

**Working Paper 368**

**Conceptualising Work-life  
Balance**

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# CONCEPTUALISING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Gayatri Pradhan\*

## Abstract

*The relationship between work and family has been explained by several theoretical models which vary accordingly in terms of their underlying assumptions, their emphasis on the nature, degree and direction of the relationship between social systems and the nature and magnitude of the impact of the systems on the individual. These theoretical models include work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, spill-over and cross-over theories, congruence, integration and ecological theories and resource drain and compensation theories. In addition, theories like the border theory, boundary theory, gender inequality theory and work-life management theory have also highlighted the relationship between work and family. All these theories depict a similar connotation of balance, i.e., juggling and managing multiple roles successfully especially for working women.*

**Keywords:** Work, family, women, relationship, theories, gender, conflict.

## Introduction

There are several theories that seek to explain the relationship between work and family. However, these theories have not been integrated into a comprehensive theory that can serve as a guide to research on work-family issues. The academic body of knowledge depends on different theoretical approaches with regard to work-family interface. These theoretical frameworks includes spill-over, compensation, work-family conflict, resource drain, enrichment, congruence, segmentation, integration and ecological theories (Clark, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Frone, 2003; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In addition to the above mentioned theories, researchers in recent years have tried to explain work-family relationship through theories like border theory, boundary management theory, gender inequality theory, work-life management theory etc. All these theories provide insights into the relationship between work and family domains. The Role theory has been considered as the most common perspective for explaining the nature of work-family relationship which is evident in the literature. The Role theory has been discussed from two different perspectives - the scarcity perspective (also known as conflict perspective) and the enrichment perspective.

## Conflict Theory

Work-family conflict occurs when demands of work life create problems in fulfilling the demands of family life. Work-family conflict has been defined in terms of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect, i.e., participation in work role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Originally, work-family conflict was considered as unidimensional but it is now conceptualised as bi-dimensional, i.e., work interfering with family and vice-versa (Frone *et al*, 1992). Most research on work-family conflict showed that its greater prevalence was among employees, thus a greater focus was on the extent of work interference with family (Kelly *et al*, 2008).

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Three types of work family conflict were identified and studied by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). These are time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. When the time demands on one role make it difficult to participate in another role, it is known as time-based conflict. For instance, to complete a presentation and be present at a family event on the same evening (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). Based on the work-family framework, the earlier studies done by Staines and O'Connor (1980) revealed that the most cited hindrance between work and family domain is the competing requirement for time. Thus, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) advocated two forms in which time-based conflict is manifested and consistent with the works of Staines and O'Connor (1980). First, due to time pressures involved in one role, it becomes physically impossible to satisfy the time demands of another role and secondly, despite being physically present and attempting to meet the demands of one domain, a person is mentally preoccupied with another domain. The second type of conflict which is known as strain-based conflict occurs when psychological symptoms (anxiety, fatigue and irritability) generated by work/family demands spill-over or intrude into the other role, making it difficult to fulfil the responsibilities of that role. For example, an employee might be less responsive to her family's needs while preparing herself for an official meeting. Moreover, studies have identified that a negative psychological strain will lead to extensive time involvement in one domain, thereby reducing the time available for role performance in another domain which in turn will create conflict. Both strain-based and time-based conflicts are believed to share a number of sources despite being conceptually distinct (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Behaviour-based conflict takes place when expected or appropriate behaviour in the family role (expressiveness, emotional sensitivity etc.) is considered to be dysfunctional or inappropriate in the workplace. For instance, an assertive working style of an employee which is considered as a sign of success at the workplace might create an atmosphere of tension when displayed at home (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Like a strain-based conflict, a behaviour-based conflict demonstrates a negative spill-over from one domain to another where behaviour in one domain is influenced by the behaviour desired and developed in another domain where by inhibiting role performance in that latter domain simultaneously (Edward & Rothbard, 2000). For instance, in a family setting wherein a warm, nurturing and cooperative approach is desired, an assertive and confrontational behaviour may be considered inappropriate or out of place (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). In terms of job factors, the amount of working time is regarded as the most powerful and enduring predictor that influences work-family conflict. In other words, the highest incidence of work-family conflict results from long working hours. In addition, health, work and family outcomes are influenced by work-family conflict which is supported by studies (Frone *et al*, 1997). For instance, greater depression, physical health complaints and hypertension results from work-to-family conflict while greater consumption of alcohol results from family-to-work conflict. Work-family conflict and work outcomes such as performance, absenteeism, turn-over intentions, burn-out and job commitment were examined by a meta-analysis done by Kossek & Ozeki (1999). The conflict of family interfering with work is negatively related to work attitudes and performances according to the findings. Moreover, regardless of direction, conflict between work and family was related to lower commitment to work and organisations, care-related absence and higher turnover intention. Family outcomes such as lower marital quality and family satisfaction is related to

