Managing work-life policies in the European workplace: explorations for future research

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About the authors

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Abstract

In this paper we focus on the implementation and management of work-life policies in the workplace and the key role of managers in this context. We review the existing literature, enabling us to set a research agenda focused on explaining managerial attitudes and behaviour toward work-life policies in different organisational and national contexts. The evidence found in several studies suggests that managers often receive mixed messages about the implementation of work/life policies because these policies are not embedded in the workplace; managers are often unaware of such policies and lack training in them, leading to inconsistency in implementation and short-term thinking rather than a long-term perspective that cherishes human capital. Our review points to the need for more research allowing a full understanding of managerial attitudes and behaviour in different organisational and national contexts. Although a few interesting studies do exist, research in the field is still in its infancy. More research is needed, in particular systematic studies with well-developed theoretical frameworks.

Keywords

Introduction[1]

Employees today are offered a wide range of work-life policies, such as flexible working hours, part-time work, a compressed work week and various types of leave arrangements (e.g. Den Dulk, 2001; Evans, 2001; Haas et al., 2000). Nevertheless, there is evidence that many employees are not taking advantage of existing policies (e.g. Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Lewis, 1996; Thompson et al., 1999, Luijn & Keuzekamp, 2004). Research has also shown that employees do not always utilise existing schemes, even when they need to do so (see, e.g., Anderson, Coffey & Byerly, 2002; Eaton, 2003; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Lobel, 1999; Williams, 2000). For example, in 2003 only 27% of Dutch employees entitled to parental leave actually made use of their entitlement (Portegeijs, Boelens & Olsthoorn, 2004). This paper focuses on what happens after work-life policies are adopted, whether in statutory provisions, collective agreements or company policy. More specifically, we focus on the implementation and management of work-life policies in the workplace and the key role of managers in this context.

Research suggests that managerial support is critical when it comes to the utilisation and effectiveness of work-life programmes (e.g. Allen, 2001; Fried, 1999; Perlow, 1997; Thompson et al., 1999; Veenis, 2000; Maxwell, 2005), as it is up to managers to communicate, implement and manage work-life policies in organisations (Lewis, 2003). Studies have shown that managers' attitudes to work-life policies are of vital importance; after all, it is the managers who give (or fail to give) employees information on policies, who are responsible for seeing that the rules are observed, and who grant or reject employee requests (see, e.g., Fried, 1999; Guerreiro, Abrantes & Pereira, 2004; Lewis, 1997; Veenis, 2000). The advent of performance-related HRM practices and the general trend toward decentralisation – in which personnel practices have been devolved to line managers – have made the role of managers even more important (Wise & Bond, 2003). While HR managers now play a more supportive role, it is the line manager who decides whether and when to approve employee requests for work-life benefits

In addition, work-life policies often include an element of line managers' discretion (either explicitly or implicitly) (Wise & Bond, 2003; Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005). For instance, managers have the discretion to turn down a request or to determine the nature of take up (for example the length of leave or the degree of flexibility). The discretionary power of managers varies across national and organisational contexts, emphasising that context factors should be taken into account when examining implementation and the 'allowance decisions' of line and other managers (Guerreiro, Abrantes & Pereira, 2004).

Research indicates that managers greatly vary in their responses to employee requests to use work-life policies. Managers may be very supportive and seek additional (informal) solutions, such as allowing employees to work from home when a child is ill. On the other hand, they may stick strictly to the official policies or even discourage employees from making use of them (e.g. Guerreiro, Abrantes & Pereira, 2004; Lewis & Den Dulk, 2006; Veenis, 2000; Yeandle et al., 2003). The term 'management lottery' illustrates the variable and discretionary powers of managers, especially in facilitating – or not facilitating – employees' work-life balance (Guerreiro et al., 2004).

Managers often sacrifice their own family life in order to advance in the organisation, work long hours, and are less likely to use work-family policies than non-managerial employees (Poelmans & Beham, 2005; Den Dulk & Peper, 2007). Hence, managers are seldom role models with respect to utilisation and tend not to encourage take up. In fact, middle managers are often seen as key barriers to the actual implementation of policies.

Despite the key role of managers in the practical implementation of work-life policies, few researchers have examined the factors that shape managerial attitudes and behaviour (Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005, Lewis, 2003; Poelmans & Beham, 2005). This may be due to the complex nature of the phenomenon, with many interrelated factors at different levels – employee, manager, organisational and national context – playing a role. In this paper we will review the existing literature, enabling us to set a research agenda focused on explaining managerial attitudes and behaviour toward work-life policies in different organisational and national contexts. In section 2, we discuss the different work-life policies explored. In section 3 we discuss how researchers have attempted to understand and explain managers' attitudes and behaviour toward work-life policies. In section 4 we review the research methods applied in existing studies and in section 5 we discuss the main findings. In the concluding section, we discuss gaps in contemporary research and suggest directions for future research.

Work-life policies

Work-family or work-life policies are intended to support employees in combining paid work and personal/family life. They can take the form of statutory provisions, may be part of a collective agreement, or may be formal or informal arrangements within individual companies. Examples of work-family policies are: flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work or flexible starting and finishing times; leave arrangements, such as parental, paternity and emergency leave; care arrangements, including financial support or referral services; and supportive arrangements, such as training and counselling programmes. Some countries have a large number of public provisions while other countries leave such policies and arrangements to the social partners (employers' organisations and trade unions) or to individual companies and firms. Regardless of the level at which such policies are introduced, however, it is in the workplace that they are actually implemented and used. Despite the increase in work-family policies in the past few decades, research indicates that their implementation and actual take up is not yet automatic in all countries and organisations and among all groups of employees.

