Chapter 1

Introduction

Work plays an important role in the lives of many people. However, most people have other roles that are central to their lives as well, such as the role of being a parent, child, sibling or grandparent. In this dissertation I will examine how work and other roles in life can influence each other. Research addressing the interface between work and home life roles – generally referred to as the work-family literature - has predominantly focused on the negative side of role combination (Voydanoff, 2004). Over the past 40 years, scholars have examined how different roles can negatively affect each other and have specified the difficulties and stresses that can be experienced in role combination. The central construct in the work-family literature therefore is work-family conflict, which is the individual’s experience that joint role pressures from the work and family domains are incompatible in some respect, as a result of which participation in one role is made more difficult by virtue of another role (Greenhaus, 1985). This construct of work-family conflict has received much research attention over the years as a result of which scientific knowledge on the negative side of the work-family interface is extensive. For instance, we know that conflict is bi-directional in nature. Work can negatively interfere with family roles (work-to-family conflict), but family roles can also negatively interfere with fulfilling the work role (family-to-work conflict, Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Moreover, different types of conflict can be experienced. Individuals can, for example, experience that the time they devote to one role prevents them from adequately fulfilling the other (time-based conflict). In can also occur that they feel exhausted and strained from participation one role as a result of which they can not satisfactorily participate in another role (strain-based conflict; Greenhaus, 1985). Moreover, it is known that experiencing conflict between the work and family domains can have serious negative consequences for well-being, such as burnout and depression (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). However, is conflict all there is to role combination? And is experiencing “no conflict” the best possible outcome? I argue that this is not the case. Indeed, recently, work-family researchers have started to pay attention to the positive side of role combination and found that individuals can also enjoy role combination and can experience a positive exchange between their work and family roles (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001;
Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). To address this, scholars have developed the construct of work-family facilitation, which refers to the individual’s experience that participation in one role is made better or easier by virtue of participation in another role (Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004). To date, much less is known about this positive side of role combination: the possibility that work and family roles benefit each other. In this dissertation, I take a positive psychological perspective on role combination. The central objective of the work presented here is to increase the understanding of the positive side of the work-family interface. I will focus on the construct of work-family facilitation and will address several questions that have remained unanswered in the work-family literature to date. For instance, what does the experience of facilitation between work and family roles actually consist of? Is it possible to distinguish between different types of facilitation experiences, as is the case with the different types of conflict that have been identified in the literature? Is there added value in examining facilitation - in addition to conflict - for instance when trying to understand and predict how role combination affects outcomes in the work domain (e.g., job performance)? What are relevant antecedents of experiencing facilitation between work and family, and is it possible to influence these experiences? These and other questions will be addressed in the present dissertation.

The very first study I conducted to increase my understanding of the positive side of the work-family interface and the ways in which people experience that their work and family roles influence each other was a qualitative interview study on role combination (this study is presented in detail in Chapter 2). I interviewed 25 employees on role combination and addressed the negative as well as the positive side of the work-family interface. During these interviews, it happened many times that employees expressed their appreciation of my attending to the positive as well as the negative side of combining roles instead of merely focusing on negative aspects. They indicated that in their work and daily lives people often only asked about the problems and difficulties that one is faced with in role combination “It must be difficult to pursue a career and have children”, “How do you deal with the stress?”. The lively stories of these employees I have interviewed have been

\[a\] It should be noted that the work-family literature is also referred to as the “work-home” or “work-nonwork” literature because scholars often examine how individuals experience the interface between their work role on the one hand and the variety of other roles in their life (e.g., parent, husband/wife, family member, friend) on the other (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Witt & Carlson, 2006; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). In this dissertation, consistent with this approach, my use of the term family is intended to denote individuals’ “non-work” roles in a broad sense.
very instructive and useful to increase my understanding of the different ways in which work and family roles can facilitate each other and have inspired me to further pursue this issue. Moreover, this study confirmed the idea that there indeed is more to role combination than experiencing role conflict alone. As one female employee put it:

“What I dislike about the combination is the constant pressure of time. Moreover, sometimes I take the stress from work home with me. What I really dislike is the fact that that I have to miss certain activities from school, such as my children’s school outing (. . .). However, I do have the feeling that I have best of both worlds. For instance, I have the feeling that I am a nicer and more interesting wife at home, because I can tell about and discuss matters from work. And I also learn certain things at work, for instance about insurance or legal issues, but certain social skills as well, which come in handy at home. The combination enriches your life I think. I also have the feeling that I am a nicer mother because of my work. I often come home from work in a cheerful mood, causing the children to have a more cheerful mom at home. And, of course, the use of time. Because of my work, I do the things at home more efficiently, groceries etc. (. . .). In the same vein, because I have tasks at home to do, I carry out my work more efficiently; I have a deadline to be at day-care at 5 pm you see. Another good thing: I have (emphasis) a life at home. Because I have this life at home - a life besides work – I know the world is larger than this organization alone (. . .). Having your work only and a very limited life at home makes one short-sighted in the end (. . .). I think that people who have a life besides their work are more stable employees”.