work-family conflict which has been suggested by earlier studies (Matthews, Conger & Wickrame, 1996).

## **Enrichment Theory**

Another perspective of the work-family relationship, i.e., the enrichment perspective has been investigated by researchers in recent years. Work-family enrichment argues that the activity in one domain can enrich the experiences in the other domain instead of depleting energy from the other domain. The positive side of combining work and family responsibilities has been examined from the enrichment perspective. Different terms such as facilitation, enhancement and spill-over are associated with work-family enrichment. However, these concepts vary in their emphasis of received benefits, experiences and improvement of role performance. For instance, work-family facilitation refers to a form of synergy when resources such as affect, skills, self-esteem etc., from one role makes it easier to participate in the other role (Wayne, Musica and Flenson, 2004). The positive spill-over refers to experiences such as skills, moods, values and behaviours transferred from one role to another (Carlson *et al*, 2006). The work-family enrichment is the direct opposite or contrast of work-family conflict and it refers to the extent to which experiences in one role improves the quality of life in the other role (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

There are multiple benefits resulting from participating in different roles such as status security, personality enrichment, role privileges, status enhancement, which is revealed by initial research on work family enrichment (Seiber, 1974). However, later research mentioned that different types of positive spill-over such as mood, skills, behaviour and value spill-over (Edward and Rothbard, 2000) still exist. The transfer of one emotional status from one domain to another is known as mood spill-over while value spill-over occurs when what is valued at work is also demanded in the family domain. It has been pointed out that when the skills and abilities gained in one domain can be applied to another domain, it is referred to as affective enrichment. For example, conflict solving skills learned at the workplace can be applied to resolving conflicts at home. Flexibility and psychological, physical, social capital and material resources are considered as other instrumental benefits (Kirschmeyer, 1992). A scale was developed and validated by Carlson *et al* (2006) in order to further understand family-to-work and work-to-family enrichment. Carlson pointed out that there are two ways in which work-family enrichment takes place. First, it is instrumental when resources gained in one role either directly improves performance in another role, and the second one is affective, where work-family enrichment occurs indirectly through the influence of a positive effect.

Instrumental work family enrichment occurs when resources are directly transferred from one role to another as pointed out by Carlson (2006). On the other hand, the affective path focuses on the degree to which mood and emotions from one role can step in and positively affect an individual's functioning in the other role. Thompson and Bunderson (2001) suggested that as long as time spent in a particular role is identity-affirming, one role can positively affect another role. In other words, when the time spent is meaningful to the individuals, they are likely to experience personal satisfaction. The notion that experiences in the workplace can enrich family life and vice-versa is supported by studies which found a positive relationship between family and work domains. For instance, according to

Rothbard (2000), men's psychological engagement in family life was positively related to psychological engagement (attention and absorption) in work, while work engagement of women was associated with psychological engagement in family life.

