The Intersection of Work and Family Roles

Implications for Career Management

Work and family lives touch each other in so many ways.\(^1\) Think of how your career responsibilities can affect your family and personal life; how a good (or bad!) day at work affects your mood at home, or the times you missed a child’s music recital or a workout at the gym because of your job. Think also of how your family responsibilities can affect your career; for example, whether you are willing to spend countless evenings or weekends in the office rather than with your family or friends, and whether you are prepared to accept a relocation that jeopardizes your spouse’s career or your children’s friendships.

It is no wonder that work–family balance is a hot topic on the nation’s social agenda, especially when organizational downsizings have left many of us with more work to do and fewer resources with which to do it. Articles on flextime, parental leave legislation, “mommy tracks,” and child care arrangements filled the pages of the popular press and the professional journals in the 1980s and 1990s, and have continued with even greater frequency in the new millennium. Individuals and families are increasingly concerned with finding ways to juggle their work and family responsibilities.

Why has the need to balance work and family lives become more intense in recent years? First, many individuals are simultaneously pursuing a career and committed to a family relationship. Indeed, both spouses are employed in nearly 6 out of 10 married-couple families in the United States,\(^2\) and other industrialized countries throughout the world are witnessing similar trends. The changing composition of the workforce is largely attributable to the increasing participation of women in paid employment. Consider the following statistics:\(^3\)

- In 2005, 59.3 percent of all married women in the United States age 16 and older were in the workforce, compared with just 30 percent in 1960.
• Nearly 62.6 percent of all married women with children younger than six were in the workforce in 2005, compared with only 19 percent in 1960.

• The employment rate for married women with children ages 6–17 was 76.9 percent in 2005, nearly double the rate (39 percent) in 1960.

• Approximately 28 percent of the households with children under 18 were single-parent households; 82 percent of these were headed by women.

In addition, men are increasingly required to juggle their work and family lives. With their wives employed outside the home with greater frequency, more responsibility for home chores and child care falls on husbands, who then need to balance these responsibilities with their work demands. Moreover, a small but significant number of divorced men assume custody of their children and feel the crunch of extensive family and career commitments.

In addition to these demographic changes, advances in communication technology have increased the work pressures of employees in many organizations. The proliferation of PDAs, cell phones, and other forms of electronic communication often makes employees feel “on call” 24 hours and seven days a week at the whim of organizations that require their immediate action. Recent studies indicate that more than 10,000 companies provide PDAs to their employees, 60 percent of the employees with cell phones or smart phones take the phones with them on vacation, and 20 percent are contacted by their employers while on vacation.

Moreover, an increasingly global economy requires many employees to communicate with colleagues, suppliers, and clients in different parts of the world and consequently in different time zones. Making or taking a 3:00 a.m. telephone call from the United States to speak with a colleague in Asia during the colleague’s normal work hours can put additional strain on an already harried businessperson and disrupt sleep patterns.

The combination of heavy work commitments and extensive family responsibilities has required individuals and families to cope effectively with the stresses of this demanding lifestyle. It has also posed a challenge to employers to develop “family responsive” policies and practices or risk losing their competitive edge in attracting and retaining talented women and men.

This chapter examines the relationship between work and family lives. We will discuss the factors that produce conflict between employees’ work lives and their family lives as well as the consequences of this conflict for employees, families, and employers. We will also consider the many ways in which work and family lives can strengthen and enrich one another. Next, we will discuss potential stresses in a two-career relationship and the ways individuals and couples can manage this stress. We will also identify actions that organizations can take to help their employees resolve their work–family challenges and actions that individuals can take to manage their careers in ways that take their work and personal lives into account.
There are many times when our work and family lives are in conflict with one another. Work–family conflict exists when pressures from work and family roles are mutually incompatible, that is, when participation in one role interferes with participation in the other role.\(^7\) Sometimes our work responsibilities interfere with our family lives (known as work-to-family conflict), whereas at other times our family lives interfere with our work (family-to-work conflict).\(^8\) We will use the term work–family conflict when referring to the general notion of conflict between work and family lives and use the more specific terms work-to-family conflict or family-to-work conflict when referring to the specific direction of the conflict or interference. Research has revealed three significant forms of work–family conflict: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict.

*Time-based conflict* occurs because the activities we pursue in life compete for a precious commodity—time. The time spent in one role generally cannot be devoted to the other role. Out-of-town business meetings or late evenings at the office can interfere with family dinners and children’s parent–teacher conferences. It is simply impossible to be in two places at once. Time-based work-to-family conflict is likely to be most prevalent for employees who work long hours, travel extensively, frequently work overtime, and have inflexible work schedules. All of these work characteristics increase or fix the time at work that cannot be spent on family role activities.

Time pressures that arise from the family domain can also produce conflict. Employees who experience the most extensive family-to-work conflict tend to be married, have young children, have large families, and have spouses or partners who hold responsible jobs. All of these family characteristics increase the amount of time required to fulfill family role requirements, which can interfere with work-related activities.

*Strain-based conflict* exists when psychological strain produced within one role affects our functioning in another role. Work stressors can produce such strain symptoms as tension, irritability, fatigue, depression, and apathy, and it is difficult to be an attentive partner, a loving parent, or an understanding friend when one is depressed or irritable. Strain-based work-to-family conflict is likely to be most intense for employees who experience conflict or ambiguity within the work role; who are exposed to extensive physical, emotional, or mental work demands; whose work environment is constantly changing; and who work on repetitive, boring tasks. All these stressful conditions can produce a “negative emotional spillover” from work to nonwork.\(^9\)

Of course, many sources of strain can arise from the family role as well. Individuals who experience difficulties with partners or children or receive little support and aid from their families may find that their family stress intrudes into their work life. It is difficult to devote oneself fully to work when preoccupied with a stressful family situation.
Sometimes behavior that is effective in one role is simply inappropriate in another role. It has been suggested, for example, that managers when at work are expected to be self-reliant, aggressive, detached, and objective. Family members, on the other hand, may expect that same person when at home to be warm, nurturant, and attentive. If people cannot shift gears when they enter different roles, they are likely to experience behavior-based conflict between the roles. Behavioral styles that employees exhibit at work (logic, objectivity, power, and authority) may be incompatible with the behaviors desired by their partners and children on the home front.**10** Partners and children do not appreciate being treated like subordinates!

Therefore, a variety of role pressures can produce work–family conflict. Some of these pressures demand excessive time commitments, others produce extensive stress, and many produce both. Where do these pressures come from? Some come from role senders, persons with whom we interact in our work and family lives. Bosses, colleagues, partners, and children are all role senders who place demands on us to finish projects, attend weekend meetings, wash the dishes, and paint the house. People tend to experience more conflict when there are strong penalties for failing to comply with these demands from work and family roles. If a boss insists that you attend a Saturday work meeting, and a partner refuses to change vacation plans by one day, you are caught between the proverbial rock and hard place. If either the boss or the partner permits latitude to deviate from expectations, there is room to maneuver.

However, many pressures to participate or excel at work or in family activities come not from other people, but from the expectations we place on ourselves—we become our own role senders. For example, Type A employees, as we discussed in Chapter 9, place tremendous pressure on themselves to work long hours and be highly successful. Not surprisingly, they experience more work–family conflict than Type B’s.**11** In the family realm, the desire to be the “perfect” partner or parent can place pressure on us that goes far beyond any pressure that children or partners can muster.

The pressures people put on themselves depend on the importance or salience of the role to their self-concept. People for whom work is a central part of life are more demanding on themselves to participate fully and competently in that role, thereby exacerbating the degree of conflict. Those who are highly involved in both work and family are likely to experience the most conflict.**12** They want to be highly productive in their careers and be an attentive parent and partner, and they feel guilty if they cannot do both all the time. Consider the following three scenarios.

- Bill is a hard-working attorney in his early 30s, married, with two children. He is preoccupied with his career, working long hours, traveling extensively, and bringing work home most evenings and weekends. Despite his heavy work pressures and a young family, Bill does not feel intense work–family conflict. He is
so concerned about his career that he hardly notices the family pressures that
surround him. Since he often convinces his wife to make only minor demands on
his time and emotion, he does not even see the impact of his work on his family
life, or, if he does see it, it does not bother him deeply. It is not so much that his
family is unimportant, but rather that it takes a back seat to his career.

