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Negotiating work and household demands: Effects of conflict management strategies in Dutch households on the labor supply of male and female employees

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## **Negotiating Work and Household Demands**

**Effects of Conflict Management Strategies in  
Dutch Households on the Labor Supply of  
Male and Female Employees**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explains variation in the labor supply of male and female employees by taking into account differences in conflict management strategies in Dutch households. While existing accounts on labor supply either emphasize household restrictions, firm influences or institutional constraints the approach taken here focuses on strategies of spouses to handle time-based interpersonal work-household conflicts. Using a sample of 304 male and 238 female cohabiting employees drawn from 30 Dutch organizations, we analyze how gender moderates the effect of conflict management strategies on labor supply, measured as the amount of actual working hours. Building on role congruity theory, we distinguish between two types of conflict management behavior. "Agentic" strategies are characterized by a low concern for other, and are usually ascribed to a male gender role. "Communal" strategies are characterized by a high concern for other and are usually ascribed to a female gender role. OLS and multilevel regression analysis supports two hypotheses. First, working women relying on communal strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts with their male partners will be more successful in achieving their objective to work more hours than women who don't use communal strategies. Second, labor supply of working men increases with their use of agentic strategies. The findings support the proposition from role congruity theory that (in-)congruence between the (male) provider role and a female gender role explains gender differences in the impact of interpersonal conflict management behavior on labor supply.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Der Artikel untersucht den Einfluss von Konfliktstrategien im Haushalt auf das Erwerbsarbeitszeitvolumen männlicher und weiblicher Beschäftigter. Während in der bisherigen Forschung Unterschiede im Arbeitsangebot durch Haushaltsrestriktionen, betriebliche Faktoren und institutionelle Merkmale erklärt werden, akzentuiert der vorliegende Beitrag unterschiedliche Strategien von Paaren zur Bewältigung interpersonaler Zeitallokationskonflikte. Anhand einer Stichprobe von 304 männlichen und 238 weiblichen Beschäftigten aus 30 niederländischen Betrieben wird untersucht, auf welche Weise geschlechtsspezifische Unterschiede den Einfluss der Konfliktstrategien auf das Erwerbsarbeitszeitvolumen moderieren. Ausgehend von der „role congruity theory“ werden zwei Typen von Konfliktstrategien unterschieden: „agentic strategies“ und „communal strategies“. Die Ergebnisse der OLS-Regressionsanalyse und Mehrebenenanalyse bestätigen die folgenden Hypothesen: Der unterschiedliche Einfluss von Konfliktstrategien auf das Erwerbsarbeitszeitvolumen von männlichen und weiblichen Beschäftigten lässt sich aus der (In-)Kongruenz von Versorgerrolle und geschlechtsspezifischen Rollenattributen erklären. Weibliche Beschäftigte können ein größeres Erwerbsarbeitszeitvolumen realisieren, wenn sie zur Lösung von Zeitallokationskonflikten im Haushalt „communal strategies“ anwenden. Das Erwerbsarbeitszeitvolumen männlicher Beschäftigter steigt, wenn sie zur Lösung von Zeitallokationskonflikten im Haushalt „agentic strategies“ anwenden.



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# 1. Introduction

Differences in the labor supply of men and women remain an important issue in sociological, economic and policy oriented research. In the Netherlands, like in most European countries, women spend considerably fewer hours on paid work and more hours on unpaid work than men (SCP, 2000; Plantenga, Schippers & Siegers, 1999: 109). Current explanations of these differences in labor supply come from economics, sociology, and organizational research.

The standard economic labor supply model explains variations in working hours by differences in the comparative advantage each spouse may have on the labor market (Hallberg, 2001; Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996): the spouse with the higher earning potential will spend relatively more hours on paid work, while the other one takes over a higher share of unpaid work (see Grift, 1998; Van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994 for empirical evidence for the Netherlands). With the earning potential of men still being higher than that of women (Puchert, Gärtner & Höyng, 2005: 55), men will tend to work more hours than women.

Sociological household research emphasizes the impact of 'traditional' vs. 'modern' gender norms and role expectations on labor supply and the division of labor inside the household (Coltraine, 2000). Where traditional norms are salient, women were found to spend fewer hours on paid work and more hours on unpaid work than men (Bittman, England, Folbre et al., 2003; Van der Lippe and Siegers, 1994). Another important research line emphasizes the life-course perspective (Schmid & Gazier, 2002). This approach acknowledges the fact that household demands for paid and unpaid work vary over the life course and are strongly influenced by life-event and life-phase specific time and income preferences (Anxo, Boulin, Cebrián et al. 2005). Institutional opportunities and barriers to adjust – to reduce or increase - working hours accordingly provides an important explanation of the gap between actual and preferred working hours (Fagan, 2001; Anxo & Erhel, 2005: 1).

Organizational research stresses financial and non-financial incentives and constraints of the work environment as important factors affecting labor supply decisions of employees (Campbell, 2004: 6; Moen & Sweet, 2003: 22; Clarkberg & Moen, 2001: 1119; Bell & Freeman, 2000; Hochschild, 1997). Recent studies have identified High Performance Human Resource Management (HPHRM) practices (e.g. performance related pay or team job designs) as an important determinant of labor supply. Hochschild (1997) stresses the impact of a high-commitment firm culture, Perlow (1998) focuses on the effect of managerial control and a competitive firm culture, Barker (1993) demonstrated the strong impact of peer pressure as it originates from team job designs, and Moen & Sweet (2003) emphasize the role of high prestige jobs. In the Netherlands as elsewhere women are less likely to work long hours than men (Van der Broek & Breedveld, 2004). This difference is usually explained by the continuing trend for women to be more involved in unpaid family work (Van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994).



