What do we want now or later? Work-family decisions in a dual-earner context

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Elisabeth Abraham & Marijke Verbruggen

Dual-earner couples

- Dual-earner households as the **norm today** (Malconado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015; OECD, 2011)
- Prone to **work-family conflict** (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus et al., 1989; Masterson & Hoobler, 2015; Radcliffe & Cassel, 2014; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969)
- ⇒ **uncertainty** and **complexity**: **align** work-family preferences and commitments on an individual and a **couple** level, in the **short** and **long run** (Bailyn, 1977)

Impact on dual-earner work-family decisions

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Gaps in frameworks on WF decision-making

Work-family decision-making as a rather **rational** and **coherent** process (Lupu et al., 2018): only explains part of work-family choices

- ⇒ Calls to include concepts from behavioral decision-making literature (Poelmans et al. 2013; Greenhaus & Powell, 2016)
- ⇒ Human choices as influenced by **automatic thinking** processes

The implied role of **time** in work-family decision-making

- Expectations of possible outcomes ⇒ but process of **anticipation**?
 - Favorable work-family outcomes ⇒ but evaluation in **retrospect**?
- ⇒ Calls to explore subjective time experiences in work-family research (Allen et al., 2019; Verbruggen et al., 2020), including **mental time travel** (Shipp & Cole, 2015; Wheeler et al., 1997)

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Aims of our theoretical paper

Extend frameworks on **work-family conflict decisions** in dual-earner **couples** using a **behavioral decision-making** lens

1. Argue that such decisions are particularly prone to irrational or incoherent influences like **cognitive biases**

2. Investigate how cognitive biases impact time in work-family decisions:

- the process of **anticipation** and **retrospection**
- daily and long term

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Daily decisions

Existing frameworks on daily WF decisions

Individuals

< different sets of information to navigate daily life (March, 1994)

1. **Logic of consequences:** anticipated outcome of different choice alternatives and match with **personal preferences**?
2. **Logic of appropriateness:** appropriate behavior considering the situation and match with **social roles**?

Couple rules to facilitate work-family decisions

- Arise through **explicit and prospective** agreements or through **silent and retrospective** arrangement (Sillars & Kalbflesch, 1989)
- Possible forms:
 - **Couple adaptive strategies** (Becker & Moen, 1999)
 - **Relational scripts** (Crawford et al., 2019; Gioia & Poole, 1984)

⇒ what (we think) we **should do** in a given conflict situation

Biased anticipations in the moment

Should
Before decision

Want
During decision

Should
After decision

Two mechanisms of the **present bias** (Bazerman et al., 1998; O'donoghue & Rabin, 1999)

1. **Preponderate: act on momentary impulses**

⇒ in case of immediate gratification or when anticipating other decision options/outcomes is **uncertain**

2. **Procrastinate: delay decision in the moment**

⇒ in case of immediate costs or when anticipating/deciding is **complex**

React on impulses in the moment

- not always in line with preferences, social roles or couple rules
- not always after careful reflection about outcomes

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Proposition 1a.

The more daily work-family conflict decisions are characterized by uncertainty or complexity, the less likely partners in a couple decide rationally or coherently.

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In retrospect

Negative emotions like regret about unjustifiable decision outcome and process

Decision outcome

Decision process

(Connolly & Zeelenberg, 2002; Zeelenberg et al., 2002; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2010)

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Proposition 1b.

The less daily work-family conflict decisions are made rationally or coherently, the more likely partners in a couple will experience negative retrospective emotions.

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Existing frameworks on long-term WF decisions

Individuals tend to **take family into account** when making work or career decisions (family-relatedness of work decisions; Greenhaus & Powell, 2012; Powell & Greenhaus, 2012)

⇒ reach favorable outcome for the individual, but also for the family (Greenhaus & Powell, 2016)

Couples **navigate major career and family decisions together** (Petriglieri, 2019; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014)

⇒ achieve a feasible combination

⇒ Which options are the best out of different alternatives? (Lupu et al., 2018)

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Biased anticipations of the future

Long-term decisions are inherently difficult; anticipating an **uncertain** and **complex future**

We tend to **focus on losses** in our decision-making (loss aversion, endowment effect; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992)

We are **bad forecasters** (affective forecasting; Bühler & McFahrland, 2001; Gilbert & Ebert, 2002; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005)

⇒ **Less willing to take chances or make changes**

Many dual-earner work-family decisions involve **uncertainty** and **complexity**

- A lot to lose
- Underestimate couple coping ability
- Complex choices (chance vs. loss?)

⇒ More likely to make **safe choices** or **defer decisions** (e.g., career inaction; Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020)

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Proposition 2a.

The more long-term work-family decisions are characterized by uncertainty or complexity, the less likely partners in a couple will decide rationally or coherently.

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In retrospect

Cautious or deferred decisions ⇒ **negative experiences over time**

Regret about not acting

especially in important life domains like career, parenting, love (Roese & Summerville, 2005)

Unhappy with past decisions

e.g., home-to-career interference (Schooreel et al. 2017)

Downward spiral for new decisions

- Path dependency (Verbruggen et al., 2015)
- Inaction inertia (Tykocinski et al., 1995)

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Proposition 2b.

The less long-term work-family conflict decisions are made rationally or coherently, the more likely partners in a couple will experience negative retrospective emotions.

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Dealing with uncertainty and complexity

Deal better with uncertainty and complexity when we can justify our choices, transfer decision responsibility or comprehend our preferences **during decision-making and in retrospect** (decision justification theory; Connolly & Zeelenberg, 2002)

Couple context: possibility of **justifying decisions** together, **sharing accountability** and **putting decisions into perspective**

Relational factors → dealing with conflict

- **Positivity** in conflict (Gottman et al., 2015) ⇒ reach consensus
- **Secure-base relationships** for career development (Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2018) ⇒ overcome fear of risk
 - ⇒ Reduce impact of uncertainty and complexity

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Proposition 3.

The more partners in a couple maintain positivity in couple interactions and a secure-base relationship, the less cognitive biases will impact their daily and long-term work-family decisions. ^{EA101}

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EA101 the less a) cognitive biases will impact ... b) less retrospective emotions ...

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Suggestions for further research

Testing the framework

- Organize qualitative semi-structured **interviews**
- Study illogical decisions in **quantitative designs** (e.g., diary studies, longitudinal questionnaires)
intentions/commitments vs. decisions made
- Use **small-sample designs** (e.g., Hobbs et al. 2013)

Extending the framework

- Investigate **aspects of the work-family conflict situation** (e.g., intensity, couple routines, ...)
- Examine **role of emotions** (aside from regret)

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Sources

- Credits images
 - <http://blog.thebreastcancersite.com/automatic-thoughts/>

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EA84 Update paper; versimpelen

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