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*Female Entrepreneurs, Work–Family Conflict, and Venture Performance: New Insights into the Work–Family Interface**

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Existing theory is extended to predict the effectiveness of strategies for structurally reducing work–family conflict by manipulating roles, given the salience of work and family roles and resources available to the female entrepreneur. A conceptual framework based on the constructs of role involvement and role conflict is used to examine whether high-growth female entrepreneurs choose more appropriate strategies for reducing work–family conflict than their less successful counterparts. Three basic strategies for manipulating roles are discussed: (1) role elimination; (2) role reduction; and (3) role-sharing.

The following propositions are advanced: (1) work–family management strategies are a significant determinant of venture growth; (2) women who develop high-growth businesses more effectively reduce work–family conflict by choosing strategies better matched with their internal needs and access to external resources than less successful women; and (3) role-sharing strategies are preferred because they allow women to enjoy the enhancement of both work and family roles while reducing the level of inter-role conflict. As a result, the high prevalence of team-building and participative management practices observed in women-owned businesses may be driven by the need for female entrepreneurs to manage work–family conflicts as well as genetics or socialization.

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Introduction

Managing the demands of both work and family is a continuing challenge for female entrepreneurs. While previous research documents that women experience greater conflict between work and family roles than men (Noor 2004; Welter 2004; Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992), and the negative results of this conflict on the well-being of women (Hammer et al. 2004), relatively little work has examined the strategies employed to mitigate work–family conflict. While a number of researchers examine psychological means of coping with emotions resulting from work–family conflict (that is, Ashforth 2000; Edwards and Rothbard 2000; Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999; Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr 1999), very few have examined strategies to structurally alter the interference between work and family roles that generates these emotions. Although Baltes and Heydens-Gahir (2003) test general life management behaviors, they stop short of examining specific methods. Here, existing theory is extended to predict the effectiveness of strategies for structurally reducing work family conflict by manipulating roles, given the salience of work and family roles and resources available to the female entrepreneur. More specifically, the following question is examined: Do high-growth female entrepreneurs choose more appropriate strategies for reducing levels of work–family conflict than women who desire but can not achieve high growth? The conceptual framework and testable propositions resulting from this investigation will be of interest to practitioners and academics alike.

As a result of comparing high-growth women entrepreneurs to their aspiring but less successful counterparts, insights are also provided into the differences among female entrepreneurs. By relaxing the implicit assumption that female entrepreneurs are homogeneous, this paper sheds light on the complexity of issues faced by female entrepreneurs.

The theoretical framework is based on the constructs of role involvement and conflict (Edwards and Rothbard 2000; Lobel 1991; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). In addition to illustrating the mediating effect of work–family management strategies on new venture performance, it is also demonstrated that external resources and internal role salience impact the choice and effectiveness of work–family strategies. Guidelines for choosing and implementing various work–family management strategies based on these two factors are also presented.

It is argued here that mitigating work–family conflict is an important condition for growth in entrepreneurial ventures. Three basic strategies for manipulating roles to manage work–family conflict are identified: (1) role elimination; (2) role reduction; and (3) role-sharing. It is proposed that women who successfully develop high-growth businesses will use one or more of these strategies. In addition, the claim is so advanced that they will more effectively reduce work–family conflict by choosing strategies that better match their particular internal needs and access to external resources than their less successful counterparts.

Finally, it is proposed that high-growth female entrepreneurs are more likely to choose to manage their businesses in ways that require less involvement of the entrepreneur. Delegation, progressive human resource practices (Hornsby and Kuratko 2003, 1990), and participative management techniques require effectively communicating a vision and culture, selecting employees based on fit and character instead of only on experience, as well as sharing information and authority and providing financial incentives. It is expected that high-growth female entrepreneurs would be more likely to utilize these methods than their less successful counterparts who have deferred or redistributed family obligations, or than successful men. This raises the possibility that many of the team-oriented, integrative management practices observed in women-owned businesses, particularly in high-growth female-owned ventures (Gundry and Welsch 2001; Brush 1992; Bird and Brush 2002), are driven by the need to manage work–family conflict as well as socialization or genetics.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section provides an overview of the current literature on handling work–family conflict, with emphasis on internal coping mechanisms. The conceptual framework is developed in the third section, and testable propositions regarding the performance implications of work–family management strategies and optimal selection of these strategies are presented. The concluding section summarizes the previous analysis, provides an inventory of future research opportunities, and discusses the implications for women entrepreneurs and public policymakers.