There are several components of work-family enrichment from a theoretical perspective (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). There are directions and dimensions of work-family enrichment, different paths promoting work-family enrichment and generations of resources in the work and family roles. First, work-family enrichment is considered to be multi-dimensional wherein work provides resource gain that enhances performance in the family domain and vice-versa. With regard to work-to-family direction, development takes place when work involvement leads to acquiring new skills, knowledge or behaviour which enables the individual to become a better member of the family; affect is viewed as a positive emotional state wherein work involvement enables the individual to become a better family member and capital takes place when work involvement facilitates levels of psycho-social resources such as sense of confidence, security, self-fulfilment or accomplishment which aids the individual to become a better family member. With regard to family-to-work direction, development takes place when family involvement leads to acquiring new skills, knowledge or behaviour which enables the individual to become a better family member; affect takes place when family involvement leads to a positive emotional attitude which in turn helps the individual to become a better worker and efficiency take place when family involvement provides a sense of urgency or focus which aids the individual in becoming a better worker.

Secondly, in order to promote work-family enrichment, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) have listed five types of resources. These are psychological and physical resources, skills and perspectives, flexibility, social-capital resources and material resources. Thirdly, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) identified two different paths through which the resources can be achieved, which in turn help in promoting work-family enrichment. They are the instrumental path and affective path. The instrumental path, as shown by earlier research, is when employees perceive that their family's involvement has prepared them with the resources required to handle colleagues, or that those resources have helped them to perform better at work. On the other hand, the affective path facilitates work-family enrichment indirectly through moods and influence of emotions which resulted in role participation (Carlson *et al*, 2006). Individuals' moods or emotional state increases as they gain greater resources through ongoing participation in that role, i.e., work-to-family. This, in turn, improves their performance in the other role (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Work-family enrichment acts as a barrier against negative events and it will result in positive health for the employees as well as providing help in strengthening social relationships. In connection with this finding, it has been pointed out that employers possess a positive outlook towards work-life balance and there are benefits which are brought into the personal lives of employees as well as in their workplace. Nevertheless, if minimum business disruptions are to be considered, the major challenge faced by employers would be implementation of working practices relating to flexibility (Grzywacz, 2000).

## **Spill-over and Cross-over Theory**

Apart from the conflict and enrichment perspective, there are other theories which explain the relationship between work and family domain. One of these theories is the notion of spill-over between domains. Spill-over is said to occur when one domain impacts the other domain in the same way, despite having established boundaries between an individual's family and work domain. Spill-over can be explained as a process by which work and family affects one another, which in turn, generates similarities between the two domains (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Both affective and instrumental types of spill-over have been identified by the researchers (Illies, Wilson and Wagner, 2009). Affective spill-over is defined as "work-related moods or attitudes are carried to home or family-related moods or attitudes are carried to work" (Illies *et al*, 2009, p.87). On the other hand, specific skills and behaviours which are carried from one domain to another and which results in positive or negative consequences is known as instrumental spill-over (Edward and Rothbard, 2000; Kirschmeyer, 1992; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Spill-over can take place in both directions. Initial research indicates that the "direction of the spill-over of interference has been found to be dependent on the salience of each role to the focal person as well as the negative sanctions associated with non-compliance with each role pressure" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p.77). The second notion of cross-over is a similar construct to spill-over which can be applied to the study of work-life balance. Cross-over is defined as "the reaction of individuals to the job stress experienced by those with whom they interact regularly" (Westman, 2001, p.717). Cross-over is also described as "a bi-directional transmission of positive and negative emotions, mood and dispositions between intimately connected individuals such as spouses or organisational team members" (Macrtz and Boyer, 2010, p.589). Three pathways have been suggested by literature through which cross-over can take place. The first path occurs when the stress experienced by one partner creates an empathic reaction in the other partner resulting in the increase of their own stress (Westman, 2001). The second path takes place when heavy demands on one partner decreases the leisure time they have as a couple which in turn leads to negative feelings such as emotional exhaustion or stress (Demerouti *et al*, 2005). The final pathway occurs through social undermining process wherein stress and time pressure causes a partner to engage in negative behaviour such as criticism or negative affect toward the other partners, which in turn results in increasing the stress of the other partner (Bakker *et al*, 2008).