This initial qualitative study further enhanced my interest to examine the positive side of the work-family interface more closely. The purpose of the present introductory chapter is to give an overview of the dominant theories that have been central to the work-family literature over the years and provide the theoretical backdrop for the work carried out in the context of this dissertation. First, I will provide a theoretical and empirical overview of current knowledge on the negative side of role combination. Second, I will give an overview of theory development and recent empirical findings on the positive side of the work-family interface to introduce the main question I aim to address in the present research. In doing this, I will discuss methodological and measurement issues that have hindered the work-family literature to date, which I have aimed to take into account in my own research. Additionally, I will elaborate on the organization in which all of the studies that are presented in this dissertation were carried out. Finally, I will give an overview of the studies that are presented
in the different chapters of this dissertation and indicate how these relate to the central topic of my investigation.

1.1 Scarcity Theory and Work-Family Conflict

In the literature, different models have been used to characterize the relationship between the work and family domains (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Rothbard & Dumas, 2006). Two early models are commonly referred to as the “segmentation model” and the “compensation model” of work and family. The segmentation model posited that the work and family domains are inherently different and separate domains that do not influence each other in any way (Dulin, 1956; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Rothbard & Dumas, 2006). In addition, the so-called compensation model hypothesized that people attempt to make up for deprivations in one domain through greater involvement in the other. As such, it was thought that the work domain could compensate for deprivations in the family domain and vice versa (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Rothbard & Dumas, 2006; Wilensky, 1960). Both models have received little support in the empirical literature (Peeters & Heiligers, 2003).

In contrast to these early models, the dominant view in the current literature, which has received substantial empirical support, is referred to as the “spillover model”. The spillover model acknowledges that the work and family domains are interconnected domains of human life that influence each other. This model postulates that the work and family domain are interconnected because people’s attitudes, moods, values, habits, and behaviors can spill over from one domain to the other, thus generating similarities between the two domains (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Rothbard & Dumas, 2006). Within this view of work and family as interconnected domains of human life, the primary focus in the literature has been on the role conflicts that individuals can experience in fulfilling work and family roles (Frone, 2003; Rothbard & Dumas, 2006). Although role theory (Goode, 1960; Kahn, Woelke, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964) is quite generally applicable to all situations in which people fulfill multiple roles, this theory is often referred to as the founding theory of the work-family literature (Frone, 2003). According to this theory, a role is a set of activities or behaviors that others expect an individual to perform. This theory asserts that, in the case of fulfilling multiple roles, the individual will be confronted with incompatible role pressures because the (behavioral) requirements and expectations associated with these different roles will unavoidably conflict in some way. This type of role-conflict has been labeled
interrole conflict. Role theory predicts that fulfilling multiple roles will inevitably lead to experiencing role conflict, which relates to higher levels of stress and decreased satisfaction and motivation at work. Based on these premises, many scholars have theorized about the alleged difficulty of managing multiple roles and stressed the overdemanding nature of role combination. Edgell (1970) describes role combination as an inevitable dilemma between being “married” to your work or to your family life and denotes that someone who attempts to subscribe to both domains will be the victim of role conflict “since any degree of commitment to one role will detract from commitment, and chances of success, in the other, simply in terms of the availability of time and energy” (Edgell, 1970, p. 320). In the literature, it was generally assumed that individuals’ personal resources of time, energy, and attention are limited and fixed and that spending energy or devoting attention to one role necessarily implies that fewer resources are available for another role. As such, the central assumption has been that participating in one role tends to have a negative effect on other role performances (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Marks, 1977). Marks (1977) has labeled this negative perspective on role combination in the literature the scarcity theory on human energy.