Literature Review

Most of the previous research on managing work–family conflict focuses on methods of coping with the resulting negative emotions. For example, Kirchmeyer (1993) applies the taxonomy of coping with responses identified by Hall (1972)—structural role definition (altering the expectations of others), personal role definition (altering one's own expectations) and reactive role behavior (responding to all demands)—to the work–family area. Ashforth (2000), Edwards and Rothbard (2000), Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1999) and Lambert (1990) present psychological tactics such as segmentation (the suppression of behavior, thoughts, and feelings from one domain while participating in another), compensation (intensive involvement in one domain to counteract negative outcomes in the other), accommodation (limited psychological involvement in one domain to accommodate the demands of the other), and boundary management (methods of developing and navigating borders between work and family domains) as methods of coping with work–family conflict.

Ruderman et al. (2002) discuss the importance of psychological resources and social support in strengthening coping ability. The role synthesis work of Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr (1999) concentrates on boundary management and role embracement concepts, with external resources only playing a mediating role. While these authors elucidate various internal means of handling work–family conflict, they are silent on techniques to reduce the sources of this conflict.

Becker and Moen (1999) and Moen and Yu (2000) identify a number of externally oriented methods of lowering work–family conflict, including postponing children, hiring assistance with childcare and household duties, and scaling back work, and nonwork, but they stop short of discussing how to choose the optimal strategy. The framework presented here contributes to previous research in three ways: (1) by focusing on externally oriented, structural strategies for reducing the level of work–family conflict instead of internal coping mechanisms; (2) by illustrating how work–family management strategies impact new venture performance; and (3) by providing guidelines for choosing among these strategies.

Conceptual Framework

Work–Family Conflict, Work–Family Management Strategies, and Venture Performance

Given the research focus on ambitious female entrepreneurs who desire high growth, the terms *high growth* and *ambitious women* are defined here. Consistent with Dsouza (1990) and Gundry and Welsch (2001), *high growth* is defined as sales growth that exceeds the average growth rate for the industry. While Gundry and Welsch (2001) compute sales growth over a two-year period, other researchers such as Nicholls-Nixon (2005) and Sadler-Smith et al. (2003) use four- and five-year time periods, respectively. Here, sales growth of a venture must exceed the average growth rate of the industry for at least a two-year time frame in order to be considered as high growth.

According to Delmar, Davidsson, and Gartner (2003), Ardishvili et al. (1998), and Hoy, McDougall, and Dsouza (1992), sales is the favored measure of new venture growth because it is relatively insensitive to capital intensity and degree of integration, tends to be a precursor of growth in other indicators such as assets, net profits, and employees (Delmar 1997), and is the growth measure preferred by entrepreneurs themselves (Barkham et al. 1996).