## **Congruence, Integration and Ecology Theories**

The Congruence theory refers to the manner in which additional variables can influence the balance of multiple roles that are not directly related to work and family. This theory shows a similarity between work and family through a third variable like personality traits, genetic and socio-cultural forces and behaviour styles. Both work and family domain can be positively affected by a third variable such as level of education or intelligence based on the Congruence theory (Edward & Rothbard, 2000; Zedeck, 1992). The Integration theory refers to the holistic view that work-life and community-life domains can be encouraged and facilitated better through a healthy system of flexible and permeable boundaries (Clark, 2000). With regard to work and life, the incorporation of additional contextual elements such as community into a body of knowledge is best portrayed by the Integration theory. This theory makes all

stakeholders (employers, workers and communities) active partners with equal voices in the formation of a holistic model of work-life balance by focusing on contemporary understanding that rebuild traditional work-life paradigms (Morris and Maden, 2007). Instead of providing solutions which are shaped in isolation, an approach that includes all parties and shared responsibility will provide better results in both work and family domain. The Ecological system theory refers to the idea that work and life are symptomatic in nature where each and multiple characteristics provide an affective effect on the work-life experiences and are also considered as a joint function of process, person, time and context characteristics. However, the Ecology theory was converted into the Person-in-environment theory later with a common link among diverse person-environment variants as a recognition of the vibrant relationship between individuals and groups with their physical, social and natural environments (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000).

### **Compensation Theory**

The Compensation theory is considered as one of the relationships within the work-family literature. Compensation occurs when the resources are used to fulfil the need of one domain from another domain (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990; Staines, 1980) which is similar to the buffering effect attributable to work-family enrichment (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). The idea of compensation as a mechanism through which one role can support the other and which is induced by insufficient positive experiences has been discussed by Edwards and Rothbard (2000) in their paper on linking mechanisms between home and work domains. Two forms of compensation have been identified by Edwards and Rothbard (2000), i.e., Supplemental and Reactive compensation. Supplemental compensation is likely to occur when an individual does not receive the rewards they need from one domain and seeks them from another domain (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). For example, an employee may become overly dependent on praise from his family if he does not receive any praise for his efforts at work. Relative compensation takes place "when undesirable experiences in one domain are readdressed by an individual seeking contrasting experiences in the other domain" (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000, p.181). For example, a mother might seek out quality time with her children after a tiring day at work.

### **Boundary and Border Theory**

The Boundary theory is considered as an important theoretical contribution providing a strong starting point for literature exploration relating to work-life boundaries (Ashforth *et al*, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Zerubavel, 1991). This theory differentiates blocks of space and time in its most basic form, each block is covered by frames and can be attributed to differing roles in one's life environment (Zerubavel, 1991). The Boundary theory has been defined as a way in which individuals create and maintain boundaries as a means of simplifying and ordering the environment (Ashforth *et al*, 2000, p.474). This theory has been refined by another theory known as the Border theory which focuses on various forms of boundaries surrounding work and non-work domains (Clark, 2000). Three types of borders have been identified which individuals maintain between their personal and work lives. These are temporal, physical and psychological borders (Clark, 2000). Temporal boundaries refers to actual