Den Dulk (2001) distinguishes four main categories of work-life arrangements: flexible work arrangements, leaves, childcare arrangements, and supportive arrangements (see Figure 1). Where the term work-life policies implies formal company policies and statutory rights, the term arrangements also includes non-formalised company policies. Different work-life policies will have different consequences from a managerial perspective. Policies that enable employees to take time off for a longer period, such as maternity leave, force managers to think about

temporary replacement. Policies that allow employees to take leave on very short notice, such emergency leave, force managers to deal with a temporary loss of manpower. Flexible work arrangements create variation in work schedules and often increase employee autonomy. In particular, working from home may raise issues of managerial control (Peters & Den Dulk, 2003; Fealstead et al., 2003; Appelbaum et al., 2005). On the other hand, childcare provisions or a dry-cleaning service enables employees to outsource care tasks and leaves their work schedules relatively untouched.

I. Flexible work arrangements	**II. Leaves**
▪ Part-time work ▪ Flexible hours ▪ Job sharing ▪ Teleworking/working at home ▪ Term-time work ▪ Banking hours	▪ Maternity leave ▪ Parental leave ▪ Paternity leave ▪ Leave for family reasons ▪ Adoption leave ▪ Career break scheme
III. Childcare arrangements	**IV. Supportive arrangements**
▪ Workplace nursery ▪ Childminding ▪ Childcare resource and referral ▪ Financial assistance ▪ Holiday play scheme/summer camp	▪ Work-life management training ▪ Employee counselling/assistance ▪ Supply of information ▪ Research on employees' needs

Figure 1: Types of work-life arrangements (Den Dulk, 2001:8)

Managers can influence the utilisation of work-life policies in several ways. To begin with, their influence lies in their response to work-life requests. Secondly, they influence the use made of work-life policies by the way they manage employees who make these requests on a day-to-day basis. Thirdly, their own use of work-life policies and/or the way they manage their own work-life issues can be of influence (Lewis, 2003). Managers' behaviour toward work-life policies can also vary considerably. Veenis (2000), for example, divides managers into three groups: those who deal flexibly with existing policies and allow plenty of scope for informal arrangements; those who adhere strictly to the official rules when implementing such policies and give their consent only under specific conditions; and those who tend to respond discouragingly when they receive an employee request.

Yeandle et al. (2003), found four types of managers in relation to their knowledge and awareness of work-life policies. In order of decreasing interest in work-life policies, they distinguish: managers who take a 'progressive' approach to work-life issues; managers who have a 'vague' understanding of family-friendly policies; managers who displayed ignorance of family-friendly policies; and managers who were 'resistant' to the family-friendly approach (2003:12-19).

Understanding the management of work-life policies

In our review of the research, whether empirical, theoretical, or both, we came across two types of studies; those that address the take up and use of work-life policies by managers themselves (for instance Kossek, Barber & Winters, 1999; Drew & Mutagh, 2005), and those that examine how managers deal with their subordinates' work-life policy requests (for instance, Klein et al., 2000; Powell and Mainiero, 1999; Wise & Bond, 2003). Not all studies rely on an elaborate theoretical framework; some are merely descriptive and empirical, while others use a number of theoretical notions. It should be generally noted that the field is still in its infancy and that research is patchy. In this section we discuss factors and mechanisms noted in existing studies that impact the way managers implement and manage work-life policies.

Work-life arrangements not embedded in organisations

Much of the research examining how and why employers decide to provide work-life benefits is based on an institutional perspective. The starting point of the institutional theory is the assumption that there is growing institutional pressure on employers to develop work-family policies. Changes in the workforce, such as the increase in the number of working mothers and dual-earner families, have made work-life issues more salient. In addition, the public's interest in the work-life balance and state regulation have heightened institutional pressures on employers to respond. However, not all organisations are sensitive to such growing institutional pressure and research shows large variations in employer responses. Generally, large companies and public sector organisations are taking the lead (e.g. Den Dulk, 2001; European Foundation, 2006; Evans, 2001; Goodstein, 1994).

Managers' attitudes and decision-making are shaped by the organisational and national context in which they operate. The organisational and national contexts determine, among other things, the discretionary power of managers in granting requests to utilise work-life policies. Based on the institutional theory, researchers argue that work-life policies are relatively new in many national and organisational contexts, and therefore not yet institutionalised or taken for granted (e.g. Den Dulk, 2001; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). Although both governments and employers increasingly offer work-life policies, the degree to which these policies are embedded in organisational policies and practices differs.

Based on the institutional theory, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) emphasise that policies may be adopted for symbolic rather than substantive reasons and thus may fail to produce any real changes in organisational structure or behaviour: companies may gain external legitimacy as desirable employers, but may intentionally or unintentionally discourage employees from ever using these benefits. Blair-Loy and Wharton argue that when work-family policies are controversial or ambiguous, they are in an early stage of adoption and not yet taken for granted. Policies are not yet embedded in organisational practices and structures, and they may conflict with organisational norms relating to time and career demands. 'When organizational policies are controversial or ambiguous, intra-organizational interests and politics

may shape policy outcomes' (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002:816); in other words, various actors may try to encourage or discourage their take up or institutionalisation.

This perspective highlights the role of management discretion and powerful others in organisations. When organisational policies are controversial or ambiguous, the meanings and expectations associated with their actual use may vary widely across the organisation and be constructed locally by supervisors and work groups, within various departments. Blair-Loy & Wharton (2002) argue that the successful institutionalisation of contested policies generally depends on the political action and relative power of 'core constituencies' – in this case, working parents (mothers), those with family responsibilities, those most in need of work-life policies.