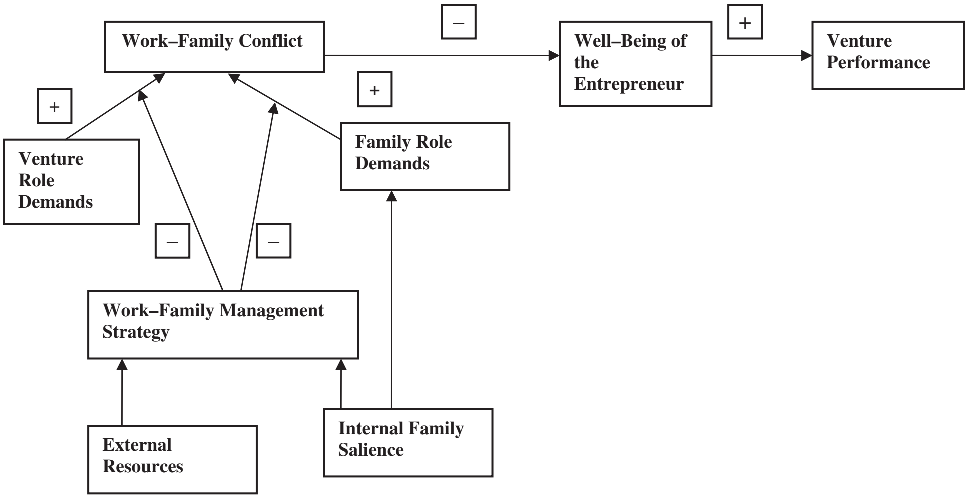
Ambitious or *high-growth-oriented female entrepreneurs* are defined as women who have the intention and motivation to develop high-growth ventures. They possess the personal characteristics of vision, energy, and opportunism (Morrison, Breen, and Ali 2003). In a comparison of high-and low-growth-oriented female entrepreneurs, Gundry and Welsch (2001) find that ambitious women have the intention to emphasize market growth and technological change, possess stronger commitment to the success of their businesses, and have greater willingness to sacrifice for their ventures. Unlike lifestyle entrepreneurs who are primarily motivated to support a particular lifestyle or generate family income, ambitious or growth-oriented entrepreneurs are motivated to start and develop larger, highly visible, and more valuable firms (Henderson 2002). Thus, *high-growth female entrepreneurs* are defined as ambitious women who have succeeded in creating high-growth ventures. Less successful but ambitious or high-growth-oriented women desire to reach this goal, but have been unable to obtain it.

Work–family conflict is defined here as a form of inter-role conflict arising because pressures emanating from one role are incompatible with those from another role (Stoner, Hartman, and Arora 1990; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). As a result, obtaining certain rewards in one domain requires foregoing rewards in another (Edwards and Rothbard 2000). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identify three major forms of work–family conflict: (1) time-based; (3) strain-based; and (3) behavior-based, which, consistent with the role scarcity perspective, imply that persons have fixed amounts of time and energy to spend (Ruderman, Ohlott, and King 2002). While researchers have identified two directions of work–family conflict—work into family and family into work (Carlson and Frone 2003; Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992)—no distinction between these directions is necessary here.

According to the role accumulation perspective, assuming multiple roles results in work–family enhancement as well as conflict, because time and energy can be shared, integrated and, expanded across spheres of activity. Consequently, some researchers argue that both depletion and enrichment processes operate simultaneously for women who assume both roles (Ohlott, Graves, and Ruderman 2004; Ruderman et al. 2002; Rothbard 2001). However, work–family interference still must be managed because the existence of enhancement does not eliminate role conflict.

The theoretical framework, which is based on the constructs of role involvement and conflict (Edwards and Rothbard 2000; Lobel 1991; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985), is illustrated in Figure 1. Work–family conflict negatively impacts venture performance by lowering the

Figure 1
The Impact of Work–Family Management Strategies on New Venture Performance



well-being of the entrepreneur, and subsequently hindering work performance. Work–family conflict is positively correlated both with venture role demands, which are based on hours worked (Huang et al. 2004), industry requirements, and the aspirations of the entrepreneur; and family role demands, which depend on the number and ages of dependent children (Huang et al. 2004), marital status (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 1998), and relative salience of family (Noor 2004). According to Williams (2004), the time spent by the entrepreneur for taking care of the children reduces venture life span. Loscocco et al. (1991) find that family-related role conflict negatively impacts owner income in small businesses.

