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Resolving couples' work–family conflicts: The complexity of decision making and the introduction of a new framework

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to develop a theoretical framework in order to illuminate the cues involved in real life work–family conflict resolution within dual-earner couples. We draw on episodic and longitudinal data from qualitative diaries kept for a one-month period by both members of 24 dual-earner couples (48 participants) with child dependants, as well as from introductory and subsequent in-depth qualitative interviews with the couples, both together and apart. Two distinct types of work–family decision making: a) anchoring decisions and b) daily decisions were revealed, each of which were differentially impacted by enabling and constraining cues, considerations of fairness and equity, and beliefs, values and preferences. The findings suggest that the decision-making process engaged in by couples in incidents of work–family conflict does not progress in a logical sequence, but instead involves numerous complex negotiations and interactions. A decision-making framework encapsulating these findings is reported, highlighting the cues considered when making both types of work–family conflict decisions, and the relationships between them.

Keywords

conflict, decision making, diaries, dual-earner, longitudinal, qualitative, work and family

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Introduction

Work intensification and the long-hours culture in the UK have led to employees, in particular managers and professionals, working some of the longest hours in Europe (Department of Trade and Industry, 2003). Dual-earner couples are now replacing the traditional male-breadwinner family model, making up around 60 per cent of all households with dependent children (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). Consequently, an increasing number of dual-earner couples raising families now face the pressure of balancing multiple roles. Indeed, the majority of employees experience a conflict between work demands and personal or family responsibilities (e.g. Butler et al., 2005). The potential detrimental effects of such role pressure have been well-documented (e.g. Allen et al., 2000; Holmes et al., 2012; Van Steenbergen and Ellemers, 2009) and interest in the dynamics of the work–family interface is both enduring and increasing (Greenhaus, 2008). Research has found that adopting a variety of diverse roles in daily life – such as partner, parent and worker – leads individuals into complex situations in which they must prioritize issues, make decisions and apply coping strategies (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2011). This article describes a qualitative diary study that takes an episodic approach to the exploration of work–family conflict and aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how incidents of work–family conflict unfold. As Medved (2004: 128) suggests: 'It is through these everyday actions and interactions that we get a glimpse of the practices that constitute work and family balance, or alternatively conflict'. On this basis, a framework has been developed that captures the everyday interactions that comprise how decisions are made when work–family conflicts are encountered. We contribute to this literature by explicating this decision-making process and providing a more nuanced understanding of how such conflict is managed within couples.

The work–family interface

Work–family conflict has been described as a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are, in some respect, incompatible (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Much research on work–family conflict has focused on establishing its antecedents and consequences (e.g. Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1997), which are treated as objective characteristics of the individual, their family, or their work (Zedeck, 1992). Greenhaus (2008) noted that a number of recent reviews of the field have drawn attention to some of the limitations in our knowledge and understanding of the work–family interface (e.g. Casper et al., 2007; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). Such limitations are of both a theoretical and methodological nature, including the relative lack of attention paid to the impact of contextual influences (Greenhaus, 2008). As noted by Eby and colleagues (2005) in their review of the work–family literature, research has tended to focus on the centrality of the work role in peoples' lives, rather than the family role. This over emphasis on the work domain results in a limited perspective on the totality of work–family experiences. Although in some work–family research attention has been given to control at work (e.g. Clark, 2002; Thomas and Ganster, 1995), none has been given specifically to control at home. The majority of research on the family domain has examined variables that contribute to the

difficulties of managing work and family roles; generally focusing on demographic cues (e.g. number of children, family responsibilities), role stressors and workplace policies as the key predictors (Byron, 2005). There is also a growing literature on work–family facilitation, which considers how participation in the work role is made easier by virtue of the family role or vice versa (Van Steenbergen et al., 2007). This perspective, assuming that resources can expand rather than being finite, argues that engaging in greater role commitment can actually provide a greater overall benefit.

Other research has explored different types of coping strategies used by individuals experiencing work–family conflict (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2009; Wiersma, 1994). The concept of family adaptive strategies was discussed by Moen and Wethington (1992: 234) who define these strategies as, 'the actions families devise for coping with, if not overcoming, the challenges of living and for achieving their goals in the face of structural barriers'. The three strategies they suggested were making changes in work or family roles, obtaining support from a partner and utilizing family-orientated programmes provided by an employer. Researchers have since made attempts to list more specific types of coping strategies used specifically by individuals experiencing work–family conflict (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2009; Wiersma, 1994). Furthermore, Maertz and Boyar (2011) reviewed frameworks of strategies used to manage work and family responsibilities and concluded that all frameworks leave out at least one construct expressed in another model, and that some constructs overlap within and across frameworks with many representing different levels of specificity.

Such research has highlighted the different strategies that people use to resolve work–family conflict, but does not explain how or why these coping strategies were selected: another important piece of the story. As Moen and Wethington (1992) suggested more than two decades ago, families make purposeful decisions by choosing patterns of behaviour that enable them to manage their various life demands. However, little attention has been paid to trying to understand the specific dynamics involved within the family when faced with a work–family conflict. One of the reasons for this is the focus of much of the research upon a 'levels' approach where conflict is conceptualized and measured as a consolidated level. Here the 'level of work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW) carried around in memory' at the time of measurement is captured (Maertz and Boyar, 2011: 70). This focus upon levels prevents any of the specific details of work–family conflict events from being uncovered or explored. For instance, inter-role incompatibilities beginning at a specific time and place, different patterns of work–family conflicts over time, or the effects of attempts to cope with or resolve these work–family conflicts are concealed.

An alternative approach focuses upon events and episodes. Much of the extant episodic research concerns the relationships between conflict, mood and other outcomes, using daily diaries or surveys exploring how mood can spill over across domains (Poppleton et al., 2008). Other research deals with interpersonal crossover effects, which refers to the impact that one person's mood has on those closest to them (e.g. Bakker et al., 2009). Medved (2004) used interviews to focus upon women negotiating work and family life using daily accounts of their work and family routines. Three distinct categories of practical actions employed were identified: routinizing strategies for managing daily routines; improvising strategies for managing interruptions to these routines; and

restructuring practical actions. Although Medved (2004) touched upon the reasoning behind participants' decisions to use particular strategies, a detailed exploration of the reasoning behind the use of these strategies was not provided. As she suggested, although the interview data used provided 'valuable recollections and sensemaking of past and current work and family routines . . . it does not illicit descriptive data' (Medved, 2004: 143) of strategy use over time, for which other methods are required.