In sum, the available evidence convincingly demonstrates that characteristics of the household (in particular the wage rates, the presence of kids, age) and the employer (in particular the presence of high work demands) explain labor supply.

More recent labor supply research suggests that previous studies are incomplete because they have neglected negotiation processes in the household (Beblo, 2001; Kluwer, 1998; Perlow, 1999; Hochchild, 1997; Wotschack 2005). This holds also true for the life-course approach, which pays little attention to processes within the household to (re)negotiate and regulate time allocation patterns and working-time transitions of spouses. The degree to which spouses can successfully realize working-time transitions over the life course is usually explained by institutional influences but not by the household's internal capability to initiate and govern processes of change.

The conclusion that negotiation processes in the household impact on the household's labor supply is drawn by both economists and sociologists. First, departing from the assumption of a joint utility function in the standard economic model, *economic bargaining models* assume that households consist of individuals 'with unique tastes and preferences who may or may not always agree – who may or may not have equal powers – who may or may not be equally well off' (Phipps & Burton, 1995). Empirical studies show that an increase in the relative bargaining power of women in the household indeed increases women's labor force participation (Beblo, 2001: 63; Chiappori, Fortin & Lacroix 1997). Second, recent sociological studies show that variations in the strategies to handle time-allocation conflicts within the household affect labor supply decisions (Kluwer, 1998; Perlow, 1998). Perlow's (1998) analysis suggests that some spouses ('resistors') will actively contend the additional time claims that a firm puts on their partner, whereas 'acceptor'-spouses either do not object, or even encourage their partners to work more hours. In both cases, spouses actively influence the employee's labor supply decision. Kluwer's (1998: 127) study shows that such time-allocation conflicts usually follow a gender specific 'wife-demand and husband-withdrawal' interaction pattern, resulting in men being more likely to comply with high workplace demands.

According to these more recent contributions, strategies to resolve time allocation conflicts in the household are a potentially important, yet so far neglected, determinant of labor supply decisions of employees. However, none of these studies systematically tested to what degree variations in the strategies to manage intra-household time allocation conflicts can explain gender differences in labor supply.

The present study addresses this gap by deriving and empirically testing hypotheses on the effect of cooperative vs. non-cooperative conflict management strategies on the labor supply of male and female employees in the Netherlands. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first effort to test a model of labor supply which assesses the joint impact of employer demand, household characteristics, and conflict management strategies of employees and their partners.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Many scholars have noted that the rich literature on compliance-gaining, conflict management or influence strategies<sup>1</sup> has to a large degree neglected to model the effectiveness of these strategies (Barry & Watson, 1996: 298; Brett et al., 2005). The effectiveness of a conflict management strategy can be defined as the degree to which an interpersonal influence attempt brings about the desired result. In the case of intra-household time-allocation conflicts, an influence attempt of a spouse is effective if e.g. she succeeds in convincing her husband to refrain from his intention to make long hours.

Several theories have been proposed to explain gender differences in conflict-management effectiveness. Despite differences in their arguments, these *gender role theories* share the assumption that gender related biases play a crucial role as moderators of the relationship between conflict management strategy and effectiveness.

Proponents of *bias-centered theory* (for a summary of this approach see Brett et al., 2005:493) argue that in organizational contexts, women's compliance gaining efforts will always be less effective than men's, since a pro-masculine gender role bias allocates higher status to men in Western societies. As a result, men will be taken more seriously than women and will be better listened to. Hence, even if women choose compliance strategies that are considered as appropriate for the situation by both men and women, they will be less effective than men using the same strategy.

*Asymmetric conflict theory* (Kluwer, 1998; Vogel & Karney, 2002) suggests that conflicts about the division of work in the household typically occur because the wife is discontent with the husband's contribution to unpaid work. She demands change while the husband wants to maintain the status quo. This conflict constellation leads to an asymmetric conflict-handling pattern, the 'wife-demand and husband-withdrawal' interaction pattern (Kluwer, 1998: 127), which in turn is ineffective for women. Men benefit from this asymmetric structure: since they are in favor of the status quo they have a strategic advantage in negotiations over the division of unpaid work in the household and are more likely to reach their goal: 'She wants to change the status quo and needs his active cooperation to reach her objective, but he wants to maintain the status quo and will reach this goal by doing what he normally does' (Kluwer, 1998: 35).

The most elaborate attempt to theoretically model and empirically test the effect of gender differences on the effectiveness of compliance gaining strategies is *role congruity theory* (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Ritter & Yoder, 2004). Role congruity theory builds on three key propositions.

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1 We will use these terms interchangeably.

First, it assumes that the majority of beliefs about the sexes pertain to 'communal' and 'agentic' attributes: "Communal characteristics, which are ascribed more strongly to women, describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people – for example, affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle. In contrast, agentic characteristics, which are ascribed more strongly to men, describe primarily an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency – for example, aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader". (Eagly & Karau, 2002: 574).

Second, it argues that in order to be effective in their compliance gaining attempts, the behavior of men and women needs to be consistent with their gender roles. Thus, women using communal strategies are likely to be more successful in gaining compliance than women using agentic strategies, and the use of agentic strategies will be more disadvantageous for women than for men. A key difference between role congruity theory and other gender role theories is that it makes no assumptions about gender differences in the use of specific kinds of compliance gaining behaviors, but only that behaviors that are accepted for a man may not be accepted for a woman.