Work family conflict is expected to be particularly significant for female entrepreneurs who desire high growth. First, women who are determined to achieve high growth cannot reach their objectives for their ventures by reducing their commitment to their businesses. Female entrepreneurs who are not ambitious or high-growth-oriented may be able to reduce or limit the scope of their firms in order to reduce work–family conflict, but scaling back is not considered a viable option for women seeking high growth.

Second, in a study of new ventures across a diverse set of industries, Harris, Saltstone, and Fraboni (1999) find that entrepreneurs experience higher workloads than white-collar, blue-collar, or professional employees. Also, female entrepreneurs are likely to face significant challenges in raising large amounts of start-up capital from banks, venture capitalists, and other investors, because these tasks are likely to prove more difficult for women than for men (Carter et al. 2003; Anna et al. 1999). In addition to the higher entry barriers in industries such as construction, high technology, and manufacturing (Anna et al. 1999), female entrepreneurs in these sectors face additional challenges in gaining access to business clients (Bates 2002). Thus, high-growth-oriented women entrepreneurs may find it necessary to invest additional time over and above the higher workload undertaken by all entrepreneurs in order to acquire necessary capital and to win important clients. These longer hours of work are likely to result in increased work–family conflict.

Thus, high levels of work–family conflict can be expected for ambitious women entrepreneurs. However, the level of work–family conflict can be lowered by work–family management strategies, which reduce conflict by altering the level and configuration of the family and/or venture demands that fuel dissonance between work and family roles. Reducing the level of work–family conflict is expected to enhance well-being more than using internal coping mechanisms to handle that conflict, and higher levels of entrepreneurial well-being should translate into better venture performance. Therefore, work–family management strategies are expected to be an important determinant of venture performance for female entrepreneurs who desire high growth. Thus, the following are advanced:

P1a: Female entrepreneurs who employ external work–family management strategies to reduce work–family conflict will experience greater well-being than those who rely on internal emotional coping mechanisms.

P1b: Female entrepreneurs who employ external work–family management strategies will have stronger venture performance than those who do not.

Choosing the Optimal Work–Family Management Strategy

Table 1 illustrates three basic strategies of role manipulation to reduce the inter-role conflict arising from work–family interference—role elimination, role reduction, and role-sharing. These externally based strategies seek to lower the level of conflict at the work–family interface by organizing, sequencing, and delegating work and family activities, and are fundamentally different than internally based coping mechanisms, which focus on managing thoughts and emotions. Both role manipulation and methods of coping can be employed simultaneously; however, role manipulation strategies reduce need for coping mechanisms by lowering the level of work–family conflict.

Table 1
Work–Family Management Strategies and Implementation

Strategy	Implementation
Role Elimination	No Family
Role Reduction	Smaller Family
	Defer Family
Role-Sharing	Delegate Venture Role: Participative Management Techniques
	Delegate Family Role: Outsource Family Obligations

According to Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr (1999) and Thoits (1992), the way in which roles are merged and integrated can influence both psychological and nonpsychological outcomes as much as the number of roles held. Thus, the absolute level of work–family conflict can be reduced if one role is manipulated by work–family management strategies to mitigate either venture or family demands. For ambitious women, role elimination and reduction strategies are implemented by shrinking the family role rather than the work role, while less growth-oriented women may choose to scale back work goals or stay at home (Moen and Yu, 2000; Becker and Moen, 1999).

Role-sharing strategies involve delegating the obligations of one or more roles to other parties and allowing women to actively participate in both work and family spheres. Role-sharing can be implemented by delegating either the venture or family roles. Entrepreneurs delegate portions of their venture role by employing participative management techniques and investing in training, competitive compensation, and other progressive human resource practices (Hornsby and Kuratko 2003, 1990) to empower subordinates and build teams. Similarly, portions of family role can be delegated by hiring assistance with childcare and household chores, or by seeking the help of relatives and friends.