Greenhaus and Powell (2003; Powell and Greenhaus, 2006) are the only researchers within the field so far to have taken an episodic approach in order to focus directly on the decision-making processes in incidents of work–family conflict. Based on two studies, they concluded that people base their decisions on three cues: internal cues, which describe an individual's priorities regarding work and family explained by role salience (Lobel and St Clair, 1992); role sender cues describing the priorities of the other individuals involved in the situation, who may exert varying amounts of pressure or support regarding participation in the other role; and finally, role activity cues, which describe characteristics of the activity, such as whether each activity could be rescheduled. Their initial study employed a vignette method with part-time MBA students. In the subsequent study, they used the critical incident technique, where respondents were asked to recall the last time they had to make a decision between work and family. These studies yielded important findings demonstrating the impact these cues have on individual's decision-making processes when faced with a work–family conflict. However, the vignette method, as acknowledged by the authors, does not necessarily indicate what individuals would do in a real life situation (Greenberg and Eskew, 1993). The critical incident technique, while allowing the exploration of real-life events, is retrospective and, so, it is possible that participants may not have recalled the incidents or cues affecting their decision making accurately (Schwarz, 1999). It is also difficult to know whether the incidents and resolution strategies chosen were typical of daily conflicts, or whether participants may have chosen exceptional incidents that were particularly salient in their minds due to their rarity (Schwarz, 1999).

Here we seek to address some of the aforementioned limitations by outlining a qualitative diary study of couples that takes an episodic approach to the exploration of work–family conflict. The aims of the study are to provide a more in-depth analysis of how each work–family conflict incident unfolds, and to explore the processes occurring in incidents of work–family conflict that lead to couples' adopting a particular resolution strategy. As such, we are seeking an 'insider's account' of these dynamics (Poppleton et al., 2008). Consequently, the method employed differs from previous studies in several important ways. First, the focus is upon couples; second, daily diary studies are employed to gain a day-to-day account of how conflicts are dealt with as they happen; and third, we use a mixture of qualitative methods (diaries and interviews) to achieve a detailed and in-depth understanding of conflicts and the decision-making process. Specifically, through this qualitative analysis we address the research question: How do couples negotiate their work and family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two?

Method

Forty-eight people took part in the study, which comprised 24 dual-earner couples all responsible for child dependents. They were from a variety of organizations and

occupations in both the public and the private sector. Participants were recruited during spring 2009 using self-selection and snowball sampling. Although this method of sampling can cause problems of representativeness, due to respondents being most likely to identify other potential respondents similar to themselves (Saunders et al., 2003), given the rather specific requirements of the desired population this was the most effective way of recruiting the necessary number of participants. Participants were recruited in this way until the 'saturation' point was reached, meaning that no new information or themes were emerging from the data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998: 93). An information sheet explaining why the research was being carried out was presented to potential participants. Details of the sample and their occupations can be found in Table 1. It is important to note that all names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Each initial interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and took place in the interviewees' own homes, with both members of the couple present. Initial interviews began with demographic questions, before focusing upon areas of difficulty with regard to work–family conflict, how decisions were made, and how potential conflicts were resolved. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. All participants were then given a diary to keep individually for four weeks where they were asked to report all incidents of work–family conflict experienced and the consequent decisions made as they occurred. This was a fairly long period of time to ask participants to maintain commitment to the study, but was necessary to ensure that sufficient conflicts were reported as it was not expected that conflicts would be reported every day. A copy of the instructions provided for completing the diaries can be found in the Appendix. Four weeks later, when the couples had completed the diaries, a second follow-up interview was conducted, this time individually. This acted as an opportunity for participants to discuss any issues that had been raised while completing the diary.

A particular challenge associated with diary studies is the level of participant commitment and dedication required, which is rarely required by other types of research (Bolger et al., 2003). Several practices were put in place as a means of addressing this problem. First, the demands of being involved in the study and the particular requirements were made explicit to all potential participants from the outset as suggested by Symon (2004). This helped to ensure that participants did not become involved in the study without serious consideration and, subsequently, that they were committed to the process from the beginning. The initial interview was also utilized as an opportunity to provide clear instructions regarding exactly what participants were being asked to record in the diaries, including the amount of detail required. The use of event-contingent diaries requires a clear definition of the triggering event and therefore the importance of recording minor, routine work–family conflicts was emphasized in the initial interviews, including discussion of specific examples. Contact was also maintained with all participants by email and telephone at least once a week. It was expected that there might be a general pattern of decline in the response rate over time due to the level of commitment required to continue recording events over a four-week period (Bolger et al., 2003). However, this was infrequently noted in participants' diaries. The success of these practices was ascertained via the quality of the diary entries produced and from participants' personal reflections in the follow-up interviews.

Forty-three decisions were reported in participants' interviews and 255 daily conflict episodes were reported within their diaries (see Table 2). Conflicts were reported on

Table 1. Overview of participants.

	Names	Children	Occupations	Work flexibility
Couple 1	Lucy & Paul	Rachel – 8 Kieran – 5 James – 2	Paul – civil engineer Lucy – social worker	Paul – Flexitime & works from home 2 days/wk Lucy – Part time
Couple 2	Sylvia & Ben	Fiona – 11	Ben – machine operator Sylvia – personal assistant in healthcare	Ben – works nights Sylvia – part time
Couple 3	Hannah & Nigel	June – 17 Sam – 14 Liam – 8	Nigel – engineer Hannah – payroll manager	Hannah – working hours arranged around school times
Couple 4	Amy & Keith	Logan – 10 months	Keith – IT consultant Amy – research assistant	Keith – works from home Amy – flexitime & often works from home
Couple 5	Katrina & John	Jake – 6	John – accounting manager Katrina – social worker	John – can work from home sometimes
Couple 6	Sarah & Adam	George – 6 Richie – 3	Adam – senior hydraulic modeller Sarah – statistician for Transport Police	Sarah – works part time
Couple 7	Melanie & Steve	Annabelle – 2	Melanie – secretary in accountancy firm Steve – owner of plumbing business	Steve – works part time/ is his own boss Melanie – can work time in lieu
Couple 8	Anthony & Elizabeth	Michael – 16 Jonathan – 11	Elizabeth – partnership manager for the learning skills council Anthony – contract manager for adult care facilities	Both have flexitime
Couple 9	Julia & Tom	Lewis – 8 Nina – 4	Julia – personal assistant Tom – graphic designer	Julia – works part time
Couple 10	Emma & Richard	Andrew – 11 Melissa – 10 Joanna – 10	Emma – secretary Richard – engineer	Richard – works flexitime Emma – works part time
Couple 11	Linda & Edward	Matthew – 13 Oliver – 11	Linda – secretary for big blue chip companies Edward – chartered surveyor with own company and lecturer	Edward – works flexitime/is his own boss

Table 1. (Continued)