On the basis of this scarcity theory and based on Kahn’s et al. (1964) concept of interrole conflict, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) developed their construct of work-family conflict (Frone, 2003). As described earlier, they defined work-family conflict as “a type of role conflict that arises when joint role pressures from work and family domains are experienced as incompatible in some respect, as a result of which participation in one role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the other role” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). They also distinguished between different types of conflict experiences (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Strain-based conflict exists “when strain produced in one role makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role.” For instance, someone is stressed and tired after a working day, which makes it difficult for him or her to attend to what is needed at home. Time-based conflict occurs “when time devoted to one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another role”, for example, missing your son’s important soccer match because of work obligations. In addition, behavioral conflict emerges “when behavior required in one role makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role.” This type of conflict refers to the experience that it can be difficult to switch from one type of behavior in one role to another type of behavior in another role, for instance, switching from pragmatic business behavior to patient caring behavior at home. These types of conflict can be
experienced in the work-to-family (WF) as well as the family-to-work (FW) direction and are statistically distinct (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Carlson, Brooklyn Derr, & Wadsworth, 2003; Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002). Greenhaus (1988) also distinguished yet another type of conflict, namely psychological conflict. This conflict experience refers to being mentally distracted by or preoccupied with one role, while physically present in another role (Cardenas, Major, & Bernas, 2004; Carlson & Frone, 2003). For instance, someone keeps thinking, worrying or ruminating about home-life matters while at work, rendering him/her unable to concentrate on what needs to be done at work (or vice versa). Psychological conflict is defined as “the psychological preoccupation with one role, while performing another role that interferes with one’s ability to become engaged in that last role” (Carlson & Frone, 2003, p. 518).

The construct of work-family conflict has guided most of the research on work-family role combination, a field which has grown dramatically over the past decades. The increased interest in this field has been stimulated by the trend in the United States as well as in Europe of increased female labor force participation, together with the increased prevalence of dual earner families (Emancipation Monitor, 2006; United Nations Statistics, 2003; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In the Netherlands, for instance, in 1970, only 29% of females aged between 16 and 65 years participated in the labor force. Nowadays, 66% of the females in this age category are employed in paid work (Emancipation Monitor, 2006). Together with this increase in female labor force participation, nowadays in 60% of the families with a child under age, both partners participate in the labor force (Emancipation Monitor, 2006). Other developments as well have stimulated research interest into the work-family interface, such as the trend towards more global competition, which pressures employees to react flexibly to change within their organizations and also is associated with working irregular hours and more traveling for work. Moreover, technological advancements (e.g., cell phones, e-mail, laptops) have fuelled scholars’ interest into the work-family interface. These new technologies have changed our way of working and have made it more likely for work to intrude in the family domain or vice versa (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2006; Peeters & Heiligers, 2003). However, almost all of this research over the past decades has been based on the scarcity theory of human energy. Thus, the basic assumption underlying most past work-family research has been that role combination is inherently difficult and inevitably leads to experiencing role conflict and stress (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003, Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Voydanoff, 2004). Scholars who have paid special attention to the experiences of women in combining work and family roles have also often
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approached this issue from a negative perspective. Focusing on the negative side of role combination, it is often expected in the literature that women experience higher levels of conflict because they bear the largest past of the care-taking and household activities alongside their work or because of the difficulties associated with performing the work role with the latter being seen as “unnatural” for women according to traditional gender role expectations (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). As such, to date, research into the experiences of women at work has primarily adopted a negative perspective.

Scarcity Perspective in Organizations

In organizations, the issue of work-family role combination is often approached from a scarcity perspective as well. Several work-family scholars have pointed out that within organizations the basic principle seems to be fear that employees’ commitment to other roles than the work role will go at the expense of employees’ availability or performance at work. Moreover, it is often assumed that – to be fully committed to work – employees should not be “distracted” by other commitments (Acker, 1999; Ferree, 1990; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007; Kofodimos, 1990). In the literature, several components of organizational cultures have been identified that are based on this assumption. One such a component, labeled “organizational time demands”, refers to the requirement of having to work long hours in order to demonstrate one’s motivation and commitment to work (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999). Another important concern is referred to as “perceived negative career consequences” associated with devoting more time to family issues. This indicates employees’ reluctance to use work-family benefits (e.g., parental leave) or otherwise devote time to their family responsibilities out of fear that being less visible at work will be interpreted as a lack of commitment, which will in term jeopardize their career (Allen, 2001; Poelmans, 2003; Thompson et al., 1999; Voydanoff, 2004). These aspects of organizational culture have been found to relate to increased levels of conflict experiences among employees. In the same vein, employees who receive little support and understanding for family responsibilities from their manager and co-workers indicate that they experience higher levels of conflict (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999).

In the literature, organizations are advised to try to question these aspects of their organizational culture and enhance managerial and co-worker support for family issues within their organization in order to prevent the detrimental consequences of conflict from occurring (Kofodimos, 1990; Thompson et al., 1999; Allen, 2001). In a meta-analysis, Allen et al. (2000) revealed that employees’
conflict experiences relate to detrimental outcomes in the work domain (e.g.,
decreased work satisfaction and decreased organizational commitment), as well
as the non-work domain (e.g., decreased life satisfaction). Moreover, this meta-
analysis revealed strong relationships between employees’ conflict experiences
and stress-related outcomes, such as increased levels of emotional exhaustion
(burnout), increased levels of depression, and a higher level of somatic
complaints. By highlighting these negative consequences of conflict, work-family
scholars have attempted to stimulate other researchers and organizational
practitioners alike to think of ways to reduce employees’ experiences of conflict
between the work and family domain and its negative consequences for
individual workers as well as the organizations they work in (e.g., Allen et al.,
2000; Thompson et al., 1999). Thus, again, the topic of role combination is
basically approached from a negative perspective, by merely paying attention to
the negative side of role combination (conflict) and its adverse consequences.