times within which work activities versus personal activities takes place. For instance, an employee may set a time-based boundary of 6 pm to end their day at work in order to collect their children from day care (Clark, 2000). Physical boundaries refer to actual locations in which personal and work activities take place. This location may be home versus office or for people who work from home, it may be the area where they perform their work role, i.e., study or separate area. Lastly, psychological boundaries may be characterised by the perceptions associated with the activities of work and home roles (Ashforth *et al*, 2000; Clark, 2000). For example, the psychological boundary can be referred to an employees' interpretation of attending a work-related meeting in the evening as a social activity with friends from work. The Border and Boundary theories assert that less conflict will be experienced when an individual manages work and non-work separately. However, the transitions between these roles is likely to be easier when these roles are integrated (Ashforth *et al*, 2000; Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). In addition, depending on the characteristics which are unique to the individual and the environment, the Border and Boundary theory suggest that segmentation and integration of work and home roles can result in positive outcomes such as their preferences for integration or segmentation and contextual factors like work environment which allows conditions of work to match or fail preferences of employees (Ashforth *et al*, 2000; Clark, 2000; Desrochers and Sargent, 2004). The contention that these unique characteristics can influence work-life outcomes has been supported by research. For instance, Chen *et al* (2009) in their study of managerial level employees in the United States of America found that the congruence between employee preference for segmentation or integration of work and non-work roles was positively related to time and strain-based work-family conflict. Likewise, the ability of employees to successfully manage their professional and personal lives' boundary have been impacted by the organisational context in terms of "formal policies, job design, social support for work-family strategy choices and prevailing cultural expectations"(Kossek *et al*, 1999, p.116). It was suggested by their framework that in order to classify effects of policies on managing work and family roles, research on policy should be enriched by greater reliance on work-family integration theories, i.e., direct spill-over, indirect spill-over, segmentation (Kossek *et al*, 1999).

### **Separate Sphere Theory**

This theory considers work and family as distinctive systems wherein family is a domestic haven for women and work is a public arena for men. Generally, this theory asserts system independence although according to the proponents of the Separate sphere theory, there are some structural connections at the broadest level. The family is understood as distinctive sex-typed traits and is characterised by different domains. Erikson (1965) identifies an inner sphere for women as wives and homemakers and an outer sphere for men as decision-makers and bread-winners in psychoanalytic theory while separate gender roles (instrumental and expressive) have been identified in Sociology by Parsons (1970). Parsons considered work as a public sphere mainly for the man who is supposed to fulfil instrumental and materialistic needs. On the other hand, the family was understood as a private sphere for women who is asked to provide expressive and emotional support. This type of division of labour based on gender leads to sex-typed labour market where women are confined to low-paying jobs which are considered as extensions of their domestic duties. The Separate sphere theory asserts that

family and work domain should be separated so that they can function properly for the stability of the society and in order to avoid conflict, sexual division of labour should be maintained. With regard to the labour market, the work which women perform for the family is not considered as a form of production with exchange value. However, on the other hand, men are considered as the only links as producers through which family is connected to the economic system. In addition, society has placed high value to productive activities in the public sphere rather than to the domestic activities in the private sphere (Zaretsky, 1976). Male domination and female subordination results due to differential allocation of rewards, resources and opportunities. In addition, the social structure is embedded with primacy of instrumental over expressive, of father over mother, of producer over reproducer.