	Names	Children	Occupations	Work flexibility
Couple 12	Jane & Carl	Thomas – 7	Jane – administrator in an accountancy and finance office Carl – Trainee sales manager at a gym	Jane – works part time
Couple 13	Marissa & Nick	Beth – 12 Tobey – 8	Marissa – development manager for the voluntary service charity Nick – production worker	Marissa – works flexitime
Couple 14	Dave & Emily	Kyle – 5 Suzanne – 2	Emily – healthcare assistant at pharmacy Dave – head chef	Emily – works part time
Couple 15	Anna & Adrian	Isaac – 2 Alex – 2	Anna – veterinary surgeon Adrian – veterinary surgeon area manager	Adrian – some limited flexibility and opportunity to work from home at times that he is not required on site
Couple 16	Joe & Jasmine	Jack – 7 Ellie – 1	Jasmine – teaching assistant Joe – IT service manager telecoms	Joe – works flexitime and can work from home
Couple 17	Kyle & Carly	Lewis – 16 months	Carly – HR manager Kyle – owns a small property business	Carly – works part time Kyle – flexibility due to being his own boss
Couple 18	Janet & Rick	Bella – 9 Gregory – 7	Janet – IT service manager, telecoms Rick – business development manager for a small telecommunications company	Janet – works flexitime and can work from home
Couple 19	Nathan & Mary	Imogen – 3	Mary – personal assistant Nathan – industrial paint sprayer for a steel company	Mary – working hours arranged around nursery times & she can work from home
Couple 20	Louise & Ian	Stephen – 11 Peter – 9	Louise – community matron/ PhD student Ian – hospital consultant	Louise – can work flexibly and from home Ian – some flexibility outside of clinic hours
Couple 21	Nick & Angela	Suzie – 12 months	Angela – personal advisor for a career advisory service Nick – research fellow at a University	Angela – works part time Nick – able to work from home when not teaching
Couple 22	Ray & Olivia	Marcus – 9	Olivia – inclusion officer at a school Ray – learning manager and head of year	

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Names	Children	Occupations	Work flexibility
Couple 23	Ellen & Alex	Christopher – 5 Robert – 2	Alex – freelance IT consultant Ellen – medical secretary	Alex – some flexibility as is his own boss Ellen – works part time
Couple 24	Neil & Hayley	Natalia – 2	Neil – university academic Hayley – university academic	Both have flexibility when not teaching and are able to work from home

Table 2. Occurrences of *daily* and *anchoring* work–family conflicts and the cues drawn on by participants in seeking conflict resolution.

		No. of incidents	No. of couples
Types of daily conflict:	Getting to work on time or helping family	36	14
	Completing work or getting home on time	33	14
	Work distractions while at home	9	7
	Family distractions while at work	19	6
	Working extra hours	46	17
	Children's events during usual working hours	51	17
	Usual childcare not available	42	18
	Children unwell during usual working hours	19	12
Total no. of daily conflicts:		255	
Resolution strategies:	Seek support	160	24
	Integrate	22	12
	Take time off work	96	20
	Reschedule	14	9
Daily decision-making cues:	Enabling and constraining factors (total)	255	24
	Availability of support	*255*	*24*
	At home	*156*	*24*
	At work	*99*	*24*
	Financial constraints	*17*	*9*
	Fairness and equity (total)	163	22
	Support seeking	*94*	*20*
	Time investment	*69*	*19*
	Preferences (total)	10	5
Types of anchoring conflict:	Whether or not to return to work	19	19
	Whether to work part time or full time	15	15
	Whether or not to leave an organization	4	4
	Whether or not to seek promotion	5	3
Total no. of anchoring conflicts:		43	
Anchoring decision-making cues:	Enabling and constraining factors (total)	42	24
	Availability of support (total)	21	17
	At home	*7*	*4*
	At work	*14*	*13*
	Financial constraints	21	18
	Beliefs, values and preferences (total)	39	24
	What it means to be a good parent	*16*	*11*
	Personal benefits/preferences	*23*	*18*

around 20 percent of observed diary days, which was considered a good response rate. This varied between each participant, with some reporting conflicts more frequently than others. The least number of conflicts reported throughout the four-week diary period was three and this was by Nigel. The greatest number reported was 14 by both Janet and Marissa.

There was great consistency between the conflict incidents reported within each couple with each account frequently including additional information leading to a more detailed picture of what had occurred. Notably, numerous incidents were reported by female participants that were not recorded by their partners. The sophistication of responses recorded within the diary entries also varied. While some participants provided in-depth discussions of the incidents reported, as well as their accompanying thought processes, others provided much less detail regarding their own reasoning when recording these incidents. For these participants, the follow-up interviews proved particularly useful in gaining extra insight into the incidents that had been discussed in their diary entries. In this way, using diaries in conjunction with interviews helped to counteract some of the limitations of using either method alone and allowed for a detailed picture of events and experiences to be captured.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed along with the diary data using a thematic template (King, 2004). The interview transcripts and diary data were first read with a broad view of exploring how couples managed work–family conflict situations and the accompanying reasoning processes leading to particular decisions. The initial template was developed by the first author who examined a sub-set of the transcript data (diaries and interviews from one couple), and defined codes in light of the research question regarding experiences of work–family conflict and decision making. Codes were organized hierarchically with the highest-level codes representing broad themes and the lower levels describing more narrowly focused themes within these broader themes (King, 2004). The full sets of transcripts and diaries were then worked through systematically, identifying those sections of text that were relevant to the research questions and marking them with the corresponding code from the initial template. Next, further changes were made to the template; this time with several themes being grouped together. For instance, ‘the availability of support’ and ‘financial considerations’ were grouped together as lower order themes under the broad theme of ‘enabling and constraining factors’, which more effectively described the impact that these factors were having on participants’ decision making. This template then served as the basis for interpretation of the dataset and can be seen in Table 2. The authenticity of the template analysis was assured in two ways. First, interpretation was discussed in follow-up interviews with participants to clarify meaning and to involve the participants in the analytic process. Second, the second author of the article was also involved in discussing the thematic analysis so that any alternative interpretations could be considered.

In addition to template analysis, diagrammatical decision-making representations were also created to analyse individual decision-making processes. This enabled us to more effectively organize the data from each couple so as to describe the decision-making processes they reported. These diagrams helped to retain the original context of the data and could therefore demonstrate a more detailed approximation of a participant’s decision-making process in a way that a list of themes could not. These were used

in conjunction with template analysis to effectively describe each individual conflict, providing a more detailed analysis of the data regarding how couples made decisions. As is the case in qualitative research, the categories employed are not considered as exhaustive or mutually exclusive, but instead as representations of how couples made sense of their daily lives during the process of diary completion and associated interviewing (Medved, 2004).

Findings

In this section, we focus upon the different types of decisions made and the cues that impacted upon the decision-making process.