- Malik, also married with two children, has a demanding, time-consuming career
  as an executive. Unlike Bill, however, Malik is quite concerned about spending
time with his family and sharing experiences with his wife and young children.
His career is important, but so is his family. Despite his best efforts to juggle work
and family activities, Malik experiences chronic, intense work–family conflict. He
cares so much about both roles that the tug on his time and emotion is almost
inevitable.

- Rajan’s situation is slightly different. He works as an accountant for a state
government agency. Although he likes his job, Rajan’s career is not a crucial part of
his life. He works primarily to earn enough money to support his wife and two
young children. He puts in a 40-hour week, actively avoids business travel, and
almost never brings work home. His passions are his family, his home, and his
hobbies. Rajan does not experience intense work–family conflict. His job leaves him
sufficient time to pursue his real interests, and it doesn’t drain him of his energy.

In these three scenarios, the husband’s work–family conflict depends on the relative
importance he attaches to his work and family roles. Who is most typical—Bill, Malik, or
Rajan? Fernando Bartolome and Paul Evans observed that most young male managers were
obsessed with their careers, enmeshed in their career success, and driven by a need to
achieve that seemed to overshadow family life. Family was important to these men, but
they tended to take it for granted. Although men, in general, may not be as obsessed with
their careers now as they were decades ago, there will still be individual differences in the
importance of work based on employees’ underlying life values and the nature of their
career fields.

It is not a question of who is right and who is wrong. All three situations require trade-
offs between work and family pursuits. Bill’s career progress has been rapid and success-
ful but not without cost—his family relationships. Malik gets a great deal of satisfaction from
both work and family roles. However, his heavy involvement in both roles may leave him
frustrated and wondering what kind of father/husband (or executive) he could have been
if he had centered his life even more on his family (or work). Rajan’s satisfaction with his
family and home life also came at a price—lack of extensive career accomplishments—
although he may be quite willing to pay that price. To understand the consequences of a
trade-off, people must know what values are most important to them and must understand
the risks they assume to pursue these values.
We intentionally described the experiences of three men to illustrate that males are not immune to work–family conflict and guilt. The initial belief that women inevitably experience more work–family conflict than men has not been consistently supported. Some recent research suggests that the heavy work responsibilities of many men interfere with their family lives, whereas the heavy family responsibilities of many women interfere with their work. However, there are likely to be many exceptions to this trend, and it is fair to say that anyone (man or woman) who encounters extensive work and family pressures can experience conflict or interference between these roles.

Table 10.1 presents a scale that measures work–family conflict. Strong agreement with an item reflects a relatively high level of work–family conflict. Therefore, the higher the score the more extensive is the work–family conflict. Extensive work–family conflict can produce high levels of stress; detract from our satisfaction with our family, job, and life; and can produce physical or psychological health problems. However, this does not mean that everyone who experiences work–family conflict will experience stress, dissatisfaction, and poor health. A certain level of conflict is inevitable in a society in which women and men are required to juggle work and family responsibilities. Problems are probably most pronounced when the level of work–family conflict is so intense that it exceeds individuals’ capacities to cope with the conflict. We will discuss coping skills in a later part of the chapter.

**TABLE 10.1  Inventory of Work–Family Conflict**

Below are 12 statements about the relationship between your work life and your family, home, or personal life. Indicate your agreement or disagreement by placing the appropriate number in front of each statement:

1 = Strongly Disagree  
2 = Disagree  
3 = Uncertain  
4 = Agree  
5 = Strongly Agree

**Work-to-Family Conflict**

1. ____ My work schedule often conflicts with my family life.
2. ____ After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I’d like to do.
3. ____ On the job, I have so much work to do that it takes away from my personal interests.
4. ____ My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work when I am at home.
5. ____ Because my work is demanding, at times I am irritable at home.

(Continued)
WORK–FAMILY ENRICHMENT: WHEN WORK AND FAMILY ARE “ALLIES”

Although many of us experience work–family conflict—sometimes rather intensely—we should not conclude that work and family are always at odds with one another. It is true that work and family lives may conflict with one another, but they may be allies as well.¹⁶ Our discussion about work–family conflict emphasized how work and family can be enemies by interfering with one another and producing stress and dissatisfaction. In contrast, when they are allies, work can strengthen our family lives, and family experiences can improve our work lives. We refer to these beneficial effects of work and family on one another as work–family enrichment.¹⁷

Work–family enrichment takes place when resources acquired in one role are used to improve our performance and satisfaction in the other role. A resource is an asset that can be used to solve a problem or master a challenging situation. Participating in a role—family or work—provides opportunities to acquire resources from that role. These resources include the

- Development of new skills
- Development of new perspectives, by forming novel ways of looking at situations and solving problems

### TABLE 10.1 (Continued)

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<td>6.</td>
<td>___ The demands of my job make it difficult to be relaxed all the time at home.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>___ My work takes up time that I’d like to spend with my family.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>___ My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I’d like to be.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>___ My family takes up time I would like to spend working.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>___ My personal interests take too much time away from my work.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>___ The demands of my family life make it difficult to concentrate at work.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>___ At times, my personal problems make me irritable at work.</td>
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**NOTE:** Questions 1–8 refer to the extent to which work interferes with family, home, or personal life. Questions 9–12 refer to the extent to which family, home, or personal life interferes with work.
• Enhancement of our *self-confidence* as a result of performing well in our duties

• Accumulation of *social capital*, the network of relationships we develop with other people who provide us with information or advice and who can use their influence to help us reach our goals

• Acquisition of *material resources* such as money and gifts

Imagine the resources we might acquire in our lives from our role as a family member, for example, a spouse or partner, parent, child, sibling, or in-law.

We might improve our problem-solving *skills* as we learn to work effectively with our spouse or partner to solve daily problems, our listening skills in helping our toddler communicate his or her needs to us, or our multitasking skills in juggling our many responsibilities to our children, neighbors, and spouses with our own personal needs.

Our experiences with our child or with a younger brother or sister might produce a *new perspective* on working with others, for example, to let people try to solve problems on their own at first, and not offer advice until it is requested.

We may become more *self-confident* as we master the challenges of taking care of a home, raising children, solving problems as a couple, or helping our parents with a knotty problem.

We may have access to the wisdom, advice, and direct support of a member of our nuclear or extended family as we accumulate *social capital* in our lives as family members.

We may even have access to financial resources such as a spouse’s income, a parent’s inheritance, or an in-law’s generous gift.

It is not difficult to imagine how the resources acquired from our family role can be beneficial to our work lives. For example:

• The problem-solving and listening skills honed as a spouse or parent may make us more effective members of work teams.

• The new insight regarding the importance of letting people try to solve problems before offering advice may make us more effective supervisors or mentors at work.

• The self-confidence we have acquired as a result of solving a challenging problem at home may enable us to approach our tasks at work with more confidence and resilience.

• A knowledgeable family member may provide us with excellent career advice or even use his or her influence to help us land a new job or acquire a business loan from a local bank.

• A substantial gift or family inheritance could be used to bankroll a new business.
All of these examples illustrate family-to-work enrichment, instances where resources acquired in the family domain are successfully applied to our work lives. An important series of studies by Marian Ruderman and her colleagues has demonstrated how women managers’ home and family experiences strengthen their professional lives. When asked what aspects of their personal lives enhanced their professional lives, many women replied that the resources gained from nonwork experiences improved their functioning at work. The most frequently mentioned resources were improved interpersonal skills, psychological benefits such as self-esteem, emotional support and advice, and handling multiple tasks. In their follow-up study, the researchers found that the more psychologically committed the women managers were to their home roles the greater the task and interpersonal skills they exhibited at work.

Just as our family experiences can strengthen our work life, so too can the resources acquired at work enrich our family lives. For example:

- An employee uses the communication skills she acquired in a management development workshop to develop a closer and more supportive relationship with her sister.

- An individual applies a newly appreciated awareness of work team dynamics to suggest that his family begin to solve problems collectively as a group.

- A boost in self-esteem from succeeding on a challenging job assignment gives an individual the self-confidence to solve problems at home more effectively.

- Discussions with a colleague at work provide an employee with useful suggestions on finding suitable care for elderly parents.