Third, for women in leadership positions, their gender role is likely to conflict with their managerial role: to the degree that the managerial role women have to fill is agentic, the more likely they will elicit negative reactions and non-compliance from others because she deviates from her expected gender role. Consequently, "women in managerial positions can avoid negative reactions associated with taking a masculine-oriented role by combining the assertive, confident, and decisive behaviors required in this role with a more communal or feminine style" (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Role congruity theory has been applied successfully to explain gender related variations in the effectiveness of compliance gaining in organizational and experimental settings. Carli (1999) found that women have greater difficulty exerting influence than men do, particularly when the influence tactic they use conveys competence and authority – traits that are usually attributed to male interpersonal behavior. Consequently, women are less influential when the influence or communication strategy they use is perceived as dominant (Carli, 2001). An experimental study by Shackelford, Wood & Worchel (1996) showed that women with a people-oriented style and competence exerted greater influence over men than did women who were merely competent. Atwater, Carey & Waldman (2001) found that female managers engaging in 'masculine oriented roles' (e.g. delivering reprimands) were seen as less effective than male managers by their employees. Brett et al. (2005) showed that women are more effective than men if they use a 'communal' style of compliance gaining.

The presented evidence supports the assumption that the use of 'agentic' strategies is seen as a traditionally masculine role (Brett et al., 2005; Ritter & Yoder, 2004). So far, the application of role congruity theory has been limited to organizational and experimental settings. Role incongruity was defined as a mismatch between a (communal) female gender role and an (agentic) managerial or leadership role. We suggest that role congruity theory can be extended to

the context of intra-household time-allocation conflicts. More specifically, we argue that working women experience incongruity between their gender role and their role as (main, secondary, or co-)provider (Hood, 1986) in the household. The traditional provider role has predominantly agentic connotations: “The traditional good provider role took on negative connotations such as *distant, strict, harsh, authoritarian, bumbling, and incompetent* ... putting priority of job over family... Breadwinning was active, responsible, emotionally invested, demanding, expressive, and measured real devotion” (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Based on discourse analysis of interviews with 45 white professional men, Riley (2003) concludes that despite social change in gender relations and the rise of egalitarian value systems, a legitimate successor to the male provider role has not yet emerged: “The provider role functioned to define success and status; ‘real’ work; and the legitimate mechanism for the production of male identity”. Furthermore, there is strong empirical evidence that women taking a provider role violate gender role expectations (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998; Helms-Erikson et al., 2000; Tichenor, 2005; Willot and Griffin, 2004). Though empirical evidence also shows a trend towards more egalitarian gender ideologies regarding family roles both in Europe (Ciabattari, 2001) and the U.S. (Zuo & Tang, 2000), this trend is slower and less pronounced for men, and exhibits considerable cross-national variation (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). In particular higher status men tend to disapprove of women sharing a provider role (Zuo & Tang, 2000).

From the perspective of role congruity theory, the highly agentic connotation of the provider role implies that working women will be likely to experience role incongruity between their (communal) female gender role and their (agentic) provider role. It follows that this role incongruity will affect the effectiveness of their compliance gaining strategies during intra-household time allocation conflicts. Working women using agentic compliance gaining strategies (e.g. forcing) enact the traditional agentic provider model, and will therefore be likely to elicit negative reactions and non-compliance from their male partners, because by doing so they deviate from their communal gender role. Conversely, working women who instead use communal compliance gaining strategies (e.g. problem solving, accommodating) to resolve time allocation conflicts with their partner will be more successful in resolving the conflict to their advantage. Hence, we formulate our first two *theoretical* hypotheses:

TH1: The stronger the reliance on agentic compliance gaining strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts, the less effective working women will be in achieving their objective.

TH2: The stronger the reliance on communal compliance gaining strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts, the more effective working women will be in achieving their objective.

For men, the opposite holds, since expectations concerning the (agentic) provider role and the (agentic) male gender roles are congruent. This legitimates their use of agentic compliance gaining strategies, whereas the use of communal compliance gaining strategies will be perceived as incongruent with the role expectations. This leads to our second set of theoretical hypotheses:

TH3: The stronger the reliance on agentic compliance gaining strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts, the more effective working men will be in achieving their objective.

TH4: The stronger the reliance on communal compliance gaining strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts, the less effective working women will be in achieving their objective.

### 3. Empirically Testable Hypotheses

Research on compliance gaining strategies is characterized by a very large amount of typologies and measures, and a recurring criticism in this field concerns the often rather weak link between the compliance gaining classification and the theoretical objectives of the study (Kellerman & Cole, 1994). In the present study, 'agentic' vs. 'communal' orientations represent the key theoretical constructs underlying interpersonal compliance gaining behavior during intra-household time-allocation conflicts. Communal behaviors have been defined as describing primarily a concern with the welfare of other people („affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle“), whereas agentic behaviors are described by behavior showing a low concern with the welfare of other people (“assertive, controlling, aggressive, dominant, forceful, independent“). A measurement instrument for compliance gaining strategies which captures exactly these two dimensions has been developed in the context of dual concern theory (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Jansen & Van de Vliert, 1996). Dual concern theory classifies compliance gaining strategies according to the degree to which they represent a high or low concern for self and a high or low concern for others. The resulting constructs have been validated and tested in numerous studies (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). Strategies representing a high concern for other are labeled problem solving and accommodating. We consider both strategies to represent the theoretical construct of 'communal' strategies.<sup>2</sup> Strategies linked to a low concern for the other are avoiding and forcing. We consider these two strategies as mapping the theoretical construct of 'agentic' strategies.