Distinguishing between types of decisions

Through the analysis of the data, it became apparent that there was a clear conceptual distinction between two different kinds of decisions. These will be referred to as *anchoring* decisions and *daily* decisions. Anchoring decisions are major decisions about the overall approach to work–life conflict taken by the couple. They provided a framework within which other day-to-day decisions were made and tended to be made at key points in the couples' lives; for example, when they first had children. Examples are the decision that both would continue to work; the decision that one member of the couple would work part time; or the decision to move to another job. For instance, Sarah explained why she decided to return to work part time rather than full time:

> I did want to go back but I didn't want to go back full time because I didn't want to have kids that somebody else had brought up . . . When you work full time somebody else sees more of your child than you do.

These anchoring decisions were different from daily decisions that couples made. The latter focused on rather more immediate issues, such as who would look after a child if they were sick and unable to go to school on a particular day, how to resolve the conflict between a meeting at work that clashed with a school event, or whether or not to engage in extra work while at home with their family.

Anchoring and daily decisions were clearly linked. For example, an anchoring decision impacted upon daily decision making by creating a framework within which work and family commitments and resultant conflicts were managed on a daily basis. One example was provided by Paul, who after his first child was born chose to give up contract work for employment at the council because 'working for the council is more flexible and involves less travelling than contract work'. This anchoring decision meant that he had flexible hours, which impacted upon how daily decisions were made. He was regularly able to be involved in the school run, reporting, for instance, 'I chose to cater for the family before work' or that he and his partner had 'talked in the morning and I could take the children to school and still get to work relatively early'. The consequence of this anchoring decision on daily decisions was also apparent in his partner's diary entries. For example, on several occasions Lucy was required to work extra hours at

times when she also needed to look after the children. This type of conflict tended to be easily resolved by relying on Paul's flexible work arrangements. Lucy reported in response to one conflict, 'it really helps that my husband works from home', emphasizing the importance of this anchoring decision in the resolution of daily work–family conflicts.

Conversely, anchoring decisions could be the cause of daily conflicts, increasing daily conflict occurrences or limiting the options available for conflict resolution. For example, Carly's decision to accept a promotion meant that she had to increase her working days from three to four days a week. In their diaries, Carly and her partner Kyle reported daily work–family conflicts that would not have occurred prior to the promotion. Kyle talked about being solely responsible for the nursery run and being unable to work late because: 'If it's one of Carly's busy days it's all me'. This highlights how her anchoring decision to take a promotion impacted upon their daily decision making as a couple. Anchoring decisions can create daily conflicts as well as constrain the support options available for conflict resolution. It also meant that such conflicts would continue to be difficult to resolve in the future.

A further example of the linkages between the two types of decisions is how recurring problems in daily decision making led to rethinking an original anchoring decision. For example, Olivia and her partner Ray, both high school teachers, decided to leave the school where they were working together and move to a new school, due to their boss's lack of flexibility regarding family commitments. Olivia explained how she finally made the decision to leave based on her boss's disapproval of how they had handled the daily conflict that occurred when their son burnt his hand on a radiator:

> Marcus was only a tiny baby and when we were getting him ready in the morning he banged his hand on the radiator and he burnt his hand so as any normal parent would do, we got him in the car and took him to hospital. We phoned in work and said we'd be late. We got him sorted then took him to my mum's and both went in work. Half an hour after being in work we both got told off because we'd both been to the hospital with him . . . She was horrible. She just didn't see . . . family life didn't exist, everything was work . . . I actually walked out and I said I'm not coming back, and I didn't, did I? One of the things that finally made me do that was when we took Marcus to hospital. It was the best decision I ever made. It was a build-up of everything.

Lucy also discussed her intention to leave her current job based on the increase in daily work–family conflicts that she was experiencing, explaining that '[w]ork have been quite demanding of late', meaning that she was experiencing an increase in daily work–family conflicts and subsequently that she would 'probably be looking around for another one [job]'. These examples highlight how the possible consequences of experiencing recurrent daily work–family conflicts led to individuals or couples making an anchoring decision in an attempt to reduce them. So, although anchoring and daily decisions are different types of decisions, they are interlinked in important ways.

Cues impacting upon decision making

As well as revealing the distinction between anchoring and daily decisions and the inherent links between the two, various cues that had an impact on such decision making were

also brought to light, including the differential impact of these cues on the two types of decisions. The term 'cues' is used here to describe anything, whether contextual or internal, that had an impact on the decision-making process involved in a couple's selection of a resolution strategy. Resolution strategies discussed by participants in the current study were support seeking, integration and rescheduling. These strategies were not mutually exclusive and some form of support was usually necessary when using all strategies. In identifying the various cues that influenced such decision making, we label them here as enabling and constraining cues, fairness considerations, and beliefs, values and preferences.

Enabling and constraining cues. These cues are related to the context within which couples must make their decisions. Enabling cues refer to those that enable a decision to be made more easily by providing a greater number of options to the couples when dealing with work–family conflicts. Conversely, constraining cues are those that constrain decision making by limiting the couple's available options in dealing with such conflicts. The reason that these two seemingly opposing categories have been grouped together is because of their interrelated nature. If a particular enabling cue was not present or was lacking this would usually become a constraining cue and therefore it makes sense to discuss these in parallel. We now address the key enabling and constraining cues identified: financial cues and availability of support.

Financial cues were raised as having an important constraining impact in that they set the limits within which couples were able to make decisions about where to invest their resources. Dave and Emily discussed how financial necessity limited their options when making the anchoring decision of whether or not to both return to work after having children:

Dave: Work is very important, as it is the main source of income for the family. Without my wage we would not afford the mortgage, holidays and general household financial commitments.

Emily: Our main priority is being able to pay the bills etc., whilst family is very important to us; if we have to work, we have to work . . . It's always easy for people to say they put their family ahead of everything else, but in the real world that is not always practical, as we work to provide for our family . . .

Emily went on to discuss the cost of childcare in terms of further constraints this put on how, and when, she was able to work. It was not feasible for her to work during the day while her partner was at work, as childcare costs would negate her earnings; therefore, she had to work evenings. This constraint severely limited her options. However, the impact of financial decision making on anchoring decisions was shown to be multifaceted, moving beyond considerations of couples' current financial situations. They also took into consideration the impact of long-term financial factors in relation to the maintenance of financial security. For example, Anna and Adrian, who had 18-month-old twins and both worked as veterinary surgeons, discussed why this was an important factor in their decision to both return to work after having twins, despite this meaning that Anna would be earning little more than the cost of childcare.

Anna: We work for contractors so if they lose the contract we don't have a job. It's never 100 per cent secure.

Adrian: You have no security. You have a mortgage; you have everything so the main reason for both of us working is job security. If one of us loses the job, the other one can take care of the babies, take the money that we are paying for the nursery and keep going until we get another job, but the main reason is job security.

Carly echoed such a consideration when discussing her decision to return to work, highlighting how her partner being self-employed meant that 'there's so much risk that we can't financially afford for me not to work'.