- Sizeable salary increases are used to purchase such essentials as quality child care, education, and medical care for the entire family.

In summary, when our work and family lives jostle for our time and attention, we experience conflict and stress. On the other hand, when work and family strengthen each other, we experience enrichment in our lives. Nowhere is the opportunity for conflict—or enrichment—more apparent than in the daily lives of two-career families, who are constantly juggling their work and family responsibilities. We examine this increasingly popular lifestyle next.

THE TWO-CAREER FAMILY

The “traditional” household—employed husband, at-home wife, two or more children—currently represents only a small percentage of American families. Instead, there are a
greater variety of lifestyles, including single-parent households, childless couples, “househusbands” tending to the domestic front, and of course two-career families. We define a two-career couple as two people who share a lifestyle that includes an ongoing love relationship, cohabitation, and a work role for each partner. Consistent with the definition of a career offered in Chapter 1, each partner in a two-career couple need not necessarily hold a professional or managerial job or a job that is emotionally absorbing.

Why has the two-career lifestyle become so prominent? Certainly, one attractive feature is the financial security derived from two incomes. Many couples believe they need two incomes to acquire and maintain a desired standard of living.

However, money does not tell the whole story. Each partner’s quality of life can be enriched as well. From a woman’s perspective, employment can satisfy a whole range of needs—achievement, challenge, variety, and power—that may not be fully satisfied in a homemaker role. A woman’s employment can enhance her self-esteem and emotional well-being, especially if her job provides opportunities for challenging, interesting work. A rewarding, satisfying job can contribute to the richness of a woman’s life. Moreover, the pursuit of a career can promote an independence and self-sufficiency that is healthy in its own right and critical if the marriage ends through divorce or death of the partner.

From a man’s perspective, participation in a two-career relationship often involves additional responsibility at home. A more extensive involvement in child rearing can provide a closer bond with the children and expand the enjoyment in a man’s life. Since the husband in a two-career relationship is not solely responsible for the financial well-being of the family, he may feel less pressure to “succeed” and so have more freedom to leave a dissatisfying job.

The two-career lifestyle can also benefit the quality of the relationship between the two partners. Two-career relationships provide opportunities for a more egalitarian sharing of participation in family roles. Moreover, the employment of both partners can increase their mutual respect as equals, bring them closer together, and make for a more interesting, compatible couple.

**Sources of Stress in the Two-Career Relationship**

The preceding section does not imply that two-career relationships are stress free. Indeed, there are a number of significant issues that need to be faced in such relationships. This section examines these issues, recognizing that they are not equally relevant to all two-career couples. But first, consider the following situation.

Rob and Helen are business executives in their mid-30s with two young daughters. Although they love their jobs and are deeply committed to their family, Rob and Helen feel frazzled much of the time. Juggling business meetings, birthday parties, and trips to the pediatrician leaves them physically and mentally exhausted. They are also concerned with the quality of the family day care center their daughters attend.
Rob and Helen experience occasional pangs of guilt. At times, Helen wonders whether she is as good a mother to her daughters as her own homemaker mother was to her. And although Rob is proud of Helen’s accomplishments at the public relations firm where she works, he secretly wonders how long it will be before her salary outstrips his own. Rob and Helen feel guilty when they are not devoting enough time to their work, and feel guilty when they can’t spend as much time with their children or with each other as they would like. Rob and Helen both wonder whether their careers will suffer as a result of their extensive family responsibilities, and they realize that their employers have done little to help them balance work and family.

This example highlights the many forms of stress that can be experienced in a two-career family. We now discuss the specific sources of stress in more detail.

**Work–Family Conflict**

We have discussed how extensive work and family demands can produce work–family conflict. Many individuals find that their work demands conflict with the responsibilities they are expected to assume at home. Challenging jobs, extensive travel, and long work hours can easily conflict with pressures and desires to participate in family activities. Nevertheless, women still bear the brunt of the responsibility for homemaking and child care. Although women have added another role to their lives—the work role—they have not typically restricted their involvement in home and child care roles to any substantial degree, and they may still take major responsibility for most household chores as well as raising the children. Moreover, even when husbands do increase their participation in these domestic roles, they are often seen as “helping out” rather than assuming primary responsibility for the activities.

In effect, two-career wives often work a “second shift” of home and family chores, with their “work day” only half over when they return home from their paid employment. One study of two-career business professionals found that mothers spent on average more than twice the number of hours on home and child care activities as fathers did. Even marriages that start out with an equitable sharing of home responsibilities often revert back to a gender-based division of labor after the birth of a child, when the husband’s career may take priority over his wife’s.

The overload and stress experienced by two-career partners can threaten the relationship in several ways. First, as in the example of Rob and Helen, parents may experience guilt over not spending enough time with their children. Second, the couple may simply not have the time to nurture their own relationship. Work demands and children’s needs leave partners with little time for each other. The absence of shared time can pose a threat to the romantic and emotional relationship and can estrange partners from one another. Third, family and work responsibilities frequently leave little time for individuals themselves. Time to relax, reflect, exercise, or pursue leisure activities does not come easily, if at all.
In short, partners in two-career relationships often lead hectic, frenetic lives, especially if there are children in the family. There are work pressures, carpooling, overnight business trips, children’s dance lessons, demanding bosses, housework—the list seems endless. The two-career lifestyle can be quite rewarding, but it is not easy.

**Restricted Career Achievements**

The two-career lifestyle may restrict or slow down an individual’s career accomplishments. This is especially likely to occur for women. Many mothers reduce their career involvement in an attempt to alleviate the conflict they experience between work and family. Two-career mothers often cut back on the number of hours they work, turn down career development opportunities that would conflict with their family responsibilities, refuse promotions that require relocation, or put their career “on hold” by leaving the workforce for a period of time. In this respect, two-career mothers may incur a “family penalty” because their extensive family responsibilities limit their career progress. This penalty is partly self-imposed because two-career mothers often “voluntarily” cut back on their career involvement in order to meet their family responsibilities. However, employers may also discriminate against mothers by restricting their investment in them—for example, by providing limited opportunities for mentoring and challenging job assignments—because of their belief that mothers are more committed to their families than to their careers.

Of course, not all women necessarily experience a family penalty. In fact, a recent study of managers and executives found that women’s psychological commitment to their role as spouse did not restrict their job performance. Moreover, their commitment to their role as mother was associated with higher levels of performance on their job.

Whereas some mothers may experience a family penalty that impedes their career success, men often experience a “family bonus” that actually helps their career. One study found that fathers earned more money, reached higher levels in their organization, and were more satisfied with their careers than men without children. Why? Because fathers experienced more autonomy on their jobs than did men without children. Although it is possible that the fathers in this study sought additional autonomy, employers may also have granted fathers more autonomy because they perceive them to be more responsible and stable than men without children.

Just as a family penalty is not experienced by all women, a family bonus is not necessarily experienced by all men. Men who are highly involved in their family lives—who believe that their family time is a critical part of their lives—may cut back on their involvement in work, just as many mothers in two-career families do. Such men may switch careers, limit travel, and turn down promotions or relocations for family reasons.

The extent to which career achievements are restricted in two-career families may depend, in part, on the time commitments required in a particular career field. A man or woman may not experience obstacles to career progress in a field that has reasonable,
predictable, and flexible hours. On the other hand, job performance and career progress may suffer in a field requiring extensive and inflexible work hours and heavy travel. In addition, career achievements may depend on the relative importance of each partner’s career, each partner’s commitment to the family, the availability of outside help for housework and child care, the support received from the partner, and the employer’s flexibility in addressing work–family concerns.

Two-career couples often must decide whose career has priority at any particular point in time. Who stays home with a sick child? Who takes a few hours off to attend an afternoon parent–teacher conference? For whose job will the family relocate? The partner whose career takes priority will make fewer career accommodations and will pursue his or her career more intensely than the other partner. Traditionally, a man’s career took precedence over his family responsibilities, whereas a woman’s family responsibilities were expected to take precedence over her work. Generally, the rationale was that the husband’s job was more important, more demanding, and provided a larger portion of the family’s income. These assumptions may no longer be accurate.

