was unsuccessful, did you try to reschedule the other activity?” (0 = no, 1 = yes); and “Was your attempt to reschedule the other activity successful?” (0 = no, 1 = yes).

The following item assessed decisions regarding participation in the work and/or family activity: “In which activity or activities did you finally decide to participate?” (1 = work activity, 2 = family activity, 3 = some combination of the two activities, 4 = neither activity). From this item, two decision variables were computed: “Did you participate in some combination of the two activities?” (0 = no, 1 = yes) and “If you participated in a sole activity, did you participate in

the work or family activity?" (0 = work activity, 1 = family activity).

Summary of Decisions and Outcomes

The decisions that respondents made in incidents of work-family conflict and the outcomes of these decisions may be summarized as follows:

Eighty-two of the 270 respondents (30%) tried to reschedule an activity. Of these 82 respondents, 52 attempted to reschedule the work activity first (63%) and 30 attempted to reschedule the family activity first. Of the 52 respondents who tried to reschedule the work activity first, 26 were successful (50%) and 26 were unsuccessful, six of whom (23%) then tried to reschedule the other (family) activity; two of the six attempts (33%) to reschedule the other activity were successful. Of the 30 respondents who tried to reschedule the family activity first, 22 were successful (73%) and eight were unsuccessful, three of whom (38%) then tried to reschedule the other (work) activity; two of the three attempts (67%) to reschedule the other activity were successful. Overall, 52 of the 82 respondents (63%) who made at least one rescheduling attempt were successful in mobilizing social support; these respondents were able to participate fully in the work and family activities that had previously been in conflict.

The remaining 218 respondents, representing 81% of the sample, faced decisions about (1) whether to participate in some combination of the two activities and (2) if not, whether to participate solely in the work or family activity. Of these 218 respondents, 55 participated in some combination of the two activities (25%), 160 participated in a sole activity (74%), and 3 in neither activity (1%). Of the 160 respondents who participated in a sole activity, 76 participated in the work activity (47%) and 84 in the family activity (53%).

Sampling Issues

The sampling method may have yielded a sample that did not represent the population of managers and professionals as a whole. In addition, analyses were conducted on samples that

were progressively smaller for each support mobilization decision ($n = 270$ for decision about whether to try to reschedule an activity, $n = 82$ for decision about which activity to try to reschedule first if a rescheduling attempt was made, $n = 34$ for decision about whether to make a second rescheduling attempt if the first rescheduling attempt was unsuccessful) and each participation decision ($n = 218$ for decision about whether to participate in some combination of activities if neither activity had been rescheduled, $n = 160$ for decision about whether to participate in the work or family activity if the respondent participated in a sole activity). Thus, the potential for sample bias was large. We explored the presence of sample bias in several ways.

First, a university placement center official who reviewed the data concluded that the demographic characteristics of the sample generally reflected the regional population of managers and professionals in full-time jobs. Next, sample characteristics were compared with information on the characteristics of individuals in managerial and professional occupations in the United States. These comparisons suggested, for example, that men (58% in sample vs. 49% in population) and Caucasians (88% in sample vs. 80% in population) were slightly overrepresented in the sample (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). Also, the sample was more highly educated than the U.S. population of managers and professionals; respondents possessing a graduate degree (38% in sample vs. 26% in population) were overrepresented and respondents possessing less than a bachelor's degree (26% in sample vs. 38% in population) were underrepresented in the sample (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Accordingly, we examined relationships between each of the five decisions under investigation, decision cues, and eight demographic characteristics: industry, sex, race, education, marital status, number of children under age 18 living with you, age, and years of full-time work experience. In only two instances was a demographic characteristic significantly related to both a decision variable and a cue that was hypothesized to predict that decision;

detailed results of all tests are available from the senior author. The general lack of relationship between demographic characteristics and study variables suggested that any sample bias due to lack of representativeness of the sample would have minimal effect on results of the study.

Further, within the data set for the 270 incidents, we examined the effect of the sample's becoming progressively smaller on respondents' demographic characteristics and assessment of decision cues. Specifically, we compared data for respondents who tried to reschedule an activity ($n = 82$) to data for other respondents ($n = 188$) and compared data for respondents whose first rescheduling attempt was unsuccessful ($n = 34$) to data for other respondents ($n = 236$). In addition, we compared data for respondents who did not reschedule any activity ($n = 218$) to data for other respondents ($n = 52$) and compared data for respondents who participated in a sole activity ($n = 160$) to data for other respondents ($n = 110$).

Respondent industry, sex, race, education, marital status, number of children under age 18 living with you, age, and years of full-time work experience did not significantly differ for any of these comparisons; results are available from the senior author. Thus, sample bias due to objective data associated with respondents did not appear to be present. However, as Table 1 indicates, assessments of several decision cues, especially role sender and role activity cues, significantly differed in one or more comparisons. These results raised the possibility that the effects of cues that influenced earlier decisions in the support mobilization stage and the participation decision stage would carry over into later decisions in the same stage. To control for any such effects, cues that served as predictors of earlier decisions in each stage were controlled in analyses of later decisions in that stage whenever possible.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Analyses

Logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between predictor

cues and four of the five decisions examined. Pseudo R^2 , the proportion of variance explained in each of these decisions, was calculated using the formula suggested by Aldrich and Nelson (1984). Statistical power analysis (Cohen, 1992; Murphy & Myors, 1998) was conducted for each of these regression analyses. Because of the small sample size for the decision about whether to try to reschedule the other activity if the first rescheduling attempt was unsuccessful ($n = 34$), different analyses were required to examine the relationship between predictor cues and this decision.