Lee et al. (2000) applies the idea of organisational learning to the implementation of relatively new policies in organisations. In their study on organisational responses to new non-standardised forms of work (i.e. part-time work), they distinguish three paradigms of organisational learning: accommodation, elaboration, and transformation. In the first paradigm, organisational learning is minimal. Work-life requests are treated as non-standard requests that do not need to lead to new organisational behaviour. In the elaboration paradigm, a few new routines emerge, but on the whole the organisation sticks to the old procedures. Finally, in the transformation paradigm the organisation adjusts to new ways of working and the accompanying work-life requests. In the latter paradigm, the organisation is willing and eager to learn '…new ways of defining and organising work or rethinking career paths and reward structures for a changing workforce' (Lee et al., 2000:1218). This form of learning occurs mainly in organisations that are accustomed to rapid changes in the global marketplace, and in organisations where the management considers it to be '…a normal part of trying to keep your best people…' (2000:1219).

Influence of contextual factors

Existing research shows that work-life policies and arrangements are frequently not embedded in organisational norms and practices. Researchers have pointed out that the implementation of such policies often conflicts with organisational norms and values regarding, for instance, working hours (i.e. a long-hours culture) (e.g. Fried, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Thompson et al., 1999). How does the lack of embeddedness of work-life policies and initiatives affect the discretionary scope of managers dealing with work-life policies, for example?

Organisational culture, management regime and communication
Case study research emphasises that managerial attitudes and practices are shaped by the organisational culture in which managers operate. A manager's response to a request is influenced not only by official policy, but also by the 'unwritten rules' of an employing organisation. Such 'unwritten rules' (the set of shared assumptions, opinions and values, also referred to as 'organisational culture') are a decisive factor in managers' attitudes (Lewis & Taylor, 1996; Perlow, 1995). Fried (1999) shows that in a company with a typical 'overtime' culture – one in which working long hours is regarded as a sign of productivity and commitment – managers

regard requests to take parental leave or the actual utilisation of such leave as contrary to the prevailing standards. In their view, taking parental leave is a sign of a 'negative' attitude, with all that that implies for the relevant employee's career.

The work-life culture of an organisation is the shared set of assumptions, opinions and values concerning the extent to which the organisation acknowledges and supports its employees work-life balance (Thompson et al., 1999). The literature distinguishes between various dimensions of work-life culture. Thompson et al. (1999) differentiate between the time investment that employees are expected to make (which may conflict with their duties at home), the career consequences of utilising work-life arrangements, and the support that managers offer with respect to the integration of paid work and family responsibilities. Allen (2001) differentiates between support by managers for the integration of working life and family life and support by the organisation as a whole, as perceived by the employees. Another dimension of organisational culture is the extent to which colleagues are supportive of employees who wish to combine working life and other responsibilities (Dikkers, Geurts, Den Dulk, Peper & Kompier, 2004; Dikkers, Geurts, Den Dulk, Peper, Taris & Kompier, 2007).

On the one hand, managers are influenced by the organisational culture in which they operate (Kossek & Friede, 2006); on the other hand, the way managers respond to requests by employees can change – or maintain – an organisational culture. Research has shown, however, that it is often very difficult to change an organisation, and even more difficult to change an organisation's culture (see, e.g., Haas, Hwang & Russell, 2000).

An organisation's work-life culture may range from very positive to very negative. The work-life culture is positive when the organisation considers the work-life balance important, when utilising work-life arrangements has few consequences for employees' careers, and when the standards set for working hours allow scope for family duties. However, the work-life culture of an organisation can also contain contradictory elements (Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005; Kirby, 2000; Lewis, 2003). An organisation may show concern for its employees' work-life balance, for example, but at the same time associate employee commitment with attendance and working long hours. In other words, the organisation may support employees in their efforts to achieve a good work-life balance – for example by introducing work-life arrangements – but simultaneously place time demands on the employees that conflict with the actual use of such measures.

A work-life culture with conflicting elements creates uncertainty among managers who take the final decision as to whether or not to grant employee requests. When a culture is unambiguously negative, the manager will reject many such requests; if it is unambiguously positive, the manager will view most of the requests to utilise work-life arrangements favourably. If the culture has conflicting elements, the manager will be given discretionary powers and other factors beyond organisational culture may shape his or her attitude and behaviour (Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005).

Kelly and Kalev (2006) also note the growing managerial discretionary scope with respect to the implementation and management of work-life policies. Their focus is on management regimes and their impact on policy implementation. A

management regime consists of '…the policies and practices for managing the workforce and also the ideas, beliefs and assumptions that make these policies and practices seem sensible' (2006:381). Kelly and Kalev identify two different management regimes: legalisation and restructuring of the workplace. The first regime is based on the increasing formalisation and quasi-legalisation of policies in American organisations. The second regime refers to the tendency to individualise negotiations about salary and additional benefits. Institutional theory suggests that even if a shift is occurring from a legalised to a restructuring regime – something that fits in with the contemporary neo-liberal focus on market-based industrial relations – the former regime will still have an influence. Empirical evidence from their study suggests that the influence of formal policies is declining. Managers are increasingly using their discretionary scope to 'award' work-life policies to employees who 'deserve' them, instead of granting requests to every eligible employee (see also Yeandle et al., 2003).

Societal and institutional context

Although there are only a few cross-national studies in this area of research, their results indicate that managerial attitudes and behaviour are also shaped by the national context in which managers operate (see for instance Guerreiro, Abrantes & Pereira, 2004). This is especially the case in European countries, where government is more closely involved than in the US. For example, in Europe there are statutory provisions that entitle employees to work-life policies (e.g. parental leave and reduction in working hours). Legislation may give rise to a social climate in which employers and managers are expected to show support (Den Dulk, 2001). Managers in such circumstances might be more positive toward employee requests than managers who operate in a context with few or no statutory provisions entitling employees to work-life arrangements. The role of the trade unions is important in this respect. Trade unions can put work-life policies on the agenda in organisations and can encourage organisations to implement policies included in collective agreements, something that is likely to reduce the variation in managers' responses.

