

Nevenka Černigoj Sadar

Societal and Organizational Contexts of Women's Careers

Abstract

Globalisation, demographic and labour market changes and the development of new technologies have completely changed the structure and functioning of organizations as well as the workforce expectations. New career conceptualisation is based on continuous organizational changes and changes in private life that means also multiple commitments related to various roles and as a consequence creation of multiple careers. Careers unfold in multilayered context and over the life course (Moen & Sweet, 2004). In spite of growing intensification of work, for young generations the endeavours for balancing work and private life are as important as meaningful work and development of employability. The role of individual and the organisation in managing professional careers are of equal importance.

In the paper we shall explore the impact of child birth upon work careers of women and the role of organisations in developing women's career regarding the options for balancing work and family life. The analysis is based on recent comparative qualitative and quantitative studies about young parents in Slovenia (Černigoj Sadar & Kersnik, 2004; Kanjuo Mrčela & Černigoj Sadar, 2007). Special attention is paid to family friendly measures introduced in 32 organisations in Slovenia to ease work and out of work life balancing. These measures are evaluated in terms of their long - term impacts upon the women's positions in organizations and the work conditions for developing parents'/women's careers.

Key words:

demographical changes, new technology, career conceptualisation, multiple careers, women's careers, new psychological contract, flexible work arrangements, work – private life balancing, sustainable work, organisational policies, family friendly measures, cross- national case studies.

Authors short biographical statement:

Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, PhD in Psychology, is a senior researcher at the Organisations and HR Research Centre and professor of social psychology at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Her main areas of research are: changing life patterns, gender divisions in paid and unpaid work in relation to social policy measures, quality of life in various life spheres and women at the labour market. She lectures organisational behaviour on undergraduate level and career management on post-graduate programme and is a mentor to graduate and post-graduate students. She participated in several of Slovenian and international comparative projects: Changes in the Life Patterns of Families in Europe (1979-86); Childhood as a Social Phenomenon (1990-92); COST A13: Changing Labour Markets, Welfare Policies and Citizenship- WG on Gender issues (1999-2003); Gender, Work and Employment in Ten Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (2003-2004); Gender, Parenthood and the Changing European Workplace (2003-2005) and Young Mothers/Families Friendly Employment (2004-2007). She has been a visiting scholar at Centre national de recherches scientifique - Paris, Manchester Metropolitan University- UK and University of Bath- UK.

Nevenka Černigoj Sadar

The Societal and Organisational Contexts of Women's Careers*

Theoretical framework

There has been a major change across Europe in the organisation of work especially in the last three decades of the 20th century regarding the division of labour between men and women and the organisational structure. On the basis of an extended cross-national study Crompton (1999) presents a range of possible earning and caring alternatives. At the traditional end of continuum is the male breadwinner/female carer model while the dual earner/dual carer model is on the other end. In between three other models can be found: the dual earner/female part-time carer model, the dual earner/state carer model and the dual earner/marketised carer model. The dual earner/female part-time carer model has emerged particularly in England and the Netherlands; it primarily involves a modified breadwinner model and does not contribute to the transformation of gender relations. Former state socialist countries constituted the conditions that could lead to more gender equality but little attention was paid to the prevailing gender culture which remains relatively traditional or even more in some countries, like Poland and the Czech Republic, the process of the retraditionalisation of gender relations has appeared. Scandinavian countries have developed versions of the dual earner/state carer model and encouraged the dual earner/dual carer model. The latter is by definition associated with less traditional gender relations. However, Crompton argues that such a model would likely be associated with the restructuring of paid employment itself. And in some cases the modernisation of work can contribute to the process of equalisation between men and women but on one condition that it is not gender-biased. Let us explore which processes on the organisational level may lead in the direction of positive changes.

Globalisation, labour market changes and the development of new technologies have completely changed the psychological contract between the individual and the organisation. This situation contributes to the development of a career conceptualisation based on continuous changes and multiple commitments related to multiple careers. Careers unfold in a multilayered context and over the life course (Moen and Sweet, 2004). At the end of the 20th century, lifestyle which also underlined self-actualisation outside of paid work was only one of the possible career anchors (Schein, 1985). While at the beginning of the 21st century the work-family balance or, more precisely, a balanced life is one of the basic characteristics of the contemporary conceptualisation of a career, together with a spiritual purpose and the development of employability (Baruch, 2006). This means that the concept of traditional linear careers related mainly to career promotion in paid work can no longer be applied in case organisations want to be socially responsible and responsive to their stakeholders' needs.

