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## Cognitions And Work-Family Interactions: New Research Directions In Conflict And Facilitation

Maria Nicoleta Turliuc<sup>a \*</sup>, Daniela Buliga<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University "A.I.Cuza" Iași, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Toma Cozma nr. 3, 700554, Iași, Romania

<sup>b</sup> University "A.I.Cuza" Iași, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Toma Cozma nr. 3, 700554, Iași, Romania

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### Abstract

The article aims at enhancing the value of the cognitive psychology's and the cognitive-behavioural paradigm's assumptions in work-family interface studies, reviewing the research directions regarding the role of the cognitive variables and underlining new possible approaches that can lead to a better understanding of the necessary strategies in the multiple roles management. These new approaches focus on the role of individual factors, namely cognitive variables, such as cognitions or cognitive appraisals. The ABC cognitive model or the appraisal theory could serve as theoretical frameworks in studying the mechanisms through which different work, family and individual factors influence individuals' experiences as family members and employees and their well-being. Theoretical and practical implications of studying these variables are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Work-family relations represent a dynamic area of research, reaching a significant development in the last decades (Rothbard & Dumas, 2006), with many empirical studies analysing this theme from different perspectives, such as organizational psychology, family psychology, and occupational health psychology. The complex and multi-dimensional relationships between work and family domains require an interdisciplinary approach (Heraty, Morley, & Cleveland, 2008) and the increasing importance attributed to this area of research comes from the need to achieve a balance between the work and family demands as important social changes have emerged during the last decades:

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\*Corresponding Author: Maria Nicoleta Turliuc. Tel.: +4-072-307-2870  
E-mail address: [turliuc@uaic.ro](mailto:turliuc@uaic.ro)

the increasing number of dual-earner and dual-career couples, changes in the traditional gender roles and employees' values, with a higher emphasis on reaching work-family balance. Taking into account the results of the studies, we focus on outlining the importance of applying the assumptions of the cognitive-behavioural paradigm in the future study of the work-family interface.

## **2. Research directions in work-family interface: the role of cognitive appraisals**

Work-family conflict is the central concept in work-family studies and several theoretical models have been proposed. Most of these models encompass three essential components: (1) work/family predictors/antecedents; (2) consequences/effects in the work and family domains; (3) work-family conflict as a mediating variable (Michel, Mitchelson, Kotrba, LeBreton, & Baltas, 2009). Research in work-family interface included a variety of variables, neglecting somehow individuals' cognitive reactions (Poposki, 2011). There are two cognitive variables that have been studied with a higher frequency in work-family interface research: coping strategies and self-efficacy. As for cognitions, their role seems to be overlooked. However, organizational researchers attach an increasing attention to the role of cognitions at individual and organizational level (Hayes & Allinson, 1998). Although studies analysing the effects of work-family conflict emphasized its negative aspects, like low levels of job satisfaction (e.g. Dorio, Bryant, & Allen, 2008), general psychological strain (e.g. Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) or high levels of stress (e.g. Kelloway, Gottlieb, & Barham, 1999), according to the transactional model of stress, a situation does not determine stress by itself, but through the agency of personal perceptions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, two persons with similar demographic characteristics, who experience comparable levels of work-family conflict, can be differently affected, depending on the cognitive style or the way of perceiving, processing and organizing information (Hayes & Allinson, 1998).

A first study which pointed out the role of the cognitive variables in work-family interactions belongs to Janasz and Behson (2007) and is based on the premise that people differ in how they process and perform the work and family roles and that some cognitive characteristics can improve the effects of work-family conflict. The authors examined the tolerance for uncertainty and the cognitive complexity as mediators in the relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction/organizational commitment, suggesting that some people have certain abilities that are necessary in processing and managing work-family conflict. Thus, their level of satisfaction and engagement in conflict situations is higher, compared to those with low cognitive capacity.

Also, Moen, Kelly, and Huang (2008) found different components of people's cognitive appraisals of fit between demands and resources in work-family interactions and argued that cognitive appraisals of fit include evaluations of work-family relations, causal attributions regarding the direction of the influence (work-family and family-work) and anticipations of future conditions. The authors rely on the idea that changes in objective demands/resources in work and family life lead to modifications of the cognitive evaluations of fit and these evaluations are mediating factors between objective work-family conditions and individuals' health, well-being and adaptive strategies (Moen et al., 2008).

A new perspective in work-family interface research is brought by an experimental study of Steenbergen et al. (2008), who analysed people's cognitive appraisals related to the integration of work and family roles. The authors manipulated the content of the message participants received, consisting of the limited resources perspective or the expansion perspective regarding the integration of the two roles. The results show that information associated with the limited resources perspective activated a threat appraisal, while the expansion perspective information activated a challenge appraisal. Steenbergen et al. (2008) point out the noteworthy role of the cognitive processes in work-family interactions, as well as the possibility to influence these appraisals. Another recent study by Poposki (2011), which addresses cognitive processes in work-family interactions, analysed attributions related to work-family conflict. Results show that external attributions are more frequent than internal attributions and that the professional role is perceived to a greater extent as being responsible for the conflict compared to the family role.

## **3. Cognitive psychology, cognitive-behaviour paradigm and work-family interface**

The cognitive theory underlines the role of cognitions within the relationship between emotions and behaviours (Alford & Beck, 2011). *Cognition* is a core concept within the cognitive-behavioural paradigm, representing processes of identification and prediction of the complex relationships between events and emotional, behavioural and cognitive consequences (Szentagotai & Jones, 2010). The relationships between cognitions (rational and irrational) and adaptive reactions to stress and well-being has been addressed in several studies (Caserta, Dowd,

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