However, relatively recently, work-family scholars report empirical
results that challenge this negative view on role combination and indeed some
have started to criticize the work-family literature for its one-sided focus on the
negative side of role combination (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Casper, Eby,
Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Voydanoff,
2004).

1.2 Expansion Theory and Work-Family Facilitation

A theoretical alternative for the scarcity perspective was proposed by Marks
already in 1977. In contrast to scarcity theory’s assumption that role enactment
inevitably and unavoidably depletes a person’s finite resources, in his Role
Expansion Theory, Marks considered human energy and attention to be abundant
and expandable. He proposed that participation in one role not necessarily takes
away from the energy available for another role. In fact, he posited that fulfilling
one role can even create energy for the use in that or other roles. As such, he
argued that participation in one role can also have positive effects on other role
performances. Moreover, he argued to view time not as some sort of
“prefabricated scarcity” which inevitably makes us fall victim to the experience
of role conflict. By contrast, he posited that people are active agents who, by their
own role bargaining, can allocate and use their time flexibly as a result of which
there is no need to presuppose conflict in role combination. In sum, Mark’s
(1977) role expansion theory posits that people can also benefit from multiple role

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participation and highlights the possibility that different roles positively impact upon each other.

This positive perspective on role combination has long been neglected in the literature. However, relatively recently, there is increasing attention for this positive perspective among researchers in the work-family field. This growing interest in the positive side of role combination in the work-family literature seems to correspond with the more general trend in psychology referred to as “positive psychology” (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which argues that psychologists have been too preoccupied with examining the problematic developments and downside of human life. Rather than merely focusing on negative phenomena, such as people’s diseases, disorders, and distresses, “positive psychologists” call for more examination of positive phenomena to identify the factors that enhance human well-being, excellence, engagement, and resilience. A similar development among work-family scholars has caused them to aim for a better understanding of the upside of role combination.

Work-family studies that have addressed the positive side of role combination indeed suggest that role combination does not necessarily elicit conflict nor will it always be associated with detrimental outcomes. In fact, these studies have revealed that participation in multiple roles can be associated with enhanced well-being for individuals. Additionally, these studies suggest that employers do not need to fear that employees’ involvement in and commitment to other life roles goes at the expense of work. On the contrary, they indicate that the work domain can actually benefit from employees’ participation in other roles. That is, challenging the scarcity perspective on human energy, individuals who were involved in a greater number of roles in their lives have been found to have better mental health and better physical health over time (Barnett, Marshall, & Singer, 1992; Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992). Moreover, Kirchmeyer (1992) has established that when employees, besides their work role, spent more hours on home life roles (e.g., parenting roles, community roles) they actually reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In a similar vein, Steptoe, Lundwall, and Cropley (2000) assessed the influence of participation in family roles on physiological recovery after work. They divided their sample into three groups: a) married/cohabiting parents, b) married/cohabiting non-parents, and c) singles, and assessed their stress levels during and after a working day. There were no differences across these groups in the overall stress levels experienced at work. However, after a working day, when at home, the greatest reduction of stress was found among
parents, subsequently among married/cohabiting individuals, and finally singles displayed the lowest recovery rates. Thus, rather than that family roles depleted these employees, participation in family roles seems to have helped these individuals to relax. These findings again indicate that there may be a positive side to participation in multiple roles as well. Also important in this regard is the research by Ruderman et al. (2002), which examined, in a quantitative as well as quantitative fashion, whether women in management experienced that their work role benefited from their participation in and commitment to the other roles they fulfilled in their lives. The qualitative data obtained in this research illustrate that these women felt that their involvement in other life roles helped them to be more effective in their managerial role. These female managers, for example indicated that the role of being a parent taught them how to understand, motivate, develop, and direct their subordinates. Additionally, they reported that active participation in family settings and community or volunteer work had provided them with opportunities to gain experience in leadership positions and had enabled them to refine their listening and communication skills. Furthermore, the quantitative data obtained in this research revealed that managers who reported higher levels of commitment to other roles besides the work role indicated that they had higher levels of general well-being and were rated to have better task related as well as interpersonal skills in a 360-assessment by their peers, subordinates, and supervisors. Along similar lines, a recent study among male and female managers indicated that managers who felt more committed to their parental and marital roles did not indicate that they experienced more role conflict – which would have been expected from a scarcity perspective. On the contrary, those in dual roles reported higher levels of well-being and received better work performance ratings as assessed in a 360-assessment (Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007).