Finances were also shown to have some impact on daily decision making; acting as a constraint. This was discussed in relation to restricting participants' flexibility to take time off work for family events, regardless of preferences. In his diary, Rick wrote about being unable to take the day off work for his son's birthday because 'no work, no pay and no annual leave left'. In the interview with his partner, they discussed how it was essential for both to work so they could afford to pay the bills, which also meant that they could not afford to take unpaid leave. This constrained their decision making by limiting their available options when faced with such a conflict. Dave also discussed the impact of finances when deciding to work on what should have been his day off, explaining that he 'would have preferred to stay at home' with his family, but 'with bills and a new garden to pay for I chose extra work'. Overall, a consideration of financial issues was vital to how couples made work–family decisions.

The availability of support was also an important cue that could act by either enabling or constraining anchoring and daily decision making. Here, the availability of support at work was frequently discussed in terms of the availability of official family-friendly workplace policies and other less official forms of support in the work domain, including supervisory support. At least one person in 18 of the 24 couples worked flexitime and there were four couples where both partners worked flexible hours. These participants also tended to be able to work all or part of their contracted hours from home. For example, Joe discussed taking time out of work to pick the children up when his partner was unable to do so. He was able to make this decision due to his flexible working arrangements, meaning he was 'in a fortunate position that the nature of my job allows me to do this'. Flexitime was an important form of organizational support that enabled non-work commitments to be met.

Where there was a lack of support available at work this often had an impact on anchoring decisions. For example, although Mel had previously enjoyed her job in the hotel industry, she decided to change jobs to work as a secretary once she became a parent due to the lack of flexibility in her job undermining her role as a parent:

> I used to work in a hotel before we had Annabelle. I worked there for 12 years as a deputy manager and because of the role that I was playing then I wouldn't have just been given set hours . . . you sometimes have to work until 11pm at night or you do an early shift where you work until 3pm from 6am. But then they wanted me to stay overnight for a full weekend and that sort of really made me . . . I didn't want to do that, even though it was only one a month, I mean it's a full weekend away, and when Annabelle would have only been small, so I decided against it.

This demonstrates not only the impact that the amount of available support in the workplace has on individuals' anchoring decisions, but also how these anchoring decisions can be made in order to reduce the amount of daily constraints placed upon decision making in the future.

Less formal sources of support also impacted daily decision making. Several participants discussed a type of unspoken, informal agreement with their boss based on a mutual trust and understanding. Nathan and Mary discussed this type of arrangement in their interview and talked about the benefits this had in incidents of work–family conflict:

Mary: I think it's more a favour for you because you're classed as a good worker, so it was like go on but be as quick as you can kind of thing.

Nathan: Yeah, just sort of nipping out then getting back as quick as I could. But I mean policy wise, if you're away two hours they can make you make that back up on a Saturday . . . I had to just call the works manager over and explain, the wife's away, mother-in-law's gone with her and she'd normally pop down, so like nursery doesn't open until 8am so I'll have to come in late, and he just said don't worry about it. But he's alright if you're alright with him.

Other participants discussed the constraining impact that an unsupportive workplace had on their experience of dealing with work–family conflicts. For example, Janet reported experiencing constraints placed upon her decision making by an unsupportive and inflexible superior at work on an occasion where she was required to work away from home:

> For me to go for a two day trip, I said to management, for that day we had to be there for a 9am start and I said can I not get there at 10am so I don't have to stay over, and straight away he came back . . . and you can tell straight away that person who makes that decision will not have children or an understanding . . . because he turned round straight away and said no you have to get there for 9am.

A decision that is constrained is shown to have a negative impact not only on the individual, in the form of increased stress, but also on others in the family domain and subsequently on concentration at work. Janet reported in her diary that she was '[s]till worrying about this decision', which continued to have a knock-on effect on both her work and personal life over the following days. This worry resulted in further daily conflicts due to her thinking about the situation while at work and consequently creating a conflict as to whether she should take time out of work and make arrangements for the time she would be working away. This, in turn, resulted in conflict with her partner Rick when she rang him at work to discuss the arrangements. In seeing how this conflict unfolded, the longitudinal nature of the research enabled the observation of the impact of organizational structures on constraining decision making over time.

Support outside of the workplace was also an influential cue when making anchoring decisions. Julia and Tom talked about how they were both able to work due to her parents being available to offer help with childcare for their two children. On the other hand, Sylvia decided that she should only work part time rather than full time because of a lack

of support available from others. Her partner Ben worked long hours, as a machine operator, including shifts, so was only able to help at certain times. The couple also had no support available from other family members:

> I wouldn't have had any backup . . . All my family work and Ben's too so we couldn't rely on anybody, we had to sort everything out ourselves, so that was the only way of doing it really . . . you can't always rely on other people can you?

This lack of support in the home domain led to Sylvia's decision to work part time and to choose to work for the healthcare sector in a more family-friendly organization. In this way, the amount of support available at home can act to both enable and constrain decision making.

Support at home was discussed more frequently, and in much greater detail, with regards to daily decision making. This included considerations of the work responsibilities and work flexibility of those in the home domain. These cues were mentioned by all participants at some point throughout their diaries as crucial in their daily decision making. The job flexibility of others had a great impact on the availability of support in participants' home domains. This was most frequently discussed in relation to the flexibility of their partners' jobs. For those participants whose partner had an inflexible job, this also had an impact on daily decision making by acting as a constraining factor. Mary's partner Nathan was unable to take their daughter to nursery because, 'Nathan has to leave the house at 6:45am and nursery opens at 8am' and Janet's partner Tim was also unable to participate in the school run 'because of work constraints'. In both cases, they turned to grandparents for help. As well as general job flexibility, specific work task flexibility at the particular time of the conflict situation was also frequently mentioned as an important factor in decision making. For example, Anthony and his partner Elizabeth, who both had fairly flexible jobs working for the council, explained how they tended to deal with work–family conflicts. Anthony said: 'We sort of look at priorities really. Like today and tomorrow I can't get out of these meetings whereas Elizabeth's got more flexibility.'

This highlights the impact that workplace flexibility has on the on-going decision-making processes involved in reaching a conflict resolution. The workplace flexibility and support of both members of a couple can either enable or constrain decision making. Couples simultaneously consider enabling factors, as well as the opposing constraints, placed upon each of them on a daily basis and these considerations form the basis of decisions made.

When both members of a couple had limited work flexibility, they often looked at other available support options, also taking into consideration the job and task flexibility of others, as well as their non-work commitments and preferences. The latter considerations are important cues when assessing the availability of outside support, but such cues are often considered as secondary when seeking support within the couple. If support was limited in both domains, this also led to integration strategies. Under such constraints, Anna took her twin babies to the abattoir where she worked as a last resort:

> Just filling them with breadsticks, balls, toys, anything they wanted to eat, I didn't care! It was just like keep quiet in the car for one hour. The poor babies were in the car seat, you know, no movement or anything.