The effectiveness of a compliance gaining strategy can be related to a large variety of different objectives which the person using it might want to achieve. In the context of our study, the intra-household conflict is related to a boundary control issue. It concerns the amount of time that the employed conflict party allocates to his or her work ('labor supply' as reflected in the number of actual working hours), and the attempts of the spouse to negotiate this amount. Following Perlow (1998), we distinguish between conflict management behavior of a focal employee and conflict management behavior of his or her partner/spouse. From the perspective of the partner/spouse, the purpose of his or her compliance gaining effort is to influence the labor supply of the employed partner (e.g. the 'resistor spouses' in Perlow's study). From the perspective of the focal employee, the purpose of his or her compliance gaining effort is to legitimize and defend his or her own time allocation decision.

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2 Compromising was excluded from the analysis because it is highly correlated with problem solving. Yet, additional analyses which included compromising did neither show a significant effect of compromising nor did it change the significant effects of the other strategies.

Building on this specification of the theoretical constructs and informed by role congruity theory, we can now formulate the following *empirical* hypotheses on the effect of compliance gaining strategies on labor supply.

EH1: The stronger an employed woman relies on (a) forcing, or (b) avoidance to resolve time-allocation conflicts with her male partner, the lower the amount of hours she will spend at work.

EH2: The stronger an employed woman relies on (a) problem solving or (b) accommodation to resolve time-allocation conflicts with her male partner, the higher the amount of hours she will spend at work.

EH3: The stronger an employed man relies on (a) forcing or (b) avoidance to resolve time-allocation conflicts with his female partner, the higher the amount of hours he will spend at work.

EH4: The stronger an employed man relies on (a) problem solving or (b) accommodation to resolve time-allocation conflicts with his female partner, the lower the amount of hours he will spend at work.

**Table 1: Overview on the expected effects on employees' labor supply**

	Male employees	Female employees
<b>Household and firm characteristics</b>		
High earning potential employee	+	+
High earning potential partner	-	-
Children	-	-
Age	-	-
High employer demand	+	+
<b>Conflict management strategies</b>		
Agentic strategies employee	+	-
Communal strategies employee	-	+
Agentic strategies partner	+	-

As noted above, role congruity theory predicts that agentic behavior of women is particularly likely to elicit resistance if the woman who applies them has to fill at least two incongruent roles. Role congruity theory is less clear with regard to what happens if non-working men and women use agentic compliance gaining strategies. Since the occurrence of a negative reaction would not be at odds with role congruity theory, we draw on bias centered theory to specify the following empirical hypotheses with regard to the effects of compliance gaining behavior of the partner:

EH1\*: The stronger the female partner of an employed man relies on (a) forcing or (b) avoidance to resolve time-allocation conflicts with her male partner, the higher the amount of hours he will spend at work.

EH2\*: The stronger the female partner of an employed man relies on (a) problem solving or (b) accommodating to resolve time-allocation conflicts with her male partner, the lower the amount of hours he will spend at work.

EH3\*: The stronger the male partner of an employed woman relies on (a) forcing or (b) avoidance to resolve time-allocation conflicts with his female partner, the lower the amount of hours she will spend at work.

EH4\*: The stronger the male partner of an employed woman relies on (a) problem solving or (b) accommodating to resolve time-allocation conflicts with his female partner, the higher the amount of hours she will spend at work.



## 4. Research Design and Data

The Time Competition Survey 2003 is used for testing the hypotheses. This survey used a multi-stage, multi-level research design of 1114 employees and their partners (if applicable) from 30 Dutch work organizations. Since the firm survey oversamples modern (knowledge based) work organizations the sample is not representative for the Dutch population. In each firm, two to four characteristic occupational groups with homogenous work conditions were selected; in total 89 different occupational groups. Management (human resource management and department managers) completed a written questionnaire on firm and work characteristics (e.g. occupational structure, market demands, work organization, incentive structure, working time regulations). This resulted in an organization-level dataset based on the responses of 30 human resource managers and 89 department managers. In a second step, we drew a random sample of four to ten employees from each occupational group. The selected employees and their partners (if applicable) were interviewed by both (computer aided) face-to-face interviews and written questionnaires (including a pre-coded time-use diary for one week). All data were collected in 2002/3.<sup>3</sup> Employees and partners were interviewed separately at home. The interviews were carried out by professional interviewers and took between one and two hours. The following analysis is based on a subsample of 542 cohabiting employees (304 male and 238 female cohabiting employees) from 79 different occupational groups in 30 companies.

The 304 *male employees* are between 25 and 60 years old (average is 40 years, for partners 39 years). They are relatively highly educated (on average 15,8 years of formal education, partners 15,3 years) and earn on average (net wage-rate) about 17,6 Euros per hour (partners 14,6 Euros per hour). 18% of the male employees live in breadwinner households, 65% in one-and-a-half earner households, 17% in dual earner households. 33% of the male employees do not have resident children. In 28% of the households children are younger than 4 years, 40% of the households have children between 4 and 12 years, 24% have children of 12 years and older. On a scale of five different items for high firm demands – firm in the private sector, high performance work culture, understaffing, supervisory position, working with targets and deadlines – our male employees score on average on 2,27 items indicating a moderate average employer demand for this group.