Thus, these findings clearly call for a more positive perspective on role combination in work-family research and warrant additional research to increase our understanding of the mechanisms that can produce these beneficial effects. It should be noted that scholars who advocate examining the positive side of role combination (e.g., Graves et al., 2007; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Ruderman et al., 2002) acknowledge that role conflict and overload can be experienced in role combination. Moreover, they do not propose that fulfilling more roles is necessarily better since, conceivably, there are certain limits beyond which multiple roles can become burdensome or stressful (Ruderman et al., 2002). What they argue against however is adopting a standard scarcity assumption of
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human energy, which results in under representation of research on the positive side of role combination in the literature.

Work-Family Facilitation
How then can participation in multiple roles produce beneficial outcomes? Greenhaus and Powell (2006) have identified three relevant psychological mechanisms that can account for the positive outcomes associated with participation in multiple roles. These include the possibility that 1) participation in different roles can have additive effects for well-being, 2) participation in one role can have buffering effects from distress in another role, and 3) participation in one role can produce positive experiences and outcomes in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This third mechanism refers to the concepts of work-family facilitation, enhancement, positive spillover, and enrichment.

In the present dissertation, I will focus on this third mechanism, and more specifically on employees’ experiences of facilitation between their work and family roles. Several definitions have been advanced to specify the construct of facilitation. For instance, “the extent to which participation in one role is made easier by virtue of the experiences, skills, and opportunities gained or developed in another role” (Frone, 2003, p. 145), and “the extent to which participation in one role is made better or easier by virtue of participation in another role” (Wayne et al., 2004, p. 109). A central element in these definitions is that role functioning is made easier by virtue of participation in another role. In the present research, facilitation is accordingly defined as the extent to which participation in one role makes it easier to fulfill the requirements of another role. As such, facilitation can be regarded as the conceptual counterpart of conflict, which refers to the extent to which participation in one role makes it more difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role. It is important to note here that conflict and facilitation, rather than bipolar ends of a single continuum, represent separate constructs which can be experienced by an individual at the same time (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Wayne et al., 2004). Second, it should be noted that scholars have used the term facilitation interchangeably with the terms positive spillover, enhancement, and enrichment (e.g., Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). However, in the present research, I concur with other work-family scholars (e.g., Carlson et al., 2006; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006) that these concepts address (slightly) different aspects of the positive side of combining multiple roles (see Carlson et al., 2006 for a detailed overview). Positive spillover indicates moods, values, habits or skills being transferred from one domain to another
domain in ways that make the two domains more similar (Hanson et al, 2006; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Enhancement encompasses the acquisition of resources and experiences that are beneficial for individuals in coping with general life challenges (Sieber, 1974). However, neither of these concepts directly captures the experience that one role makes is easier to fulfill the requirements of the other, which is the essence of facilitation. Finally, enrichment refers to the individual’s judgment that participation in one role improves the quality of life - in terms of performance and affect - in the other role. Enrichment measures then assess the individual’s self-judgment that, for example, their work performance benefits from their participation in family roles (Carlson et al., 2006). This differs from the more proximal and narrow construct of facilitation, which captures the individual’s judgment that participation in one role makes it easier to fulfill the requirements of another role (just as conflict measures capture the individual’s judgment that participation in one role is makes it more difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role). To examine how facilitation and conflict experiences affect outcomes such as work performance, I will empirically relate facilitation and conflict measures to outcome variables such as objective measures of work performance. Thus, in the present dissertation, I will address the positive as well as the negative side of the work-family interface by examining individual’s experiences of role facilitation as well as their experiences of role conflict.

Aims of the Present Dissertation
The central objective of this dissertation thus is to increase understanding of the positive side of role combination. I will examine in detail how work and family roles can facilitate each other. As a result of the predominant focus on conflict in previous research, much is still unknown about employees’ experience of work-family facilitation or about the positive outcomes that might result from this experience (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Voyeranoff, 2004). For instance, is it possible to distinguish between different types of facilitation experiences, in parallel to the different types of conflict that have been identified in the literature? And is there added value in examining facilitation - in addition to conflict - for instance when examining the effects of role combination on outcomes in the work domain (e.g., job performance)? Might there be gender differences in experiences of facilitation between roles? Moreover, when facilitation proves to be a relevant construct, is there evidence to suggest that employees’ facilitation experiences in role combination relate to actual organizational outcomes, such as objective indicators of employees’ job performance and absenteeism levels, or is facilitation only
related to employees’ subjective well-being? Finally, I aim to identify relevant antecedents of experiencing facilitation between work and family and will assess whether it is possible to influence these experiences. Below, I provide an overview of the questions that will be addressed in the different chapters of this dissertation. However, first, I will discuss the methodological and measurement issues that have hindered previous work-family literature and provide information on the organization in which the research presented in this dissertation took place.

