

## **Managing personal & professional life: Conflicts & solutions**

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In the modern world most people irrespective of their gender have to serve dual roles of a family person and a working person. In the family again there can be multiple roles, that of a parent, caregiver, bread earner vis-à-vis in workplace roles of multitasking. Hence one individual may need to juggle between several roles everyday and is expected to do full justice to each and every role everyday year after year. This rather superhuman profile, even if feasible, is greatly appreciated socially. But the person putting on that garb may not be at ease with this superhuman image. This article will endeavour to explore the conflicts of juggling between personal and professional roles and finding plausible solutions for the same.

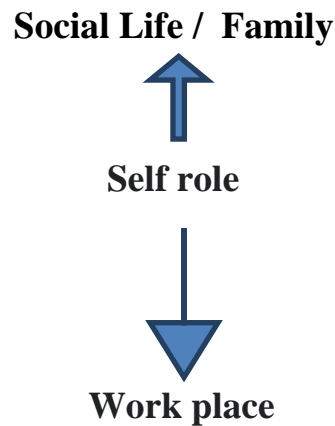
The discussion can begin with the very basic concepts of family and profession. Family is a socially recognized group of two or more people usually joined by blood, marriage, cohabitation ,adoption which forms an **emotional connection** amongst members and is also seen as an economic unit of the society.

Workplace is a location where someone works for the employer or for oneself. It is a place of employment which can range from home office to office building, field or factory. In a workplace an activity is done where the worker exerts strength or faculties to perform a task , which eventually gives **earning for a livelihood**.

The highlighted words above show the depth or the importance of both the spheres as a human being survives both personally ( with emotional connection) & professionally (with earnings for a comfortable life for self & family with whom one has that emotional connection). Thus both the domains become equally important.

Hence between these two domains often conflict occurs because of inter-role conflict in which the role-demands stemming from one life domain (work or home) are incompatible with role demands stemming from the other domain (home or work). Thus an individual experiences incompatible demands between work and family roles, making equal participation in both roles

difficult. This imbalance creates conflict at the work-life interface, a diagram of which given below.



Nature of this conflict is bidirectional, namely :

- a) **Work-to-family conflict (WFC):** It occurs when work responsibilities interfere with family responsibilities. In such cases individuals become incapable to meet role demands in the private life due to work demands.
- b) **Family-to-work conflict (FWC):** It occurs when familial responsibilities interfere with work responsibilities. In such cases individuals become incapable to meet role demands in the work domain due to private life demands.

This conflict has three basic areas of difficulty. Such as:

- a) **Time Based Difficulty** – Competing with the time requirements between Work & Family roles i.e. Time devoted to one role prevents meeting the demands in the other role.
- b) **Strain Based Difficulty** – Pressure in one role hindering performance in the second role i.e. When stress or strain in one role prevents meeting the demands in the other role.
- c) **Behaviour Based Difficulty** – Incompatibility of behaviours necessary for two different roles i.e. When the behaviour required in one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another role. Infact this difficulty is most important as it is the only area which is visible from outside. And often the previous two areas have

a direct and comprehensive impact on this, thereby making one's behaviour visibly incompatible to outside world.

This visibility is manifested in types of conflicts a person faces or bears starting with the most powerful one i.e.

1. Conflict with the **self** , the internal battle of dilemma which makes a person confused. This confusion often creates, even unknowingly.....
2. conflict with **others**, being caused by unprovoked & unnecessary wrong behaviour.. In the larger sphere, this gets manifested as.....
3. conflict with the **environment** , i.e. home atmosphere or work atmosphere where a person finds difficulty to adjust.

## II

There may be several reasons causing such conflicts between family & work. But the commonest ones are identified as :

1. **Workaholism:** When one's priority of work may interfere with family commitments. Usually in the lives of those infatuated with work, overabundance of work takes priority over everyone and everything else. This excessive work prevents one from forming and maintaining intimate personal relationships and close friendships. Workaholics spend a vast amount of time in work-related activities, which results in ignoring family life, social life and even personal relaxation times. Marital problems, trouble with maintaining close relationships, isolation from friends and family happen as a result of Workaholism.
2. **High Work Demands :** This can be portrayed by extensive, irregular, or inflexible work hours, work overload, extensive travel, career transitions, unsupportive superior or organization. Other work demands creating work-family conflict includes compulsory or unexpected overtime/ shift work which can prevent a staff to fulfill an important family responsibility eg. picking up his or her child from school or taking elderly parents to doctor.
3. **Family Commitments :** When experiences and commitments in the family which include presence of young children, primary responsibility for children in case of single

parent or one parent having an away job, elder care responsibilities, interpersonal conflict within the family unit, unsupportive family members interfere with work life. This results in lower work productivity of employees.

4. The other reasons of conflict include lack of proper communication, stressful family members, no work division of household chores, being far from family (in home front) & discrimination, bullying or harassment, lack of job satisfaction (in work front).