Countries not only differ when it comes to the nature and degree of public provisions, but also vary with respect to the prevalence of gender ideology and cultural assumptions about work and family. Lyness and Kropf (2005) found support for their hypothesis that the degree of national gender equality impacts the degree of organisational work-family support. Gender role theory has been used to develop hypotheses on possible gender effects (e.g. Braham, Gottlieb and Kelloway, 2001; Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005, 2008; Powell & Maniero, 1999; Klein et al., 2000). Even though industrialised countries differ in the extent to which the traditional male breadwinner role is dominant, it is still customary in most countries for men to be the primary breadwinners and for women to bear the main responsibility for the family and the household. These 'gendered' expectations also influence managerial attitudes and decision-making on work-life policies. Social norms related to the gender division of labour increase the social costs and benefits accruing to managers when they grant employee requests, since doing so might earn the manager in question the approval or disapproval of his or her peers. The additional social cost of granting requests to male employees will mean a less positive attitude to such

requests, while the additional social benefits of granting requests to female employees will result in a more positive attitude. Consequently, researchers expect that managers will be more favourable toward requests by female than by male workers.

Allowance decision

Besides studies that concentrate on the macro or meso context, there are several studies that look at how managers grant requests by their subordinates. In this section we discuss theories and concepts used to explain managerial attitudes toward and decision-making about employee requests, i.e. the 'allowance decision' concerning work-life policies.

In their study on supervisor referrals to work-family programmes, Casper, Fox and Sitzman (2004) refer to Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action to explain the link between managers' attitudes and behaviour. They also use the expectancy theory and, more specifically, the concept of instrumentality, to explain when managers are motivated to refer employees to work-family policies. Based on this theory, Casper et al. expect that supervisor referral frequency will increase when managers believe that utilising work-family policies will lead to positive organisational outcomes (instrumentality).

Powell and Mainiero (1999) also assume that managers take the impact of utilisation on work outcomes into account when considering an employee request. They developed the disruptiveness hypothesis to explain managerial decision-making when it comes to alternative work arrangements for subordinates. According to this hypothesis, managers consider whether granting a request to utilise a work-life arrangement will disrupt the department's work. Work-life policies can make managers' jobs more complex and difficult because they then have to work around various schedules and arrange replacements when employees are on leave, while still making sure that the necessary work gets done. Managers are responsible for the performance of the department they manage, and are rewarded primarily for the results they achieve in their work units rather than for the concern they demonstrate for their employees' work-life balance. Given the additional demands work-life policies place on managers, they may be unwilling to grant requests unless they believe that doing so will cause little or no disruption to the conduct of work. This will in particular be the case in organisations where managers get few incentives or rewards for implementing work-life policies.

According to Powell and Mainiero (1999), several factors influence the degree to which a manager will view a subordinates' request to use work-life policies as disruptive, namely: a) the type of work-life policy requested and the reason offered by the subordinate for making the request and b) the nature of the tasks, skills and responsibilities of the subordinate making the request.

Another US study on the allowance decision examines dependency theory (Klein, Berman and Dickson, 2000). The central assumption of dependency theory is that supervisors depend – to varying extents – on their subordinates. Managers are responsible for the results and performance of the department they manage. Their

subordinates contribute – in varying degrees – to this performance. This makes managers dependent on their employees, and the greater the employee's contribution, the more dependent the manager is. This may give such employees more power, not only in salary negations but also regarding the use of work-life policies.

Den Dulk and De Ruijter (2008) argue that both disruptiveness and dependency considerations play a role and can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Managers face a dilemma when deciding whether to grant employee requests concerning work-life policies. Granting such a request involves costs, as it may disrupt the conduct of work to varying degrees. On the other hand, not granting a request also involves costs, since it could lower the productivity of employees who are struggling to balance their work and family lives, and eventually lead to a loss of valuable human capital. In addition, it can be argued that considerations or decision-making criteria are shaped by group and organisational rules as well as the individual characteristics of managers (Poelmans & Beham, 2005).

Based on social identity theory, Hopkins (2005) argues that managers' attitudes and behaviour toward their employees' work-life issues may also be affected by managers' own work-life experiences. 'For example, a supervisor who has experienced child-care problems and received support and assistance from a manager and the human resources department may be more likely to support workers in similar circumstances and refer them to human resources' (2005:453).

Main methods

A review of empirical studies in the field makes clear that research has been limited thus far, and that the studies are all very recent. Research in Anglo-Saxon countries dominates: most of the studies present data collected in the US, the UK or Canada (see also the appendix). The research consists of a mix of qualitative research based on open interviews with managers and quantitative research using survey design or vignette studies to examine managerial attitudes and behaviour. Summarising, existing research can be divided into three clusters of research methods:

- Case studies focusing on the influence of contextual factors;
- Vignette studies focusing on the manager's allowance decision regarding employee requests, based on hypothetical situations;
- Survey research, often focusing on the use of work-life policies by managers themselves.

Whatever method is chosen, the data are collected predominantly in large organisations, i.e. from financial sector organisations and government agencies. Different types of policies are examined, although flexible work arrangements are the most common object of study.

Review of the empirical studies on managing work-life policies

In this section we discuss the outcomes of recent empirical studies of how managers (mainly middle managers) deal with work-life policies; see also Table 1 in the appendix for an overview.