1.3 Measurement and Methodological Issues

In the present dissertation, I aim to address several persistent shortcomings that have hindered the work-family literature to date. Recently, Casper and colleagues (2007) have conducted an extensive review of the research methods used in the work-family literature over the past 24 years. Based on these observations, they have criticized the field for the fact that very few scholars have attempted to examine the work-family interface through frameworks other than scarcity theory as a result of which little is known about the possibility of work-family facilitation (see also Voydanoff, 2004). As I have described above, the central objective of the work presented here is to address the positive side of the work-family interface and gain more insight into individuals’ experiences of facilitation between work and family roles. Another shortcoming of the field, identified by Casper et al. (2007) pertains to the finding that scholars have often only assessed one direction of conflict (and facilitation) or relied on generalized measures instead of examining specific experiences that represent the work-to-family (WF) as well as the family-to-work (FW) direction. These directions, which have proven to be statistically distinct (Frone et al, 1992; Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000), capture fundamentally different subjective employee experiences, namely that the work domain has a negative (or positive) influence on the home domain or vice versa and thus should both be taken into account (see also Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Frone, 2003). The distinction between directions is also relevant for practitioners, for instance to design work-family intervention programs. Therefore, in all studies I present in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, I will provide a more balanced perspective on the work-family interface by addressing the negative (conflict) as well as the positive side (facilitation) in the WF and FW direction.

Furthermore, in the present research, I aim to move beyond the mere use of cross-sectional single-source survey research designs. The use of this kind of
designs raises concerns about mono-method bias and renders firm conclusions about causal relationships inappropriate. Moreover, when one relies on employees’ self-reports only - for instance to examine the relationship between facilitation and work performance - one can only confidently say whether or not employees’ facilitation experiences relate to their own subjective assessment of their performance at work. One can, however, never be certain that their facilitation experiences relate to their actual performance at work, in objective terms. In fact, this predominant reliance on cross-sectional single-source survey data has been identified as major shortcoming of work-family research to date (Casper et al., 2007). Casper and colleagues (2007) strongly recommended to advance the field by using multi-source data, including hard (objective) outcome measures, and by making use of longitudinal and experimental research designs to adequately examine causal relationships (see also Allen et al., 2000; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). In this dissertation, I therefore combine several different methodological research designs, in line with these recommendations. That is, in addition to the use of cross-sectional survey data (Chapter 2 and 3), I present qualitative data (in Chapter 2), which greatly enhanced my understanding of the construct of work-family facilitation. Moreover, I report two studies in which I use multi-source data, including objective data, such as objective indicators of physical health, job performance, and actual absenteeism rates (Chapter 4). This allowed me to examine whether employees’ subjective experiences of facilitation and conflict relate to objective outcome measures. Furthermore, to examine whether experiences in role combination actually predict objective outcomes (e.g., objective job performance) over time, I deployed a longitudinal research design (Chapter 4). Finally, to examine whether it is possible to influence employees’ cognitive appraisals of the work-family interface, I present a field experiment (Chapter 5) in which I manipulate the (alleged) views of others on role combination to examine how this causally affects how individuals themselves view the combination of their work and family roles.

1.4 The Organization in which this Research took Place

All of the studies I report in this dissertation are the result of a successful collaboration project over the past four years between Leiden University and ING. This multinational financial services organization is headquartered in the Netherlands and employs over 30,000 people in the Netherlands alone. Its professional Human Resources (HR) department in the Netherlands wanted to increase their understanding of work-family issues within their organization.
This interest was motivated by the reality that many of their current (and future) employees are part of dual earner families and the fact that there is much more diversity than there used to be in the manner in which employees combine their work role with other roles in life and employees’ preferences in this regard. Moreover, the HR department was aware that contemporary employees tend to attach great importance to being able to satisfactorily combine their work with other life roles (see also Peeters & Heiligers, 2003). Stimulated by these developments within the organization and society at large, the aim of HR department was to become more knowledgeable on work-family issues to find effective ways to manage these issues. The HR department for instance wanted to know what it means for employees - in terms of implications for their well-being, work satisfaction, and work performance - to experience either a problematic or a successful combination of roles. Moreover, the HR department aimed to gain more insight in the factors that can contribute to experiencing a successful combination of roles in order to be able to address possible organizational factors that are relevant in this regard.