### **Interactive Theory**

In order to move beyond an understanding of women and their families or of men and their work, feminists have tried to integrate the study of work and family for a better understanding of the intimate relationship between work and family. The mutual interdependence between work and family has been highlighted by the Interactive theory by considering the reciprocal influences of work and family and taking into account their joint as well as independent effects on the social and psychological conditions of individuals either directly or indirectly. The interactive model has been divided into two types which describes system interdependence between family and work. They are Marxist and Non-Marxist. Family and work are considered as economic units by Marxist and they study the general linkages of work and family to the larger economy. Family and work are viewed as social systems or structural units by Non-Marxist and they examine the specific circumstances under which there is an intersection of occupational and familial roles. Specifically, Non-Marxist considers how family relationships, coping mechanisms and lifestyle are influenced by the work context such as occupational conditions, job characteristics and in turn how work life is affected by the family context. Non-Marxists used theoretical perspectives which varied from structuralist to social psychological in nature. Kanter (1977) has highlighted five aspects of the occupational structures and work-life organisations that shape family system in a dominant way. These aspects comprise job absorption, rewards and resources, time and timing, emotional climate and cultural dimension of work. It has been suggested that work orientations, motivations, emotional energy, ability and the demands people carry to their workplace can be explained in terms of their family situation (Kanter, 1977). Moreover, the effects of maternal employment, whether negative or positive, depends on work and family conditions, reactions to work, use of resources, coping effectiveness, networks and other factors have been acknowledged by the Interactive theory (Acock, 1982). For some employees, stress, conflict and other problems are created through simultaneous membership in multiple systems. However, this theory argues that those consequences may be functional under certain circumstances rather than being dysfunctional (Marks, 1977). It is evident in a recent family research that there is an integration of work and family and a shift from a bifurcation of the two. The mutual impact of both spheres are adequately dealt with by earlier studies which focused on dual-earner families with professional and managerial jobs requiring high commitment, greater job absorption, long work hours and career with continuous upward mobility (Esther and Catherine, 1988).

## **Conservation of Resources Theory**

Another appropriate theoretical foundation for examining the relationship between work and family would be Conservation of Resources (COR) model used by Grandey and Cropanzano (1999). For the study of work-family balance, the COR model offers a strong framework which argues that individuals attempt to utilise and keep resources. Resources refers to the means of attaining those objects, conditions or energies and personal characteristics that are valued by the individual. It may be used in problem-solving and coping and includes autonomy, social support, contingencies, established behaviour outcomes etc. An individual is likely to experience stress when a potential loss of resources is perceived or when an expected resource gain fails to materialise or when there is actual loss of resources. The COR model explains that the depleted resources resulting in negative outcomes like lower job satisfaction, lower commitment and poor performance is caused by conflict between the employee's home and work life. Work-life balance and positive outcomes can be achieved by anything that serves to replenish these resources. Resources such as job autonomy, family support and presence of spouse are responsible for a better balance of work and family lives. There is likely to be less conflict in the presence of availability of resources. Responsibility of child-care and elderly-care are considered as a possible drain on resources. The energy and time required for dependent care will result in smaller pool of resources and higher conflict of work and family (Premeaux *et al*, 2007).

## **Work-Life Management Theory**

Based on the Self-determination theory, the work-life management model focuses on managing life through an autonomous self proactively. This theory gains insight from the life-management (Freund and Baltes, 2002; Smith, 1999) and self-management factors (Lorig & Holman, 2003; King, 2001; Hughes and Scott, 1998). Issues such as Environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental and similar issues are simultaneously recognised by this theory wherein a person living in the changing environment develops themselves through interaction with the environment over time. Workplace and home are considered to be those environments. The work-life management model which is proposed as an organising framework for coaching practice is deliberately structured around the acronym MANAGER. Each of the seven domains consist of an array of techniques instead of a single technique and they are areas for consideration within coaching. This model allows practitioners to incorporate techniques based on evidences from behavioural sciences and is designed to be coherent conceptually. In addition, it gives more importance to environment unlike many of the individualistic approaches to coaching. The manner in which the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness for the individual are met by home and work environment have been examined by this theory. The seven domains of work-life management model are M - manager, A - acceptance, N -nurturing needs, A - authenticity, G - goals, actions and time-management, E - environmental opportunities and threats and R - responsibility (Oades *et al*, 2005)