This demonstrates how a lack of work flexibility accompanied by limited support from the home domain can lead to reliance on undesirable resolution strategies.

Fairness judgements. A key cue that impacted decisions was judgement of fairness. These judgements were discussed as influential with regards to daily decision making, but were absent in accounts of anchoring decisions. Although the availability of different types of support was clearly crucial in both types of decision making, this alone did not explain why participants decided upon a particular strategy to resolve their daily work–family conflicts. When considering whether or not to rely on the available support to deal with a particular daily conflict, participants frequently evaluated fairness in relation to the support on offer. These fairness judgements, rather than depending on specific beliefs or values of individuals, appeared to be common across participants, demonstrating a general need to maintain a feeling of equity. For instance, the impact on the person from whom the support was sought was considered with regards to the resolution of specific work–family conflicts. Such considerations sometimes led to the rejection of support seeking as a viable option altogether. For example, Janet and Rick discussed their reluctance to seek support from their neighbours, although this had been offered, because they were aware that they had their own needs and commitments to attend to.

> *Janet*: But they've now started doing a little job of their own so I feel I can't now ask.
> *Rick*: And one of them has had a new baby.
> *Janet*: So I feel like I'm putting on them even though they say . . . I just wouldn't do it now. It would be a last resort, in an emergency.

This example illustrates that it is not simply the availability of support that is important, but also that the type of support available is fair and appropriate, given the particular situation. Participants also frequently discussed consideration of the impact on those offering support in terms of the amount of support provided previously, or agreed to provide in the future. In general, participants were less likely to seek further support from someone who they deemed to be already doing more than their fair share. For example, Lucy decided not to attend a work meeting outside of her working hours and Jasmine made the decision to bring her work home with her rather than stay at work to complete it. In both cases this was because they did not want to rely on further support from their parents, who had already provided invaluable help.

> *Lucy*: I hate asking dad and his partner as they do enough already looking after James on Tuesdays to save us paying more nursery fees.
> *Jasmine*: It was easier and quicker to do the work at school as I had all the facilities I needed to do it there. But I already felt guilty enough that my mum had Jack all day and although she loved it I knew they were back at ours in the morning to do the school run when Joe [her partner] was in London.

An important consideration here was the ability to reciprocate. If participants received outside support, there was the unspoken assumption that they should reciprocate and this understanding had an impact on whether or not participants decided to seek such support from others in the first place. This was usually discussed in relation to non-family members. Sylvia discussed her decision to ask another mother from her daughter's school to pick her daughter up on occasions when she was unable to leave work on time: 'She's done it with me though as well to be honest. It got like a pattern at one stage where I'd pick Hannah up for her and she'd pick Fiona up for me.'

This demonstrates the increased likelihood of seeking help as this enabled both parties to maintain a feeling of equity. On the other hand, when participants felt that they would not be able to offer support in return, therefore leaving them unable to sustain such a reciprocal arrangement, this made them reluctant to accept support from others. Emma talked about this in her diary when discussing different possibilities of childcare during the school holidays: 'Difficult to get friends/neighbours to help out and I find it difficult to ask when I am limited in what I can offer in return'.

So although support seeking often acted as a solution to work–family conflicts, it also entailed problems creating extra 'work' and pressure for these couples who already had numerous other pressures. In summary, feelings of fairness and equity play an important role and the decision to seek support is complex and cannot be explained simply by its availability.

Beliefs, values and preferences

Also important was the impact that personal beliefs, values and, consequently, preferences had on decision making. These were mainly discussed with regards to anchoring decisions and were mentioned only infrequently when discussing daily decision making. With regards to anchoring decisions, they were discussed as an influential factor in the majority of such decisions. These cues manifested themselves here in terms of beliefs regarding what it means to be a 'good parent', as well as preferences regarding life satisfaction. Being a good parent included beliefs regarding the amount of time that should be spent with their children, whether they valued organized childcare as being beneficial to their children and whether they believed that their working was beneficial to their children both financially and emotionally. For example, Mel explained the decision that she would move to a more flexible job and her partner would work part time:

> I wouldn't want to put her in nursery full time. I don't believe in having a child and then putting them into someone else's care for five days. That's my personal thing and I'd rather her stay with me one day . . . even though she really, really enjoys it [nursery]; she loves being there, I don't really want her in five days. It's a personal thing.

Ed, who worked full time but very flexibly so his work could fit in around the needs of the children, talked about his decision to take on a less demanding career to enable him to be the main carer. This decision was impacted upon by his personal beliefs about what it meant to be a good parent and the value he placed on this:

> I think if it didn't mean that much to me [being a parent] I would possibly have decided to stay in a career and work all the hours that God sends. There are people who think that is their role as a parent and I'm not saying that is wrong but that's the way they decided to approach their life and this is the way I decided to approach mine.

Conversely, several couples expressed strong beliefs regarding the value they placed upon organized childcare, with a view that this was important and beneficial for their children. Anna and Adrian both shared this belief and discussed it at some length in their interview:

Anna: I think it's very good for the children to go to the nursery. We are very lucky because we deeply think that it's the best thing for them to spend time with other children and with so many activities, things that we would never do at home.

Adrian: At the beginning we were thinking in money because we have two so it is double paying at the nursery so it is quite high. So if you are making numbers, a nanny makes sense. Maybe it would make sense, but we think that we prefer the nursery because the contact of the babies with everyone, to different people.

This was a common theme that ran throughout the participants' accounts of their anchoring decisions, particularly the women's accounts of the perceived benefits to their children of their returning to work. The implication here is that being involved in a role other than their role of parent enabled them to invest more energy in this role. Rather than leading to a depletion of their energy, it appeared to increase it, having a positive impact on both themselves and their children. The self-awareness of such effects impacted upon participants decisions to return to paid work as they viewed this as a strategy that enabled them to be 'better' parents. By looking at the wider system of beliefs and values it was evident that the internal cues that had an impact upon decision making were not limited to role salience but were more complex. For example, the importance of one role did not always lead to the individual investing less time in the other role as this could depend upon other beliefs and values held by the individual. The complexity of the impact of participants' beliefs, values and preferences was succinctly expressed by Joe:

> Currently with school runs and my desire to spend quality time with my family, I am just managing to work my contracted 37 hours a week and sometimes I'm not as focused on my job as I should be. I do feel that you need to put the extra hours in to get noticed and move up the ladder. I am reluctant to do this because I want a good family life. However, my desire to move up the ladder and ultimately earn more money has increased tenfold since having my own family. A bit of a conundrum.

Here, the importance placed on his role as a father increased Joe's desire to invest more time and energy in both the home and work domains, meaning that the decision to invest in the home domain would not necessarily be the result of work–family conflict situations.