Logistic regression analysis was adopted as the primary analytic strategy because it is particularly suited for examination of the dichotomous decisions that were the focus of this study and it provided easily interpretable information about the size of effects of various predictor cues on these decisions (Aldrich & Nelson, 1984). However, we acknowledge that other analytic strategies could have been used to capture the relationships examined, e.g., the quantum dynamic model or the Markov model of human decision-making (Busemeyer, Wang, & Townsend, 2006).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Support Mobilization Decisions

Hypothesis 1 predicted that individuals would be more likely to try to reschedule an activity when (a) both the work role and the family role were highly salient to them, (b) both the work activity and the family activity were highly important to them, and (c) neither the work activity nor the family activity could be held without them. Table 3 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis for the decision about whether to try to reschedule an activity (box 1 in Figure 1, $n = 270$). Contrary to Hypothesis 1a, respondents' decisions about whether to try to reschedule an activity were not significantly predicted by whether both roles were highly salient

to them. In support of Hypotheses 1b and 1c respectively, respondents were significantly more likely to try to reschedule an activity when both activities were highly important to them ($p < .05$) and when neither activity could be held without them ($p < .01$).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 2 predicted that individuals who made a rescheduling attempt would be more likely to try to reschedule the family activity rather than the work activity first when (a) support from role senders in the family domain was high, (b) support from role senders in the work domain was low, (c) the family activity could be held at a different time, and (d) the work activity could not be held at a different time. Table 4 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis for the decision about which activity to try to reschedule first if a rescheduling attempt was made (box 2 in Figure 1, $n = 82$). Composite cues that served as predictors of the first support mobilization decision (high-high role salience, high-high activity importance, and neither activity could be held without you) were controlled in this analysis. In support of Hypotheses 2a and 2c respectively, respondents were significantly more likely to try to reschedule the family activity rather than the work activity first when family support was high ($p < .05$) and when the family activity could be held at a different time ($p < .001$). Contrary to Hypotheses 2b and 2d respectively, respondents' decisions about which activity to try to reschedule first were not significantly predicted by work support or whether the work activity could be held at a different time.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 3 predicted that individuals who were unsuccessful in rescheduling an activity in one domain would be more likely to try to reschedule the activity in the other domain when (a) support from role senders in the other domain was high and (b) the activity in the other domain could be held at a different time. For purposes of hypothesis testing, all decisions about

whether to try to reschedule the other activity if the first rescheduling attempt was unsuccessful (boxes 3 and 4 in Figure 1, $n = 34$) were combined. Contrary to Hypothesis 3a, respondents' decisions about whether to try to reschedule the activity in the other domain were not significantly related to support from role senders in that domain ($r = .15, p = ns$). In support of Hypothesis 3b, respondents were significantly more likely to try to reschedule the activity in the other domain when it could be held at a different time ($\chi^2 = 5.48, df = 1, p < .05$).

Participation Decisions

Hypothesis 4 predicted that individuals who had not rescheduled an activity would be more likely to participate in some combination of the conflicting work and family activities rather than a sole activity when (a) both the work role and the family role were highly salient to them, (b) both the work activity and the family activity were highly important to them, and (c) neither the work activity nor the family activity could be held without them. Table 5 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis for the decision about whether to participate in some combination of activities if neither activity had been rescheduled (box 1 in Figure 2, $n = 218$). Contrary to Hypotheses 4a and 4b respectively, respondents' decisions about whether to participate in some combination of activities were not significantly predicted by whether both roles were highly salient to them or whether both activities were highly important to them. In support of Hypothesis 4c, respondents were significantly more likely to participate in some combination of activities when neither activity could be held without them ($p < .01$).

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 5 predicted that individuals who participated in a sole activity were more likely to participate in the family activity rather than the work activity when (a) the salience of the family role to them was high, (b) the salience of the work role to them was low, (c) the importance of the family activity to them was high, (d) the importance of the work activity to

them was low, (e) pressure from role senders in the family domain was high, (f) pressure from role senders in the work domain was low, (g) support from role senders in the family domain was low, (h) support from role senders in the work domain was high, (i) the family activity could not be held without them, and (j) the work activity could be held without them. Table 6 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis for the decision about whether to participate in the work or family activity if the respondent participated in a sole activity (box 2 in Figure 2; $n = 160$). Composite cues that served as predictors of the first participation decision (e.g., high-high role salience) were fully determined by cues that were hypothesized to predict the second participation decision (e.g., family salience and work salience); therefore, no control variables were included in this analysis. In support of Hypotheses 5a, 5c, 5d, 5e, 5f, 5g, 5h, and 5i respectively, respondents were significantly more likely to participate in the family activity rather than the work activity when family salience was high ($p < .05$), family activity importance was high ($p < .001$), work activity importance was low ($p < .05$), family pressure was high ($p < .05$), work pressure was low ($p < .01$), family support was low ($p < .05$), work support was high ($p < .05$), and the family activity could not be held without them ($p < .001$). Contrary to Hypotheses 5b and 5j respectively, respondents' decisions about which sole activity in which to participate were not significantly influenced by work salience or whether the work activity could be held without them.

INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Power Analysis

Murphy and Myor (1998) suggested that the desirable level of statistical power is .80 in tests of hypotheses. Further, they offered recommendations for the sample size necessary for a multiple regression analysis with a specified number of independent variables to achieve this level of power. According to Murphy and Myor's (1998, Table 3.1: 56) recommendations, to

achieve a power of .80 with a significance level of .05, an n of 267 was needed for a multiple regression analysis with three independent variables to detect a proportion of variance explained (PV) of .04, whereas the n for such an analysis reported in Table 3 was 270. To achieve the same level of power and significance level, (1) an n of 45 was needed for an analysis with seven independent variables and $PV = .32$, whereas the n for the analysis in Table 4 was 82; (2) an n of 213 was needed for an analysis with three independent variables and $PV = .05$, whereas the n for the analysis in Table 5 was 218; and (3) an n of 50 was needed for an analysis with ten independent variables and $PV = .37$, whereas the n for the analysis in Table 6 was 160. Thus, the sample sizes for the logistic regression analyses performed in this study were sufficient to detect the effects that were actually found at an acceptable level of power.

DISCUSSION

Using a decision-making perspective on work and family life, we examined the actions that individuals take to avoid work-family conflict as well as the choices that they make when conflict is unavoidable. We proposed that individuals who are confronted with a difficult choice between engaging in a work activity or a competing family activity make several types of decisions. First, they may try to mobilize tangible support from a role sender in either the work or family domain to reschedule one of the activities. If successful, this strategy avoids work-family conflict by enabling individuals to participate fully in both activities. If support mobilization is unsuccessful or not attempted, individuals decide whether to participate partially in some combination of both activities or to participate solely in either the work or family activity. We believe that our identification of this decision process and our initial test of cues that contribute to the decisions offer a fresh perspective to the examination of work-family conflict.

Consistent with Ilgen et al.'s (1995) decision-making perspective, our findings demonstrate that individuals use multiple cues in deciding how to respond to situations of

potential work-family conflict. For example, the decision to mobilize support was associated with the importance of both activities (internal cue) and the impossibility of holding the activities without the individual (role activity cue). For those individuals who attempted to mobilize support, the decision to seek support from one role rather than the other role depended on the supportiveness of a role sender (role sender cue) as well as the possibility that an activity could be held at a different time (role activity cue). The decision to participate solely in one or the other activity was associated with the salience of a role and the importance of the work and family activities (internal cues), pressure and support within each role (role sender cues), and the impossibility of holding an activity without the individual (role activity cue).

In addition, our findings provide insight into the factors that contribute to specific decisions. As noted above, individuals who were most likely to seek tangible support to reschedule an activity placed a high level of importance on both activities and believed that neither activity could be held without them. The importance of both activities represents a “pull” factor in the sense that individuals seek support that will enable them to participate in both activities when each of the activities is personally appealing. On the other hand, the perceived impossibility of holding each activity in one’s absence is a “push” factor that impels individuals to try to meet all of their obligations to fulfill role requirements, thereby preserving their relationships with role senders in both domains (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The decision to seek rescheduling support from a particular role sender also represents multiple motives. Individuals attempted to mobilize support from a family member when they perceived the family role sender to be generally supportive of their work responsibilities and when the family activity could be held at a different time. Approaching a supportive role sender to reschedule an activity that can be held at a different time not only increases the likelihood of receiving the assistance but also reduces the chances of alienating the role sender.

Prior research has shown that support from the work and family domains can reduce an individual's work-family conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Thompson et al., 1999). However, our results reveal the delicate nature of the support mobilization process. Individuals apparently do not want to approach any role sender for tangible assistance regarding rescheduling an activity unless they have what they see as good reasons (both activities are highly important, neither activity can be held without the individual). These stringent conditions probably explain why only 30% of the respondents in the sample attempted to reschedule an activity.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents who attempted to mobilize support initially approached a role sender in the work domain. The preference for approaching someone at work for assistance is puzzling because supportiveness at work ($M = 2.86$) was perceived to be lower than supportiveness in the family domain ($M = 3.36$, $t = -4.62$, $p < .001$) and because the work domain is generally thought to be less elastic and less flexible than the family role (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). However, work activities were thought to be more capable than family activities of being held at a different time (31% vs. 21%, $t = 2.65$, $p < .01$), and the perception that an activity can be held at a different time was more predictive of the decision to approach a role sender than the general supportiveness of the role sender (Table 4). Therefore, the attempt to mobilize support from a role sender may have more to do with the characteristics of the particular conflict situation (ease of rescheduling a specific activity) than with the ongoing supportiveness of the role sender who is approached. Ironically, initial attempts to reschedule the work activity were less successful (50%) than were initial attempts to reschedule the family activity (73%, $t = -2.10$, $p < .05$), suggesting that many individuals misjudged the responsiveness of work role senders to their family concerns.

What happens when one of the conflicting activities is not rescheduled, either because an individual did not attempt to mobilize support or the attempt was unsuccessful? One alternative

is to participate partially in a combination of activities, spending some time at each or being less than fully engaged in each, in an attempt to meet all role senders' expectations at least to some extent. This was not a favored strategy for members of our sample, as only 25% of the respondents chose to participate in a combination of activities if they had not rescheduled an activity. Moreover, the only significant predictor of this decision was the perception that neither activity could be held without the individual. As noted earlier, one's required presence at both activities was an important determinant of the initial decision to mobilize support. When the mobilization effort failed, this same factor apparently motivated individuals to participate in at least a portion of each activity. This finding highlights the importance of role activity cues in work-family decision making as well as the desire to maintain relationships with role senders (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) who are likely to be upset with individuals who fail to make an appearance at an activity that is compromised by their absence.