The 238 *female employees* are between 23 and 59 years old (average is 39 years, for partners 40 years). They are relatively highly educated (on average 15,7 years of formal education, partners 15,7 years) and earn on average (net wage-rate) about 14,8 Euros per hour (partners 15,6 Euros per hour).

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3 Data collection was part of a larger integrated research project 'Time Competition' (Principal Investigators Tanja van der Lippe, Utrecht University, and Arie Glebbeek, University of Groningen) funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

**Table 2: Descriptives**

	Male employees (n=304)		Female employees (n=238)	
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation
Actual weekly working hours	40,9	6,5	30,8	9,2
Age employee	40,1	8,2	38,7	7,9
Age partner	39,0	7,9	40,1	8,4
Educational years employee	15,8	2,5	15,7	2,2
Educational years partner	15,3	2,4	15,7	2,5
Wage rate (net) employee	17,6	2,6	14,8	1,8
Wage rate (net) partner	14,6	2,1	15,6	3,01
No kids	0,33	0,47	0,36	0,48
Kid younger than 4 years	0,28	0,45	0,21	0,41
Kid 4 to 12 years	0,40	0,49	0,36	0,48
Kid 12 years and older	0,24	0,43	0,24	0,43
Firm in private-profit sector	0,39	0,49	0,23	0,42
High performance work culture	3,03	0,90	2,6	0,94
Understaffing	0,31	0,46	0,22	0,42
Supervisory position	0,53	0,50	0,34	0,47
Having targets and deadlines	3,47	0,70	3,18	0,81
Cumulative scale (5 items)	2,27	1,06	1,5	1,10

67% of the female employees live in one-and-a-half earner households, 27% in dual earner households, 5% are breadwinners. 36% of the female employees do not have resident children. In 21% of the households children are younger than 4 years, 36% of the households have children between 4 and 12 years, 24% have children of 12 years and older. On a scale of five different items for high firm demands – firm in the private sector, high performance work culture, understaffing, supervisory position, working with targets and deadlines – our female employees score on average on 1,5 items.

## Dependent Variable

The number of *actual weekly working hours* is the dependent variable. It was measured using the following question: ‘How many hours are you factually working on average per week? Please take into account overtime, but not your traveling time’. Furthermore, the variable contains the hours that are worked in a second job (if any). If the employee receives yearly time compensation for overtime on a regular base (so called ‘adv hours’) these hours were subtracted from the total amount of weekly working hours.

The 304 *male employees* in our sample work on average about 41 hours per week. About 10% of the male employees work less than 36 hours per week, a majority of 40% works 36 to 40 hours per week, 24% work 41 to 45 hours per week, 20% more than 45 hours per week. The 238 *female employees* work on average about 31 hours per week. Typically for employed women, the working hours show more variation: about 15% work 20 hours per week or less, 27% work 21 to 30 hours per week, 23% work 31 to 35 hours per week, 25% work 36 to 40 hours per week, 10% work more than 40 hours per week.

## Independent Variables

In order to investigate how spouses handle situations of time-based *work-household conflict* we used a conflict scenario. The scenario represents a rather moderate conflict situation in which the reactions of the partners are less sensitive to socially desirable answers (as it would be the case when it was about ‘time for children’) and where the partners cannot easily escape the conflict by third party strategies (outsourcing of tasks). The employee and the spouse independently from each other indicated their reactions on the following situation:<sup>4</sup>

“You have a dinner appointment with your partner for the next week. But suddenly it turns out that you have to work overtime on that evening. Your

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4 This particular conflict situation (‘time for work’ versus ‘time for each other’) is not representative for all the various conflicts that use to occur in households. A more exhaustive measurement of conflict handling would have to work with a number of scenarios that would take into account additional conflict issues like ‘time for children’ or ‘time for household tasks’.

partner is very interested to have this dinner together with you, but you would prefer to work. What would you do in such a situation?”

The conflict issue differed for the employee and the spouse: for the employee it was working overtime (though the partner wants to have dinner together), for the partner it was having dinner together (though the employee wants to work overtime). The scenario was followed by 20-items taken from Janssen's and Van de Vliert's (1996) operationalization of five different conflict handling strategies. For each item, the respondents indicated on five-point Likert-type answer categories to what extent they would use the conflict handling strategy described by the item. The twenty items represent five different conflict-handling subscales of 4 items each: (1) *Accommodating*: Making concessions to the wish of the partner (e.g. 'I conform to the goals of my partner'). (2) *Problem solving*: Trying to find a solution that matches both spouses' wishes (e.g. 'We negotiate thoroughly until we achieve a solution, which is satisfying for both of us'). (3) *Compromising*: Making concessions when the partner is doing so, too (e.g. 'I stand up for that we both have to make concessions'). (4) *Avoiding*: Doing nothing (or as little as possible) to resolve the conflict (e.g. 'I avoid a confrontation with my partner'). (5) *Forcing*: Trying to persuade the partner to make concessions (e.g. 'I do everything to win the conflict'). In the regression models (see tables 6.4 and 6.5) each conflict-handling strategy enters as a dummy variable, indicating that the respondent uses the strategy (value higher than 12 on a scale from 4 to 20). Because of high collinearity compromising was excluded from the analysis.