Couples can handle the issue of career priorities in different ways. Phyllis Moen and her colleagues have examined the strategies that two-career couples use to allocate their time and commitment to different roles. They found that in the most typical strategy (called neotraditionalists), husbands were more highly invested in their careers than their wives, who were more invested in their families. However, the researchers noted that other strategies are certainly possible: wives more invested in their careers than husbands (crossover committed), both partners highly invested in their careers (dual committed), and neither partner highly invested in his or her career (alternative committed). It is also likely that in some two-career relationships, the relative priority of each career shifts, depending on the needs and stages of each career. What is most important is not the eventual solution that is reached, but rather the process the couple uses to reach the solution. This process should involve openness, flexibility, and concern for the partner. At the very least, both partners must agree on the relative priority of each other’s career or risk extensive strain in the marriage.

Therefore, the pressures and constraints of a two-career relationship may impede the career progress of one or both partners, especially if career progress is defined as rapid mobility up the organizational ladder. However, researchers found that two-career professional women often experienced significant career accomplishments, although at a somewhat later stage in their lives than their single or childless counterparts. It would not be surprising if the same trend holds true for men. In the long term, then, career accomplishments may not be seriously hampered, at least not in occupations and organizations that permit flexibility in the pace of career growth. We will discuss this issue further when we examine organizations’ responsiveness to employees’ work–family concerns later in this chapter.
**Competition and Jealousy**

The division of labor in the so-called traditional family makes for a neat, noncompetitive world. The man achieves competence in the work world, the woman masters the domestic demands, and comparisons of relative success in their respective ventures are unlikely. When both parties are employed, however, it is likely that one partner will ultimately become more “successful” than the other.\(^{34}\) Forty percent of college-educated women earn as much or more than their husbands,\(^{35}\) and in some cases a husband may be threatened if his wife’s career success outstrips his own. Indeed, one study found that the better a woman performs on her job, the lower her level of marital satisfaction, suggesting that her success at work might produce resentment by her husband.\(^{36}\) Jealousies on the part of the man or the woman, if left unattended, can threaten the stability of the relationship.

The effect of a partner’s career success on feelings of competition and jealousy probably depends on the orientations of the two partners. Perhaps the most intense feelings of competition and jealousy are experienced by individuals who place substantial importance on their own career success, yet are insecure about their sense of worth. Under these conditions, a partner’s career accomplishments can be particularly threatening. We must add, however, that in extensive discussions with undergraduate and graduate business students, we have found few men or women who believed that a partner’s career success would provoke intense feelings of competition or jealousy.

**The Impact of Two-Career Status on Children**

According to a *Fortune* survey of working parents conducted more than 20 years ago, a majority of men (55 percent) and women (58 percent) believed that “children of working parents suffer by not being given enough time and attention.”\(^{37}\) However, most of these same parents also believed that children benefit by having working parents as role models. Perhaps these findings reflected the ambivalence experienced by many two-career parents. A more recent national survey, however, reveals less ambivalence: 64 percent of men and 78 percent of women believe that an employed mother can have just as good a relationship with her child as a mother who does not work outside the home.\(^{38}\)

Although individual studies have sometimes revealed beneficial or harmful effects of both parents’ working on their children, the research literature as a whole suggests that a mother’s employment (which for married couples usually translates into both parents’ employment) has no consistent positive or negative effect on children’s development. Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute persuasively argues that we should not view a mother’s employment in “either/or” terms, that it is either bad or good for children. She concludes that “[i]t depends on the people and the circumstances of their lives. And what’s right for one person may not be right for another.”\(^{39}\) Ultimately, the impact of a two-career lifestyle on children’s adjustment probably depends on such
factors as the quality of the parent–child relationship, the quality of child care, and the personal satisfaction of the parents.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN TWO-CAREER FAMILIES

Some of the potential advantages and risks associated with a two-career relationship have already been presented. How can families maximize the advantages and minimize the risks? Three closely related factors are particularly significant: social support, effective coping, and flexibility.

Social Support

We talked earlier about support from others as a resource that can help people improve the quality of their lives. Not surprisingly, individuals who receive extensive support from organizations and individuals tend to experience less work–family conflict and greater well-being than those who receive modest support. In the context of a two-career relationship, support can enable husbands and wives to solve work and family problems effectively, and is strongly associated with partners’ well-being. Communication and mutual support are essential ingredients in a successful two-career relationship. Two-career couples can benefit from a wide variety of supportive relationships.

Emotional support, especially from family members, is particularly important since the partners are involved in a lifestyle that requires compromises and can produce identity problems, jealousies, and guilt. Nearly 40 years ago, Robert and Rhona Rapoport spoke of the understanding and caring “facilitating husband” as a major contributor to the success of a two-career relationship, a point of view that rings true to this day. However, men also need the support of an understanding partner. Indeed, support must be mutual, in that each partner must provide as well as receive support.

Since most two-career couples frequently experience novel situations, partners will benefit from information and advice on work- and family-related problems so that marital difficulties do not become too intense. Men need to contribute substantially in terms of action—home maintenance and child care being the primary areas—if there is to be balance and sharing in the relationship. Although hired help, another form of instrumental support, can substantially reduce conflict and overload, it cannot fully replace a mutually agreed upon and balanced sharing of responsibilities. Perhaps it is most important that two-career partners view their involvement and their spouse’s involvement in home-related activities as fair and equitable.

Finally, support can provide each partner with useful feedback. Partners may find it difficult to assess how well they are balancing work and family roles, whether the children are handling the situation satisfactorily, and how the relationship between the two partners is...
faring. Accurate, constructive feedback can serve as a confirmation of each partner’s efforts and as a way to improve the functioning of the family unit.

Although support can and should come from a variety of sources, the support received from one’s partner plays a special role because it reflects a commitment to the relationship. The relative emphasis placed on work and family by each partner may determine the degree of support each is willing to extend. Families in which at least one partner is strongly family oriented may be most able to balance work and family roles with minimal stress. A family orientation among husbands, for example, has been strongly associated with marital happiness, especially when the woman places a great deal of importance on her career. Presumably, family-oriented husbands, who are willing to accommodate their careers to their family role, are less competitive and more supportive than their career-driven counterparts.

Perhaps the most stressful and least supportive relationship is one in which both partners are highly involved in their careers and minimally involved in the family, yet both partners value a satisfying home and family life. Such relationships, described by Francine and Douglas Hall as “adversaries,” may be threatened by constant conflicts over career priorities and division of labor in home and family tasks. As they state, neither partner “may be willing or able to make career sacrifices to facilitate the career of the other or to fulfill home and family roles.”

Coping With Work–Family Stress

Douglas Hall identified three strategies for coping with work–family conflict. Using structural role redefinition, an individual reduces work–family conflict by changing role senders’ expectations of responsibilities. An individual who arranges with the boss to leave work early on certain days or to limit the amount of work-related travel is altering other people’s expectations. A woman who negotiates with her husband and children to do more work around the house or who hires outside help is reducing some of her domestic pressures. Structural role redefinition is an active, problem-solving approach to changing a part of the environment that is producing conflict and stress.

With personal role reorientation, the person changes expectations not by directly confronting role senders, but by changing his or her own conception of requirements. A woman who decides that standards for housekeeping can be relaxed and a man who gradually reduces his involvement at work are both reorienting the priority of certain tasks or roles to reduce their conflict.

With reactive role behavior, the individual tries to meet all expectations more efficiently. Getting up earlier, going to bed later, and managing one’s time more efficiently are all attempts to “do it all.” This strategy, so characteristic of the so-called Supermom, is mentally and physically taxing, fails to address the underlying conflicts, and is not generally successful.

Perhaps what is most important is that individuals develop active coping strategies to alleviate work–family conflict and stress. One such approach to successful life management,
called selection–optimization–compensation, emphasizes the importance of goals, strategies, and plans to overcome obstacles. Research has shown that individuals who engage in these behaviors experience low levels of stress and work–family conflict. Time management, another self-management strategy, has also been shown to reduce work–family conflict.