Individuals who chose to participate solely in one activity were guided by many cues. Our results are consistent with Greenhaus and Powell's (2003) finding that individuals tend to participate in a particular activity when role senders in that domain exert a strong pressure to participate and role senders in the other domain exert a weak pressure. However, the findings of the present study indicate that respondents also took into account factors that Greenhaus and Powell (2003) did not assess such as the importance of the activity to the individual and whether the activity could be held without the individual.

The decision to participate in one activity at the expense of another activity is the classic example of time-based work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and the particular activity in which one decides to participate determines the direction of the interference. The selection of a work activity results in work having interfered with family (WIF), whereas the selection of a family activity results in family having interfered with work (FIW). It is

noteworthy that a similar proportion of respondents who participated in a sole activity selected the work activity (47%) versus the family activity (53%). This pattern occurred in spite of the greater salience of the family role than the work role ($M = 4.19$ vs. 2.38 , $t = -20.75$, $p < .001$) and the greater importance of the family activity than the work activity ($M = 4.42$ vs. 3.77 , $t = -7.68$, $p < .001$). Despite these factors favoring the selection of the family activity, respondents believed that their family role senders were substantially more supportive of their work responsibilities than their work role senders were of their family responsibilities as noted earlier; that is, the family role was seen as more elastic and accommodating to work than the other way around (Gutek et al., 1991). This probably explains why the respondents as a group tended to select the work activity beyond what would have been expected on the basis of their personal preferences and why WIF has been generally found to exceed FIW (Frone, 2003).

We observed four trends in our findings that highlight additional insights derived from this study. First, although prior research has shown that the salience of a role affects the decision to participate in that role (Lobel, 1991; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992), the literature has neglected to examine specific activities within roles. We found that activity importance was a more powerful cue than role salience in the decision to mobilize support and the decision to participate solely in either the work or the family activity. These findings suggest that individuals discern within-role differences in the importance of tasks or activities and that, at least in some decisions, the importance of a particular activity trumps the salience of the role in which the activity is embedded. Additional research is necessary to determine whether there are some conditions under which the salience of a role takes precedence over the importance of particular activities within that role in the decision to seek support or participate in a work or family activity.

Second, characteristics of the activities themselves—whether they can be held at a different time and whether they require the presence of the individual—are likely to be more

important than anticipated in the work-family literature. These pragmatic activity cues are important because they may trigger concerns about meeting role requirements and preserving positive relationships with role senders. For example, requesting a manager or spouse to reschedule an activity that is difficult or impossible to hold at a different time, or bailing out on an activity that requires one's presence, is likely to invoke resistance and annoyance on the part of a role sender. Consistent with this notion, individuals perceived more pressure to participate in an activity from a role sender in the work (family) domain when the work (family) activity could not be held without the individual and could not be held at a different time (Table 2). These role activity characteristics have been virtually ignored in prior studies that focus on chronic or ongoing work-family conflict rather than specific incidents of work-family conflict. Our findings suggest that additional research could fruitfully examine the impact of these and other role activity characteristics on a wide variety of work-family decisions.

Third, several of the cues we examined, especially those pertaining to role sender and role activity characteristics, invoke concerns about preserving positive relationships with important role senders in the work and family domains. This concern undoubtedly played a role for individuals who decided to mobilize support when neither activity could be held without them, or who decided to participate in a role in which the pressure to participate was high and the supportiveness of the role sender was low. Baumeister and Leary's (1995) conclusion that people need to establish and maintain strong and stable interpersonal relationships to satisfy their belongingness needs seems to have considerable relevance to individuals juggling work and family responsibilities, and represents a fertile area for future research.

Fourth, in several instances, a decision was predicted by a cue in the family domain but not the corresponding cue in the work domain. The decision to mobilize support from one domain rather than the other was associated with the supportiveness of the family (but not the

work) role senders and whether the family (but not the work) activity could be held at a different time. In a similar vein, the decision to participate solely in one activity rather than the other was associated with the salience of the family (but not the work) role and one's required presence in the family (but not the work) activity. Note that this asymmetry in the relevance of family versus work cues held for four different cues and two different decisions. Moreover, there was no instance in which a work cue, but not a corresponding family cue, predicted a work-family decision. These findings suggest that individuals may place more weight on cues from the family domain than the work domain, although additional research is necessary to confirm and explain the differential impact of work-related and family-related decision cues.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

The limitations of this study suggest several fruitful avenues for future research in addition to those we have already mentioned. First, data were collected only from individuals who held full-time managerial and professional jobs. Therefore, our results should not be generalized to other populations of employees without further research. Further, these results should be interpreted with caution because our steps to minimize the effect of sample bias on results may not have completely eliminated such effects.

Second, data were collected only from individuals facing conflict situations, whose perceptions of pressure and support from work and family role senders may have differed from the perceptions of the role senders themselves. Individuals may have presented their decision-making in self-serving terms, making it seem more heroic than warranted. Thus, although the focus of this study was on the individual's perspective, the perspective of other involved parties warrants research attention to increase our understanding of what actually transpires in incidents of work-family conflict.

Third, existing measures were not available for most of the study variables. The

development of valid measures for newly-introduced constructs such as activity importance would facilitate the conduct of future research on actual incidents of work-family conflict. Also, the development of valid measures for familiar constructs that have not been previously applied to such incidents (e.g., role sender pressure and support) would be beneficial.