Balancing paid work and other spheres of life means flexibility in achieving and establishing a meaningful balance between time and various kinds of investments to do our work effectively, while at the same time having enough time for the other important things in our life such as one's family, community, learning and various free-time activities (Černigoj Sadar and Lewis, 2002). The roles of the individual and the organisation in managing careers are equally important. People choose and stay in organisations that match their actual needs

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and if organisations are expected to be responsive to their future needs. Organisations look for human capital that will provide them with a competitive advantage. In the era of great uncertainty and the passing away of lifelong employment, the organisation has a new significant role to play – being supportive as well as an enabler and developer of its human assets (Baruch, 2006: 130). This means that organisations should encourage socially sustainable work and the quality of life of their employees that also includes family-friendly management. Family-friendly management involves employers' use of family-friendly practices in a concerted and co-ordinated way and them having an underlying commitment to help employees find a balance between work and family obligations (Wood and Lasasosa, 1999). This means that the employer does not treat family problems as the exclusively private responsibility of the employees but tries to recognise the characteristics of life stages and take into consideration the needs of parents related to the birth, upbringing and education of their children or care for the other dependent family members. However, it does not mean that the employer is merely responsive to the family related demands of employees. The employer should in partnership with the employee create career paths in the organisation by taking into account that work-family relations are not only conflicting but may also be enriching. The results of a comparative international study of employed men and women living in urban areas in Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Finland and Norway indicate that paid work and family life are as rewarding for women as for men. Some of the most frequently mentioned influences of paid work on the family and vice versa are personal satisfaction and learning better social relationships. This is reported by both men and women in all the countries under comparison. Women more often reported the transfer of skills learned in the family to work than men. We could say that the family is a place where some important basic work habits and caring skills useful at work are learned. 'The experienced positive influence of paid work on the family and/or vice versa does not mean that there are no conflicts between these two spheres. Positive relations also imply more engagement in the family and paid work and in turn more confrontations with existing social, economic and individual limitations. Cultural, historical and economic factors determine which life sphere will be the source of conflicts' (Černigoj Sadar, 1989:155). Also recent studies have confirmed the enriching relations between paid work and the family (Greenhaus et al., 2000) that decisively contribute to subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999). Organisations together with their employees could have impacts on the transitions between work and family life and the experiences of the time and events of their everyday lives.

The purpose of the paper is to present the interplay of societal and organisational contexts in the creation of women's careers. In post-modern society non-material values like, for example, 'loving' and 'being' (Allardt, 1995) came forward in the creation of our everyday life and therefore at the beginning of the empirical part of the paper we identify the sources of the individual well-being of parents with young children. The role of public policies in enhancing/hindering parents' career development in organisations is then explored, some problems faced by parents after the birth of a child are also presented while, at the end, some possible organisational strategies are explored to improve the balancing of paid work and family demands. The analysis is based on recent comparative qualitative and quantitative studies about young parents in Slovenia and certain European countries (Černigoj Sadar and Kersnik, 2004, Lewis and Smithson, 2006; Kanjuo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007). Special attention will be paid to family-friendly measures introduced in 32 organisations in Slovenia to ease the balancing of paid work and out-of-work life. These measures are evaluated in terms of their long-term impacts for developing parents'/women's careers.

Some arguments for paying attention to paid work-family relationships

Well-being experienced at the individual level is created through the interplay of processes occurring at different levels: national, organisational, work, community and the family. Cross-national case studies of public and private sector workplaces in the 'Transitions' project (www.workliferesearch.org/transitions) carried out in Bulgaria, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK indicate that during a period of growing uncertainty the family is the most important source of well-being (Černigoj Sadar and Kersnik, 2004).

Table 1: Average percent of positive scores of different aspects of well-being for each country in the public sector – the social service sector

Public sector						
Country	Well-being at work		Family well-being		General well-being	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Sweden	1	85.1	4	79.1	1	89.8
Norway	2	73.8	3	80.6	2	75.0
UK	4	65.1	6	64.0	4	63.3
Portugal	5	60.3	2	82.3	6	45.8
Slovenia	3	67.5	1	85.6	3	67.3
Bulgaria	6	58.2	5	73.1	5	53.3
Average		68.3		77.4		65.8

Source: Černigoj Sadar and Kersnik, 2004

Table 2: Average percent of positive scores of different aspects of well-being for each country in the private sector – the financial sector

Private sector						
Country	Well-being at work		Family well-being		General well-being	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Norway	1	82.9	2	86.4	1	83.3
Netherlands	6	49.8	1	87.9	2	75.8
UK	3	60.3	3	73.9	4	61.0
Portugal	2	69.6	4	72.9	3	70.8
Slovenia	4	50.7	5	69.0	5	50.0
Bulgaria	5	50.7	6	51.8	6	44.6
Average		60.7		73.6		64.2

Source: Černigoj Sadar and Kersnik, 2004

It is clearly indicated that there is no linear relationship between the GDP of a country and well-being at work and family well-being. However, employees in Norway and Sweden expressed the highest level of well-being at work which could also indicate the transfer of the positive impact of public social policies on paid work. Employees from Bulgaria expressed the lowest level of well-being compared to employees in other countries, reflecting the drastic economic, social and organisational changes of the last few years.