These coping strategies are individual responses to stressful situations. Couples also should develop collaborative coping strategies to solve the problems of the family unit as a whole, moving from a “me” orientation (self-interest, coercion, and suppression of conflict) to a “we” orientation (mutual goals, encouragement, a healthy expression of differences, and a willingness to compromise). Hall and Hall offer many useful suggestions for how to achieve a “we” orientation in such areas as housework, parenting, and time management. But what works for one couple may not work for another; there is be no cookbook formula for success. However, what is applicable from one situation to another is the need to establish a climate of communication and problem solving. Hall and Hall suggested the following strategy to establish such a climate: talk about problems regularly, listen to your partner and express your own feelings, discuss goals and explore expectations, practice problem solving, and practice negotiating compromises.

These actions take time, skill, and practice, but they are essential if problems are to be identified and managed. Problem solving and compromise are necessary to prevent sex-role stereotypes or old behavior patterns from disrupting a couple’s attempt to find fresh solutions to novel problems.

**Flexibility**

Satisfactory coping requires a great deal of flexibility on the part of all members of a two-career family, including the children. Seeing problems from another person’s perspective and changing behavior or attitudes that are outmoded are hallmarks of effective coping. Rigid patterns of behavior, by definition, are not conducive to the resolution of stressful situations.

In Chapter 2 we discussed the notion of a protean career to illustrate the importance of flexibility. A protean career involves greater control over one’s work life, in which career success is judged by internal standards (satisfaction, achievement, or a balanced life) rather than the traditional external standards of salary and promotions in an organizational structure. We can also speak of a protean relationship, which focuses on the growth and development of the partners, relatively unstifled by society’s norms and expectations. The protean family is willing to adjust its relationship to meet the needs of family members, whether that involves remaining childless, living apart a portion of the time, or reversing the traditional sex roles within the relationship.

The ability of two-career couples to adopt a more flexible lifestyle is often dependent on the policies and practices of their employers. Until recently, organizations did not see a need
to help their employees balance their work and family roles. Fortunately, this attitude of neglect is changing. An organization’s role in addressing work–family issues is examined in the following section.

**ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO WORK–FAMILY ISSUES**

Many, if not most, employers realize that it is in their best interest to help their employees balance their work and family lives. What used to be considered a “woman’s issue” is increasingly recognized as an employee issue and a business necessity. What accounts for this shift in attitudes among the nation’s largest employers?

First, more employees are struggling to balance their work and family responsibilities than in prior years. As discussed earlier, the emergence of the two-career lifestyle requires parents to coordinate their work demands with their family responsibilities. Although women face the most extensive pressures to juggle work and family demands, men are increasingly involved in home and child care activities, either by choice or necessity. In addition, a divorce rate that hovers around 50 percent has resulted in an increasing number of single-parent households, many of which are confronted by a steady stream of work and family pressures, with no partner to share the responsibilities. Moreover, employees are increasingly called upon to care for elder parents or other adult relatives. One study revealed that 35 percent of U.S. employees in 2002 had elder care responsibilities, up from 25 percent five years earlier.54

In addition, employees’ values are shifting to place a greater emphasis on quality of life. Indeed, employees are demanding opportunities to attain balance between their work and family, and a sizeable number are willing to make sacrifices in their careers to achieve a higher quality of life. More and more job seekers are raising the issue of work–life balance in their employment interviews. And substantial numbers of men and women are refusing promotions, relocations, and jobs with extensive pressure or travel because of the strains these positions would put on their family lives.

These changes in family and employment patterns, as well as shifts in employee values, are playing havoc with organizations’ ability to staff themselves effectively, especially in light of the nation’s shrinking talent pool. For one thing, organizations are losing the services of many talented young women managers and professionals who leave their jobs following the birth of a child. Many of these “career-and-family” oriented women want to continue their career but not with 50- to 60-hour weeks and extensive travel requirements.56 Since employers have not typically provided an alternative work schedule for parents of young children, the employees often leave. This represents a substantial blow to employers who have invested time and money, and now face extensive recruiting and training costs to replace these valued employees.
The talent pool is not only shrinking, but it is increasingly female. It is projected that by the year 2014, nearly 60 percent of all women will be employed, and 47 percent of the workforce will be women. In addition, with increasing numbers of women receiving bachelor’s, master’s, legal, and medical degrees, employers find that many of their best and brightest job candidates are women. Extensive turnover among this group results in high costs and low productivity.\(^{57}\)

In addition, mothers and fathers who remain in the workforce are often preoccupied with the difficulties of balancing work and family responsibilities. Moreover, excessive work–family conflict can produce high levels of absenteeism and extensive stress,\(^ {58}\) both of which can detract from an organization’s productivity. Not surprisingly, a family-supportive work environment can improve employees’ attitudes toward their work and their organizations.\(^ {59}\)

Despite the demographic changes in the workforce discussed in this chapter, employers usually run their operations on the assumption that the vast majority of managerial and professional employees will be willing to devote as many hours as necessary to complete a project, including evenings and weekends; will travel at the drop of a hat; and will relocate whenever it is to the advantage of the organization and the employee’s career progress. Of course, this approach assumed that the managerial and professional workforce would be male, married to a homemaker, and therefore able to devote full time and attention to work.

Nobody likes to change assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors, especially if they have been working well for a long time. Employers are no exception. For many years, organizations had been slow to address work–family issues for a variety of reasons: they didn’t know how to solve the problem, they were threatened by the demand for work–family balance that violates their “upward mobility ethic,” they saw it as a “woman’s issue,” and they didn’t see the payoff to the organization for addressing these issues.\(^ {60}\) However, this resistance to change is weakening as more companies experience difficulties attracting and retaining valued employees, and organizations see the benefits of implementing family-supportive practices. A study by the Families and Work Institute identified the leading reasons why employees initiated such practices. Topping the list were the desire to recruit and retain employees (47 percent), to support employees and their families (39 percent), and to enhance employee commitment and productivity (25 percent).\(^ {61}\) We now turn our attention to actions that organizations can take to help their employees balance their work and family lives.

Table 10.2 summarizes a variety of family-supportive policies and practices that have been adopted by organizations in response to the issues discussed in this chapter. We classify these organizational actions into three broad categories: dependent care, flexible work arrangements, and changing the organization’s work–family culture.
Concerns about the welfare of their children are keenly felt by working parents. In response to these concerns, employers have supported a wide range of child care programs. Only 17 percent of large companies surveyed by the Families and Work Institute in 2005 provided on-site or near-site child care centers for their employees’ children; other forms of direct support for children include subsidies (discounts and vouchers) for private child care facilities and emergency assistance for sick children. Another widespread form of support is the

### TABLE 10.2 Examples of Family-Responsive Policies and Practices

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### Dependent Care

Concerns about the welfare of their children are keenly felt by working parents. In response to these concerns, employers have supported a wide range of child care programs. Only 17 percent of large companies surveyed by the Families and Work Institute in 2005 provided on-site or near-site child care centers for their employees’ children; other forms of direct support for children include subsidies (discounts and vouchers) for private child care facilities and emergency assistance for sick children. Another widespread form of support is the
administration of flexible spending accounts in which pretax dollars can be used to pay for child care services. 62

The most popular—and probably least expensive—initiative is a resource and referral system that provides useful information and assistance to employees with a variety of child care needs. IBM created the first nationwide network of referral services that has been used by many other corporations. 63 Referral programs may also be supplemented by seminars, support groups, libraries, and newsletters. In addition, some employers are working with community groups to expand and improve a variety of child care services such as after-school programs, backup or “sick child care centers,” and subsidies to family day care associations to increase the number of child care providers in family homes.

Although dependent care is often equated with child care, a growing area of concern is the care of elder relatives, most notably parents. With ever-increasing life spans, senior citizens are expected to make up 20 percent of the population by the year 2030. 64 In previous generations, nonemployed daughters and daughters-in-law often looked after their elders. Increasingly, these demands are being felt by employees who may not have the time, knowledge, or resources to help care for their loved ones.

As a result of these pressures, organizations are beginning to provide elder care support to their employees. This support can take the form of the flexible use of time to care for elders’ needs, information about available services and policies, subsidies to defray the costs of elder care, and support groups through employee assistance programs. Not surprisingly, a recent survey revealed that companies are more likely to provide employees with time off to provide elder care (79 percent) than to provide direct financial support to employees to pay for elder care programs (6 percent). 65

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible Work Schedules. As important as child care assistance can be to working parents, additional flexibility in the workplace remains a major priority for many employees. One of the early efforts in this regard was the establishment of flexible work schedules, which is offered by a sizable percentage of the companies in the 2005 Families and Work Institute survey. Flexible work schedules usually involve a core set of hours in which all employees must work (e.g., 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.) with a band of several hours around the core to provide flexible starting and leaving times. Additional flexibility may be provided by granting employees some control over when they take breaks, the shifts they work, and the number of paid and unpaid overtime hours they put in.