## Control Variables

We include several household and firm related variables which have been identified as important determinants of labor supply in previous research. According to economic accounts on labor supply (see Beblo, 2001; Hallberg, 2001) employees will work more hours when they have a comparative advantage (higher productivity) in paid work while their partner has a comparative advantage (higher productivity) in unpaid work. Differences in the *earning potential (wage rates)* of spouses make it efficient for the household to apply a specialized division of paid and unpaid work. The higher the earning potential of an employee and the lower the earning potential of the spouse, the more the household can maximize household income (and free time) by a specialized division of work. A high earning potential of male employees and a low earning potential of their wives will thus support long working hours. In contrast, a high earning potential of female employees and a low earning potential of their husbands will support long working hours of female employees. We therefore include the wage rate of the employee and the wage rate of the spouse as control variables. Calculation of the employee's and the partner's *net wage rates* is based on several income measures (considering additional income sources) and average actual weekly working hours, including overtime and its compensation. For individuals with missing relevant variables, including partners who do not work for pay, a wage rate had to be imputed on the basis of a wage equation for individuals with all relevant variables available. For consistency reasons, an imputed wage rate

**Table 3: Handling of work-household conflict by employees and their spouses**

	Male employees (n=304)					Female employees (n=238)				
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Value >12	Cronbach's Alpha		Mean value	Standard deviation	Value >12	Cronbach's Alpha	
Forcing employee	5,73	3,13	18%	0,76		6,2	3,18	24%	0,75	
Compromising employee	8,65	3,01	56%	0,7		9,45	2,73	64%	0,6	
Problem solving employee	10,87	2,67	81%	0,69		11,28	2,94	82%	0,79	
Accommodating employee	7,45	2,47	33%	0,66		6,31	2,63	18%	0,73	
Avoiding employee	6,14	3,54	24%	0,8		5,48	3,41	19%	0,84	
Forcing partner	4,41	3,5	13%	0,83		3,84	3,01	8%	0,79	
Compromising partner	8,14	3,62	49%	0,79		6,71	3,14	29%	0,69	
Problem solving partner	11,71	3,25	75%	0,77		9,96	3,07	69%	0,74	
Accommodating partner	7,13	3,02	31%	0,74		8,84	2,87	53%	0,7	
Avoiding partner	5,39	3,39	13%	0,82		5,53	3,21	19%	0,78	

has been used for all individuals. The wage equations have been estimated separately for male respondents, female respondents, male partners and female partners.

*Children* in the household increase the need for time (particularly when they are young) and money (higher expenses). Spouses with (young) children can maximize household income and free time by a specialized division of paid work and childcare. Women usually face more normative expectations to engage in childcare. As a consequence, the presence of (young) children will establish incentives for women to spend more time on care and less time on paid work (Van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994). Children in the household will thus restrict long working hours of female employees. For male employee we cannot predict a clear effect. On the one hand (young) children increase financial demands in the household. This might be an incentive for the husband to work more hours, particularly when he has a comparative advantage (higher productivity) in the labor market. On the other hand (young) children require time for care and establish an incentive to work fewer hours in order to spend more time on family activities. To control for the effect of the presence of children of different age, we used dummy variables for the presence of (a) *young children* in the household (younger than 4 years) and (b) *older children* (between 4 years and 13 years), and (c) *old children* (13 years or older).

Organizational research has pointed out that *high employer demands* and work incentives make it more rewarding for employees to work long hours (Van Echtelt & Smulders, 2003; Campbell, 2004). When employers claim a high work engagement, employees can achieve social approval and better career chances by conforming to these demands (respectively reduce disapproval and the risk to be dismissed). One way to conform to high work demands and to show a high work commitment is to work long hours. High employer demands will thus have a positive effect on labor supply. The cumulative amount of employer demands was measured using five items: (1) whether the firm is a for-profit or a non-profit organization (as answered by the management); (2) whether the function group is characterized by a high-performance culture (as answered by the management); (3) whether the function group is frequently confronted with targets and deadlines (as answered by the management); (4) understaffing for the employee's function group (as answered by the management); (5) whether the employee has a supervisory position (as answered by the employee). The items were first dichotomized and then summed. The minimum value is zero (hardly any employer demands), the maximum value five (strong employer demands). We controlled for the employees' age (measured in years).

## 5. Results

To test the hypotheses, separate OLS regression estimations are carried out for male and female employees. The results are summarized in Table 6.4 for women and Table 6.5 for men. In order to control for possible selection effects on the firm level ( $n=30$ ) and department level ( $n=79$ ), we also run a multilevel analysis (Snijders & Bosker 1999). The multilevel regression estimations confirmed the effects of the OLS regression analysis. Consequently, we can refer to the OLS regression models in the following. (Slight) differences between the multilevel and OLS regression model are reported in footnotes.

Table 6.4 reveals that the use of problem solving significantly increases the labor supply of working women. These findings support hypotheses EH2a but not EH2b; we do not find a significant effect of accommodating. Since none of the other conflict handling strategies has a significant effect, no support could be found for the hypotheses that working women using forcing (EH1a) or avoiding (EH1b) would work less hours.

Table 6.4 shows further that none of the spouse's conflict-handling strategies significantly affects female labor supply. Therefore, no support is found for the hypotheses that the use of forcing (EH3a\*) or avoiding (EH3b\*) by male spouses will result in an decrease in working hours of employed women, and no support is found for the hypotheses that the use of problem solving (EH4a\*) or accommodating (EH4b\*) by their male spouses will increase the labor supply of employed women.

As far as the control variables are concerned, table 6.4 shows that the wage rate, the absence of young children (up to 12 years), a low age and high employer demands significantly increase the labor supply of women. The husband's earning capacity does not have a significant effect.

