

# Enhancing 'balance' in our lives

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# What does work-life balance mean?

- **Definitions:**
  - Time: Greenhaus et al (2010) .... 'objective'
  - Role negotiation (Carlson et al., 2012)
  - Subjective perceptions of 'balance'
  - Low conflict + high enrichment
- **Conflict** = interference between one domain and another
  - 'Scarcity' model
- **Three types of conflict –**
  - Structural (time-based conflict)
  - Emotional (strain-based conflict)
  - Behavioural (behaviour-based conflict)
- Inter-role conflict has negative effects on people
- More work → family conflict than family → work conflict

# Facilitation or enrichment

- Experiences/activities in one domain (e.g. work) enhance experiences/activities in another domain (e.g. family)
- Positive psychology
- **Three types of enrichment:**
  - Development (e.g. *provides me with feelings of success*)
  - Affect (e.g. *makes me feel happy*)
  - Capital (e.g. *helps me feel personally fulfilled*)
- Enrichment → positive benefits
- Enrichment and conflict can be experienced together

# Personal coping typologies

- **Hall (1972)** – 3 types of coping
  - Type I: **structural role redefinition**, i.e. changing others' expectations
  - Type II: **personal role redefinition**, i.e. changing own perceptions and expectations
  - Type III: **reactive role behaviour**, i.e. do more (passive)
- Example: O'D & Humphries (1996)
  - Women managers
- Effectiveness of coping types
  - Types I and II more effective than type III.
  - Negative consequences of type III?

# Lazarus & Folkman (1984) - coping with stress

- Transactional model of coping
  - Primary + secondary appraisal
  - Coping (selection)
- Types of coping
  1. **Problem-focused** (either reactive or proactive)
  2. **Emotion-focused** (emotion regulation: e.g. cognitive restructuring, reappraisal)
  3. **Avoidance/escape**
  4. **Symptom management** (e.g. exercise, smoking, drinking)
- Common wisdom
  - PF more beneficial than EF: is it always?
  - Control over events
  - Personality factors? Neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness

# Thompson et al. (2007) review and critique

- Transactional approach most commonly used: PF and EF coping
- Role of personality recognized (1980s)
- **Episodic** versus **preventive** (proactive) coping
- Various coping typologies developed and tested, often based on Hall (1972) and Lazarus & Folkman (1984)
- **Overall findings –**
  - PF coping often effective, esp. for FWC (not so much for WFC). Why not? .... control over work?
  - EF coping or passive coping not so effective
  - ‘Informal accommodations’ at work often more effective than formal strategies

## Other types of coping

- Other typologies referred to in literature
  - [Rotondo et al. \(2003\)](#): direct action, avoidance/resignation, positive thinking, help-seeking
  - [Baltes \(2003\)](#): selection, optimization, compensation (SOC) – setting goals, acquiring means to achieve goals, alternative ways to achieve goals

# Somech & Drach-Zahavy (2007, 2008)

- *Personal* and *organisational* perspectives important.
- Developed typology of **8 strategies**
  1. Good enough at home (lower one's standards)
  2. Super at home (seek perfection)
  3. Delegation at home (delegating tasks)
  4. Priorities at home (setting priorities)

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  5. Good enough at work
  6. Super at work
  7. Delegation at work
  8. Priorities at work
- Effectiveness related to gender and gender-role ideology (traditional vs non-traditional)
- Personal and organisational strategies need to be complementary.



# Mauno & Ratanen (2013)

- **Coping resources**

- Contextual: social support, control over environment
- Dispositional: coping strategies

- **Contextual resources**

- Support from manager + coworkers → ↓ W->F conflict
- Support from partner/spouse → ↓ F->W conflict
- How can social support be obtained and optimized?

- **Dispositional resources**

- PF and EF coping strategies
- Avoidance coping (e.g. wishful thinking, denial, substance abuse)

- **Findings**

- **PF coping and EF coping** → more enrichment
- **Avoidance** → higher conflict (both ways), less facilitation (both ways)

- **Conclusion**

- Social support and control (autonomy) very important

# Rotondo & Kincaid (2008)

## Forms of EF coping

- cognitive reappraisal
- positive thinking

## Forms of PF coping

- direct action
- advice seeking

**Social support** a common theme, but incomplete: does not capture full range of coping options. Support not always helpful! (*reverse buffering*)

## Findings

- PF coping did reduce F->W conflict, but not W->F conflict. Why not?
- EF coping had little effect. Positive thinking was beneficial for facilitation.

# Higgins et al. (2010): coping with overload

- Examined gender diffs in coping with demands + overload in dual-career couples.
- 4 coping behaviours
  - Support seeking
  - Family-role restructuring
  - Work-role restructuring
  - Scaling back
- Gender differences
  - Women : more overload, more stress
  - Women : more scaling back, support-seeking
  - Men : less likely to restructure work, although this helped to reduce stress from overload (i.e. buffering)
- Implications
  - Restructuring (work & family) reduced stress for M and F
  - Some gender differences in coping strategies

# Does personality make a difference?

- **Baltes et al. (2011)** – YES!
  - **Conscientiousness** + **agreeableness** → more use of coping behaviours for both W->F conflict and F->W conflict. (Try to resolve issues)
  - Locus of control → more PF coping
  - Emotional stability → more PF and EF
  - Negative affectivity (neuroticism) → less PF, more avoidance
- Not universal though. Contextual factors perhaps more important, e.g. perceived control.
- Other dispositional factors: e.g. self-esteem, competence, optimism, resilience.
- Other factors to consider: **values** and **role salience**

## Issues to consider

- How to assess coping? Problems with our measurement procedures. Self-report problems.
- Lack of longitudinal designs. Negative correlation between coping and conflict. Does coping reduce conflict *or* does conflict increase coping?
- Numerous typologies and strategies – how do they compare?
- Focus on individual – what about couples' coping?
- Is there consistency over time in people's coping behaviours?
- Coping usage not equal to coping effectiveness. How to assess effectiveness?

# How to enhance work-life balance?

- It depends .... No one-size-fits-all
- Personal reflection (questions to ask yourself)
  - What are my priorities, goals at this stage of my life?
  - What are the sources of work-life conflict for me?
  - What things can I control in my life?
  - What changes can I (realistically) make to work + family + other?
  - Which coping strategies feel comfortable (personality)?
  - What actions will work for me and my partner/family?
  - How will I know if I am better off? (outcome evaluation)

# Conclusions from research

- Understanding of coping with WFC is very limited.
- Saying versus doing. Constraints on self-reports.
- We assume that work-life balance is important .... Is this the case?
- Emotions a key element.
- Gender similarities/differences?
- **Practical recommendations**
  - Social support (of the right kind!) is major contextual factor
  - Setting priorities (goals) + strategies to achieve goals
  - Having control (self-determination theory, SDT)
  - Complementary PF and EF strategies (not either/ or)