Because the HR department also wanted to know how their current employees experienced the combination of work with other roles in their lives, they decided to pay attention to this topic in their employee survey that is sent bi-annually to all employees of the organization. This gave the HR department information on how employees, on average, experienced role combination and enabled individual managers to gain information about the scores of their department on this topic. Moreover, this survey among all employees of the organization was very valuable material for the present research since I was allowed to include some measures for the present research. This enabled me to test whether some of the findings obtained among a sub sample of the organization’s population (presented in Chapter 2) also hold for the organization at large. The response rate of this organizational survey was 66% with 18,355 participating employees. I summarize the results of this survey concerning role combination in the Appendix of Chapter 2. Additional details about the survey and its participants are also provided in this Appendix.

1.5 Overview of the Present Dissertation

As detailed earlier in this chapter, the present dissertation examines the positive side of the work-family interface. First, in Chapter 2, I examine in more detail how work and family roles can facilitate each other and whether there is added value in addressing the negative (conflict) as well as the positive (facilitation) side
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of the work-family interface for the prediction of various work and non-work related outcome variables. I also examine whether there are gender differences in experiencing facilitation in role combination. Then, in Chapter 3, I aim to identify relevant antecedents, in the organizational as well as the home environment, of the experience of facilitation. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, I examine whether employees’ experiences in role combination relate to concrete organizational outcomes (e.g., objective job performance). In Chapter 5, in a field experiment, I examine whether individual’s cognitive appraisals regarding work–family role combination can be influenced by providing informational support. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a general discussion of the results of this dissertation.

Chapter 2: How work and family can facilitate each other: Distinct types of work-family facilitation and outcomes for women and men

The objective of Chapter 2 is to gain more insight into the different ways in which work and family roles can facilitate each other. On the basis of previous studies on work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, 1988; Carlson et al., 2000), as well as the premises of role expansion theory (Marks, 1977), and empirical findings on the positive side of the work-family interface, I posit that four experiential domains need to be examined to understand the different conflicting as well as facilitating experiences that individuals can have in role combination, namely 1) energy (strain), 2) time, 3) behavior, and 4) psychological state. First, I present a qualitative study (N = 25). In semi-structured interviews I address individuals’ conflict experiences as well as their facilitation experiences in role combination. I examine whether our distinction between the four domains indeed captures the conflict and facilitation experiences that individuals spontaneously report. Then, in a quantitative survey study (N = 352), I examine whether the distinction between energy-based, time-based, behavioral, and psychological conflict and facilitation experiences indeed is statistically valid. Furthermore, I aim to demonstrate the added value of addressing employees’ facilitation experiences in role combination by assessing whether the examination of facilitation contributes to the prediction of work and non-work outcomes (e.g., job performance, life satisfaction) above and beyond the effects of conflict. Moreover in this quantitative study, I address gender differences. Focusing on the negative side of the work-family interface in previous literature, it has been often assumed that women experience most difficulties in role combining (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). By contrast, I take a positive psychological perspective on women at work and posit that for women the work role can be
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regarded more as a self-chosen role than for men (see also Thoits, 2003). Based on this reasoning and organizational statistics in this regard, I hypothesize that women tend to experience the beneficial side or role combination to a higher degree than men and thus should generally report higher levels of facilitation between work and family than their male colleagues. Also stemming from this reasoning, I hypothesize that, for women, the experience of facilitation has more impact on outcome variables in the work and home domain than it has for men. I present data to examine these predictions and discuss their implications for theory and practice related to men and women at work.

Chapter 3: Combining work and family: How family supportive work environments and work supportive home environments can reduce work-family conflict and enhance facilitation

Chapter 3 aims to identify relevant antecedents of the different types of conflict and facilitation that employees can experience in role combination. In an attempt to help employees manage their work and family responsibilities, many contemporary organizations provide work-family benefits or programs to their employees, such as formal arrangements for flextime or childcare facilities. However, a substantial body of research suggests that, more than having work-family benefits or arrangements available to them, it is important for employees to receive informal support in their work environments (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2005; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). That is, employees in family supportive work environments (e.g., managerial and co-worker support for family issues, cultural norms that are family supportive) experience lower levels of conflict between their work and family roles. In this chapter, I aim to extend this line of research in two ways. First, I aim to answer the question whether creating a family supportive work environment can indeed only reduce employees’ conflict experiences or whether such supportive environments might also have the capacity to induce a positive exchange between work and family (facilitation). Thus, I not only examine whether employees in supportive environments experience less conflict in role combination, but also whether supportive environments relate to higher levels of experienced facilitation between work and family roles. Second, I aim to extend previous research by examining the effects of informal support in the home environment as well. Whereas previous research has addressed “cross-domain support” in the work environment – that is support for family issues at work –, I also aim to shed light on the effects of receiving support for work issues in one’s home environment (e.g., support of
partner and family/friends for work issues; cultural norms that are work supportive). Thus, the present chapter examines how the family supportiveness of the work environment as well as the work supportiveness of the home environment relate to employees’ conflict and facilitation experiences in role combination.