The 'M' of the acronym MANAGER stands for mindfulness through which individuals are able to evaluate their own thinking, emotions and behaviour during its occurrence. This approach of mindfulness has become central form of several therapeutic techniques and is based on principles

drawn from mindfulness meditation or *Vipassana* (Feldman, 2001). Conceptually, it is related to the interpersonal component of emotional intelligence and it is useful in allowing individuals to divert from unhealthy habits and thoughts. The first 'A' of the acronym MANAGER refers to the ability of individuals to accept themselves and their situation. Prior to the process of change, acceptance suggests that a clear view of reality is useful. The 'N' of the acronym MANAGER refers to the nurturing needs. Competence, autonomy and relatedness are considered as three kinds of psychological needs. The second 'A' of the acronym MANAGER refers to authenticity highlighting the importance of being authentic to one's personal values. The focus of the coach is moved from the 'how' of the goal to the 'why' of the goal by focusing on authenticity. The 'G' of the acronym MANAGER refers to the ubiquitous goals of the individuals which are closely connected with smaller actions and the ability to manage time and achieve these actions. This notion is similar to organismic theory which posits that individuals are active and they strive for incentives of their choice. It has been suggested by empirical evidence of three decades that goal-setting helps in increasing commitment and attainment of tasks. It has also been found that well-being can be achieved through autonomous goals (Sheldon *et al*, 2003). The 'E' of acronym MANAGER refers to environmental opportunities and threats. The structure and function of the organism may be presented with threats or opportunities by the environment which is consistent with the Self-determination theory. Through the application of this dialectic, the manner in which a person responds to the external challenge or threat is examined by coaching. An individual is effectively changed by this response which helps them in becoming a more complex organism. The 'R' of the acronym MANAGER refers to responsibility. It refers to the manner in which individuals take their own responsibility as well as that of others and understand the importance of being self-determined. The motif of personal responsibilities have been underscored by Butler-Bowdon's (2001) review of self-help research within the available literature. The coaching practitioner cannot achieve this with the clients with just one single technique. Some clients tend to have a high level of personal responsibility while other clients have less due to the presence of stress in their lives. Similarly, self-governance, autonomy and self-determination may not be familiar experiences to many clients. Hence, in order to address these issues explicitly over time, the coach practitioner utilises the acronym MANAGER. Thus, the work-life management theory based on the MANAGER model is a preliminary attempt to develop a fertile ground for a theoretically coherent and evidence-based coaching practice (Oades *et al*, 2005).

### **Gender Inequality Theory**

The theory of Gender Inequality is particularly significant as it helps in understanding the dynamics of work-family balance of women professionals. It provides a unique perspective and gives insights for unequal participation of women in the labour market as compared to men (Thomas, 2007). There are several underlying themes of the Gender Inequality theory. Firstly, it argues that men and women are situated unequally in society wherein women get inadequate material resources, power, social status and opportunities for self-actualisation as compared to men. Secondly, it posits that inequality is a result of society's organisation and not because of biological or psychological differences. Thirdly, despite having variations in traits, potential etc., there is no significant pattern of difference in human beings in order to differentiate between the sexes. Lastly, there is a possibility for a change in the situation

wherein theorists assume that both men and women will accept the egalitarian society (Thomas, 2007). Liberal feminists explained gender inequality by identifying the sexual division of labour; the existence of social activity in separate public and private sphere wherein men are located within the public sphere and women within the private sphere and socialisation of children in a systematic manner which will help them identify their future roles and spheres based on their gender (Thomas, 2007). Liberal feminists assert that gender inequality is created in the society through women's restricted access to public sphere by the social system in the society. According to liberal feminists, the actual rewards of social life like power, status, opportunity and money are provided by the public sphere and gender inequality is said to be established when women are over-burdened with activities of the private sphere and denied access to the public sphere.

Marxist feminism explains gender inequality through feminist social protest and Marxist class analysis (Thomas, 2007). 'The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State' has been considered as the most notable exploration of the gender inequality issue. The major argument of this theory is that subordination of women results from social arrangement and not from her biology. Secondly, the patriarchal family is considered as the basis for the subordination of women - wherein women are confined to their homes and they do not possess any economic independence or occupational freedom. Other factors responsible for gender inequality as per the Marxist theory are legitimisation of the patriarchal family and the emergence of a private property and exploitation of women. Thus, the Marxist feminist argues that women are unequal to men because of class oppression, inequality of property, labor exploitation and alienation and not due to any basic or direct conflict of interest between men and women (Thomas, 2007).