Taken together, the results for women provide partial support for the theoretical hypothesis that employed women using communal strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts will be more effective in achieving their objective to work more hours. However, the use of agentic strategies by working women does not work counterproductive. Forcing or avoiding do neither increase nor decrease a working woman's labor supply.

Table 6.5 shows that employed men who strongly rely on the use of forcing to resolve intrahousehold time allocation conflicts work significantly more hours than men who don't use forcing.<sup>5</sup> This finding supports EH3a. Since none of the other conflict handling strategies used by the employee significantly affects male labor supply, no support is found for the following hypotheses: neither does the use of avoiding increase the working hours of men (EH3b), nor does

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5 The multilevel regression analysis confirmed the effect of forcing but only at a 10%-significance level.

**Table 4: OLS regression analysis with actual weekly working hours of female employees as dependent variable (standardized coefficients)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Household situation</b>				
Employee's wage rate (net)	,357***	,274***	,275***	,267***
Partner's wage rate (net)	-,04	-,055	-,067	-,052
Young kids (younger than 4 years)	-,208***	-,222***	-,217***	-,226***
Older kids (4 to 12 years)	-,369***	-,342***	-,331***	-,328***
Old kids (13 years and older)	-,104*	-,086	-,082	-,084
No kids (living at home): reference	–	–	–	–
Age	-,318***	-,254***	-,253***	-,257***
<b>Firm characteristics</b>				
High employer demand (cumulative scale)		,311***	,327***	,332***
<b>Conflict handling (employee)</b>				
Forcing (employee)			,041	,038
Problem solving (employee)			,160***	,161***
Accommodating (employee)			,028	,029
Avoiding (employee)			,018	,025
<b>Conflict handling (partner)</b>				
Forcing (partner)				-,009
Problem solving (partner)				-,045
Accommodating (partner)				-,069
Avoiding (partner)				-,01
R <sup>2</sup>	,24	,327	,343	,337
n	238	238	238	238

\*significant at 10%-level; \*\* = significant at 5%-level; \*\*\* = significant at 1%-level; Data source: Time Competition Survey, 2003.



**Table 5: OLS regression analysis with actual weekly working hours of male employees as dependent variable (standardized coefficients)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Household situation</b>				
Employee's wage rate (net)	,378***	,306***	,319***	,330***
Partner's wage rate (net)	-,127*	-,122**	-,121*	-,143**
Young kids (younger than 4 years)	-,035	-,058	-,069	-,081
Older kids (4 to 12 years)	,078	,07	,061	,08
Old kids (13 years and older)	,155**	,141**	,135**	,133**
No kids (living at home): reference	–	–	–	–
Age	-,340***	-,282***	-,280***	-,271***
<b>Firm characteristics</b>				
High employer demand (cumulative scale)		,296***	,293***	,295***
<b>Conflict handling (employee)</b>				
Forcing (employee)			,110**	,113**
Problem solving (employee)			-,035	-,039
Accommodating (employee)			,021	,027
Avoiding (employee)			-,034	-,035
<b>Conflict handling (partner)</b>				
Forcing (partner)				,03
Problem solving (partner)				,074
Accommodating (partner)				,114**
Avoiding (partner)				-,009
R <sup>2</sup>	,072	,154	,157	,161
n	304	304	304	304

\*significant at 10%-level; \*\* = significant at 5%-level; \*\*\* = significant at 1%-level; Data source: Time Competition Survey, 2003.

the use of problem solving (EH4a) or accommodating (EH4b) lead to a reduction in working hours. Yet, table 6.5 shows further that the use of accommodating by the female spouse significantly increases the labor supply of male employees. Thus, we have to reject our hypothesis that the use of accommodating strategies by female spouses would reduce the labor supply of male employees (EH2b\*). No support is found for the hypotheses that the use of forcing (EH1a\*) or avoiding (EH1b\*) strategies by female spouses will result in an increase in working hours of male employees, and no support is found for the hypotheses that the use of problem solving strategies (EH2a\*) will decrease the labor supply of their employed men.

With regard to the control variables, table 6.5 shows that the wage-rate and high employer demands significantly increase the working hours of males, whereas age has a significant negative effect. The presence of young children (up to 12 years) does not have a significant impact on male labor supply,<sup>6</sup> while the presence of children of 13 years or older increases the labor supply.

In sum, the results for men provide partial support for the theoretical hypothesis that the use of agentic strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts is an effective instrument for working men. The use of communal strategies does neither increase nor decrease a working woman's labor supply.

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6 The multilevel regression analysis showed a significant (5%-level) negative effect of the presence of children younger than four years on male labor supply.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This research started from the observation that previous research on labor supply of men and women focused on the effects of household and firm characteristics but neglected the impact of intra-household conflict management strategies. This holds also true for the life-course approach, a key component of the concept of transitional labor markets. This perspective considers individuals' and households' changing needs and preferences over the life course as well as the institutional opportunities and barriers – particularly in a gender context - to meet these needs by appropriate working-time transitions (see Anxo & Erhel, 2005). Yet, it does not take into account the household's ability to really initiate working-time transitions and to realize a change of the established time arrangement in the household – even when external restrictions were favorable. It was one goal of this article to contribute to this research line by putting the focus on governance practices in the household. We wanted to know in which way and to what extent strategies to handle interpersonal time-based conflicts influence the labor supply of male and female employees. Basically, we can draw three main conclusions:

Firstly, with regard to household and firm characteristics, our findings are in line with earlier research, according to which wage rates, the presence of children, age, and strong employer demand account for most of the variation in labor supply. The findings also underline the importance of life-course specific phases and events for the labor supply of employees, like for instance a higher labor supply in the career phase when employees are young and do not yet have children. Moreover, these patterns show clear gender differences in terms of a male breadwinner and female care-provider role: it's still women who reduce their working hours considerably when children are young (up to 12 years), while men do not significantly adapt their working hours, respectively rather increase their labor supply when children are somewhat older (13 years or older), probably due to increasing monetary costs of older children.