Influence of context

First of all, the managers display a considerable lack of awareness of work-life policies, their implications, the way employees can use them, and their obligation to grant certain work-life policy requests (Wise & Bond, 2003; Bond & Wise, 2003; Yeandle, et al., 2003). Furthermore, managers are often stuck between their organisation's policy on achieving certain output targets and their own desire to be reasonable and good managers for their employees (Peper, Den Dulk & Van Doorne-Huiskes, 2009). Once again, this point indicates that work-life policies are relatively new and that – according to institutional theory – it will take more time and effort before these policies are considered standard employment benefits. When work-family policies are not yet institutionalised and taken for granted, the discretionary power of managers increases and managers are likely to vary in their responses and behaviour, based on different factors and social processes (personal experiences and ideology, the bargaining power of employees, and whether work-family policies are viewed as disruptive to the conduct of work).

Den Dulk and De Ruijter (2008) found only few country and organisational differences in their study of Dutch and British financial sector managers. They observed that managers in the UK generally are somewhat more positive toward requests to take up short-term care leave than managers in the Netherlands, and that managers in consultancy firms are generally more negative toward requests to take up parental leave than managers working in banking and insurance. However, the organisational and national contexts examined in this study are fairly similar. A qualitative cross-national research project examining the transition to parenthood in different national and organisational contexts (TRANSITIONS) presents organisational case studies in the financial sector and social services in seven different countries (Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, UK, Bulgaria and Slovenia). This study found that managers' responses are highly conditioned by national and organisational contexts. Although the state is responsible for defining basic formal labour conditions and the introduction of public work-life policies in each of these countries, the degree of freedom or discretionary power of managers to interpret and implement the legislation varies from one country to the next. For instance, 'in Nordic countries (Norway and Sweden) the welfare state is traditionally very strong, having a greater responsibility and an important role in organisations and working life, and provides concrete measures which are tightly implemented' (Guerreiro et al., 2004:23). In contrast, in the Netherlands, the UK and Portugal public legislation leaves organisations and managers more discretionary power. In the Netherlands, for instance, legal arrangements tend to include a clause that states that permission to use the arrangements must be granted *unless* they conflict with serious business interests. This gives managers the discretionary power to discourage or even reject such

arrangements. Eastern Europe has a tradition of state responsibility for the integration of work and family life, and workplaces have not been framed as important actors in this respect. The reconciliation between work and family life is seen as a personal affair demanding state intervention, and not as an organisational problem. The Slovenian and Bulgarian managers in the TRANSITIONS study only allow the minimum degree of flexibility required by state legislation. Sometimes managers would like to be more supportive of their employees, but they believe that this would be at the expense of their organisation. Dutch, Norwegian and British managers expressed the view that taking the work-life balance of employees into account also has long-term benefits for their companies (Guerreiro et al., 2004).

Lyness and Kropf (2005) investigated the relationship between national gender equality and organisational work-family support and how this in turn is related to the work-life balance of managers. By national gender equality, they refer to 'the extent to which national cultures support women's development and achievements, and recognize the importance of including women in all aspects of life' (2005:34). In their study they used the United Nations' Gender Development Index scores as an indicator for gender equality. Their findings show a positive relationship between national gender equality and perceived organisational work/family support by managers.

The research is inconclusive as to whether managers respond differently to requests by male or female employees (Lewis, 2003). Some studies did indeed find significant differences in how managers evaluate male and female employee requests (Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005; Klein et al., 2000; Barham, et al., 2001), but other studies have refuted these findings (Powell & Mainiero, 1999; Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2008).

Allowance decisions

There are few empirical studies on the allowance decision. So far, there are no studies that have tested the influence of both disruptiveness and dependency considerations, Den Dulk and De Ruijter (2008) being an exception. They argue that these considerations or arguments should not be seen as contradictory but rather as complementary. In understanding managerial attitudes, it is important to consider the dilemma managers face when deciding whether or not to grant employees' requests to utilise work-life policies: should they give priority to short-term departmental and organisational goals, i.e. ensure that the necessary work gets done and prevent disruption to the conduct of work, or should they give priority to long-term goals, i.e. retain valuable employees by responding to their personal and family needs? This dilemma is particularly striking when the two sets of goals are perceived as conflicting. Managers cope with the dual agenda of caring for employee needs and pursuing organisational goals by utilising different strategies, for instance by being supportive during crises but very demanding in day-to-day working life (Guerreiro et al., 2004).

Den Dulk and De Ruijter (2008) tested the two theories in a vignette study among a sample of 46 Dutch and British financial sector managers working in four different firms. Instead of focusing on whether or not managers grant a request, this

study examined the attitudes of managers toward requests by hypothetical employees. Evidence from this study generally supported the disruptiveness theory. The findings indicated that the person making the request (female versus male, supervisory position or not) and the nature of the request itself do matter. Requests by women are judged more positively than requests by men, in particular when they concern taking up leave, indicating that care duties are seen mainly as a woman's responsibility. Requests made by supervisors are judged more negatively than requests by employees who do not supervise others. The study considered the characteristics of the department concerned in addition to the type of request and the identity of the person making the request.

First of all, Den Dulk and De Ruijter tested the assumption that granting work-life policies is less likely to disrupt the conduct of work in large departments than in small ones. The larger the department, the easier it is to divide the work among employees. As a result, it may be easier for managers to replace employees who would like to take up leave or want to reduce their hours. Secondly, they tested whether the type of work done in the department matters. It is relatively easier for managers to cope with the consequences of using work-life policies in departments that perform fairly skilled, professional work. Much of this work is project-based, and lends itself to short breaks, part-time work or working at home occasionally for a day. Furthermore, highly educated 'professionals' often bear more responsibility for their own work, which takes some of the pressure off the manager. These professionals are also often judged on 'output' rather than the number of hours they work. Based on disruptiveness theory, we may assume that managers will be more positive toward requests to use work-life policies if they manage a large or 'professional' department with a highly educated workforce. The findings indicated that the type of work done in the department influences managers' attitudes, but no significant effect was found regarding department size.