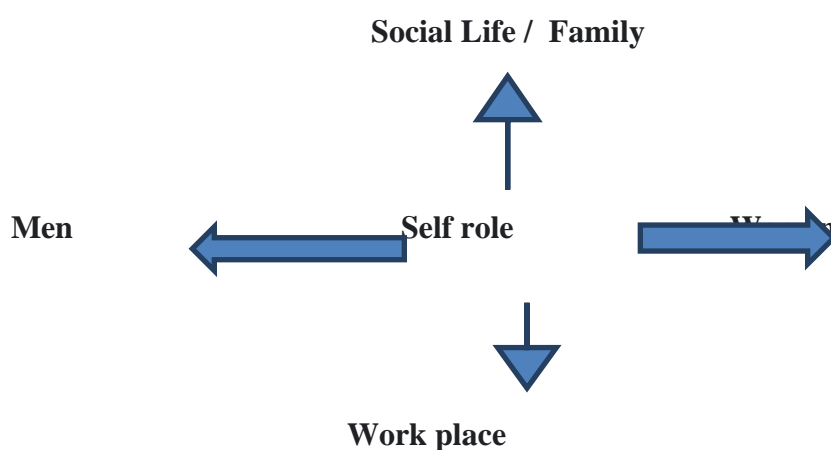
Quite naturally these conflicts have unpleasant outcomes as well which mainly affect the person facing such conflicts starting with :

1. **Dilemma** between family and profession resulting in
2. **dilemma of action choices** which is the inability to prioritise work between the two domains.
3. This dilemma causes **dominant stress** emerging due to
  - **unrealistic expectations based on irrational beliefs** i.e. social role construct of duties of a wife, a mother, the eldest son, only child etc.
  - **social undermining** when a person fails to live up to such expectations
  - **shared decision control** creating opposed and argumentative decisions
  - **lack of social support** particularly in **dual-employment families** with minor children.
4. And finally continued stress causes **adverse effects on the person's life** as a whole by.....
  - increasing risk of anxiety, burnout, depression, and substance use disorders. People who are stressed are more likely to engage in unhealthy dependences like cigarette smoking, taking alcohol, drug abuse and poor dietary habits, all of which affect general health.
  - by adversely affecting performance because due to stress an employee can make constant mistakes, relationship with co-workers deteriorates and finally productivity is **reduced**.

- In case of people living far away, too much time away from the family causes tension & worries which means the extra time an employee is spending at work is not at all productive.

### III

Till here the discussion has been gender-free. But in reality one's gender becomes a large factor in work-family conflict because sometimes gender may determine the role of an individual in home or in work place.



Some such discriminations are worth exploring :

In work place a term called **Ideal worker** refers to an employee who is "committed to work above all else". Such workers take up tasks beyond formal and assigned duties and give valuable attributes to the organization.

- Women in the workplace can be inaccurately perceived as **not ideal worker** under the false notion that women have less commitment to their organizations than their counterparts because they are thought to be dividing their time (and their commitments) between family and work and hence less dedicated to the organization. It is important to remember that in a male controlled organization, typical concept of "ideal worker" does not accommodate the family lifestyle. Hence it gets difficult for working women

to get ahead in the workplace while still maintaining a home and family as per the societal ideas & expectations.

- On the contrary a male staff is considered as an “ Ideal worker” because an **unmarried male** is seen as devoid of "typical" family responsibilities. In case of a **married male** , if his wife is at home tending to the "typical" family responsibilities, he is thought to be more dedicated in the workplace. It is important to note that higher percentage of males at the top of the organization hierarchy creates workplace policies which reflect strong gender discrimination and never acknowledges the competence of women at workplace.
- But strangely an **unmarried female** is also seen as devoid of "typical" family responsibilities and hence often gets dumped with an overload of work which is exploitative in nature.

This gender discrimination is manifested even in home front in case of a family where parents / couples both of whom have professional lives. Still it can be seen that -

- the mother has to attend Parent- Teacher Meeting in school, taking leave from work or even cancelling important work.
- in case the child is sick, only the mother has to stay back .
- after a hectic work day for both the partners, female working spouse is expected to do the household chores.

But the worst gender discrimination is seen in the case of working mothers who are compelled to pay a **Motherhood penalty** (a term coined in sociology) which has dual manifestation:

- **In workplace** - Mothers are thought to be much less committed to their jobs, less authoritative, and less dependable than non-mothers. This fact is completely disregarded that it is the mother who takes care of & rears a baby into being a grown up & thus shows how dependable and committed she can be. Such wrong perception often demotivates a competent female staff to not take up challenging assignments.

- **At home** - When mothers try to be committed to jobs, they are perceived as bad mothers, not caring enough for or giving more time to children as they spend more time outside home. This “ judgemental” attitude often affects a mother’s psychology so much that she may get engulfed by a sense of guilt for being away from child for a long time and therefore often try to compensate wrongly by giving too many gifts &/or unjustified lenience to the child. This hampers proper upbringing of her child, for which again she will be blamed when & if the child grows up as pampered, selfish and indisciplined. Therefore this motherhood penalty is not only society-inflicted but also many a times self -inflicted, which eventually harms both the mother and the child in the long run.