As Figure 1 illustrates, two key factors are critical in selecting work–family management strategies. These critical factors are the relative internal salience of work and family roles, and the type and quality of external resources available to the female entrepreneur. Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr (1999) and Lobel (1991) emphasize the importance of *fit*, which can be defined as the congruence of strategies to the context in which they are used. It is argued that the most effective work–family management strategies fit the relative salience of the family role for a particular female entrepreneur, while the availability of resources determines the range of options that can be pursued.

Choosing a work–family management strategy consistent with the relative salience of the family role will reduce the likelihood of a woman experiencing attitudinal conflict regarding the enactment of a role (Noor 2004; Kossek and Ozeki 1998). Studies of employed mothers show that while policies such as flextime and on-site childcare centers reduced time-based conflicts, they did not necessarily reduce affective conflict for those mothers who felt badly about how the family role was being enacted (Goff, Mount, and Jamison 1990; Bohen and Viveros-Long 1981). Therefore, the following is proposed:

P2: Female entrepreneurs who choose a work–family management strategy consistent with the relative salience of the family role will experience greater well-being, and subsequently high venture performance, than those who do not.

Thus, in Table 2, work–family management strategies are classified by both external resources and internal family salience. External resources include spouse/partner support (De Bruin and Lewis 2004; Martins, Eddleston, and Viega 2002), flexibility (Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999), financial resources (Martins, Eddleston, and Viega 2002), quality and availability of hired and volunteer help (Kossek 1999), and trustworthy managers and employees. Because role commitment can have direct and indirect effects on psychological well-being (Noor 2004; Martire, Stephens, and Townsend 2000), role salience has important implications for choosing appropriate work–family management strategies. While some women may be relatively more committed to the

Table 2
Optimal Work–Family Management Strategy Choices

		Internal Family Salience: Low	Internal Family Salience: High
External Resources	High	Delegate Family Role (Role-Sharing)	Delegate Venture Role (Role-Sharing)
	Low	No Family (Role Elimination)	Defer Family Smaller Family (Role Reduction)

work role, and others are relatively more committed to the family role, it is possible for women to be highly committed to both roles (Lobel 1991).

Thus, it is argued that women entrepreneurs who achieve high growth are more likely to choose their work–family management strategies according to the guidelines illustrated in Table 2, and as a result, gain a high level of fit between the strategy selected and the relative level of family salience. Because women experience enhancement by participating in both family and work roles, it is assumed that role-sharing is generally preferable to either role reduction or elimination. However, limitations in either the quantity or quality of external resources available can reduce the options available to female entrepreneurs. Therefore, the following are proposed:

P3a: In the absence of resource constraints, women entrepreneurs who achieve high growth and place a high level of salience on the family role will choose a role-sharing strategy that delegates the venture role.

P3b: In the absence of resource constraints, women entrepreneurs who achieve high growth and place a low level of salience on the family role will choose a role-sharing strategy that delegates the family role.

Discussion and Implications

The analysis presented here shows that appropriate work–family management strategies will improve venture performance for women-owned businesses. It is argued that work–family management strategies are a significant determinant of venture growth, and that role-sharing strategies are preferred by most women because these options permit them to enjoy the enhancement of both work and family roles while reducing the level of interrole conflict. Delegating the venture role through participative management techniques and progressive human resource practices is vital for ambitious female entrepreneurs who are also highly committed to the family role. Women who build management and worker teams are able to handle family emergencies without disrupting business operations, while those who do not delegate may have to halt the conduct of business in order to tend to family matters, and consequently suffer reduced firm performance. By reducing the level of personal involvement required by the entrepreneur in the business, participative management practices allow increased involvement in the family role.

As a result, it is proposed that the high prevalence of team-building and participative management practices observed in women-owned businesses is driven by the need for female entrepreneurs to manage work–family conflicts as well as genetics or socialization. Empirical studies show that women experience more work–family conflict than men (Noor 2004; Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992), and that the former have a higher motivation to balance work and family than the latter (Collins-Dodd, Gordon, and Smart 2004; Schindehutte, Morris, and Brennan 2003), possibly because women perform twice as much family labor as men (Shelton and John 1996), and working women still assume a majority of household responsibilities (Friedman and Greenhaus 2000). Because women are socially defined as caretakers of the family, they are more likely to experience strong negative sanctions for noncompliance with this role than men are (Noor 2004).