### **Expansionist Theory**

In order to understand the reality of today's society, the Expansionist theory is an attempt to fill this theoretical gap by articulating an inductive theory of gender, work and family (Barnett, 2001). This theory consists of four basic principles that are derived and tested empirically. The issues of gender, work and family have been addressed by the first three principles directly whereas the broader issue of men and women's nature has been addressed by the fourth principle which in turn has implications for a better understanding of work, family and multiple roles. According to the first principle of the Expansionist theory, multiple roles are beneficial to both men and women. For women, participating in a work role is proved to be beneficial while for men, adding or participating in family role is proved to be beneficial. The idea that strong commitment to one role does not reduce strong commitment in another role is one of the consequences of the facilitation that occurs when men and women occupy home and work roles. The second principle of this theory suggests that a number of processes such as buffering, added income, increased self-complexity, similarity of experiences, expanded frame of reference and gender-role ideology contributes to the beneficial effects of multiple roles. The third principle of the Expansionist theory states that multiple roles are beneficial only under certain conditions. Depending on the number and time demands of roles, the benefits of multiple roles can be seen. Overload and distress are likely to occur beyond certain upper limits. In comparison to the number of roles or the time spent on a particular role, quality of role is considered to be important for health. Multiple roles can also

provide opportunities for failure or frustration just as they provide opportunities for success especially in terms of sexual harassment, low-wage work and discrimination at the workplace. The fourth principle argues that psychological gender differences are not immutable or large in general. The differences in personality of men and women do not force them to enact in highly differentiated roles. It can be noted that current historical period have been reflected by these four principles and thus it can be seen that current values and norms are useful in shaping these principles. Role practices can be affected by cultural norms which in turn can be responsible for affecting the subjective role quality and capabilities. However, these four principles need to be amended if there is a change in cultural norms. In addition, this particular historical period has been reflected by current definitions of social roles (i.e. interpersonal patterns of rights and obligations). These four principles need to be revised if there is a change in the practice associated with roles. Finally, with a change in experiences, expectations and context; a change is likely to occur in the abilities and personality characteristics required by certain roles which in turn are related to cultural definitions and historical period (Barnett, 2001). Even though the expansionist theory may prove to be beneficial in providing a better framework for future policy and research, it is culture and time-bound. Thus, it cannot be considered as a universal theory.

## **Conclusion**

The work family interface has, increasingly, become a topic of interest in the field of research with regard to greater participation of women in the labour market, increasing number of dual-earner families as well as significant and drastic changes occurring in the workplace. Several theoretical models have been constructed to understand the relationship between work and family. These models vary accordingly in terms of their underlying assumptions, their emphasis on the nature, degree and direction of the relationship between social systems and the nature and magnitude of system impact on the individual. However, gender remains integral to any discussion with regard to intersection between personal and professional life. Different theories on work-family issues have tried to justify a highly gender-segregated division of labour in the family and the workplace by assuming pervasiveness of large gender differences in ability, social behaviours and personality. The manner in which gender identities are continually reconstructed can be understood by exploring the boundary between male domain of work life and female domain of family life. The woman's role in the family have always been emphasised by social pressures, consolidated in common cultural practices, by which men tend to offer support in terms of being side-by-side rather than actual sharing of housework. Thus, women still continue to carry the major burden of family and caring responsibilities even though their participation in the workforce is widely accepted. Although work-family conflict is experienced by both men and women, more conflict has been reported by women due to spending more time on work and family activities. In summary, the different perspectives with regard to work-family balance which is evident in the literature depicts a similar connotation of balance, i.e., juggling and managing multiple roles successfully despite their variations especially for women.

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