But with more and more people, both men & women getting into professional life, the need for a balance between the two domains became necessary and from sociological & psychological points of view certain suggestive solutions started surfacing. It is true that every problem and the reaction to it is person specific, neither coping mechanism is identical among people, yet idea of some basic way outs and willful adherence to those definitely help fight the dilemma and handle the situation better.

#### IV

Amongst the probable wayouts two basic theories are talked about :

- **Boundary Theory:** According to this theory a person divides life into two interdependent sections, work and family respectively where individuals have to play different roles and bear different responsibilities in each section. Since the sections are interdependent, two roles cannot take place at the same time. As a consequence an individual has to **participate in role transformation** between expectations of the workplace and expected roles within the family structure resulting in a constant **oscillation** or swaying between the two roles as a pendulum.
- **Border theory :** This other theory expands the idea by considering the influences each section has on the other. This theory actually attempts to point out ways to manage the

conflict by multitasking thus integrating the two segments by working simultaneously & thereby **achieving balance** between two conflicting identities.

As previously mentioned, this conflict has 3 basic areas of difficulty. Hence those 3 areas need to be managed as well.

1. For managing Time Based difficulties most important is **Schedule Control** which can be defined as flexibility or flexible work arrangements. This flexibility includes :
  - **Timing of work** :Whether working time starts early morning or during rush hours or in the evening. This time-schedule needs to be balanced with time for family accordingly.
  - **Number of hours to work.** : **This duration may** vary depending on home situation or emergencies. So working hours need to flexible accordingly.
  - **Location of work** : Work location affects both commuting time and total time away from home. Hence longer the distance between home & workplace, stress is more. So maintaining contact with family using modern day devices like WhatsApp, video calls etc can minimise that stress.
  
2. For managing Strain based difficulties the following measures become useful :
  - Exploring membership & concept of responsibility in two systems by questioning the stereotypes defined by society and family. This can be ideally explained as arguing the justification of gender discriminatory social constructs for men & women.
  - Such social constructs are usually deeply embedded in the psyche of those who are actually suffering for it or are causing the suffering. In order to get rid of one's own social stereotypes, the individual has to personally work through it by getting over the guilt feeling (in case of women) & by accepting that like working women, working men also need to perform dual responsibilities.
  - Lastly while redefining relationships in terms of equality & redesigning new/unconventional roles for self, one should be aware of the “price” to be paid in the process. Therefore by denying social constructs while both men & women perform dual



role equally, they are likely to face criticism which they will need to brace against it jointly and avoid stress.

3. Managing behavior based difficulties are to some extent similar to Strain management processes and may need work-supportive behaviour from others in both the domains of Family & Workplace. This will require :
  - Acceptance of partnership in the real sense between women & men both in family & work settings by adopting practices like collaborating & accommodating.
  - Not compromising while redefining relationships & redesigning new roles for self in social system, which means in the process not succumbing to criticism in any domain.
  - Avoiding provocative behaviour from others both at home and workplace, as this will result in confrontation, mental stress and finally jeopardy of assigned responsibilities.
  - Finally conflict-management needs an individual to discover processes of anchoring the self in the decisions taken, against the criticism & carry on in one's chosen path confidently and unfalteringly.

## V

It is important to note that administration can also play a proactive role in reducing this conflict by providing :

- **Instrumental support which is manifested in** flexible work scheduling policies .  
This actually is the day-to-day support that institution provides in the form of managing work schedules and responding in concrete ways to meet workers' family needs while still ensuring that the work gets done. With advances in technology institutions now can implement telecommuting policies for individuals who work outside home for intense schedules & need ways to keep in touch with their families when they cannot physically be with them. Here this institutional support can allow employees to keep in touch regularly with family through video calls or even permit them to work from home and provide more flexibility and control over their schedules.
- **Emotional support** is when a staff feels comfortable discussing family commitments with the superiors. When institution is aware of and sympathetic to staff's family needs, many family-friendly policies can be implemented which may include maternity,

paternity, parental & sick leaves and health care insurance. Institutes may also provide child care options either as on-site child care centre or by providing references of child care centres closeby where a parent can quickly go between work to get assured that the child is safe and also give the child the necessary mental assurance that parents are around.

- **Role modelling behaviours- Staffs** will feel more confident in using appropriate strategies to balance their work and family commitments if they can see that those strategies are actually working for others, most importantly their seniors/ bosses.

Therefore if an institution can create an environment that values oscillation or integration, cares for employee's work-life balance , it is able to attract and retain satisfied employees, improve their performances and boost employees' morale and institutional identification as well.

After searching the conflicts and solutions in the work- life interface, therefore in the final analysis what emerges is that for any person (irrespective of gender) who has a dual role to play as family person and as a working person, the individual needs to find a balance between both domains by adopting certain methods which can be shortlisted as

- schedule control
- work supportive behaviour from family
- family supportive behaviour from workplace
- minimising gender-discrimination.

And all these can be achieved if there is understanding, caring, sharing for one another and by being bold to face criticism in the way.

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