Fourth, the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) used in the study called for the recollection of a past incident of work-family conflict. Although being asked to select an incident that posed a difficult choice increased the chance that it would be “inherently memorable” (Kirwan & Ainsworth, 1992: 47), respondents still may not have recalled incidents accurately (Golden, 1992; Schwarz, 1999). Further, respondents’ self-reports may have been influenced by the phrasing of survey questions (Schwarz, 1999). Future research should make use of alternative methods to determine whether findings based on self-reports of past conflict incidents may be replicated by other means. For example, individuals could complete a “conflict diary” in which they reported all incidents of work-family conflict experienced over a specified period of time. These diaries could be examined to get a sense of individuals’ decision histories, which could then be used to predict how they would respond to incidents in the future. Further, if such diaries were completed by members of a couple who experienced the same incidents of work-family conflict, multiple perspectives could be gained about how individuals respond to incidents both as decision makers and as role senders for the other party.

Finally, we do not know whether the incidents of work-family conflict described in individuals’ self-reports were typical or atypical (Schwarz, 1999). We asked respondents to select “a difficult choice” they had faced between conflicting work and family activities for the purpose of examining the full complexity of the decision-making process that individuals may adopt in such incidents. In so doing, we assumed that incidents that represented easier choices for individuals would be more likely to be handled by pre-established routines, resulting in a less

elaborate (and less theoretically interesting) decision-making process. If these difficult choices were made in nonroutine, atypical situations, our findings may not generalize to more typical work-family conflict situations. On the other hand, if individuals repeatedly face difficult choices, the situations that produce these choices may become typical for them. To explore the influence of the typicality of conflict incidents on the nature of the decision-making process, we recommend that future research assess incident typicality through self-report and then determine whether the types of decisions made and the influence of various cues on these decisions differ for typical vs. atypical incidents.

Conclusion

Incidents of work-family conflict present dilemmas to the people who experience them. Many people would like to avoid work-family conflict if at all possible. However, their attempts to avoid conflict may make situations worse rather than better if key role senders are displeased by their attempts. What transpires in such incidents—the actions that individuals take to avoid work-family conflict as well as the choices they make when conflict cannot be avoided—may influence individuals' sense of ongoing work-family conflict. We recommend that further scholarly attention be devoted to such incidents to increase our understanding of how people deal with the challenging task of managing the work-family interface.

REFERENCES

- Abbey, A., Abramis, D. J., & Caplan, R. D. Effects of different sources of social support and social conflict on emotional well-being. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 1985, 6, 111-129.
- Aldrich, J. H., & Nelson, F. D. *Linear probability, logit, and probit models*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1984.
- Allen, T. D., Herst, D. E. L., Bruck, C. S., & Sutton, M. Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 2000, 5, 278-308.
- Barling, J., & Sorensen, D. Work and family: In search of a relevant research agenda. In C. L. Cooper & S. E. Jackson (Eds.), *Creating tomorrow's organizations: A handbook for future research in organizational behavior*. New York: Wiley, 1997, pp. 157-169.
- Barnett, R. C. Toward a review and reconceptualization of the work/family literature. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 1998, 124, 125-182.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1995, 117, 497-529.
- Behson, S. J. The relative contribution of formal and informal organizational work-family support. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 2005, 66, 487-500.
- Brett, J. M., & Stroh, L. K. Working 61 plus hours a week: Why do managers do it? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2003, 88, 67-78.
- Brunswik, E. 1956. *Perception and the representative design of experiments*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burke, P. J. Identity processes and social stress. *American Sociological Review*, 1991, 56, 836-849.

- Burke, P. J., & Reitzes, D. C. An identity approach to commitment. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1991, 54, 239-251.
- Busemeyer, J. R., Wang, Z., & Townsend, J. T. Quantum dynamics of human decision-making. *Journal of Mathematical Psychology*, 2006, 50, 220-241.
- Carlson, D. S., & Kacmar, K. M. Work-family conflict in the organization: Do life role values make a difference? *Journal of Management*, 2000, 26, 1031-1054.
- Carlson, D. S., & Perrewé, P. L. The role of social support in the stressor-strain relationship: An examination of work-family conflict. *Journal of Management*, 1999, 25, 513-540.
- Cohen, J. A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1992, 112, 155-159.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1985, 98, 310-357.
- Connolly, T., Arkes, H. R., & Hammond, K. R. (Eds.) General introduction. In *Judgment and decision making: An interdisciplinary reader*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 1-11.
- Coyne, J. C., & Lazarus, R. S. Cognitive style, stress perception, and coping. In J. L. Kutash & L. R. Schlesinger (Eds.), *Handbook on stress and anxiety: Contemporary knowledge, theory, and treatment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980, pp. 144-150.
- Cutrona, C. E., & Russell, D. W. Type of social support and specific stress: Toward a theory of optimal matching. In B. R. Sarason, I. G. Sarason, & G. R. Pierce (Eds.), *Social support: An interactional view*. New York: Wiley, 1990, pp. 319-366.
- Eby, L. T., Casper, W. J., Lockwood, A., Bordeaux, C., & Brinley, A. Work and family research in IO/OB: Content analysis and review of the literature (1980-2002). *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 2005, 66, 124-197.
- Flanagan, J. C. The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1954, 51, 327-358.

- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 1980, 21, 219-239.
- Frone, M. R. Work-family balance. In J. C. Quick & L. E. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational health psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003, pp. 143-162.
- Frone, M. R., Russell, M., & Cooper, M. L. Antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict: Testing a model of the work-family interface. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1992, 77, 65-78.
- Golden, B. R. The past is the past—Or is it? The use of retrospective accounts as indicators of past strategy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1992, 35, 848-860.
- Greenhaus, J. H., Allen, T. D., & Spector, P. E. Health consequences of work-family conflict: The dark side of the work-family interface. In P. L. Perrewe & D. C. Ganster (Eds.), *Research in occupational stress and well-being, Volume 5*. Amsterdam: JAI Press/Elsevier, 2006, pp. 61-98.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 1985, 10, 76-88.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Parasuraman, S. Work-family conflict, social support and well-being. In M. J. Davidson & R. J. Burke (Eds.), *Women in management: Current research issues*. London: Chapman, 1994, pp. 213-229.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. When work and family collide: Deciding between competing role demands. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 2003, 90, 291-303.
- Gutek, B. A., Searle, S., & Klepa, L. Rational versus gender role explanations for work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1991, 76, 560-568.
- House, J. S. *Work stress and social support*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981.

- Ilggen, D. R., Major, D. A., Hollenbeck, J. R., & Segoe, D. J. Raising an individual decision-making model to the team level: A new research model and paradigm. In R. A. Guzzo, E. Salas, & Associates (Eds.), *Team effectiveness and decision making in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995, pp. 113-148.
- Jacobs, J. A., & Gerson, K. Who are the overworked Americans? *Review of Social Economy*, 1998, 56, 442-459.
- Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. New York: Wiley, 1964.
- Kirwan, B., & Ainsworth, L. K. (Eds.) *A guide to task analysis*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1992.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer, 1984.
- Lobel, S. A. Allocation of investment in work and family roles: Alternative theories and implications for research. *Academy of Management Review*, 1991, 16, 507-521.
- Lobel, S. A., & St. Clair, L. Effects of family responsibilities, gender, and career identity salience on performance outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1992, 35, 1057-1069.
- Lodahl, T. M., & Kejner, M. The definition and measurement of job involvement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1965, 49, 24-33.
- MacDermid, S. M. (Re)considering conflict between work and family. In E. E. Kossek & S. J. Lambert (Eds.), *Work and life integration: Organizational, cultural, and individual perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005, pp. 19-40.
- Martins, L. L., Eddleston, K. A., & Veiga, J. F. Moderators of the relationship between work-family conflict and career satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, 2002, 45, 399-409.
- Maslow, A. H. *Toward a psychology of being*. New York: Van Nostrand, 1968.
- Medved, C. E. The everyday accomplishment of work and family: Exploring practical actions in daily routines. *Communication Studies*, 2004, 55, 128-145.

- Milliken, F. J., & Dunn-Jensen, L. M. The changing time demands of managerial and professional work: Implications for managing the work-life boundary. In E. E. Kossek & S. J. Lambert (Eds.), *Work and life integration: Organizational, cultural, and individual perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005, pp. 43-59.
- Murphy, K. R., & Myors, B. *Statistical power analysis: A simple and general model for traditional and modern hypothesis tests*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998.
- Near, J. P., Rice, R. W., & Hunt, R. G. The relationship between work and nonwork domains: A review of empirical research. *Academy of Management Review*, 1980, 5, 415-429.
- Netemeyer, R. G., Boles, J. S., & McMurrian, R. Development and validation of work-family conflict and family-work conflict scales. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1996, 81, 400-410.
- Raiffa, H. *Decision analysis: Introductory lectures on choices under uncertainty*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1968.
- Ruderman, M. N., Ohlott, P. J., Panzer, K., & King, S. N. Benefits of multiple roles for professional women. *Academy of Management Journal*, 2002, 45, 369-386.
- Sarason, B. R., Sarason, I. G., & Pierce, G. R. (Eds.) *Social support: An interactional view*. New York: Wiley, 1990.
- Schwarz, N. Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, 1999, 54, 93-105.
- Scott, J. *Social network analysis*. London: Sage, 1991.
- Shumate, M., & Fulk, J. Boundaries and role conflict when work and family are colocated: A communication network and symbolic interaction approach. *Human Relations*, 2004, 57, 55-74.
- Stryker, S., & Serpe, R. T. Identity salience and psychological centrality: Equivalent, overlapping, or complementary concepts? *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1994, 57, 16-35.

- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*, 2nd ed. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986, pp. 7-24.
- Tepper, B. Upward maintenance tactics in supervisory mentoring and non-mentoring relationships. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1995, 38, 1191-1205.
- Thoits, P. A. On merging identity theory and stress research. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1991, 54, 101-112.
- Thompson, C. A., Beauvais, L. L., & Lyness, K. S. When work-family benefits are not enough: The influence of work-family culture on benefit utilization, organizational attachment, and work-family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 1999, 54, 392-415.
- Uchino, B. N. *Social support and physical health: Understanding the health consequences of relationships*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.
- United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of education statistics*, 2004, table 377. Retrieved February 8, 2006 from <http://nces.ed.gov>.
- United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Employment and Earnings*, 2006, table 11. Retrieved February 8, 2006 from <http://www.bls.gov>.
- Wills, T.A., & Shinar, O. Measuring perceived and received social support. In S. Cohen, L. G. Underwood, & B. H. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Social support measurement and intervention: A guide for health and social scientists*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Zedeck, S. (Ed.). *Work, families, and organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