Discussion

Our analysis of the couples' decision-making processes extends the literature in this area in a number of ways. First, from the analysis, an important conceptual distinction has been made between anchoring and daily decisions. Whereas Medved (2004), when discussing how women dealt with work–family conflict, suggested that the daily practices used by women to maintain their work and family routines may be restructured around a trigger of 'family turning points', this restructuring was seen as another coping strategy. Here, however, we highlight that anchoring decisions are conceptually distinct from daily decision making and, as the analysis has demonstrated, are a distinct type of decision making impacted upon by their own set of cues.

Second, within previous literature, different types of coping strategies used by individuals to manage work and family have been uncovered that demonstrate clear similarities to the strategies reported by participants in the current study, such as support seeking, integrating and rescheduling (e.g. Kreiner et al,. 2009; Maertz and Boyar, 2011). However, the current study goes beyond this by revealing the complex processes involved in relying upon a particular resolution strategy, including the different cues that have an impact upon this process. In particular, we highlight the importance of obtaining the perspectives of both members of a couple and the interrelated cues that impact upon each of them and how these lead to a joint conclusion. Although there are useful general heuristics related to work–family conflict episodes in recent research (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2009; Medved, 2004; Repetti et al., 2009; Shepherd and Haynie, 2009), no previous model or framework has demonstrated specifically how a conflict episode unfolds, how its results may carry forward to subsequent episodes, or how these accumulate over time to influence role performance and satisfaction.

In exploring how the different types of decisions and cues are linked, a decision-making framework is now presented. The framework highlights the cues that had an impact on the decisions made by participants and how these cues interacted with one another to reach a conclusion. Compared to previous studies of decision making, where the focus has been upon less naturalistic settings (e.g. Greenhaus and Powell, 2003; Powell and Greenhaus, 2006), the current findings revealed a less-structured decision-making pattern where decisions were the result of ongoing negotiations between partners and were influenced by a range of different contextual cues. Furthermore, there were no distinctive typologies of decision making within which the couples easily fitted. It was not the case that particular patterns of cues had a differential impact upon different types of work–family conflict incidents. Whether the conflict experienced occurred because childcare arrangements fell through or because participants were asked to complete extra work, the same cues would be used to reach a decision on how this should be resolved. The way in which these cues interacted to lead to such a decision was an inter-personal process. This process relied on negotiations incorporating not only those factors that both enabled and constrained each individual and couple, but also a concern with maintaining equity and balance both within the couple and with external others. These rather complex negotiations were also framed by previously made anchoring decisions. The findings reported imply that a set model portraying an invariable description of how this process occurs is implausible as it is too complex and varied to be defined in a stable, linear step-by-step fashion, hence the preference for a more flexible framework.

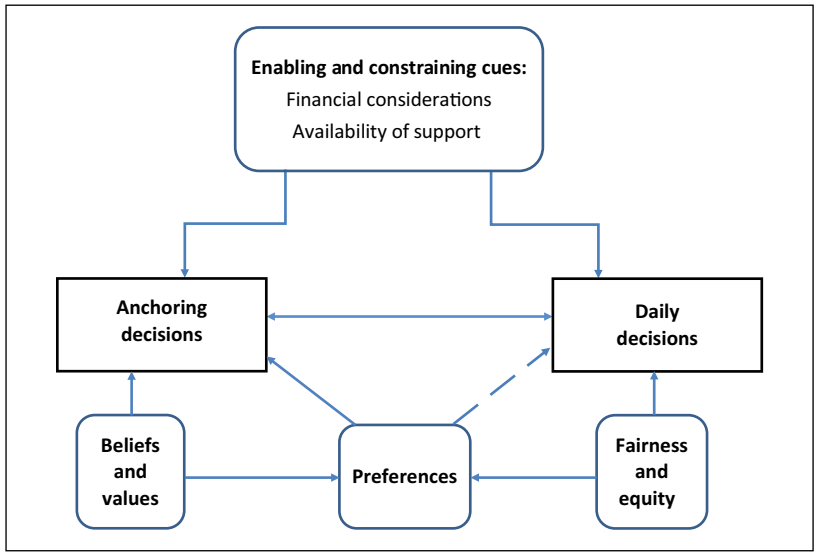

Figure 1. Decision-making framework.

In Figure 1, the left-right bi-directional arrow between the anchoring decisions and daily decisions represents the important conceptual link previously discussed. While anchoring decisions had both a constraining and an enabling effect on daily decisions, these daily decisions could also accumulate in a way that resulted in anchoring decisions being made in an attempt to improve daily experiences.

Enabling/constraining cues and personal preferences are highlighted as having an impact on both anchoring and daily decisions. However, the arrow linking preferences to daily decisions is a dashed arrow, representing the somewhat weaker direct effect that preferences were seen to have on daily decision making. Preferences were impacted upon by the more enduring beliefs and values of a person that extended beyond preferences; a link that is represented by the rightwards arrow between the two. However, such beliefs and values were expressed as having an impact on decision making at the level of anchoring decisions, rather than directly impacting daily decisions. For example, beliefs surrounding what it means to be a 'good parent' were discussed in relation to anchoring decisions, rather than daily decisions. This is not to say that such beliefs and values did not have an impact on daily decision making, but rather that this impact was indirect, via anchoring decisions. In the reports of their daily decision-making processes, participants tended to focus more on practical issues and necessities, such as financial cues and the availability or lack of support, and did not discuss such enduring beliefs and values.

The leftwards arrow highlights how considerations of fairness and equity had an impact on preferences regarding which of the available options to use to resolve a particular conflict. However, such considerations appeared to be much more than a preference or desire. In line with social exchange and equity theory (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1958), equity is attained if the ratio of one's rewards to one's costs is perceived to be

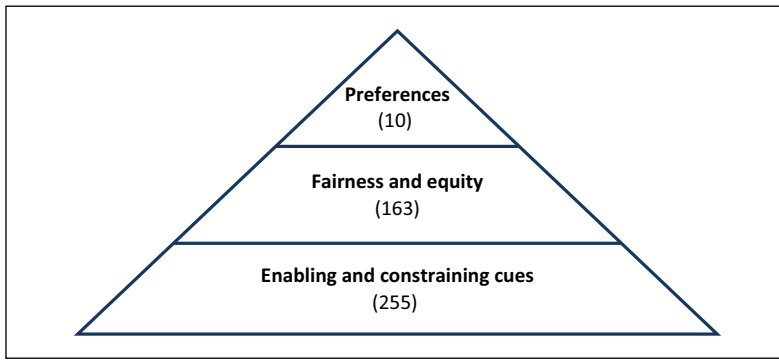

Figure 2. Diagram depicting the hierarchy of cues considered by participants when making *daily* decisions.

equal to a partner's rewards-to-costs ratio. Hence, participants were sometimes less willing to rely on available support to resolve work–family conflicts. Indeed, the specifics of moral obligations, such as how much and how soon you should reciprocate, are vague and can vary across relationships. As noted, equity theory can provide insights toward understanding close, intimate relationships (e.g. Hatfield, 1985; Hatfield et al., 1979). However, a consideration of fairness and equity has not previously been explored directly in relation to couples making work–family decisions. These findings suggest that this might be a fruitful avenue for further research.