The study found considerable support for the disruptiveness theory. Regarding less disruptive requests, for example short-term leave, the study found that dependency arguments were also important. When the labour market is tight and it is difficult to find new employees, managers were (even) more positive about short-term care leave. The conclusion is that managers consider both the degree of disruptiveness and employee needs, as well as the risk of losing valuable personnel.

However, research has not produced the same results with respect to requests to work from home occasionally, another arrangement that can be considered as relatively non-disruptive. This finding might be explained by the fact that working from home gives rise to new coordination and control problems (e.g. Peters & Den Dulk, 2003), which managers may perceive as making their tasks more complex and difficult. We also have to consider the possibility that managers may combine a negative attitude with positive decision-making. Even though a manager might be negative about requests by employees on whom he/she depends most, as granting the request will complicate the work in the short term, the risk of the employee leaving the department might lead him or her to grant the request anyway. This is an issue that should be taken into account in future research.

Social identity

Parker and Allen (2002) found that managers with greater parental responsibility are more flexible toward scheduling changes when family needs arise than managers with fewer parental responsibilities. In addition, female managers were perceived by their employees as more sensitive to work-life issues than male managers, although this perception was not supported by managers' own reports (nor is this perception found in Yeandle et al., 2003). Besides gender and parental responsibilities, the type of management position can influence managers' attitudes and decision-making. An important distinction can be made between line and project managers. A project manager is responsible for finishing the project on time, while a line manager is also focused on continuity and so more likely to take long-term considerations into account, such as the retention of valuable personnel. Additionally, research by Miller et al. (1991) shows that top executives and middle managers have different perceptions of the effect of care-giving on job performance and whether the firm should offer assistance; on average, middle managers are more positive than top executives about both issues.

A managerial dilemma, mixed messages and communication

TRANSITIONS, the qualitative study on work/family practices in organisations in different European countries, indicates that managers see themselves as confronted by a major dilemma: whether to make employees' personal and family needs a priority, or to emphasise organisational goals. This dilemma is particularly striking when the organisational goals are perceived as conflicting with employee needs (Guerreiro et al., 2004). One way of coping with this dilemma is to be positive about employees utilising work-life policies but to devolve responsibility for the practical implications to the employees, for instance by allowing employees to reduce their working hours without adjusting their workload. Another strategy is to be supportive in a crisis but very demanding in day-to-day working life (Guerreiro et al., 2004).

Bond and Wise (2003) point out that managers are often unaware of work-life policies and lack the necessary training (see also Yeandle et al., 2003; and Thompson et al., 2005). Poor awareness and a lack of training both endanger the effective implementation of family leave policies. In practice, this often leads to inconsistency when it comes to allowing employees to utilise work-life arrangements. Kirby (2000) shows that managers have a difficult time granting work-life policy requests owing to time constraints and team needs. In their struggle to cope with such difficulties, they send mixed messages regarding the utilisation of policies: they inform their workers about the available work-life policies but at the same time hold up employees who work long hours and are always present as role models. Mixed messages are communicated both verbally and in written form, by citing role models, and by pointing out 'counteractive' programmes. As a result, managerial responses differ and implementation is inconsistent. When organisations send out mixed messages, this has a negative impact on the employees' 'sense of entitlement' to work-life arrangements (cf. Lewis & Smithson, 2001). On the other hand, training line and other managers in work-life issues, targeting communication of the available work-life policies, and promoting workforce diversity on all levels can help put policy

into effect (Wise & Bond, 2003). Awareness of the positive effect of using work-life policies on organisational goals will make managers more likely to allow them (cf. Casper et al., 2004).

Utilisation by managers

Managers not only decide about their subordinates' leave requests; they too are employees in need of and/or entitled to use work-life arrangements. Managers are role models, and their own use of flexible schedules sets an example as a change agent. Kossek et al. (1999) explain managerial use of flexible schedules by citing three factors: personal characteristics, the influence of work group peers, and concerns about productivity. Their research pointed out that female managers, and managers whose work group peers already use the flexible schedules, are more likely themselves to use the flexible schedules. The use of flextime caused the managers the most concern in terms of productivity levels. The most important finding, however, was the influence of the work group peers, e.g. the social factor. A study by Drew and Murtagh (2005) also indicates the importance of peer groups. They found that senior managers have trouble combining their private lives with a long-hours culture, but that they fear career consequences if they 'break rank' and use work-life arrangements. This study emphasises the importance – or the lack – of role models for managers wanting to use work-life arrangements.

Discussion and future research

In this concluding section we summarise our review of research into managers' attitudes and behaviour toward work-life policies. What gaps can be detected in the research literature, and what kind of research will be necessary to fill in these gaps? Line managers are increasingly the 'gatekeepers' of work-life policies and the key to policy and programme effectiveness. Examining the relative importance of different factors influencing managerial attitudes and behaviour toward work-life policies helps us identify the level or decision-making context in our efforts to improve the effectiveness of work-life policies. Do we need to focus on national legislation or on clear guidelines within organisations? Should we target top executives or should our main focus be on line managers and how to facilitate them in their daily work practices? Or should changes in organisational culture be our main concern? Our review clearly shows that more research is needed to fully understand managerial attitudes and behaviour in different organisational and national contexts. Although a few interesting studies do exist, the research is still in its infancy. More research is needed, in particular systematic studies with well-developed theoretical frameworks.