Do public social policies matter?

Further analysis in the ‘Transitions’ study indicated that the interplay of processes occurring at the national, organisational and family level determine women’s careers. On the national level public work-family policies are very important and, although it is well-known that management in organisations plays a decisive role in how and to what extent these policies will be implemented, it is clear that public policies matter. The longer the tradition of public paid work-family policies the greater are the chances of them being implemented in organisations and the more they are taken for granted in organisations. Let us look at what happened to parents aged between 25 and 40 years after the birth of any of their children in two financial organisations in Slovenia and the United Kingdom, countries with different work-life policies.

The main difference between Slovenia and the UK lay in the duration and amount of parental leave and sick child leave (Fagnani et al., 2003):

	Slovenia	United Kingdom
Parental leave:	260 days on full pay	13 weeks unpaid per parent
Paternity leave:	15 days on full pay; 75 days social security contribution based on minimum wage;	2 weeks, flat rate;
Sick child leave:	14 days (per illness) - 80% pay	None specified

Table 3: Changes in the working life of parents after the birth of a child – the financial sector

Changes in the working life	Slovenia	United Kingdom
	N=29	N=21
	%	%
Moved or been moved to lower-level job	0.0	9.5
Reduced working hours	6.9	33.3
Decided not to do extra hours	17.2	28.6
Decided not to go on a training course	6.9	14.3
Decided not to go on work-related travel or cut down on work-related travel	10.3	33.3
Taken unpaid time off for the child's sickness	0.0	33.3
Anything else: changed employer	3.4	9.5

Source: own calculations

A change in working hours and downward career moves are the most significant differences between parents in Slovenia and the UK. However, the picture in Slovenia is not so ideal when we analyse the experiences of parents, especially women working in industry, as well as the private and public service sectors. An empirical study conducted in November 2005 in Slovenia (Kanjuo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007) indicated the following most frequent negative experiences of parents after the birth of a child: they have to work longer than 8 hours a day, they have additional work burdens although they do not want them and they do not receive the working position they would like. The rank order of the most common negative experiences was the same for mothers and fathers. However, the mothers' negative experiences were statistically more frequent compared to the fathers, with the exception being long working hours in the group of fathers. Even those young people who had no children but were treated as potential parents have negative experiences which were more common amongst young women.

Table 4: The most frequent negative experiences of mothers after the birth of a child

	N = 270
	%
They have to work more than 8 hours a day	34
They experienced an increased work load although they did not want it	30
They were blocked in trying to get a work position they wanted	26
They were hindered in a career promotion	16
Their relationships with supervisors became worse	13
The employer terminated their employment contract	10

Source: Černigoj Sadar and Kanjua Mrčela, 2007:38

Especially in the computer industry the work-family boundaries are blurred and long working hours are taken for granted. Long hours seem to be embedded in women's professional careers and are also a condition of a career promotion:

‘When you are at home, you actually work more and longer. I wake up at 7:00 a.m. and sit down in front of my computer in my pyjamas; at 10:00 a.m. I put on a pullover ... I only have to change when I go to the kindergarten (mother employed in the computer industry, aged 31 years; Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007:56).

‘...then you put the kids to sleep around 8:00 p.m. and check your inbox and work to ensure you have a clear inbox in the morning (mother employed in the computer industry, aged 33 years; Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007:56).

Parental leave and sick leave in the case of a child's illness can block a woman's promotion:

‘When they (the people responsible for employee promotions in the organisation) found out that I was pregnant for the second time, they pulled back the proposal for my promotion. Since then three years have already passed.... Whenever I take sick leave for my children they give me such looks ... and yet I have done all my work ... but not being there, not throwing your children who have a high temperature out to be cared for by someone else is a big minus at work’ (mother employed in retail, aged 33 years; Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007: 51).

Developing strategies for balancing paid work and family careers

Within the EQUAL project funded by the European Social Fund – the EU and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, a development partnership composed of representatives of academic institutions (Institute for Economic Research, Ljubljana; Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana), trade unions (Association of Free Trade Unions – Slovenia; Confederation of Trade Unions Pergam), Association of Employers Slovenia and NGOs (Ekvilib – Ljubljana; Centre for Information and help to unemployed people - Maribor) developed the applied research project named Young Mothers/Family-Friendly Employment – YMFFE. The media partner of the project was the Finance daily newspaper. The main goals of the project were:

- to sensitise the general public and organisations to the negative impacts of discriminating against parents;
- to provide organisations with tools enabling work conditions for balancing work and family life;
- to publicly recognise those organisations that implement family-friendly policies; and
- to empower parents in their navigation between work and family life.