Since flexible work schedules offer employees some degree of control over their time, they can help employees reduce work–family conflict. 66 Although the results have not been uniformly positive, and the characteristics of the program must match the specific needs of the employees, flexible work schedules remain a central component of an organization’s comprehensive approach to work–family issues.
Family Leaves. Another form of workplace flexibility is the opportunity to take a leave to care for children or other family members. Countries vary substantially in the extent to which they have initiated maternity leave legislation. In 1993, the United States passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that provides employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for the employee’s own medical condition or to care for a newborn or newly adopted child or a sick child, parent, or partner. This act applies to employees who work for organizations with 50 or more workers and who have been employed in the organization for at least one year, having worked a minimum of 1,250 hours within the prior 12-month period. Although more than 35 million employees have taken leaves since the passage of the FMLA, about 53 percent of the workforce is ineligible for FMLA leave, either because their employer is excluded from the act’s provisions or because the employee doesn’t meet the eligibility requirements of covered employers. In addition to the federal statute, many states have passed parental and family leave legislation.

Moreover, in some instances the private sector has provided leaves that exceed the 12-week period mandated by the FMLA. It appears that family leave programs can improve recruitment and retention, although there has not been substantial research conducted to confirm that. It is interesting that men have not generally taken advantage of parental leaves in great numbers, in part because they believe that it would hurt their careers.

Part-Time Employment. In the 1980s and 1990s, Felice Schwartz created a storm in corporate, feminist, and academic circles when she advocated part-time employment options for women managers and professionals with young children. Schwartz observed that many mothers were serious about their careers but also wanted to spend substantial time with their young children. When faced with the option of either full-time employment or no employment, many of these women quit their jobs altogether.

Schwartz urged employers to provide part-time employment in managerial and professional positions until the woman was ready to return to her full-time job. This part-time arrangement could be in effect from several months to several years. Schwartz further recommended a job-sharing program in which pairs of part-timers could be jointly responsible for a full-time assignment. Dubbed the “mommmy track” by journalists, part-time and job-shared positions have been hailed by some as a viable option for young mothers (and fathers), and have been criticized by others as a form of second-class citizenship for women. It has often been observed that men have informally negotiated lower levels of work involvement during periods of heavy family responsibility without the stigma attached to part-time employment. In fact, relatively few men have opted for part-time employment so far.

Is part-time employment a reasonable alternative for working parents? On the positive side, part-time employment can help women and men balance work with other parts of their lives. And it appears that the work attitudes of part-time employees are generally as positive as those of full-time workers.
On the negative side, many part-time jobs do not provide health benefits. Moreover, from a career development point of view, it is feared that part-time employment, even for a brief period of time, signals to the organization a lack of serious commitment on the part of the employee. Perhaps it does have this connotation in some organizations that lack insight and experience regarding work–family issues. However, if the organization or its managers understand the work–family dilemmas experienced by many employees, provide challenging work during the period of part-time employment, and enable the employee to reenter the full-time workforce in a supportive manner if and when desired, then the long-term careers of individuals who opt for temporary part-time employment may not be seriously impaired. Therefore, employers must prevent stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies from limiting the contributions that women and men can make to the organization.

**Flexible Career Paths.** Beyond the establishment of part-time employment opportunities, organizations need to recognize more generally that an employee’s career path can have significant implications for his or her family life. Many men and women are aware of the trade-offs involved in pursuing a fast track linear career path and want to pursue an alternative career direction. It is important for organizations to provide employees with alternative career paths that involve less immense time commitments and less extensive travel and to view these paths as viable and significant ways for employees to contribute to the organization. Organizations, in other words, should legitimize and reward alternative career directions for employees.

For example, a prominent certified public accounting firm recognized that its existing career progression system, involving very long hours, extensive travel, and a specified time frame for making partner, produced a high rate of undesirable turnover. Therefore, the firm developed alternative career tracks to achieve better retention of professionals, better service to clients, and more varied ways for employees to succeed. Under the new system, employees had the opportunity to develop expertise in multiple areas or choose to build an in-depth focus in a single function. They could develop these skills at a rate that was more compatible with their lifestyle, were not required to achieve partner status in a specified number of years in order to remain with the firm, and could contribute to the firm in significant ways even if they did not aspire (or had not developed the skills) to become a partner.\(^{73}\)

Even employees on a fast track can be developed in ways that are less disruptive to their family lives. For example, companies can place a variety of facilities at a central location so employees can acquire a breadth of experience without the need to relocate. Companies can also use membership on task forces and special project assignments as an alternative to relocation, and employers that require overseas assignments can shorten these assignments to a matter of months rather than years. When relocation is essential, it is often critical that the organization support the career-oriented partner of the relocated employee. Such support could include career guidance, help in skill assessment and résumé preparation, and the waiver of policies prohibiting husbands and wives from working simultaneously for the same organization.\(^{74}\)
Telecommuting, often called flexplace, permits work to be performed at a satellite office or, more typically, from home. Work-at-home programs, made more feasible with advanced computer technology, can give employees more discretion over their use of time to balance work and family demands. Telecommuting doesn’t eliminate work–family conflict, and in fact may exacerbate stress at times because of the parents’ physical presence at home and the feelings of social isolation. Nor does it eliminate the need for additional child care assistance. Nevertheless, telecommuting can still be a viable option for parents whose ability to juggle work and family is enhanced through their physical presence at home, and/or the substantial reduction in commuting times.  

Although research on the family-supportive practices discussed in this chapter has not been entirely consistent, there is considerable evidence that individuals experience less work–family conflict and more positive work attitudes when their employers provide more flexibility and control to their employees. In addition, a number of studies have shown that organizations providing family-supportive programs tend to be productive and profitable.

CHANGING THE ORGANIZATION’S WORK–FAMILY CULTURE

As important as the availability of family-supportive practices is, the practices are not likely to be used unless they are implemented in a supportive environment by understanding and flexible managers and supervisors. In other words, the most family-supportive employers provide formal work–family programs within a culture that respects employees’ family and personal lives. These organizations have revised their cultures to eliminate outdated assumptions that are not in tune with the needs of the contemporary workforce. Some cultural assumptions that need to be revised include the following:

- “Keep your personal problems at home.”
- “Put in long hours regardless of family responsibilities.”
- “Travel when and where the organization dictates.”
- “Relocate without concern for family needs.”
- “Presence (at the workplace) equals performance.”
- “Hours (worked) equal output.”

The family-responsive organization replaces these assumptions with a more supportive culture. Central components of this culture are the recognition of the legitimacy of family and personal issues to all employees as well as the significance of work–life issues to the organization itself. Such a culture will stimulate an awareness of the potential for
work–family conflict and will encourage discussion of the impact of the conflict on the employee and the organization. The organization will understand that many employees value both career and family and will develop policies and programs to mesh employees’ values with the organization’s need to be effective and competitive.

A family-responsive organization should establish an explicit corporate policy regarding work and family and communicate this policy throughout the organization. Some companies have incorporated work–family issues into their mission statements to reflect and reinforce their commitment in this area. Companies have also formed work–family groups or departments within the organizational structure whose primary function is to develop and administer the kinds of work–family programs discussed in this chapter.

Since the supervisor is a critical link in administering policy, responsive employers have sponsored training to help supervisors react with flexibility to work scheduling and career planning. Organizations that have successfully changed their work–family culture also focus on measuring performance results rather than the number of hours or weekends spent at the office, or other symbols of organizational commitment. Perhaps most important, the responsive organization realizes that its actions can benefit its employees and give itself a competitive edge in the marketplace.