In this chapter, I use the same dataset as in chapter 2. As detailed earlier, the aim of the previous chapter was, amongst others, to examine how the different types of conflict and facilitation relate to different categories of outcome variables. The objective of Chapter 3 is to examine how supportive work and home environments relate to employees’ conflict and facilitation experiences in role combination. In accordance with our objective to study the supportiveness of the home environment - in which I address receiving support from one’s partner – I have limited the sample of this study to employees who were married or cohabiting (N = 301).

Chapter 4: Are successful role-combiners healthier and better performing employees?
Relating work-family facilitation and conflict to objective health and performance indicators

Chapter 2 and previous work-family research have shown that employees’ conflict experiences relate to adverse self-reported health and performance outcomes, whereas facilitation experiences relate positively to these self-reports (Allen et al., 2000; Allen & Armstrong, 2006; van Steenbergen, Ellemers, Mooijaart, 2007). Chapter 4 extends these findings by relating employees’ experiences in the work-family interface to objective health and performance indicators. Evidence for a link between employees’ subjective experiences in role combination and objective outcomes that are relevant for the organization would greatly advance the work-family literature and would provide practitioners with a stronger case to convince organizations to support employees in successful role combination (Casper et al., 2007). In this chapter, I present two studies. The first study is a large scale cross-sectional study (N = 1134), in which I examine whether employees’ facilitation and conflict experiences relate to objective indicators of their physical health (cholesterol, body mass index, and physical stamina). I hypothesize that facilitation experiences relate negatively to indicators of poor health (in terms of cholesterol, BMI, and physical stamina), whereas conflict experiences relate positively to these health indicators. Then, to examine whether employees’ experiences in role combination longitudinally predict objective outcomes over time (one year later), I present a second study (N = 58). In addition to examining objective physical health indicators (cholesterol level,
body mass index), I also longitudinally examine employees’ actual absenteeism and objective indicators of their job performance. I hypothesize that facilitation experiences at Time 1 negatively predict indicators of a poor health at Time 2 (cholesterol and BMI) and negatively predict absenteeism at Time 2. Additionally, I predict that facilitation experiences at Time 1 positively predict job performance at Time 2. As such, the results of chapter 4 reveal whether or not successful role-combiners indeed are healthier and better performing employees.

Chapter 5: There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so: Social influence and cognitive appraisal of the work–family interface

In the final empirical chapter of this thesis (Chapter 5), I present a different kind of study than in the previous chapters, namely a field experiment. According to the Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) no situation or event is stressful in and of itself – it is how we cognitively construe a particular situation that matters. I apply these and other insights from the stress literature to study the way in which individuals appraise and experience work-family role combination. By means of a field experiment (N = 143), I examined whether employees’ cognitive appraisals regarding their situation of role combination are fixed, or in fact can be influenced by information provided by others (appraisal support). The experiment was designed in such a way that participants first received information that supported either a scarcity perspective or an expansion perspective on human energy. Then, they completed a survey about how they themselves cognitively construed and experienced combining work and family roles. Via an open-ended question, participants were also asked to indicate their thoughts about role combination and were told that these could take any form (free listing, qualitative data). In this experiment, chance determined who received the scarcity message and who received the expansion message. I hypothesized that, compared to participants who received a scarcity message, those who received an expansion message appraise role combination as a) less stressful, b) less as a (negative) threat and more as a (positive) challenge, c) report less conflict and more facilitation, and d) spontaneously report a more positive train of thought about role-combination. In this study, I also explored the role that the source of the information plays in the appraisal process. In one set of conditions, this information was said to originate from a highly self-relevant source (i.e. employees within the participant’s own organization), whereas in the second set of conditions it was said to originate from a less self-relevant source (i.e. employees within another sector of employment). I examined whether the
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impact of the message (i.e., scarcity vs. expansion) was moderated by the identity of the source providing this message. This chapter offers new theoretical insights on the role of cognitive appraisal in work-family research and reveals ways in which the organization can influence employees’ appraisals of and experiences in role combination. As such, it offers scope for designing a new kind of work-family intervention program that helps employees to view role combining from a more positive perspective.

Chapter 6: Summary and general Discussion

Chapter 6 provides an overview of the results found in this dissertation and discusses the contributions to theory and practice of this dissertation. Additionally, in chapter 6 I will discuss the limitations of the present research and outline a number of directions for future research.

It should be noted that all empirical chapters (chapter 2 to 5) can be read independently of each other as they have been prepared as separate journal articles. As a result there is some overlap between these chapters in terms of their literature review and introduction of ideas.