Secondly, the findings with regard to conflict handling are in line with the predictions of gender role theory (Egaly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the so called status-quo effect (Kluwer, 1998). Due to the legitimizing power of the dominant time arrangement pattern, the given unequal division of paid work has a tendency to persist. Due to the asymmetric structure of the given division of work in the household, female employees who want to work more hours have to challenge the status quo. Female employees are more likely to succeed in this when they use cooperative conflict strategies, which integrate the husband into the process of change and trigger his cooperativeness. Male employees, in contrast, can successfully realize more working hours by uncooperative conflict strategies. At the same time, these results show clearly that there is a 'bonus' for role congruence: men using agentic conflict handling strategies are more likely to achieve the goal of working more, and so do women using communal strategies. The analysis shows further that here seems to be no punishment for

role incongruence: the use of agentic conflict handling strategies by working women does not evoke counterproductive reactions of their spouses, but also does not help to achieve their goal. Likewise, the use of communal conflict handling strategies by working men does not decrease their working time, but is also not effective in increasing it.

A third noteworthy aspect of the findings is that the conflict strategy of male spouses does not significantly affect the labor supply of female employees, while conflict handling of female spouses does affect the labor supply of male employees: The more a female spouse handles work-household conflicts by accommodating strategies, the more hours her husband work. Among the different communal conflict strategies, accommodating seems to be a strategy, which does not help female spouses to restrict the labor supply of their employed husbands – probably because this strategy negates own interests. This finding does not only point at an important difference in the functioning of different communal strategies. It also sheds an interesting light on Perlow's (1998) analysis, according to which spouses with a resister strategy will effectively instigate their employed partners to work less hours, with the amount of reduced working hours depending on the attitude (acceptor vs. resister) of the employee. According to our analyses, this holds partly true for male employees (respectively their female spouses) but not for female employees. At least in the Dutch couples participating in this study, it does not seem to matter much whether or not and how *spouses* react to the attempts of female employees to increase the hours spent at work. What seems to count – for male as well as female employees- is how the *employee* deals with the intra-household conflict on the interpersonal level. Strategies that are congruent with the gender role of the employed person using them are clearly more likely to be successful than strategies that are incongruent with gender expectations.

We want to conclude this study by pointing towards some limitations of our study and sketch some promising leads for future research.

The first limitation is that the model did not consider differences in concrete time demands and time preferences of households. Not all employees in our sample really have an interest to work long hours. Due to career, family or leisure demands - strongly related to the current phase in the life cycle and the household's earner model – employees will be more or less willing to increase (respectively reduce) their working hours. In this respect the model would benefit from a typology that distinguishes distinct life stages with characteristic time demands - as it is provided by the life-course approach. This would at the same time offer an opportunity to investigate whether and what sort of conflict-handling patterns in the household support employees to satisfy these time demands by appropriate working-time transitions. Moreover, our model did not consider the factual extent and character of interpersonal time conflicts in the household. It is quite evident that differences in conflict handling will have a higher impact on time allocation patterns when there is a mismatch in the spouses' time preferences. When time based conflicts are rather absent different ways of conflict handling will be of minor importance for processes of household governance.

Secondly, the model we presented here neglects the available opportunity structure of the household to solve (respectively 'outsource') time-based interpersonal conflicts. This holds particularly true for private or public institutions, providing domestic services and childcare facilities. The availability, accessibility and character of such services (see Ruijter, Van der Lippe & Raub, 2004) will influence the household's opportunities to prevent interpersonal work-household conflicts by 'buying' time. Other examples for the importance of institutional factors are legal regulations on working hours, collective agreements or ('family friendly') firm policies. We would expect that variations in these institutional factors determine the degree to which spouses are factually forced (respectively relieved) to deal with conflicts around the gendered division of work. Moreover, it is likely that the given institutional opportunity structure will also influence the choice of cooperative versus uncooperative conflict-handling strategies. It would be a promising next step in our research program to extend the model by taking into account these factors, for instance by considering available financial resources (opportunity to buy time), a high degree of influence on the amount and structure of working hours (opportunity to influence work schedules) or the availability and access to institutions, which provide domestic services and childcare facilities (opportunity to outsource work-household conflicts).

Our findings also point to some fruitful areas for further research. First, future studies would benefit from a more detailed analysis of the interaction of conflict strategies as they are used by employees and their partners, as Perlow (1998) has done in her qualitative study, and as Kluwer (1998) suggests in her wife-demand-husband-withdrawal hypothesis. Second, future analyses would benefit from paying closer attention to the impact of household rules regulating time allocation patterns. Previous analyses carried out on this dataset have shown that routines have a crucial impact on time allocation. The existence of such ex ante governance structures may result in ex post conflict handling strategies becoming less important. Finally, future research would need to pay more attention to variations in female provider role perceptions (Hood, 1986). Since provider role perceptions seem to change for both sexes, they might be among the more important future candidates explaining labor supply differences between the sexes.

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