Managerial attitudes and the allowance decision

Despite the lack of research, the present study makes clear that managerial attitudes are very important in understanding why many employees are not taking advantage of the wide range of work-life policies on offer nowadays. Managerial attitudes are not only important in understanding managerial decision-making with respect to requests to utilise work-life policies, but are also crucial in understanding

the requesting behaviour of employees. The evidence found in several studies suggests that managers generally take a short-term view of work-life policies rather than a long-term view that cherishes human capital. They do not, as yet, consider that employees' work-life balance contributes to organisational goals (see also the 'Dual Agenda' concept, Rapoport et al., 2002). If, however, organisations wish to retain valuable human capital, future policies should offer managers additional incentives or rewards for implementing work-life policies, for example by introducing facilities to manage the disruption in work. Moreover, several studies note that managers are generally unaware of existing policies and lack training in the tools that would allow them to successfully implement policies. Not surprisingly, many studies find inconsistencies in policy implementation and variations in management attitudes and behaviour toward work-life policies.

Research until now has focused mainly on either managerial attitudes or on actual decision-making. However, a manager may combine a negative attitude with positive decision-making and vice versa. Future research may reach more refined conclusions about the relative importance of various factors, such as disruptiveness and dependency considerations or , social responsibility. For example, it may be that the manager's dependency on an employee does not affect his or her attitude toward the employee's request directly, but instead influences the chance of the request actually being granted. Even though managers might not look favourably on requests by employees on whom they depend most, as granting such requests will complicate the work in the short term, they may grant the request anyway to avoid the risk of losing the employee altogether. This issue should be examined in future research. In addition, future research on the allowance decision should include more information on department-level characteristics. For example, the extent to which a department performs specialised work may be important, since it may be very difficult to divide the workload among the employees in highly specialised departments. Managerial decision-making may also depend on the department's gender composition.

Dominance of Anglo-Saxon research

Overall, we may conclude that the field is dominated by research developed and conducted by Anglo-Saxon researchers. In fact, almost all research has been carried out in the US, the UK or Canada. These are countries with liberal welfare state regimes in which the business case is often the dominant management rationale, allowing for considerable managerial discretion. We must seriously question, however, whether the findings of most Anglo-Saxon studies can be generalised to Europe, with its different welfare state regimes and national cultures (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1999). The few cross-national studies that do exist show how different policy contexts and different work and family values, practices and habits shape managers' discretionary scope, behaviour and attitudes. Future research should investigate whether the above theories, concepts and findings are transferable to other countries. The same goes for the attitude and behaviour of managers toward their subordinates (cf. Hofstede, 2001). Another aspect, which is not mentioned frequently in Anglo-Saxon research, is the role of workplace-based works councils, which can have a profound effect on the way work-life issues are dealt with in the organisation. Taking a broader view, we must not forget the influence of

corporatistic institutions such as collective wage agreements, where employers, trade unions and government discuss and negotiate terms of employment and fringe benefits. In the non-Anglo-Saxon world, the government is more closely involved in shaping industrial relations.

Types of organisation and type of employee/manager

Almost all the studies reviewed were carried out in medium-sized to large companies, mainly in the financial sector. The outcomes of these studies therefore relate only to a minority of the population employed in work-intensive post-industrial settings: the stereotypical 'knowledge' worker. The attitudes and behaviour of the average manager working in a more traditional Fordist organisation are not taken into account. Daily practice in small businesses is another area that requires elaboration.

In addition, it would be interesting to find out how the opinions and attitudes of top executives influence the attitudes and decision-making of middle line management. In order to do so, we propose a research design that encompasses interviews with both top executives (managing directors, board members), i.e. the main decision-makers, and their middle line managers.

Dominance of organisational case studies and lack of large-scale and longitudinal research

Although the methods vary (interview, vignette study, survey), most of the research has been restricted to one or a few organisational contexts. A large-scale research design that involved managers from different types of organisation (large and small, in different sectors) would allow us to study how organisational context factors impact the way managers manage and implement work-life policies. In addition, it would allow us to examine how various manager characteristics (gender, whether he or she has children, etc.) influence managers' attitudes toward the use of work-life policies. It would be interesting to elaborate on this in future studies. For example, are female managers generally more positive toward requests to utilise work-life policies than male managers? Do managers' personal experience of utilising these policies increase the likelihood of their granting requests? And do social or other similarities between the manager and the employee influence managerial attitudes toward requests to utilise work-life policies? Are managers generally more positive toward requests by employees who resemble them in important ways, for example gender and age?

What is also needed in Europe, however, are in-depth ethnographic studies, in particular in order to explore processes over time and how different factors are intertwined. To our knowledge, there have been no longitudinal studies that track managers over time. Consequently, our knowledge of causal relationships is very limited. The lack of longitudinal studies is regrettable, given the ongoing processes of organisational change that typify contemporary organisations and firms.

Appendix

Author(s), year of publication	Topic	Theory/ key theoretical concepts	Method	Main findings
J.J. Miller, B.A. Stead & A. Pereira (1991)	Perception of top managers and middle and supervisory managers of the effects of dependent care responsibilities on job performance and the firm's responsibility to offer supportive policies	-	Survey among 45 top managers and 56 middle managers in the US	Top management and middle managers have different perceptions of the effect of care giving on job performance and whether the firm should offer assistance, that is, middle managers are on average more positive regarding both issues.
Perlow, L.A. (1998)	Managing working hours, i.e. managers control over employee temporal boundary between work and private life	Greedy organisation, organisational culture	Qualitative US case study	Managers use three types of techniques to exert boundary control: imposing demands, monitoring employees and modelling behaviour.
Powell & Maniero (1999)	Allowance decision about alternative work arrangements	Disruptiveness theory	Vignette study among 53 current or past managers enrolled in an MBA programme in the US	Several factors influence the degree to which a manager will view a subordinates' request to use work-life policies as disrupting, namely: a) the type of work-life policy requested and the reason offered by the subordinate for making the request and b) the nature of the tasks, skills and responsibilities of the subordinate who is making the request.
Kirby, E.L.	How supervisors	Communication-	Qualitative US	Managers experience difficulties in allowing