A recent corporate program consistent with many of the principles discussed in this chapter is Best Buy’s initiative to change its culture from a focus on work hours and scheduling to an emphasis on the quality of the work performed by its employees. Best Buy, a retail organization headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, refers to its initiative and new culture as ROWE, an acronym for Results Only Work Environment. The ROWE initiative was deliberately not presented as a work–family or work–life program but rather as a way to achieve better performance for Best Buy by focusing on actual results rather than work time for all employees regardless of their family or personal situations. Work teams were tasked with designing ways to meet their work goals in a manner consistent with their own circumstances. The researchers described the transformation as follows:

Teams transitioning from conventional time-based work practices to a ROWE arrangement aim to foster an environment where employees are free to complete their work whenever and wherever, provided they are productive, doing what works best to accomplish the tasks at hand, as well as each team’s longer term goals. This type of working environment shifts the spotlight away from time-oriented measures of work success (how many hours a worker put in last week; how much time she spent on a given task) to a completely results-based appraisal of productivity and accomplishment. With the ROWE innovation, Best Buy aims to change the temporal organization of work, shifting to an environment where employees have the tools (ways to roll over phone calls, etc.) they need to accomplish their assigned objectives while simultaneously giving them the freedom to accomplish their tasks with whatever type of work schedule is best for them.
Although the research on the ROWE initiative is not yet complete, the preliminary results are promising. Over a six-month period, members of teams undergoing the ROWE initiative were compared to employees in other teams that had not yet experienced the ROWE culture change. Compared to these other teams, the ROWE team members (a) perceived more control over their time and more adequate time to accomplish their work; (b) reported aspects of greater health and wellness; (c) perceived the culture of Best Buy as more family friendly; (d) were more committed to Best Buy as a place to work; (e) were more satisfied with their jobs; (f) experienced less conflict between their work and family lives; (g) reported doing less low-value, unnecessary work in their jobs; and (h) held lower intentions to quit Best Buy.

CAREER MANAGEMENT AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE

This chapter has shown how our work and family lives are intertwined in many ways, some positive and others negative. We believe that most people’s ultimate aim is to feel satisfied, effective, and fulfilled in those parts of their lives that matter to them. When employees lament the work–family conflict they experience or the excessive imbalance in their lives, they are expressing a concern that they are not as satisfied, effective, or fulfilled in an important part of their life as they would like to be.

In part, the stress we experience in juggling our work and family responsibilities is due to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We may work in jobs that demand much of our time and are stressful and exhausting at the same time that our families—spouse, children, or parents—require our attention and support. With that in mind, it is important to realize that the decisions we make in our everyday lives also affect the balance or imbalance we experience. We often work long hours because we want to, select occupations or career paths that are stressful, and choose to ignore or deny the pressures we experience, all the while not realizing the effects of such decisions on other parts of our lives. Career management, a proactive, problem-solving approach to work and life, can help individuals make decisions that are compatible with the type of lifestyle they want to live. Career exploration, goal setting, strategy development, and appraisal should focus not only on our work requirements but rather on our total life. Below we list some suggestions for achieving greater balance in life that are linked to our model of career management.

Career Exploration

- Assess the importance of work, family, community, and leisure roles in your life.
- Share your life priorities with your family.
- Understand the effect of your work experiences on your physical and psychological health.
• Be aware of the implications of different jobs, career fields, and career paths on your family and personal life.

Career Goal Setting

• Set a conceptual goal that incorporates your desired balance between work and other important parts of your life.
• Recognize that your conceptual career goal can be achieved in a number of different jobs.
• Pursue goals that have real meaning to you, not those that require you to live up to other people’s expectations.
• Understand your family’s view of your career goal.
• Understand how the achievement of your career goal would affect your family and personal life, and how your family situation might affect the likelihood of achieving your career goal.

Career Strategies

• Recognize the implications of specific career strategies (e.g., extended work involvement, rapid mobility, relocation) on your family and personal life.
• Discuss career strategies with significant people in your life before and during their implementation.
• Always consider the personal acceptability of a strategy as well as its instrumental value; avoid strategies that violate ethical or moral beliefs.

Career Appraisal

• Seek feedback from different people regarding various parts of your life.
• Discuss changes in personal and career values with family members.
• Examine the effects of career strategies on your work and nonwork lives on an ongoing basis.
• Be willing to admit mistakes and make changes to your career or family life if necessary.

Sometimes we experience intense work–family conflict and stress despite our best efforts. Perhaps we made decisions that, in retrospect, were not in our best interest. Or we
did nothing to alleviate increasing pressures, mistakenly believing that they would subside by themselves and failing to seek support from other people who could have helped us. Eliminating work–family conflict is impossible for most of us, but keeping it within reasonable bounds is often possible if we understand why we experience intense conflict and stress and are committed to improving the situation.

We suggest the following four-step guide to action for individuals who are concerned about excessive work–family conflict in their lives. You will probably notice the resemblance between this guide and the proactive career-management process we have advocated in this chapter and throughout the book.

Step 1. Understand your priorities regarding career, family, and other life roles.

- If married or in a relationship, discuss, understand, and accept each other’s priorities.
- Realize that because priorities can change over the life course, communication must be ongoing.

Step 2. Understand the nature of the conflict.

- Is work interfering with family, family interfering with work, or both?
- What factors are responsible for the conflict: Time pressures from work and family roles? Extensive stress at work or at home?
- Are we contributing to the conflict by virtue of the decisions we have made?

Step 3. Develop a plan and experiment with different approaches.

If work chronically interferes with family life, attempt to reduce the time pressures and/or stress at work in one or more of the following ways that make sense in your situation:

- Be open about your work, family, and personal needs at work and at home.
- Negotiate for a more flexible work schedule.
- Redesign your job (e.g., reduce travel and/or weekend or evening work).
- Seek additional resources from work (e.g., extra staff).
- Seek emotional (understanding) and informational (advice) support from colleagues, friends, and family and be willing to provide support to others.
- Learn to cope more effectively with job stress.
- Seek a more compatible career path within the organization.
• Consider part-time or remote-location work.
• Change employer or career field.

If family life chronically interferes with work, attempt to reduce the time pressures and/or stress within the family:

• Be open about your work, family, and personal needs with family and friends.
• Seek a fair division of labor at home and consider the possibility of outside help (tangible support).
• Seek emotional (understanding) and informational (advice) support from family, friends, and colleagues, and be willing to provide support to others.
• Encourage family participation in career planning activities.
• Learn to cope more effectively with family stress.

Step 4. Monitor whether the plans are working and make changes as necessary; continue to experiment.

Active career management that incorporates work and nonwork issues is vital to enhancing one’s quality of life. Open communication is a common element that cuts across all components of career management as well as our suggested four-step guide to action. People need to enlarge their scope of thinking—about work, family, and personal values—and discuss these issues with supportive people on a regular basis, not just when a crisis appears.

SUMMARY

Work and family lives affect each other in a variety of ways. Although the two roles are mutually supportive in many respects, there are times when they conflict. Three forms of work–family conflict were identified: time-based conflict, in which the time spent in one role interferes with the requirements of the other role; strain-based conflict, in which stress in one role affects experiences in the other role; and behavior-based conflict, in which behavior that is appropriate in one role is dysfunctional in the other role.

Also examined was the nature of two-career relationships in contemporary society. Despite its many rewards, a two-career relationship faces a number of potentially stressful conditions: extensive work–family conflict, gender identity problems, competition and jealousy between partners, negotiation of career priorities, and the possibility of somewhat limited or slow career progress. To manage these potential stressors, two-career couples need to learn effective coping behavior, utilize supportive relationships with other people, and remain flexible in their careers or family arrangements.
Organizations can respond to work–family issues by providing their employees with various forms of dependent care assistance. Employers can also provide more flexible work arrangements, including flexible work schedules, family leave, part-time employment, and opportunities for job sharing. They should also legitimize alternative career paths so that employees can contribute to the organization in a way that is consistent with their underlying values and lifestyle preferences. Employers' actions will be most effective if they develop a culture that understands and supports employees' attempts to balance their work and family responsibilities.

Employees need to manage their careers in the context of their overall quality of life. The career management process provided in this book can be used to address these kinds of issues. Exploration, goal setting, strategies, and appraisal all require communication about work and nonwork issues on an ongoing basis.

ASSIGNMENT

Complete the following questions and discuss them with someone significant in your life.