TABLE 1
Decision Cues by Sample

	Samples for Support Mobilization Decisions			Samples for Participation Decisions	
	1 <i>n</i> = 270	2 <i>n</i> = 82	3 <i>n</i> = 34	1 <i>n</i> = 218	2 <i>n</i> = 160
<i>Internal cues:</i>					
1. Family salience	4.19	4.22	4.22	4.18	4.11
2. Work salience	2.38	2.38	2.18	2.36	2.39
3. Family activity importance	4.42	4.45	4.47	4.41	4.38
4. Work activity importance	3.77	3.96 ^a	4.03	3.74	3.68
<i>Role sender cues:</i>					
5. Family pressure	3.47	3.51	3.76	3.50	3.46
6. Work pressure	3.39	3.59	4.18 ^b	3.43	3.35
7. Family support	3.36	3.60 ^a	3.44	3.27 ^c	3.22 ^d
8. Work support	2.86	2.76	2.26 ^b	2.82	2.81
<i>Role activity cues:</i>					
9. Could family activity be held without you?	.71	.57 ^a	.59	.75 ^c	.77 ^d
10. Could work activity be held without you?	.66	.61	.50 ^b	.66	.71
11. Could family activity be held at different time?	.21	.24	.09	.17 ^c	.17
12. Could work activity be held at different time?	.31	.50 ^a	.47 ^b	.26 ^c	.27

Note. Variables 1-8 are measured on 5-point scales. Coding for variables 9-12: 0 = no, 1 = yes.

^a Significant difference at .05 level according to *t* test: *n* = 82 vs. *n* = 188.

^b Significant difference at .05 level according to *t* test: *n* = 34 vs. *n* = 236.

^c Significant difference at .05 level according to *t* test: *n* = 218 vs. *n* = 52.

^d Significant difference at .05 level according to *t* test: *n* = 160 vs. *n* = 110.

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Internal cues:</i>																		
1. Family salience	4.19	.84	-															
2. Work salience	2.38	.89	-.36	-														
3. Family activity importance	4.42	.86	.29	-.09	-													
4. Work activity importance	3.77	1.09	-.03	.23	-.01	-												
<i>Role sender cues:</i>																		
5. Family pressure	3.47	1.25	.10	-.01	.19	-.04	-											
6. Work pressure	3.39	1.29	.00	.04	.04	.18	.23	-										
7. Family support	3.36	1.28	.17	-.06	.20	.06	-.18	.13	-									
8. Work support	2.86	1.32	-.03	.05	.14	-.03	.00	-.40	.09	-								
<i>Role activity cues:</i>																		
9. Could family activity be held without you?	.71	.45	-.05	-.07	-.09	.05	-.13	-.04	-.01	-.08	-							
10. Could work activity be held without you?	.66	.47	.08	.00	.09	-.19	.03	-.24	-.01	.15	-.04	-						
11. Could family activity be held at a different time?	.21	.41	-.14	.09	-.13	.08	-.19	-.03	-.01	-.11	.04	-.08	-					
12. Could work activity be held at a different time?	.31	.46	-.01	.05	.10	-.05	-.06	-.16	-.06	-.03	-.21	.07	-.09	-				
<i>Decisions:</i>																		
13. Did you try to reschedule an activity?	.30	.46	.03	.00	.02	.12	.02	.10	.13	-.05	-.21	-.07	.06	.27	-			
14. If so, which activity did you try to reschedule first?	.37	.49	.06	-.10	-.07	.12	-.15	.15	.28	-.11	-.01	.14	.57	-.25	-	-		
15. Did you try to reschedule the other activity?	.26	.45	.00	.13	-.02	-.15	-.05	-.09	.19	.04	-.17	.20	.28	.24	-	.14	-	
16. Did you participate in some combination of activities?	.25	.44	.12	-.04	.06	.10	.04	.10	.06	-.01	-.08	-.18	-.01	-.05	.13	-.07	.18	-
17. If not, did you participate in the work or family activity?	.53	.50	.30	-.18	.35	-.27	.21	-.35	-.10	.32	-.28	.32	-.21	.19	-.10	-.15	.44	-

Note. $n = 270$ except for variable 14 ($n = 82$), variable 15 ($n = 34$), variable 16 ($n = 218$), and variable 17 ($n = 160$). Variables 1-8 are measured on 5-point scales. Coding for variables 9-13 and 15-16: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coding for variables 14 and 17: 0 = work activity, 1 = family activity. Decimal points are omitted for the correlations. The following correlations are significant at the .05 level: .12 or greater for $n = 270$, .13 or greater for $n = 218$, .15 or greater for $n = 160$, .23 or greater for $n = 82$, and .30 or greater for $n = 34$.

TABLE 3

Support Mobilization Decision 1:

Did You Try to Reschedule an Activity?

Variable	b	s.e.
<i>Internal cues</i>		
High-high role salience	-.15	.86
High-high activity importance	.60*	.28
<i>Role activity cue</i>		
Neither activity could be held without you	1.10**	.44
Constant	-2.84**	1.10
χ^2	11.16**	
<i>df</i>	3	
Pseudo R^2	.04	

Note. $n = 270$. Coding for all variables: 0 = no, 1 = yes.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 4

Support Mobilization Decision 2:

If You Tried to Reschedule an Activity,

Which Activity Did You Try to Reschedule First?^a

Variable	b	s.e.
<i>Control variables</i>		
High-high role salience	-.13	2.08
High-high activity importance	.69	.70
Neither activity could be held without you	-1.13	.99
<i>Role sender cues</i>		
Family support	.62*	.28
Work support	.03	.23
<i>Role activity cues</i>		
Could family activity be held at a different time? ^b	3.36***	.87
Could work activity be held at a different time? ^b	-.77	.62
Constant	-5.99*	3.01
χ^2	38.03***	
<i>df</i>	7	
Pseudo R^2	.32	

Note. $n = 82$.