The development partnership created certification methodology based on the system developed by the German organisation ‘Beruf und familie’ and adapted to the specifics of the Slovenian economic and legislative framework. The certification process is led by the non-governmental organisation Ekvilib – Ljubljana and since November 2007 the cost of the certification has been covered by organisations themselves.

All organisations wishing to participate in the process of obtaining a 'Family-friendly certificate' had to fill in a questionnaire about the structural characteristics of the organisation and provide the written confirmation of the top management. Of the 32 organisations which obtained the basic certificate those from the private sector prevailed (74%); most of them being in IT, finance/insurance and industry, 48% of them have up to 50 employees and the others are mid-sized or big companies. Most of these organisations had been quite sensitive to their employees' needs before starting the certification process:

94% offer time flexibility;
41% give parents priority in holiday planning;
38% offer work from home/at home occasionally;
31% help parents when returning to work from parental leave; and
31% give the opportunity for part-time work.

Information and communication policies were among the most frequently planned new family-friendly measures (FFMs), with the most important of them being that FFMs should become part of the organisational culture, along with the dissemination of information to publics inside and outside the organisation and a trustee/officer responsible for work-family balancing. In second place were measures related to working time, like: additional paid days off on the first day of school and during the first week at kindergarten; various forms of flexible working time; priority in planning holidays and flexibility in the transfer of over hours from one month to another or exchange for days off. Less than one-third of the organisations planned to introduce employee development like strategies for work-family problem-solving, plans related to parental leave, communications during a long-term absence from work and courses/workshops for developing new knowledge and skills. Some organisations plan to develop new organisational forms to help reconcile the organisation's and employees' interests and programmes for health protection. As already mentioned, managers are crucial when it comes to implementing work-family policies and creating the conditions for developing the professional careers of employees. In terms of organisational strategy and management development we see some serious shortcomings of these, let us say, 'model' organisations. Only 29% of the organisations plan to introduce courses about family-friendly employment (FFE) for management and 29% of the organisations plan to make family-friendly employment and an equal-opportunity programme part of the organisational strategy.

Conclusions

Career development and management in Slovenian organisations is largely focused on middle management and future top management. The topics of educational courses and training mainly relate to the actual work process and are less development-oriented (Kopač and Trbanc, 2006). This means that HRM is mostly oriented to the present and follow traditional concepts of a career in their development plans. Diversity management taking account of the needs of different social groups is quite rare. As we see from the three-year plans from 2007 to 2010 of the first-generation organisations which obtained the basic family-friendly certificate, each organisation planned to introduce as many new measures as the boundaries created by outside pressures and internal organisational potential permit. About one-third of the organisations accepted measures that support the development of women's careers although this does not mean that the concept of career development in the organisation will also change. However, it may be expected that the implementation of family-friendly

measures in organisations will enhance the career development of workers in different job positions and that career moves in different directions will increase. Besides, in the context of 'dual agenda' - that is the combination of organisational efficiency and responsiveness to employees' needs - the probability of professional career choice that is more suited to employees' needs in terms of pace, location/schedule, workload and position will also increase. At the end of 2010 we will evaluate whether the family-friendly measures have in fact contributed to taking a step forward in the development of a partnership between the different stakeholders and in the development of women's/parents' careers.

During the last few years positive trends were indicated in media discourses and in organisations. Between 2007 and 2009 the number of organisations which made a lot of effort to become more responsive to employee needs has increased; by May 2009, 17 new organisations had obtained the basic 'Family-friendly enterprise certificate' (Certifikat Družini prijazno podjetje - Novice, 2009) and some organisations joined another certification processes which underlined the promotion of best practices, namely 'The Golden Thread' organised by the Dnevnik daily newspaper (Mrak, 2007).

The creation of a dynamic balance between various life spheres is the only way to achieve the long-term creative changes demanded by an actual crisis. It is crucial for all, not just certain social groups like parents, for both people and institutions. The individual and organisational development and management of careers are growing in importance in a period of drastic demographic changes and due to limited human and capital resources. The maximisation of income/profit as the main organisational vehicle has reached a dead-end and the same is indicated for the traditional concept of a career based on a single-earner family or dual earner/female part time carer model. As Lotte Bailyn already put it last century: 'Instead of helping employees with family responsibilities to tailor their lives to meet traditional work structures, we need to change those structures to accommodate the realities of people's needs. Productivity in the end as well as social stability will depend on it' (Bailyn, cited in Work-life forum, 2000:13).

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