A limitation of this paper is its focus on female entrepreneurs who aspire to or have achieved high growth. Less ambitious women may employ work–family management strategies that are not discussed here, such as limiting the size and scale of a venture (Cliff 1998) to reduce the work role, and becoming self-employed to create more flexibility in the work role (Boden, Jr. 1999; Caputo and Dolinsky 1998). Also, it is implicitly assumed that the female entrepreneur is making decisions regarding work–family management strategies fairly independently. A number of researchers analyze work–family conflict at the couple level (De Bruin and Lewis, 2004; Moen and Yu, 2000; Becker and Moen, 1999; Foley and Powell 1997). Although spousal support is included in this framework primarily as an external resource, a husband can exert substantial influence in these decisions.

Even with these limitations, this paper opens up a number of avenues for additional research. One interesting possibility is empirically determining whether external role manipulation strategies are more effective than internal coping mechanisms in terms of reducing the negative impact of work–family conflict on female entrepreneurs. Similarly, the expected positive mediating role of work–family management strategies on the performance of women-owned ventures could be tested. Also, the impact of choosing an inappropriate work–family management strategy could be measured. Strategies inconsistent with the relative salience of work and family roles may actually decrease entrepreneurial well-being and venture performance. For example, women who choose to share a highly salient role may experience lower levels of well-being and venture performance than those who choose to delegate a less salient role.

In addition to empirically testing one or more of the propositions mentioned in this paper, a logical extension of this research would be examining the work–family management strategies of men in dual career situations to determine if these strategies, or possibly others, are critical to the performance of their ventures. The work–family management strategies of women operating home-based businesses could also be examined, and the level of work–family conflict experienced by female entrepreneurs in comparable home- and externally based firms could be compared. Another topic for investigation includes measuring the relative importance of socialization and the need to manage work–family conflict in promoting the spread of participative, team-based management techniques in women-owned businesses.

The practical implications of this research for female entrepreneurs revolve around acknowledging the importance of work–family management strategies to their business success. High-growth-oriented female entrepreneurs should regard the selection and execution of a work–family management strategy as a strategic business decision with critical implications for the growth and profitability of their ventures. Work–family management strategies should be a part of the planning process for launching a venture, and the resources to outsource family obligations or to build an effective management team should be included in the resource requirements for launching a business.

This research also provides the basis for public policymakers to launch exciting new initiatives. Given the role of work–family management strategies in enhancing venture performance, and the higher level of work–family conflict women face, assistance in managing the work–family interface should be provided to female entrepreneurs along with more traditional areas of support such as financial literacy and access to procurement programs. Consistently addressing these issues will not only remove a potential stumbling block for women business owners, but will also enhance the effectiveness of other programs already in place.

Counseling on work–family management strategies, and training in participative management techniques and progressive human resources practices can be delivered to current and prospective female entrepreneurs through existing support infrastructure such as small business and entrepreneurial advisory centers. In addition, financial assistance for childcare and household help could be made available in the form of government seed grants or loans, along with private matching funds, to expand the options for high potential, but cash-constrained entrepreneurs. Providing monies to insure that business incubators are routinely equipped with high-quality childcare facilities could also greatly benefit entrepreneurial women who are comfortably sharing their family roles.

Programs to assist women in selecting and implementing appropriate work–family management strategies represent bold yet cost-effective means for public policymakers to achieve significant improvements in the survival and performance of women-owned ventures. Because these initiatives address a vital but often overlooked need of female entrepreneurs, they can simultaneously yield a significant return on investment and help propel more women-owned ventures into high growth.

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