In terms of understanding theoretically how the cues relate to each other, a diagrammatical representation, highlighting the general order in which these cues are likely to impact daily decision making, is presented in Figure 2.

The availability of support is represented at the bottom level of the pyramid, demonstrating that this is the most basic cue, always considered by participants as part of the decision-making process. As can be seen from Table 2, availability of support was considered in all incidents reported by all couples. If there was no support available in either domain, this was when a decision was usually made to integrate activities in an attempt to combine both work and home responsibilities in some way without the need of support from others. However, as previously mentioned, the utilization of available support would depend upon considerations of fairness and equity in relation to all parties involved in the conflict-resolution scenario. It was often these two factors that worked in conjunction to reach the final solution in daily incidents. These findings demonstrating the importance of the availability of support concur with previous research (e.g. Greenhaus and Powell 2003; Maertz and Boyar, 2011; Powell and Greenhaus, 2006), but extend this by highlighting the importance of specifying not only whether support is available, but also whether or not available support is actually used. Support has previously received a great deal of attention in the literature, but the focus has frequently been upon whether or not the availability of support reduces work–family conflict, either directly or via its potential to alter the impact of stressors that lead to work–family conflict, such as role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g. Carlson and Perrewé, 1999; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). The literature on coping strategies has also acknowledged the importance of support seeking (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2009; Maertz and Boyar, 2011). However, the contingencies related to its

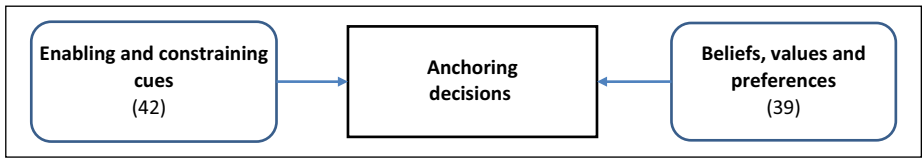

Figure 3. Diagram depicting the cues considered by participants when making *anchoring* decisions.

use as a resolution strategy in specific incidents of work–family conflict have not previously been explored. Here, we have also drawn attention to some of the negative aspects of support, as well as to the positives. Recent research findings have suggested that support receipt can increase distress in recipients (Gleason et al., 2008; Seiger and Wiese, 2009), which, based on the current research findings, could be due to the related feelings of inequity and the extra work involved in maintaining reciprocal relationships.

As can be seen from Table 2, personal preferences were rarely considered with regards to daily decision making. These are at the top level of the hierarchy, demonstrating that they were only considered as an additional cue when all other cues were satisfied. In other words, if satisfactory support was available in both domains, with limited constraints, and fairness considerations had already been taken into account, then on occasion preferences were permitted a small role in daily decision making. It is important to highlight that this is a representation of cues impacting upon *daily* decision making only and that a similar representation of anchoring decision making looks somewhat different. From Figure 3, it can be seen that the impact of beliefs and values play a somewhat equal role to that of constraining/enabling cues when making such decisions, while equity considerations are absent.

The framework produced here along with the hierarchy of cues provides insights into the way in which decisions are made in incidents of work–family conflict. We would emphasize that the analysis suggests that this process cannot be represented by a set pattern or sequence of cues that will consistently lead to a particular resolution decision. Rather, we have demonstrated that the decision-making processes around work–family conflict are complex, involving the interaction of numerous cues and negotiations between members of a couple.

Conclusions

This analysis contributes to the literature, first, by making the conceptual distinction between anchoring and daily decisions, second, through making empirically explicit the complexity of decision making in incidents of work–family conflict, including the variety of cues that impact upon the process, and third, theoretically, by highlighting how the variety of cues relate to each other in couples' decision-making processes. These contributions are realized through the distinctive methodological approach taken where the unfolding of conflicts were accessed over time and through the participants' own voices. In doing so, attention could be drawn to the impact of past events on subsequent work–family conflicts to demonstrate that each conflict cannot be understood out of context. The current research therefore demonstrates the importance of taking a longitudinal approach.

One potential limitation here is that participants were primarily white, middle class, heterosexual couples with access to full-time employment. Cultural cues can influence the variables involved in work–family conflict for dual-earner couples in a variety of ways. For example, culture can influence the meaning and relative priority of work and family (Lewis, 1999) and might also have an impact on willingness to accept support. Beyond this, individuals from under-represented groups often experience unique career issues, such as stereotyping, restricted opportunities and other stresses that are likely to have an impact on their experiences of work, as well as their experiences of trying to balance this with having a family (Allen et al., 2000; Ozbilgin et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important that future research addresses these issues by including studies using a more diverse range of participants. Finally, we believe that a focus on the types of decisions that employees regularly face, and the cues informing these decisions, can enable the creation of work–family policies that more effectively support daily decision-making processes. This in turn can foster positive work and family life experiences, benefitting not only employees and organizations but also society as a whole.

Appendix. Instructions for completing diary entries

Understanding work–life balance

The purpose of this research is to explore how couples make decisions when faced with conflicting work and family responsibilities.

Previous research has indicated that dual-earner couples often experience such incidents on a daily basis; therefore I am keen to find out your own experiences using this day-to-day diary. However, some days you may find that you have less to report than on others so please do not feel that you have to write the same amount each day. Please try to fill in the diary as soon as possible after each incident occurs. It is important that the decision-making process is fresh in your mind so you can record this process as accurately as possible.

Please record as many details as possible each time you have to make a decision regarding conflicting work and family responsibilities. Please try to include the following details:

- The decision that you arrived at regarding the two competing activities
- The cues that affected how you arrived at this decision
- The outcome of the decision made and how you felt about it
- Any other details that you think might be relevant.

Your experiences are valuable as this is the way in which future research can move forward and make a difference.

Anything that you write in this diary will be strictly confidential. If you have any queries at anytime while completing the diary please feel free to contact me via the contact details below. I will also contact you during this time to see how it is going.

Many thanks for your help with this research

E-mail: **********
Mobile: **********

Week 1
Day 1 Date: Monday _____

Please record any decisions that you had to make today regarding how to deal with competing work and family responsibilities. Please include the decisions you made, how you arrived at these decisions, and how you felt about them afterwards, as well as any other details that you feel may be relevant.

Please describe any decisions where you made a choice between work and family today
What did you decide to do?

How did you arrive at this decision? Please describe in as much detail as you can the decision process that you went through and ALL the cues that had an impact on the decision you made.

What was the outcome of the decision that you made? Please explain how you felt about the decision and anything that occurred as a result of the decision.

Please use this space to add any other comments that you feel might be relevant

Thank you

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