1. Are you as involved, effective, or satisfied in each of the following parts of life as you would like to be? Circle one response, yes or no, for each role in life.
   - Career Yes No
   - Family Yes No
   - Leisure Yes No
   - Community Yes No
   - Religion Yes No
   - Self-development Yes No
   - Other Yes No

   If yes, what have you done to achieve this? If not, why are you not as involved, effective, or satisfied as you would like?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. Develop a plan or “experiment” to become more effective and satisfied with a part of your life.
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

(Continued)
3. What do you need to do to become more involved, effective, and satisfied?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

4. How might it affect other parts of your life?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Who can help you?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

6. How can you monitor your progress?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Develop a profile of the type of person most likely to experience extensive work–family conflict. Identify work pressures, family pressures, and personal characteristics most likely to produce work–family conflict.

2. You are likely to become a partner in a two-career relationship at some point in your life. Perhaps you are already. What might be the major sources of stress in the relationship? Do the stresses outweigh the potential advantages of a two-career relationship? Why or why not?

3. The kaleidoscope perspective on careers introduced and discussed in Chapter 2 suggests that men and women may approach their careers in somewhat different ways: men focus on personal goal achievement and make career decisions designed to enhance their career growth, whereas women focus on relationships and make career decisions that take the needs of their family into account. From your personal observation or experience, are men and women similar or different in how they approach their work and family lives?
4. Some people contend that children are the victims of a two-career relationship. Defend or attack that contention, giving the reasoning behind your position.

5. Two-career couples cope most effectively when they adopt a collaborative orientation rather than a “me-first” orientation. Explain how partners in a two-career relationship can develop a more collaborative orientation toward work–family issues.

6. Defend or refute the following statement: “Being successful in your career inevitably harms your family life.” Provide the reasoning behind your position.

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**CHAPTER 10 CASE**

**The Prized Promotion**

*Doug Sanders* is a 38-year-old plant manager for Johnson Electronics, a medium-sized company that manufactures computer components. He can’t wait for dinner tonight to tell Lisa, his wife of 17 years, and Steve, his 15-year-old son, about his promotion.

It’s been a long time coming, and Doug believes he richly deserves to be promoted to Vice President for Manufacturing at Johnson. He’s been with the company for nearly 10 years, the first 5 as a mechanical engineer, and he has certainly paid his dues. For the past five years, since Doug was named plant manager, he has put in 12- and 13-hour days at the plant on a regular basis and is on emergency call 24 hours a day. Not to mention his willingness to fly to corporate headquarters in Denver whenever his boss thinks it is necessary. Besides, Doug’s plant has reached new heights in productivity and profitability each year since he took over.

Doug is really looking forward to the new position. True, the hours are going to be just as long—if not longer—than his current job. But the 30 percent salary raise is nothing to sneeze at. Lisa can finally have her dream house! And Doug will have a lot more responsibility—he will finally be able to call the shots, at least as far as manufacturing is concerned. Doug suspects that the company is grooming him for even better things in the future. The relocation to headquarters in Denver is the icing on the cake. Doug and Lisa have always enjoyed their trips to Denver and Steve will be able to ski all the time.

Doug can’t wait to break the news to the family tonight. He told Mr. Johnson that he would get back to him in a few days with a “definite yes” and a lot of plans have to be made in a hurry. Lisa will have to give notice on her job at the museum. She should be able to find something in Denver without much trouble. It’s a bustling city that has culture on its mind.

*(Continued)*
The change will be good for Steve, too. Always a pretty good student, his grades—and his attitude toward school—have been slipping this past year. Doug realizes that he has been rough on Steve lately, putting on the pressure about grades, but the boy hasn’t pushed himself hard enough. He can’t afford any more screw-ups if he is going to have a shot at a top-notch university. Anyway, Doug has found from his own business experience that you’ve got to tighten the screws if you want to get the most out of people.

Doug thinks that the promotion is coming at just the right time. He has been pretty tense and preoccupied at home lately because of the union problems and the pressure for cost cutting. A change of scenery might be just what the doctor would order. Doug can’t wait to see Lisa’s and Steve’s faces when he gives them the good news at the dinner table.

Lisa Sanders knows she has a lot to be grateful for. Doug is a good husband and father, and her son Steve is a really nice kid. Her family is very important to her and it was not easy for her to go back to work three years ago when Steve entered middle school. It wasn’t that she particularly needed the money, but she wanted to accomplish something in addition to caring for Steve and Doug.

Lisa remembers that it was pretty difficult finding a job that matched her bachelor’s degree in art history. She finally found a clerical position at the Art Museum and the rest is history. Although she doesn’t consider herself to be ambitious, she welcomed the promotions that ultimately brought her to her current position, Assistant Director of the museum. She absolutely loves the job! She is doing what she enjoys the most—developing new cultural programs for the museum—the pay is pretty good, the hours are flexible, and most important, she is appreciated as a competent, creative, productive person. It feels very good. It’s a "one in a million" job and she knows it.

Lisa can’t wait to tell Doug about her newest project—her idea—that would make the museum more accessible to the elderly and the handicapped. Not that Doug would really appreciate the project. He knows little—and cares less—about art and hasn’t shown much inclination to learn more about it in the past three years. Besides, he’s been so preoccupied—no, obsessed—with his job recently that he doesn’t seem to pay attention. He’s always at the plant, and when he’s home his mind is somewhere else. If his tension and moodiness keep up much longer, maybe Doug should see a doctor or something. Lisa thinks she should suggest that to him one of these days.

Lisa thinks lovingly about her son. Steve is bright, caring, and sensitive. It wasn’t easy at first for him to adjust to Lisa’s working, but he’s become more independent and resourceful by necessity. He’s doing OK, although adolescence can be a tough time for anyone. Actually, his grades have slipped a little lately—nothing serious—but he seems to find time for everything but studying. Maybe a little talk is in order to build up his self-confidence. He’s always done so well in school. Lisa wishes that Doug wouldn’t push Steve so hard about the studying. Putting too much pressure on Steve could easily backfire. Doug and Steve are at each other’s throat—when they talk!

Lisa hopes that tonight’s meal will be pleasant. Maybe Doug will be relaxed and will be interested in hearing about the museum project.
Steve Sanders is a high school sophomore and things are going pretty well. He has made a lot of real good friends and, probably for the first time in his life, Steve feels that he fits in at school. The teachers are tolerable, the kids are great, and he's got a new girlfriend, Lori. Steve loves his parents, although sometimes he thinks it is easier to love his mother than his father.

Steve thinks a lot about his dad. He’s always at the plant and when he does come home he’s usually angry—mostly at Steve. Steve feels that his father has been on his case since his last report card. It wasn’t terrible but it wasn’t as good as he’s done and it certainly wasn’t up to his father’s standards. Steve considers himself a pretty good student who had a bad term. Steve knows he should work harder, but he can’t stand it when his father gets on his back about school. He doesn’t listen to Steve or want to know why Steve’s grades started slipping or what problems he has. He just yells, probably like he yells at the workers in his plant.

Steve thinks about his mom a lot, too. He’s really happy that she’s doing so well at the art museum. She loves her job, but she always has time for his dad and him. Steve feels bad that his father never really seems interested in her job or spends much time with her. Steve realizes that his father doesn’t have much time for him, either. Steve wonders whether that’s the way it is when you’re a big shot in the business world.

Steve is optimistic that things will start looking up again soon. He realizes that he’s got great friends and parents who love him. And he has promised himself that he’ll start hitting the books again.

The Dinner

Dinner was anything but pleasant! Doug was astounded at Lisa’s and Steve’s reaction to the news about his promotion. He thought they were downright hostile. Lisa was angry and shocked; this is the first she had heard that Doug was even up for a promotion. And Steve didn’t know what to think, although he flatly told his parents that he’s not moving, no matter what. After about an hour, they all started repeating themselves and figured that dinner was over.

They all left the dinner table in bewilderment and anger. But Doug promised to hold off making a firm commitment to Mr. Johnson. And Lisa promised to sleep on it and continue the conversation tomorrow morning. Steve didn’t promise anything.

Case Analysis Questions

1. If you were Lisa or Steve, how would you have reacted to Doug’s announcement of his promotion? Why?

2. If you were Doug, how would you have reacted to Lisa and Steve’s anger and resistance? Why?

3. What could Doug have done differently in his conversations with his company and his family?

4. What does the Sanders’ situation illustrate about the special challenges faced by two-career families?

5. What should the family do next?