^a 0 = work activity, 1 = family activity

^b 0 = no, 1 = yes

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 5

Participation Decision 1:

If You Did Not Reschedule an Activity,

Did You Participate in Some Combination of Activities?

Variable	b	s.e.
<i>Internal cues</i>		
High-high role salience	.61	.96
High-high activity importance	.45	.33
<i>Role activity cue</i>		
Neither activity could be held without you	1.42**	.51
Constant	-3.97**	1.27
χ^2	10.29*	
<i>df</i>	3	
Pseudo R^2	.05	

Note. $n = 218$. Coding for all variables: 0 = no, 1 = yes.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 6

Participation Decision 2:

If You Participated in a Sole Activity,

Did You Participate in the Work or Family Activity?^a

Variable	b	s.e.
<i>Internal cues</i>		
Family salience	.76*	.33
Work salience	-.42	.31
Family activity importance	1.10***	.32
Work activity importance	-.52*	.26
<i>Role sender cues</i>		
Family pressure	.53*	.22
Work pressure	-.69**	.26
Family support	-.47*	.20
Work support	.56*	.23
<i>Role activity cues</i>		
Could family activity be held without you? ^b	-2.29***	.68
Could work activity be held without you? ^b	.75	.53
Constant	-1.51	2.55
χ^2	95.74***	
<i>df</i>	10	
Pseudo R^2	.37	

Note. $n = 160$.

^a 0 = work activity, 1 = family activity

^b 0 = no, 1 = yes

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

FIGURE 1

Decisions Regarding the Mobilization of Social Support

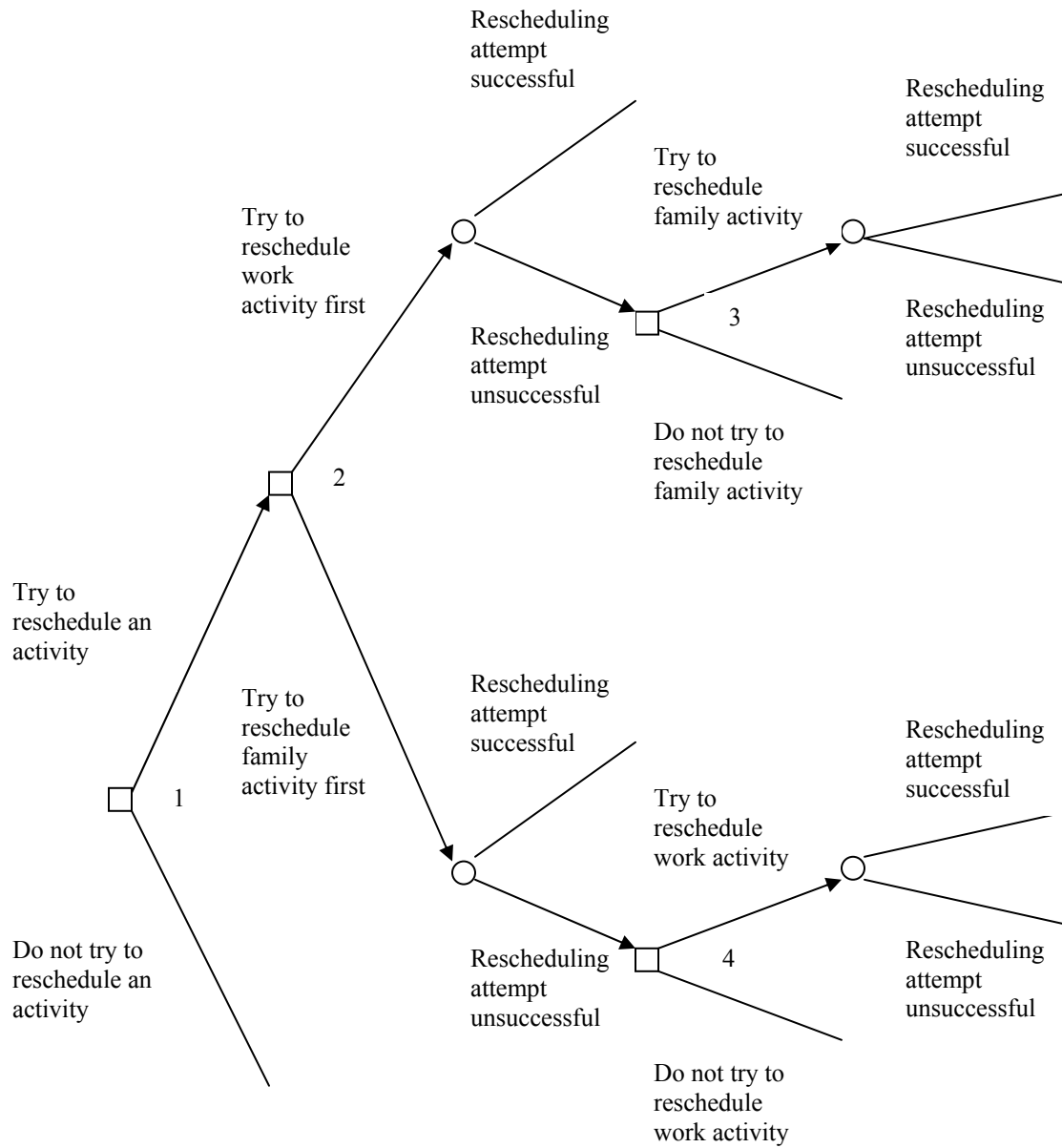


FIGURE 2

Decisions Regarding Participation in the Work and/or Family Activity

If No Activity Has Been Rescheduled