Author(s), year of publication	Topic	Theory/ key theoretical concepts	Method	Main findings
(2000)	communicate about work-family programmes	centred research perspective; organisational discourse on work and family; memorable messages; Group Decision Support Systems	organisational case study (government body), individual and focus group interviews	utilisation because of time constraints and team needs, resulting in mixed messages regarding the utilisation of policies. Mixed messages were communicated verbally and in written form, through role models and by means of 'counteractive' programmes. As a result managerial responses differed and implementation was inconsistent.
M.D. Lee, S.M. MacDermid & M.L. Buck (2000)	Organisational responses to reduced hours among professionals and managers	Organisational learning	350 interviews with managers and professionals using reduced work and other stakeholders (incl. managers) in 45 Canadian firms	3 different ways organisations implement and interpret reduced work: accommodation, elaboration and transformation.
Barham, L.J., B.H. Gottlieb & E.K. Kelloway (2001)	Allowance decision of managers about alternative work arrangements	Role of employees' personal characteristics (managerial position or not, gender, type of care responsibilities)	Vignette study among 184 managers of a Canadian financial service company	Significant effects were found regarding type of request, gender of employee and manager, type of dependent care and whether or not an employee has managerial responsibilities..
Felstead, A., N.	Managing telecommuting,		In-depth interviews	Managers develop new methods of control, i.e.

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Author(s), year of publication	Topic	Theory/ key theoretical concepts	Method	Main findings
Jewson & S. Walters (2003)	implication of working from home for managerial control		with 202 managers and employees in 13 UK case studies	monitoring, target setting and home visits. But techniques are of limited effectiveness; output management and autonomy are more successful methods.
Bond, S. & S. Wise (2003)	Implementation of statutory and company family leave policies by line managers	Devolution of HR policies to the line and managerial discretion built into policies	Interviews with managers in 4 UK financial sector companies	Managers' poor awareness of policies and lack of training endanger effective implementation of family leave policies; in particular, inconsistency of operation is a concern.
Wise, S. & S. Bond (2003)	Implementation and outcomes of work/life policies within organisations	Organisational culture and sense of entitlement	4 UK financial service case studies (survey, n=533 and interviews, n=57)	Managers' lack of awareness of policies and lack of resources to implement policies.
Yeandle, S., Phillips, J., Schiebl, F., Wigfield, A. & S. Wise (2003)	Factors explaining managers' knowledge, awareness, attitudes and behaviours in implementing flexible and work-family policies	Impact of personal characteristics and organisational and policy context	20 UK organisational settings, 91 interviews with line managers	Lack of awareness and training in how to implement family-friendly policies. Differences in attitudes toward employees with family responsibilities and approach to implementing policies. The organisational setting in which line managers operate impacts their approach.
Casper, W.J., K.E. Fox & T.M. Sitzmann (2004)	Factors influencing supervisor referrals to work-family programmes	The theory of reasoned action and expectancy theory	Survey among 1972 managers in a large US government agency	Awareness and the perception that work-family programmes will result in a positive organisational impact (instrumentality) on the frequency of referrals.
Guerreiro, Abrantes &	Examining support for the transition to parenthood in	Managerial dilemma, the dual	Organisational case studies (financial	Variation in managers' responses, which are highly conditioned by national and organisational

Den Dulk, Peper: Managing work-life policies in the European workplace

Author(s), year of publication	Topic	Theory/ key theoretical concepts	Method	Main findings
Pereira (2004)	different national and organisational contexts (TRANSITIONS)	agenda	sector, oil, social services) in 7 different countries (Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, UK, Bulgaria and Slovenia), including manager interviews, focus groups and biographical interviews with working parents	contexts; discretionary power of managers varies.
Thomson, P., D. Birchall, N. Silburn, S. Borett & J. Gill (2005)	Managing flexible working		11 HR managers, 35 team managers, 109 surveys UK	Output management becomes more important, communication becomes more important and little training for managing flexible workers.
Klein, K.J., L.M. Berman & M.W. Dickson (2000)	Allowance decision about part-time work	Dependency theory	Vignette study among 200 US attorneys	Results confirm dependency theory: attorneys were more likely to approve request to work part-time from high performing, difficult to replace and/or well-connected employees.
Den Dulk, L. & J. de Ruijter	Organisational culture and managerial attitudes toward	Organisational culture,	Vignette study among managers combined	Managers operating in a positive organisational culture are more positive about requests than

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Author(s), year of publication	Topic	Theory/ key theoretical concepts	Method	Main findings
(2005)	the use of work/life policies	disruptiveness and dependency arguments	with survey data collected in 3 Dutch financial sector organisations	managers working in an organisation with a less positive culture. Managers are more favourable toward requests by female employees than by male employees. In a contradictory organisational culture, disruptiveness arguments matter.
Kelly, E.L. & A. Kalev (2006)	How the principles of management regimes guide the conceptualisation and management of flexible work arrangements (FWA)	Institutional theory, legalisation and restructuring management regime	45 Interviews with HR managers in 41 US organisations (incl. manufacturing and service companies, non-profit social services and government agencies)	Most organisations manage FWA with formalised discretion, i.e. written policies are developed but policies grant managers' discretion to allow or deny employee requests for utilisation.
Den Dulk, L. & J. de Ruijter (2008)	Attitudes of Dutch and British financial sector managers toward utilisation of work/life policies	Disruptiveness and dependency arguments	Vignette study among 46 managers in 2 Dutch and 2 British financial sector companies	The findings generally support the disruptiveness theory: the less 'disruptive' a request is, the more positive the managers' attitude, no matter what the context is.

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